

played well in a 4–1–1 preseason that included wins over heavyweights Miami and Baltimore. Allen favored Kilmer and named him the starter while also ruling out rotating his two veteran quarterbacks during the regular season. “That’s the only way it can be,” Allen told reporters of his decision to start Kilmer. “We won with Billy, and he’s our quarterback. He did an excellent job last year.”

Allen also predicted at least 10 victories but muted his optimism. “Right now, we’re only as good as our last game, and we lost that game to San Francisco in the playoffs. What we did the rest of last year is history. Our success will be determined not by how well we play our defenses or the kicking game, but how well we work together as a 40-man team. Togetherness, that’s the phrase.”

Special teams determined the Redskins’ fate in a season-opening, 24–21 Monday night victory at Minnesota. The primary hero was a player reactivated by Allen five days before the game after going unclaimed on waivers: reserve wide receiver Bill Malinchak. With the game less than three minutes old, he blocked a punt, scooped up the loose ball, and ran 16 yards into the end zone. But Washington’s offense was sluggish, and the Redskins trailed, 14–10, early in the fourth quarter.

Kilmer, who completed only 5 of his first 13 passes, then led a 58-yard scoring drive capped by Brown’s 3-yard run. Minnesota fumbled the ensuing kickoff, and Malinchak again made the highlight reels by recovering the ball deep in Vikings territory. The play set up a 9-yard scoring run by Harraway with about three minutes left that sealed the victory. After beating Minnesota for the first time ever, the Redskins charged up the Metropolitan Stadium ramp and shouted, “We’re on our way.”

They took another step with a 24–10 win over the Cardinals. Brown, who rushed for 105 yards against the Vikings, piled up 148 to become Washington’s all-time leading running back with 3,214 yards. Jerry Smith, who caught only 21 throws in the season but seven for touchdowns, to earn the nickname “Home Run,” snared two scoring passes. Special teams produced another big play, a blocked field goal by defensive end Verlon Biggs that cornerback Mike Bass picked up and ran 32 yards for a score. The defense intercepted two passes that also led to touchdowns.

Despite the 2–0 mark, some Redskins fans were annoyed with Allen’s strategy, which relied on defense and special teams, coupled with a run-oriented offense that made the fewest mistakes possible. In fact, some of the 53,000 fans at RFK

Sonny vs. Billy Duel Captivates Washington Area

“I LIKE SONNY!” “I LIKE BILLY!” The bumper stickers were everywhere in the Washington metro area, as fans took sides in the Redskins’ first legitimate quarterback controversy of the modern era.

The choices, Sonny Jurgensen and Billy Kilmer, starred in a captivating duel over four seasons from 1971 to 1974. They alternated starting roles and subbed for one another when injuries sidelined their aging bodies.

Both competitors carried a fierce desire to play, but they never let the rivalry become acrimonious, supporting each other on the field and hanging out together away from the game. Their friendship lasts to this day.

“We’ve been friends for years and years,” said Jurgensen, about five years older than Kilmer. “We realized there wasn’t a good body between us, so the only way we were going to be successful was to help each other.”

Said Kilmer, “We knew that we were playing on a winning team, and we didn’t want to split the team down the middle. We wanted to keep everything going.”

Kilmer, who lacked Jurgensen’s grace, strong arm, and accuracy, credited No. 9 for helping mold him into a better quarterback. “Sonny helped me funda-

mentally, he really changed the way I threw the ball. I used to get a lot of sore arms. I watched him and saw how he’d get his hips in there. I tried to copy his delivery a little bit.”

Kilmer played by far the most in the four seasons they were together. He was Allen’s preferred choice, for his conservative, no-risk approach mirrored the coach’s philosophy. But Jurgensen was the apparent favorite in the community, where the aerial wizardry he used to bedevil defenses in the pre-Allen years was vivid in the minds of Redskins fans. A 1972 survey conducted for local television station WTTG found that 45 percent of respondents preferred Jurgensen as the starter, compared with 42 percent for Kilmer. Fans implored Allen to play Jurg, one banner at RFK Stadium exclaiming, “Allen: Keep Your Sonny Side Up!” Another banner read, “No More Sonny Days,” referring to Jurgensen’s retirement before the 1975 season.

Redskins center Len Hauss said that the rivalry was good for the team but was hard getting used to at first: “It was pretty tough on those of us who were here because it almost made you choose between one of two quarterbacks. I’d played with Sonny for seven years already, and it didn’t take you but a couple of hours to get to know Billy pretty well. Soon you discovered that both of these guys were great quarterbacks and great leaders. Both of them wanted to play really bad. But it was a good, honest competition.”