

redskins head coach history

Redskins Head Coach History: A Journey Through Leadership and Legacy

redskins head coach history offers a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of one of the NFL's most storied franchises. From their early days to their more recent transformations, the Washington Redskins—now known as the Washington Commanders—have been guided by a series of head coaches who have left indelible marks on the team's identity, culture, and performance. Exploring this history not only reveals the ups and downs on the field but also showcases the strategic decisions and leadership styles that shaped the franchise's trajectory.

The Early Years: Establishing a Foundation

The Redskins, established in 1932 as the Boston Braves before moving to Washington in 1937, began their journey with a handful of head coaches who laid the groundwork for future success. In these formative years, the coaching role was crucial in building a team identity that could compete in the rapidly evolving NFL landscape.

Curly Lambeau and the Initial Challenges

One of the earliest notable head coaches was Curly Lambeau, who briefly coached the Redskins in 1933. Though his tenure was short, Lambeau's influence as a pioneering figure in football coaching set a precedent for leadership expectations. The early Redskins struggled to find consistent success, highlighting how critical the coaching role was in developing competitive strategies and team cohesion.

Ray Flaherty: The Architect of Early Success

Ray Flaherty's tenure from 1936 to 1942 marked a turning point in Redskins head coach history. He introduced innovative offensive schemes and emphasized a passing game that was ahead of its time. Under Flaherty's leadership, Washington won two NFL Championships (1937 and 1942), cementing his legacy as one of the franchise's first great coaches. His approach demonstrated how coaching philosophies could directly impact a team's success and fan engagement.

The Post-War Era and the Rise of Legendary Figures

Following World War II, the Redskins continued to evolve, with head coaches who brought new energy and tactics to the team. This period is notable for the arrival of some iconic figures whose influence extended beyond the sidelines.

Paul Brown and the Brief Experiment

Although Paul Brown is more famously associated with the Cleveland Browns, his brief stint with the Redskins in the late 1940s showcased the increasing importance of professional coaching in the NFL. Brown's methods emphasized discipline and innovation, which, despite limited success in Washington, contributed to the professionalization of the coaching role in the league.

George Allen: Building a Defensive Powerhouse

Arguably one of the most influential coaches in Redskins history, George Allen took over in 1971 and transformed the team into a defensive juggernaut. Known for his strategic focus on veteran players and a "win now" mentality, Allen led Washington to multiple playoff appearances, including a Super Bowl run in 1972. His tenure redefined what it meant to be a Redskins head coach, emphasizing experience and tactical discipline.

The Joe Gibbs Era: The Golden Age of Redskins Coaching

No discussion of Redskins head coach history would be complete without highlighting Joe Gibbs, whose leadership in the 1980s and early 1990s brought unprecedented success and lasting impact.

Three Super Bowl Titles and Innovative Coaching

Joe Gibbs coached Washington from 1981 to 1992 and then again from 2004 to 2007. During his first tenure, he led the team to three Super Bowl victories (XVII, XXII, XXVI), a feat unmatched by any other Redskins coach. Gibbs was renowned for his adaptability, shifting offensive schemes to maximize the talents of his players, such as the use of the no-huddle offense and versatile quarterback play.

Legacy Beyond the Wins

Beyond the trophies, Gibbs instilled a culture of professionalism and resilience. His ability to develop players and staff made the Redskins a model franchise during his era. Many of today's coaching philosophies across the league trace their roots back to concepts popularized by Gibbs, emphasizing his lasting influence on NFL coaching.

Challenges and Changes: The Modern Coaching Landscape

After Gibbs' departure, the Redskins experienced a more turbulent period characterized by frequent coaching changes and inconsistent performance. This era reflects the challenges of maintaining stability and success in a highly competitive league.

The Struggles of Transition

Coaches like Richie Petitbon, Steve Spurrier, and Mike Shanahan faced varying degrees of success but struggled to replicate the dominance of previous decades. Issues ranging from injuries to front office instability contributed to a coaching carousel that impacted team morale and on-field results.

The Ron Rivera Era and Organizational Rebranding

In recent years, Ron Rivera's hiring marked a renewed effort to restore competitiveness and culture within the franchise. Rivera, known for his defensive expertise and leadership qualities, has worked to rebuild the team amid organizational changes, including the controversial decision to retire the Redskins name. His approach highlights the modern head coach's dual role: managing player performance while navigating complex social and organizational dynamics.

Insights into the Role of Redskins Head Coaches

Understanding the Redskins head coach history also means appreciating the evolving nature of coaching responsibilities. From early tactical innovators to modern-day leaders managing media and player relations, Redskins coaches have had to adapt continually.

- **Strategic Innovation:** Coaches like Flaherty and Gibbs introduced new offensive and defensive schemes that influenced the broader NFL.
- **Player Development:** Successful coaches have emphasized nurturing talent, balancing veteran presence with young players.
- **Leadership Challenges:** Managing locker room dynamics, public scrutiny, and organizational changes remain ongoing challenges for all coaches.
- **Adaptability:** The ability to adjust strategies based on personnel and league trends has been a hallmark of the most successful Redskins head coaches.

Lessons from Redskins Coaching History for Aspiring Coaches

For those interested in coaching or sports management, examining Redskins head coach history provides valuable lessons on leadership, resilience, and innovation. The franchise's coaching timeline underscores the importance of:

1. Building a strong team culture that can withstand adversity.
2. Embracing innovation while respecting foundational principles.
3. Communicating effectively with players, staff, and the media.
4. Understanding that coaching success is often cyclical and requires patience and continual learning.

The story of the Redskins head coaches is not just about wins and losses—it's about the people who have shaped a team's identity through their vision, determination, and adaptability. As the franchise moves forward under new leadership and a new name, the legacy of these coaches remains a testament to the enduring impact of strong, strategic guidance in professional football.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was the first head coach of the Washington Redskins?

The first head coach of the Washington Redskins was Ray Flaherty, who coached the team from 1936 to 1942.

Which Redskins head coach has the most wins in franchise history?

Joe Gibbs holds the record for the most wins as head coach in Washington Redskins history, with a total of 154 wins across his three coaching stints.

How many Super Bowls did Joe Gibbs win as the Redskins head coach?

Joe Gibbs won three Super Bowls as the Redskins head coach: Super Bowl XVII, XXII, and XXVI.

Who was the Redskins head coach before Ron Rivera?

Before Ron Rivera, the Washington Redskins' head coach was Jay Gruden, who coached from 2014 to 2019.

When did Ron Rivera become the head coach of the Washington Redskins?

Ron Rivera was hired as the head coach of the Washington Redskins in January 2020.

Have any Redskins head coaches been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame?

Yes, Joe Gibbs, the most successful Redskins head coach, has been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Who was the Redskins head coach during their last Super Bowl appearance?

Joe Gibbs was the head coach during the Washington Redskins' last Super Bowl appearance in Super Bowl XXVI in 1992.

Which Redskins head coach had the shortest tenure?

Among notable short tenures, Richie Petitbon coached the Redskins for only two seasons (1993-1994), but some interim coaches served even shorter terms.

How has the team name change affected the Redskins head coach history records?

The team's name change from Redskins to Washington Football Team (and later Washington Commanders) has not altered the historical records of the head coaches but has led to updates in the franchise's branding and documentation.

Additional Resources

Redskins Head Coach History: A Legacy of Leadership and Transformation

redskins head coach history reveals a complex tapestry of leadership that has significantly influenced the trajectory of one of the NFL's most storied franchises. The Washington Redskins, now known as the Washington Commanders, have seen a diverse array of head coaches since their inception in 1932. Each coach brought distinct philosophies, strategies, and impacts, shaping the team's identity through decades marked by triumphs, challenges, and transitions. This article delves into the Redskins head coach history, exploring key figures, coaching styles, and the broader implications these leaders had on the franchise's legacy.

The Evolution of Redskins Head Coaches

The history of Redskins head coaches can be segmented into eras defined by leadership stability, innovation, and shifts in team culture. Early coaches laid the foundation, while later figures navigated the pressures of modern professional football. Understanding these phases helps contextualize the team's successes and struggles over time.

Early Years: Establishing Foundations (1932-1960)

The Redskins' coaching journey began under the guidance of coaches like Lone Star Dietz, who led the then-Boston Braves (the franchise's original name) in 1932. However, it was under George Preston Marshall's ownership that the team relocated to Washington and adopted the "Redskins" name, marking a new chapter.

During these formative years, coaches such as Ray Flaherty, who served two stints (1936–1942 and 1946–1948), brought early NFL championships to the franchise in 1937 and 1942. Flaherty's tenure is notable for pioneering the use of the screen pass and emphasizing a disciplined, physical style of play. This era's coaching laid the groundwork for the Redskins' competitive identity, though the team often struggled with consistency due to management instability.

The Lombardi and Allen Era: A Transitional Phase (1960s-1970s)

While Vince Lombardi never coached the Redskins, his influence on NFL coaching was profound during the 1960s. Washington, meanwhile, experienced a transitional phase under coaches like Bill McPeak and Otto Graham, who struggled to translate talent into wins. The franchise sought a leader who

could restore its former glory.

Enter George Allen (1971–1977), arguably one of the most transformative coaches in Redskins head coach history. Allen's approach focused heavily on veteran players, famously coining the phrase "The Over-the-Hill Gang" for his experienced roster. His emphasis on defense and special teams led to multiple playoff appearances and an NFC Championship in 1972, though a Super Bowl victory eluded him. Allen's tenure revitalized the Redskins, laying the foundation for future success by instilling discipline and toughness.

Joe Gibbs: The Architect of Redskins' Golden Era (1981-1992, 2004-2007)

No discussion of Redskins head coach history is complete without highlighting Joe Gibbs, whose coaching legacy is intertwined with the franchise's most successful period. Gibbs served two separate terms as head coach, leading Washington to three Super Bowl titles (XVII, XXII, XXVI) during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Gibbs distinguished himself with innovative offensive schemes, including the implementation of multiple formations and the use of play-action passing. His ability to adapt his strategy to his players' strengths, combined with a calm but authoritative presence, made him a revered figure in NFL coaching circles. Notably, Gibbs was one of the few coaches to succeed with multiple starting quarterbacks, underscoring his flexibility.

His second tenure, however, was less successful, highlighting the challenges of recapturing past glories in a changing NFL landscape. Nonetheless, Gibbs' impact on the Redskins' identity remains unparalleled, as he built a culture centered on resilience, smart football, and championship ambition.

Challenges and Instability: Redskins Coaching Carousel Post-1992

Following Gibbs' initial departure, the Redskins entered a period characterized by coaching instability and uneven performance. The franchise cycled through a series of head coaches, reflecting broader organizational challenges.

Notable Coaches and Their Impact

- **Richie Petitbon (1993-1996):** A former defensive coordinator under Gibbs, Petitbon brought some stability but failed to reach the postseason,

leading to his eventual dismissal.

- **Tony Kornheiser (1995):** Though never a head coach, Kornheiser's brief stint as a color commentator overlapped with this era, highlighting media scrutiny of coaching decisions.
- **Norv Turner (1994-2000):** Turner's tenure was marked by some playoff appearances but no deep runs. His offensive-minded coaching style was sometimes criticized for underutilizing defensive talent.
- **Steve Spurrier (2002-2003):** Known for his collegiate success, Spurrier struggled to translate his "Fun 'n' Gun" offense to the NFL, culminating in a disappointing record.

This era's coaching carousel underscored the difficulties the Redskins faced in balancing offensive innovation with defensive solidity. Frequent leadership changes disrupted team cohesion, affecting player development and fan confidence.

The Jay Gruden and Ron Rivera Years: Recent Attempts at Rebuilding

In the 2010s, the Redskins sought renewed direction with Jay Gruden (2014-2019) and later Ron Rivera (2020-2022). Gruden, coming from a successful stint with the Cincinnati Bengals, initially seemed poised to restore the franchise's competitiveness. However, inconsistency plagued his tenure, and despite playoff appearances, the team failed to make significant postseason progress.

Ron Rivera's hiring coincided with the franchise's rebranding efforts and a focus on rebuilding through the draft. Rivera, known for defensive acumen and strong leadership, guided Washington to a playoff berth in the 2020 season. However, roster challenges and organizational uncertainties limited sustained success during his term.

Analyzing the Redskins Head Coach History: Patterns and Lessons

The Redskins head coach history is emblematic of broader themes in NFL franchise management: the balance between stability and innovation, the impact of leadership on team culture, and the influence of external factors such as ownership and player personnel.

- **Stability breeds success:** Coaches with longer tenures like Joe Gibbs and George Allen had the time to instill their systems and cultures, leading to championship runs.
- **Adaptability is critical:** Gibbs' ability to modify his offensive schemes based on personnel contrasts with less successful coaches who rigidly adhered to their systems.
- **Leadership beyond tactics:** Effective Redskins head coaches have demonstrated strong player relationships, media management, and resilience under pressure.
- **Organizational support matters:** Coaches who thrived generally had backing from ownership and front office, illustrating that head coaching success depends on cohesive management.

These insights highlight why the Redskins' coaching history is not just a record of wins and losses but a reflection of evolving football philosophies and organizational dynamics.

Legacy and Influence on Modern Washington Football

The Redskins head coach history continues to influence the current Washington Commanders franchise. Modern coaching hires increasingly emphasize a blend of tactical innovation, leadership excellence, and cultural sensitivity. The lessons learned from past successes and failures inform strategies aimed at returning the team to playoff contention.

Moreover, the franchise's name change and ongoing efforts to redefine its identity coincide with a new era in coaching leadership, where adaptability to social and sporting changes is paramount. The legacy of coaches like Joe Gibbs and George Allen serves as a benchmark and inspiration for future leaders tasked with navigating today's NFL complexities.

As Washington football moves forward, the rich tapestry of its head coaching history provides both a foundation and a roadmap for aspiring coaches and management alike—a testament to the enduring importance of skilled leadership in professional sports.

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redskins head coach history: The Redskins Encyclopedia Michael Richman, 2009-08-21
Hail to the Redskins and Redskin-mania have consumed the nation's capital since 1937, the Redskins' first year in Washington. And the fervor remains as strong, if not stronger, today. Amply illustrated with 200 photos of players, coaches, and fans, The Redskins Encyclopedia recounts the

franchise's first 75 seasons, reliving the great -- and not so great -- moments in the team's storied history, and the men who helped make Sundays memorable. Fans will read about: --Coaches like George Allen, the eccentric, passionate man who left a legacy as an NFL pioneer, and Joe Gibbs, who formed a D-Y-N-A-S-T-Y --Players like star running back and all-time Redskins ground-gainer John Riggins, who once told Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to loosen up, Sandy baby, and Doug Williams, the first black quarterback to win a Super Bowl and Super Bowl MVP honors --The franchise's golden run of four Super Bowl appearances -- and three wins -- in the 1980s and early 1990s --The legendary Redskins-Cowboys rivalry --A year-by-year history of the team from 1932 to the present, with stats from each season --Individual profiles of more than 100 Redskins players -- from Sammy Baugh to Darrell Green to Art Monk to Sonny Jurgensen to Charley Taylor to Joe Theismann With an unparalleled collection of anecdotes, quotes, trivia, and hard-to-find information, The Redskins Encyclopedia is a must-have book for any fan who has ever bled burgundy and gold.

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redskins head coach history: *The Sports Hall of Fame Encyclopedia* Dave Blevins, 2011-12-23 In 1936, the Baseball Hall of Fame was established to honor the legends of the sport. The first inductees were some of the greatest names of the dugout, including Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. Less than ten years later, in 1945, the Hockey Hall of Fame inducted its first members. The Soccer Hall of Fame was established in 1950, followed by the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1959, and the Football Hall of Fame in 1963. In all, more than 1,400 inductees-players, teams, and behind the scenes personnel-have been enshrined in these five halls of fame. The Sports Hall of Fame Encyclopedia is a comprehensive listing of each inductee elected into one or more of these major sports halls of fame. From Hank Aaron to Fred Zollner, this book contains biographical information, sport and position(s) played, and career statistics (when applicable) of each of the more than 1,400 honorees. The book also includes specific appendixes for each shrine, in which inductees are listed alphabetically and by year of induction. Also included are appendixes briefly describing the history of each hall of fame.

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most heartbreaking loss in local sports history? What was the greatest single play in local sports history? Who are our team's most hated rivals? Plus dozens of guest lists contributed by famous local sports and entertainment celebrities. Following each of the four major pro sports teams -- the Redskins (NFL), the Capitals (NHL), the Nationals (MLB), and the Wizards (NBA) -- plus prominent college sports programs such as Georgetown and Maryland, D.C.'s fans have a vast array of choices, and Andy Pollin and Leonard Shapiro are the guys who help sort them out.

redskins head coach history: The Sports Hall of Fame Encyclopedia David Blevins, 2012 Provides a comprehensive listing, including biographical information and statistics, of each athlete inducted into one of the major sports halls of fame.

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starting quarterback: Joe Theismann in 1983, the franchise's surprising first championship run; Doug Williams in 1988, a win full of meaning for a majority African American city during a tumultuous era; and Mark Rypien in 1992, capping one of the greatest seasons of all time, one that stands as Gibbs's masterpiece. Hail to the Redskins features an epic roster of saints and sinners: hard-drinking fullback John Riggins; the dominant, blue-collar offensive linemen known as "the Hogs," who became a cultural phenomenon; quarterbacks Williams, the first African American QB to win a Super Bowl, and Theisman, a model-handsome pitchman whose leg was brutally broken by Lawrence Taylor on Monday Night Football; gregarious defensive end Dexter Manley, who would be banned from the league for cocaine abuse; and others including the legendary speedster Darrell Green, record-breaking receiver Art Monk, rags-to-riches QB Rypien, expert general managers and talent evaluators Bobby Beathard and Charley Casserly, aristocratic owner Jack Kent Cooke, and, of course, Gibbs himself, a devout Christian who was also a ruthless competitor and one of the sport's most adaptable and creative coaching minds.

redskins head coach history: Encyclopedia of Sports Management and Marketing Linda E. Swayne, Mark Dodds, 2011-08-08 This four-volume set introduces, on the management side, principles and procedures of economics, budgeting and finance; leadership; governance; communication; business law and ethics; and human resources practices; all in the sports context. On the marketing side this reference resource explores two broad streams: marketing of sport and of sport-related products (promoting a particular team or selling team- and sport-related merchandise, for example), and using sports as a platform for marketing non-sports products, such as celebrity endorsements of a particular brand of watch or the corporate sponsorship of a tennis tournament. Together, these four volumes offer a comprehensive and authoritative overview of the state of sports management and marketing today, providing an invaluable print or online resource for student researchers.

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redskins head coach history: George Allen Michael Richman, 2023-11 George Allen was a fascinating and eccentric figure in the world of football coaching. His remarkable career spanned six decades, from the late 1940s until his sudden death in 1990 at the age of seventy-three. Although he never won a Super Bowl, he never had a losing season as an NFL head coach and was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2002. In George Allen: A Football Life, Mike Richman captures the life and accomplishments of one of the most successful NFL coaches of all time and one of the greatest innovators in the game. A player's coach, Allen was a tremendous motivator and game strategist, as well as a defensive mastermind, and is credited with making special teams a critical focus in an era in which they were an afterthought. He had a keen eye for talent and pulled off masterful trades, often for veteran players who were viewed to be past their prime, who then had great seasons and made his teams much better. In addition to his coaching feats, Allen had an idiosyncratic and controversial personality. His life revolved around football 24-7. One of his quirks was to minimize chewing time by consuming soft foods, giving himself more time to prepare for

games and study opponents. He lived and breathed football; he compared losing to death. Allen had contentious relationships with the owners of the two NFL teams for which he was the head coach, the Washington Redskins and Los Angeles Rams. Richman explores why he was fired by those teams and whether he was blackballed from coaching again in the NFL. Based on detailed research and interviews with family, former players, and coaches, George Allen is the definitive biography of the football coach who lived to win, loved a good challenge, and left a lasting legacy on pro football history.

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