

# Redskins 2011



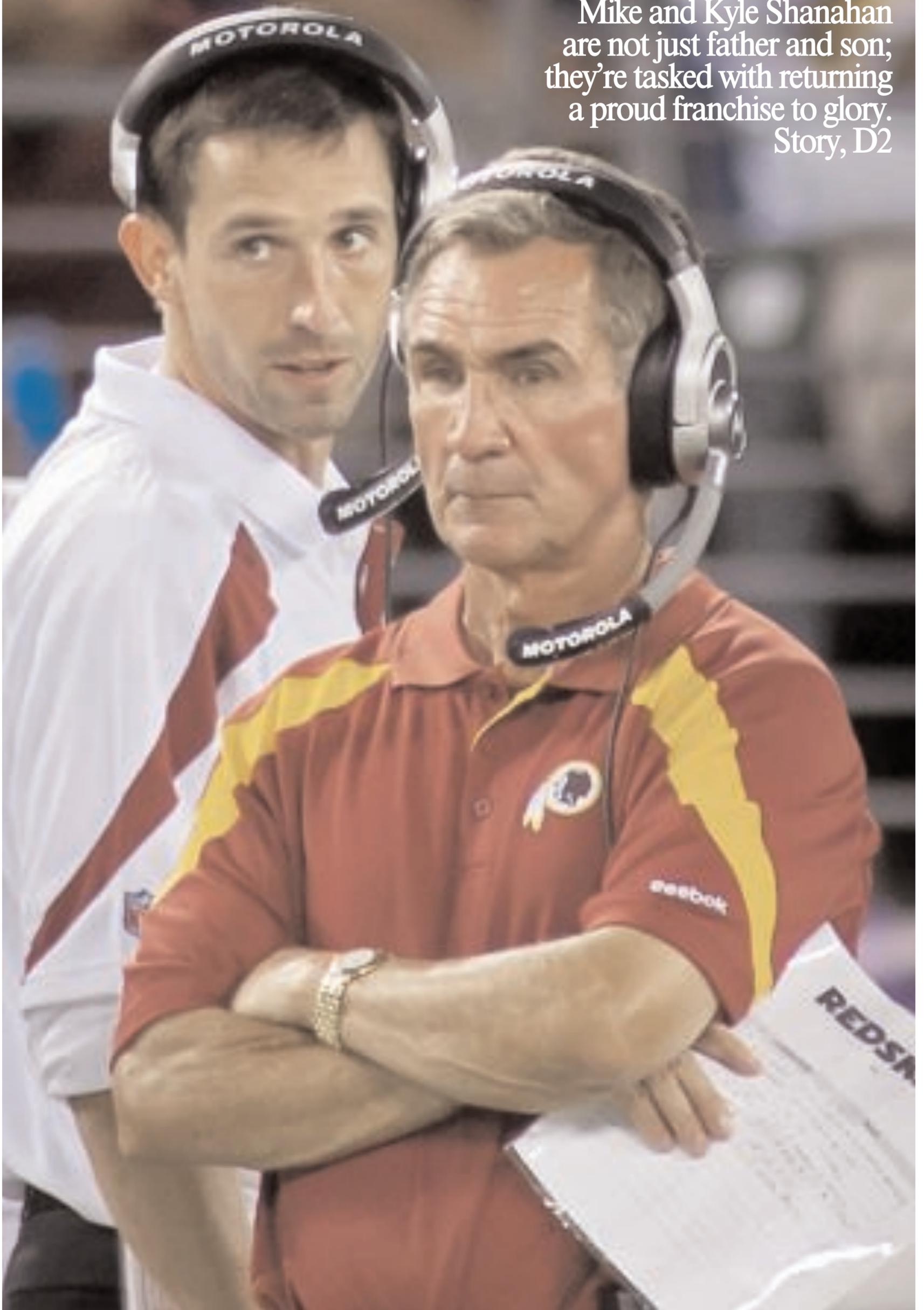
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The Washington Times

SECTION D

## FAMILY DYNAMIC

Mike and Kyle Shanahan are not just father and son; they're tasked with returning a proud franchise to glory.  
Story, D2



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## COVER STORY

## BLOODLINE ON THE SIDELINE

Two Shanahans make it work as team rebuilds

By RICH CAMPBELL

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**P**eggy Shanahan feared the worst because she knows her husband and son as well as anybody. A pair of intense, detail-obsessed competitors working closely for 16 hours a day or more? Oh yeah, that would end well. She could see the outcome clearly — the awkward silence at family dinners, the tumultuous discussions on vacation. What a joy it would be for Mike to captain the Washington Redskins' building project with Kyle as one of his top lieutenants.

"I actually thought they were both crazy when they wanted to do it," Peggy said. "But it was obviously so different than that. It's really a treat for both of them."

On the eve of their second season as Redskins coach and offensive coordinator, Mike and Kyle Shanahan are reaping all of the personal rewards and many of the professional benefits they hoped for 20 months ago when Kyle left his promising coordinator position with the Houston Texans to work for his father.

Yet with questions at quarterback that persist after a bumpy 6-10 debut campaign, Mike and Kyle still have to prove their union will produce in Washington the same success on which they separately built their reputations in other cities.

"When you have any adversity and your last name is the same as the head coach's, I know exactly what people are going to say," Kyle said. "I've known my whole life. But I'm very confident in myself because of what I've done without him, and I'm also confident that you can ask any player that I've coached, and I feel very good about that."

### Not a lot of precedent

Wade Phillips has considered his father something of a hero for as long as he can remember. Growing up on Texas' Gulf Coast, about 90 miles east of Houston, he learned football by hanging around the high school teams coached by his dad, Bum.

Wade played for Bum at Port Neches-Groves High School, and Bum was the defensive coordinator at the University of Houston when Wade was a linebacker there in the mid-1960s. Football always has been their connection. Over the years, Bum's philosophies, especially those about the 3-4 defense, became Wade's.

In 1981, Bum took his signature Stetson cowboy hat to New Orleans and became coach of the Saints. Wade served as Bum's defensive coordinator until Bum resigned during the 1985 season.

According to researchers at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, they were the only father-son, head coach-coordinator tandem on record until Mike and Kyle teamed in Washington last year.

"You want your assistant coaches to be loyal," said Wade, now the Texans' defensive coordinator. "Nobody is going to be more loyal than your son, so you can always count on that."

"They'll tell you the truth. Some other coaches might hesitate about telling you what they think about things, but if you ask your son, he's going to tell you exactly what he thinks. You get a valuable opinion there."

That was the case at Redskins Park last year as the first-year coaching staff evaluated new quarterback Donovan McNabb and determined which players fit into its schemes and were worth keeping.

"Kyle has got a lot of football in his



ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Redskins coach Mike Shanahan took a chance by hiring his son, Kyle, as offensive coordinator last year. The veteran coach admitted he had never seen his new assistant run a meeting with the entire offense present. "I was shocked to see how relaxed he was at his age," the elder Shanahan said.

background; what I mean by that is we're on the same page," Mike, 59, said. "We talk a lot of football; the running game, the passing game. It's pretty easy to be connected because we spend so much time together talking ball."

Coaches' reviews were highly critical at times last season, as the Redskins averaged 5.36 yards per play, 14th-best in the 32-team NFL.

That is not good enough for Mike and Kyle Shanahan.

Kyle's offense during his two years calling plays in Houston ranked sixth (5.88 yards) and fourth (6.0 yards). During Mike's two Super Bowl seasons in Denver, the Broncos' offense ranked third each year.

They discussed the offense and ex-

The situation would have been disastrous if it somehow cost Kyle the respect and confidence of players, but that didn't happen. In fact, it's the opposite.

"I think they handled it as good as you can," quarterback Rex Grossman said. "To bench somebody for their performance, anytime it's a Donovan McNabb-caliber player, there's no right way to do it. You're going to catch heat no matter what because he's a big name. They were in a lose-lose situation there."

You can't just take it from Grossman, though, because he directly benefited from McNabb's demotion and replaced him as the starter.

"I don't think anything with the Donovan situation makes Kyle a target," tight end Chris Cooley said. "What makes you

reads are. I care about other positions besides mine."

### The benefits of youth

Mike Shanahan didn't know exactly what to expect that day in March last year. He did all the required due diligence before hiring his new offensive coordinator, but Shanahan had never actually seen this coach run a meeting with the entire offense present.

"I was shocked to see how relaxed he was at his age," Mike said. "Then I started thinking about it. The first time I got in front of a team was coming out of college. I was about 30 years old. He's in that time frame, 30, 31, and he's been doing it for six years. In high school, he was on the side-

**"You want your assistant coaches to be loyal. Nobody is going to be more loyal than your son, so you can always count on that. They'll tell you the truth. Some other coaches might hesitate about telling you what they think about things, but if you ask your son, he's going to tell you exactly what he thinks. You get a valuable opinion there."**

— Wade Phillips, who coached with his dad Bum in New Orleans

changed ideas throughout the season, as all head coaches and coordinators do. However, their relationship allowed for greater candor.

"Sometimes I'd maybe be a little more nervous to piss the head coach off," Kyle, 31, said. "It's a little easier for me to ask him a tough question than maybe it has been [with other coaches] in the past. That has been nice because I can always ask that question. And definitely being his son, he probably gets more pissed off at me than he does with most people. So it goes both ways."

### Earning respect

Kyle Shanahan expected to be the target of scrutiny and criticism after Mike decided to demote McNabb in Week 15 of last season. It's part of the package that comes with his job and his last name.

But he was caught off guard when McNabb's agent, Fletcher Smith, publicly blamed him for McNabb's falling out with the team. Smith accused Kyle of ignoring suggestions McNabb made to improve the offense. When Kyle confronted McNabb and McNabb told him Smith's allegations weren't true, Kyle could only press forward.

McNabb, through a personal spokesman, declined to comment for this story.

a target is losing football games. If we're winning games, I think that situation probably still happens, maybe not to the extent it did. But winning overrules everything."

And toward that end, players are certain the best man for the job is running the Redskins' offense.

Not only did Kyle earn his reputation as a rising star offensive coach on his own, away from his father, Redskins players also have seen proof in meetings, the film room and on the field.

"This offense is so dynamic," receiver Santana Moss said. "The things that we can do offensively, individually and collectively, Kyle's offense gives us an opportunity to be great. All we have to do is go out there and handle our jobs. Last year, we left a lot on the field — I mean every game."

Cooley's belief in Kyle is at unprecedented levels.

"This is the first time in my career that an offense has fit so much that I've been willing to study it," he said. "I've been willing to know it as thoroughly as I do. It's exciting. It's fun. It makes sense."

"A lot of offenses have contradictions. Instead, this offense has answers. It's neat to see the way we get everyone involved. It's the first time I care what we're doing on the line. I care what our quarterback's

line in the Super Bowl. He's been through it."

Mike and Kyle's professional growth together has continued from that first meeting. Their conversations are different now than they ever were.

When Kyle was growing up, topics centered on his playing career and the path he hoped would lead to the NFL. When Kyle broke into coaching, first with UCLA and then the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the father-son discussions about coaching were limited because their experiences weren't shared.

Now, because they work so closely together, the depth of their interaction is more beneficial to how they coach.

"Mike, I know, has learned a lot of things from Kyle, being so young but having the ear of players and just new things and different ways to do things," Peggy Shanahan said.

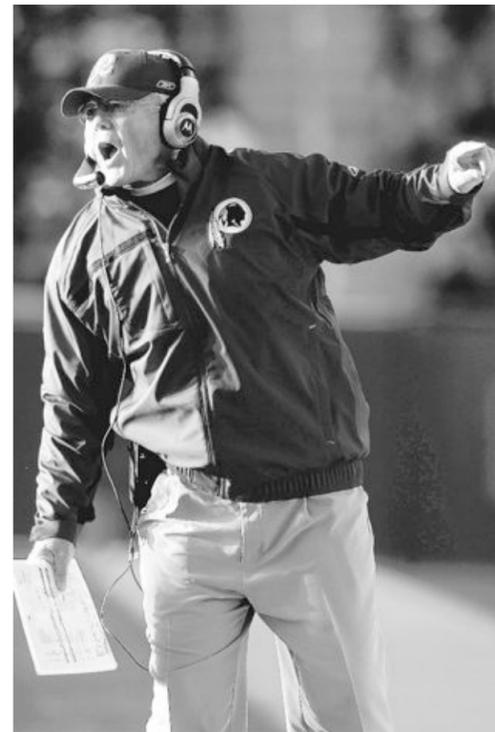
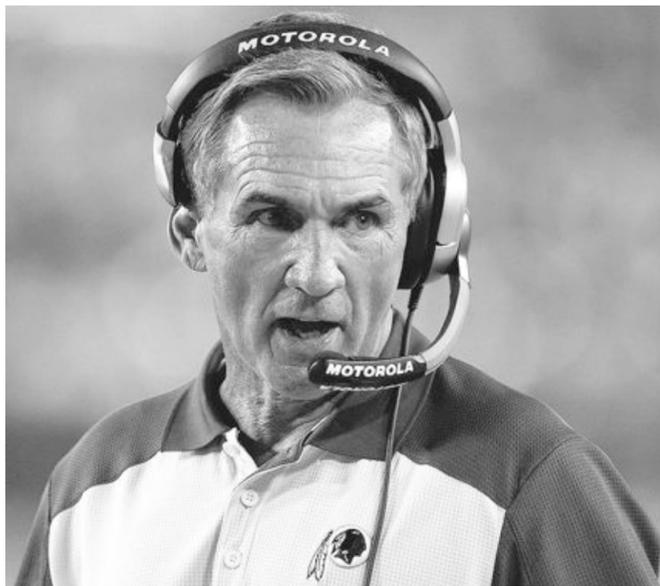
Kyle, for example, uses film analysis to anchor his meetings. The young generation of NFL coaches entered the profession with the technology to digitally break down game footage. Many young coaches, such as Kyle, have developed their methods accordingly.

In meetings, Kyle will show footage that

» see SHANAHANS | D3

## Redskins 2011

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Jim Zorn (left) experienced a four-game dropoff in 2009, his second season as the Redskins' coach. Joe Gibbs (right), on the other hand, showed a four-game improvement in 2005 — his second season in his second stint as coach — and took Washington to the playoffs. Mike Shanahan is entering Year 2 and coming off a 6-10 record he has to improve upon.

## Second (year) and goal to go



DAN DALY

“There are no five-year plans in the NFL,” Joe Gibbs is fond of saying. “I don’t care who you are. You’d better start winning pretty quick.”

He’s right, of course. By Year 2, a coach needs to show real progress — or rather, his team does. Certain allowances can be made for Year 1, which is usually a time for taking inventory (and doing some moderate-to-heavy housecleaning). The second year, though, is all about trajectory — preferably upward rather than downward.

This is the situation Mike Shanahan finds himself in with the Redskins. His bumpy 6-10 first season is in the books, and it’s imperative that he improves on it. Otherwise, well, you know the deal. Folks might begin to wonder whether, at 59, the game has passed him by. They might even begin to wonder whether he was ever as good as his two Super Bowl wins in Denver suggested.

Think about it: George Allen took the Redskins to the Super Bowl in Year 2. Gibbs, in his first term, won the Super Bowl in Year 2. In fact, let’s look at some recent Redskins coaches and see how many passed the Year 2 test:

- Norv Turner I (passed): 3-13 in Year 1 (1994, under longtime owner Jack Kent Cooke), 6-10 in Year 2. Wound up coaching in Washington for almost seven seasons.

- Norv Turner II (failed): 10-6 and a division title in Year 1 (1999, under new owner Dan Snyder), 7-6 and out of the playoffs in Year 2. Snyder fired him with three games left in the 2000 season — not that it accomplished anything.

(Note: Because of the ownership change, Turner actually had to prove his worth twice.)

- Steve Spurrier (failed): 7-9 in Year 1 (2002), 5-11 in Year 2. Resigned after the ’03 season and, after taking a year off, returned to college coaching at South Carolina.

- Gibbs II (passed): 6-10 in Year 1 (2004), 10-6 and a wild card berth in Year 2. Also made the playoffs in Year 4 before retiring for a second time.

- Jim Zorn (failed): 8-8 in Year 1 (2008), 4-12 in Year 2. Was canned as soon as he stepped off the plane from San Diego after the ’09 season finale.

The pattern is fairly well-established — in Washington, at least. If things are on the upswing in your second year, you get to keep your job. If not, you might want to put together your resume. Which isn’t to say the boss will run out of patience with Shanahan if the Redskins aren’t in the playoff hunt this year. Snyder has invested many millions in Shanny and might be inclined to give him another season or two. But how many of us would bet the house on it, given Snyder’s impulsiveness?

In Shanahan’s second year in Denver, by the way, the Broncos made major strides, going from a middle-of-the-pack 8-8 to an AFC-best 13-3. (The next season, they won the first of back-to-back Super Bowls.) But it’s hard to imagine the Redskins winning five more games this year than they did in 2010. They’ve made some nice roster additions — Barry Cofield, O.J. Atogwe, Tim Hightower, Chris Chester — but an 11-5 record seems a

little out of reach, especially with so much uncertainty at quarterback.

That said, their depth is undeniably better, almost across the board. And while they’re still very much a work in progress, they appear headed in the right direction. The 350-pound weight of Albert Haynesworth has been lifted from everyone’s shoulders — he’s New England’s problem now — and the infusion of a large draft class and several other young players has created a sense of renewal. This is no longer an old team, it’s one whose best football is likely ahead of it. The question is: How far in the future are we talking about? December? Next year? The year after that?

The year after that, after all, would be Year 4, and four years are an eon by Dan Snyder’s Rolex. They’re also pushing the limits of Gibbs’ dictum: “There are no five-year plans in the NFL.” But first things first: Shanahan needs to find seven wins on the 2011 schedule, maybe eight, to keep hope alive in Redskinsland. Otherwise, there’s no telling what might happen — as Turner, Spurrier and Zorn can attest.

## SHANAHANS

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splices how the Redskins ran a play incorrectly with footage of how they or another team ran it properly. That highlights the contrasts and teaching points.

“I know that’s something that’s not as big with the older coaches because they didn’t have the film capabilities that we have,” Kyle said. “I was pretty confident he would like how I did it. I had always wanted to show him.”

Kyle’s history as a receiver — he played the position at the University of Texas — and an NFL receivers coach also has helped Mike, a former quarterback, in his understanding of that position.

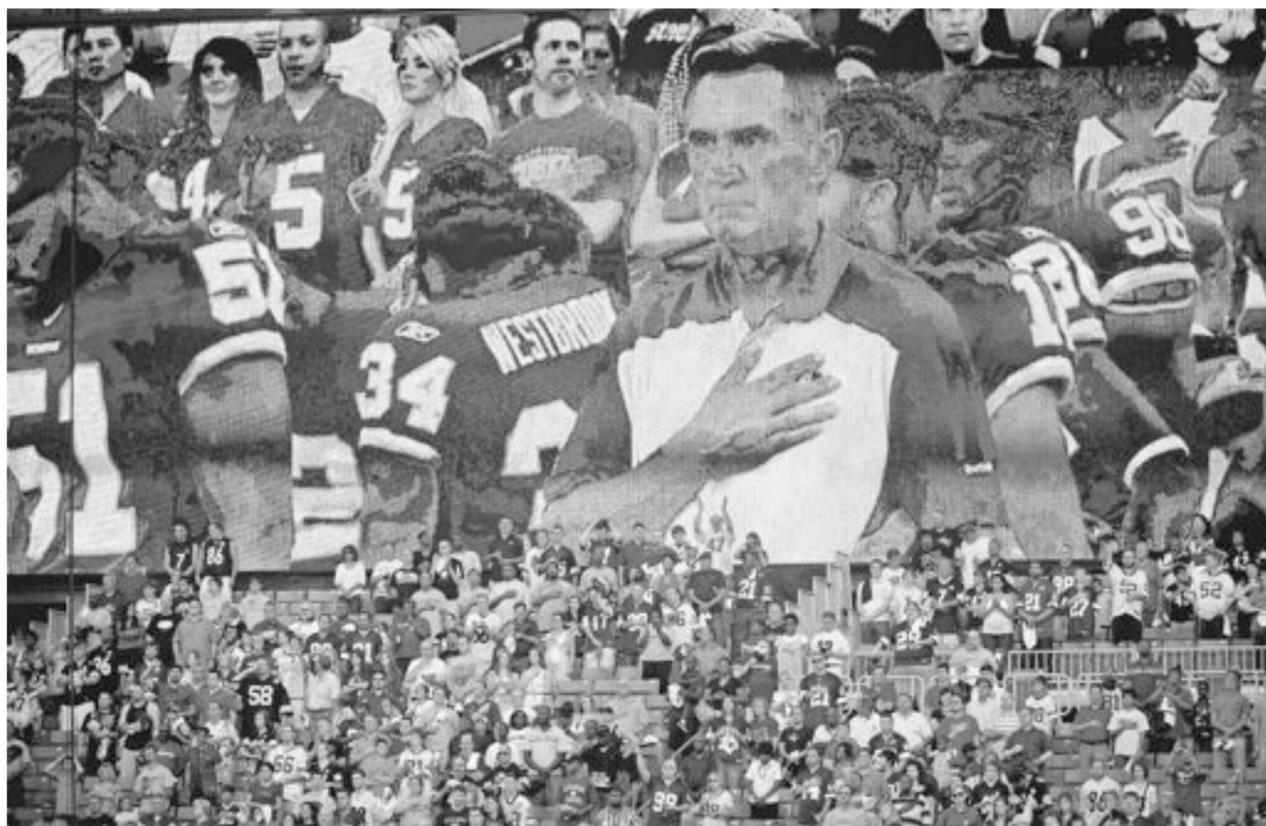
Because Kyle had his heart set on being an NFL receiver, he used to analyze his dad’s tapes of Jerry Rice, Rod Smith and others.

“When you study it to be a player, and you’re actually a wide receivers coach, you’ve got to know that as good as anybody,” Mike said.

In turn, Kyle has thrived under Mike’s disciplined, detail-oriented coaching style.

If the Redskins’ offense breaks down in a game, Mike follows up by asking Kyle whether he covered that play or concept in practice. The answer better be yes.

“If you’re slipping, he will be your worst enemy and your biggest pain because he’ll be all over you,” Kyle said. “It makes you a better coach. You’ve got to think everything out and be organized.”



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Win or lose, coach Mike Shanahan’s presence will loom large over FedEx Field and the Washington Redskins this season. The fortunes of his son, Kyle Shanahan, the offensive coordinator (right), will go a long way toward determining the team’s success.

### Family time, football time

It doesn’t matter whether your last name is Shanahan or Smith, there’s never a bad time for ice cream.

Friday mornings around 10:30 suit Mike Shanahan perfectly. That’s when he likes to drive the 10 minutes or so across Leesburg, Va., to Kyle’s house and take grandchildren Stella, 4, and Carter, 1, out for a treat.

“He’s a real good grandpa,” Kyle said.

Kyle and Mike said they don’t feel the need to see each other often outside of Redskins Park, but they do when Mike visits the grandkids and Kyle sees his mom. The convenience of those visits is just one of the perks of working together.

The NFL lockout this summer allowed for some additional time. Kyle’s family, his sister Krystal’s family, Peggy and Mike all went to the Bahamas.

Not that talk of football and the Redskins stayed behind. That has a passport, too.

“We annoy the heck out of my wife, my sister

and my mom,” Kyle said. “There’s not many dinner tables that go by without it leading to football.”

The conversation inevitably winds back to the job at hand.

Father and son have moved on to a new quarterback project now, as Mike’s vision for the team starts to take shape.

He wants players who value the work it takes to win. Those who don’t meet his standard, regardless of their resume or the size of their contract, will be gone.

“We’re going to get people that are very passionate about what they do,” Mike said. “They’re here to win a Super Bowl, and I’m never going to go away from that mindset.”

Mike’s two Super Bowl rings don’t guarantee success, though. Nor do the crooked numbers that Kyle’s offenses put up in Houston. These two are starting over.

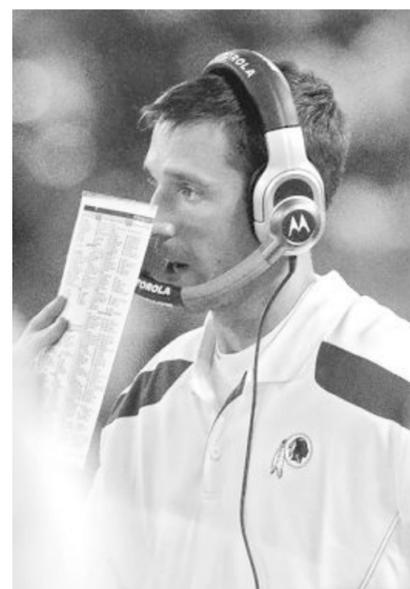
“That’s this business — it’s ‘What have you done for me lately?’” Kyle said. “I feel very good that we can do it, but we’ve still got to go out and do it.”

Winning the title this season seems improbable because of the massive scope of the Redskins’ building project. It requires more than just two years.

But the Shanahans have the big picture in mind.

They expect to get to the top eventually and get there together.

“It’d be special, and that’s why I’m here,” Kyle said. “I came here for one reason, and that was to help my dad turn something around. It’s not easy, but it’s something we are enjoying. If that’s something that we can do, and I can be a part of it with him, that would mean a lot to me.”



OFFENSE



ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Veteran wide receiver Santana Moss has had six offensive play-callers and five quarterbacks since the Redskins acquired him from the New York Jets in 2005. His 93 catches last season were the most in his 10-year career, and his 1,115 receiving yards were second best.

# MOSS IS STILL THE BOSS

Despite turnover, veteran remains a steadying influence

By NATHAN FENNO  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Santana Moss was surrounded. Music thumped in the locker room at Redskins Park. But the lyrics couldn't drown Moss' words. So the television cameras and microphones swarmed, something that seems to happen each time the veteran wide receiver opens his mouth.

The phalanx of media almost buried the face of the Washington Redskins' offense.

Most of big names are gone — Donovan McNabb dispatched to the Minnesota Vikings, Clinton Portis looking for work — leaving Moss and fan-favorite tight end Chris Cooley as leaders of a largely anonymous group. With question marks at quarterback, an influx of young receivers and a reshuffled offensive line, Moss is the certainty in a unit buffeted by change.

"I've been here [six] years, and I never had the chance to grasp the offense," Moss said. "There's always been a change here or something there. It's one of those moments where we have the advantage."

Turnover has been Moss' companion since the Redskins acquired him from the New York Jets for Laveranues Coles in 2005.

Mike Shanahan is his third coach. Five men have called offensive plays. Six quarterbacks — remember Patrick Ramsey? — lobbed passes to him.

"I've played with so many quarterbacks, man," Moss said. "Every year that goes by, it's something new. But I never really think about it."

The turnover hasn't helped the Redskins' offense, ranked in the NFL's bottom third in total offense over the past three seasons.

Last season's total — 5,374 yards — ranked No. 18 in the league. It was the

**OFFENSE**

**2-Deep Depth Chart**

- QB:** Rex Grossman, John Beck
- RB:** Tim Hightower, Roy Helu
- FB:** Darrel Young, Mike Sellers
- TE:** Chris Cooley, Fred Davis
- WR1:** Santana Moss, Anthony Armstrong
- WR2:** Jabar Gaffney, Terrence Austin
- LT:** Trent Williams, Sean Locklear
- LG:** Kory Lichtensteiger, Erik Cook
- C:** Will Montgomery, Erik Cook
- RG:** Chris Chester, Erik Cook
- RT:** Jammal Brown, Willie Smith

**Position of strength**

Tight ends Chris Cooley and Fred Davis are above-average route-runners adept at gaining yards after the catch. Will offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan exploit that tandem more than he did last season?

**Position of weakness**

The old NFL adage goes something like: "If you have two quarterbacks, it means you don't have one." Until Beck or Grossman prove they can lead the Redskins to the playoffs, they have questions at the most important position on the field.

THE WASHINGTON TIMES



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

best in Moss' six seasons in Washington. Each time, he's led the team in receiving.

But after Moss voided his contract in February, the onetime University of Miami walk-on re-signed with the Redskins in July. Other teams called. He didn't talk to them.

The past shuffling on the roster, among the coaching staff and in the front office at Redskins Park couldn't keep him away.

"If I'm going to still play, why go somewhere and start all over?" Moss said. "If we put the right people in the right places . . . we can really do some good things."

That starts with feeling more at ease in his second year under offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan. Last sea-

son, Moss caught a career-best 93 passes for 1,115 yards and six touchdowns. Kyle Shanahan used Moss more in the slot than he ever played there before while Anthony Armstrong ran deep patterns.

The relative familiarity of the offense, regardless of the quarterback, seems a luxury to Moss.

Mention Kyle Shanahan's offense and Moss drops superlatives like a late-night infomercial: "dynamic," "wide-open," "opportunity to be great," "able to prosper." But some parts of the offense aren't exactly as seen on television. A grab-bag of veterans such as Armstrong, Jabar Gaffney, Donte Stallworth, Terrence Austin and two rookies,

Leonard Hankerson and Niles Paul, are battling for playing time alongside Moss at receiver.

"We have a lot to work on still," Stall-

**"If I'm going to still play, why go somewhere and start all over? If we put the right people in the right places . . . we can really do some good things."**

— Santana Moss, Redskins receiver

worth said. "But we're moving in the right direction. That's the most important thing."

Added Kyle Shanahan: "I think every-

one is more comfortable with what we're doing, and I think it's showing."

Trent Williams, the hulking offensive tackle, echoed the sentiment. In his second year in the league, Williams felt obligated to assume a leadership role on the offensive line after the turnover.

Moss is where he looks for an example. For stability. Even a mentor.

And as the music blasted in the locker room and the cameras cloaked Moss, Williams grinned and revealed perhaps the lone weakness of the offense's face.

"There's not much," Williams said, "he can tell me about blocking somebody."

## DEFENSE



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Redskins linebacker Brian Orakpo has 19½ sacks in his first two seasons, coming under two defensive schemes. With Orakpo already comfortable in the 3-4 defense, big things are expected from him in 2011.

# 'RAK' ATTACK SETS TONE

## Orakpo keeps the pressure on opposing QBs

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

When Mike Shanahan was building winning football teams with the Denver Broncos, it wasn't hard to identify the face of the franchise — first John Elway and later on players such as Terrell Davis and Shannon Sharpe. The Redskins don't have an Elway or a Davis, but on defense they do have an emerging star.

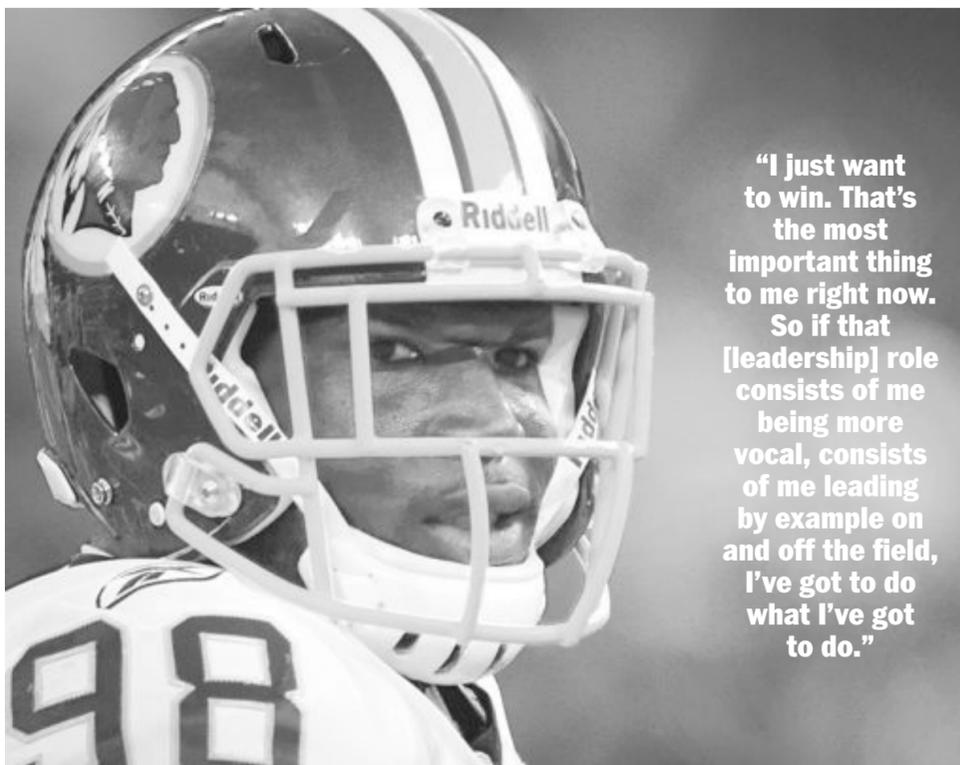
Brian Orakpo might not have the name recognition of a future Hall of Famer — at least yet — but the linebacker is growing into a vital role on an evolving defense as a playmaker and leader.

"If that [leadership label] is what y'all want to give to me, or my teammates want to, I'm going to embrace it," he said. "I just want to win. That's the most important thing to me right now. So if that role consists of me being more vocal, consists of me leading by example on and off the field, I've got to do what I've got to do."

Orakpo is only in his third season, but his impact on the team and stature within the locker room has been steadily increasing. There's a lot left to learn, though he's now a role model for younger players such as Ryan Kerrigan because he's quickly picked up Jim Haslett's defensive system.

"He's a lot more comfortable, obviously. He's not thinking as much, he's reacting," Haslett said. "Obviously, he has great pass-rush skills and he's powerful and he knows what he's doing on the run. It's night and day from last year."

In the offseason, a list of the league's top pass-rushers came out that dumped Orakpo into the third grouping, well behind the likes of Pittsburgh's James Harrison and Dallas' DeMarcus Ware. The man the Redskins took with the 13th pick in the 2009 draft is using that as "fuel to the fire," he said.



"I just want to win. That's the most important thing to me right now. So if that [leadership] role consists of me being more vocal, consists of me leading by example on and off the field, I've got to do what I've got to do."

But it doesn't seem like Orakpo — referred to as "Rak" by his teammates — needs external motivation. He has 19½ sacks in two seasons (in two different defensive schemes) and his producing even more in 2011 is seen as natural progression. The Redskins are counting on him for that.

"You need somebody that can make that quarterback get flustered, throw bad balls, not give him the time to sit back there and read and throw layups," cornerback Josh Wilson said. "Rak is a big part of this defense because he brings that pass-rushing ability to the team."

It's already evident how much Orakpo has developed a comfort zone in the 3-4 defense. The 25-year-old cited an ability to play more loosely rather than hesitating and playing tentatively.

That has shown in Orakpo's improved ability to get off blocks and

into the backfield.

"He's using his hands really well," Haslett said. "He would use his shoulders once in a while last year. But he's doing a good job with his hand placement. He's powerful and can throw tight ends around."

Selfishly — in a good way — fellow defensive players approve of Orakpo's increased role.

"He's got to be accounted for. I'm sure if you ask any offense, they locate Brian on every play and they understand that he's dangerous," nose tackle Barry Cofield said. "Any attention that's being paid on him is not being paid to me, so it helps."

Orakpo is taking the fast track to becoming not only the best player on defense for the Redskins but an elite NFL linebacker. Still, he's learning on the job in a lot of ways.

Some teammates, including cornerback Kevin Barnes, see London

Fletcher as the backbone of the defense because of his spot at middle linebacker and the Pro Bowl appearances on his resume. Orakpo hasn't been shy to rely on Fletcher for help, either.

"I've learned from him what he's brought to the table, what he's done over the years and all the teams he's been on — especially what he's done for this organization," Orakpo said. "That's the first guy that I leaned on, obviously, being a linebacker. He made the transition a lot easier seeing what he does."

Fletcher taught — and still is teaching — Orakpo how to play "faster" and count on his athleticism to produce. In turn, Orakpo has used his brief NFL experience to assist Kerrigan, the Redskins' first-round pick out of Purdue in April who is making the same transition from defensive end to linebacker.

"Rak talks to Ryan all the time about little things — about hand usage, cov-

### DEFENSE 2-Deep Depth Chart

**LDE:** Adam Carriker, Kedric Golston

**NT:** Barry Cofield, Chris Neild

**RDE:** Stephen Bowen, Darrion Scott

**LOLB:** Ryan Kerrigan, Lorenzo Alexander

**MLB:** London Fletcher, Keyaron Fox

**JLB:** Rocky McIntosh, Perry Riley

**ROLB:** Brian Orakpo, Rob Jackson

**LCB:** DeAngelo Hall, Kevin Barnes

**RCB:** Josh Wilson, Byron Westbrook

**SS:** LaRon Landry, Reed Doughty

**FS:** Oshiomogho Atogwe, DeJon Gomes

#### Position of strength

Linebackers London Fletcher and Brian Orakpo made the Pro Bowl last year for the second straight season. The 3-4 defense requires linebackers to make plays, and those two are among the best in the NFL.

#### Position of weakness

The Redskins believe they upgraded the defensive end spot by bringing in Bowen from Dallas, but he wasn't nearly as impressive as new nose tackle Barry Cofield during the preseason. Adam Carriker didn't generate a sufficient pass rush last season, so he and Bowen have a lot to prove.

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

## SPECIAL TEAMS

## CHOREOGRAPHED MAYHEM

## Alexander a force when ball is kicked

By Rich Campbell  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The chaos of covering a kickoff return is a beautiful thing to Lorenzo Alexander. Maybe that's because, to him, it's not chaos at all.

"The way he prepares and knows what's coming, it's like the play is already made before it happens," Redskins fullback Darrel Young said.

"You listen to the way he talks and you're like, 'Man, how did you see that?' He'll say, 'Well, they did this in Week 3 on a certain return.' You're like, 'How are you thinking about Week 3? It's Week 12!'"

Alexander, the two-time reigning Redskins special teams player of the year, has built his career on one of the most nuanced portions of the sport. His physical prowess, leadership and desire that extends to the film room have made him one of Washington's most respected players.

"If there's a better special teams player in this league, I haven't seen it," said special teams coach Danny Smith, who's in his 13th season coaching it at the NFL level. "I'll match him up against anybody."

Alexander, 28, is a big reason why the Redskins' coverage team has ranked in the NFL's top five in kickoff return-yard average in each of the past five seasons. He didn't play special teams during his collegiate career at California. But after unsuccessful stints with Carolina and Baltimore, the undrafted college free agent knew it was the only way to get a foothold in the NFL.

He was a defensive lineman at the time and weighed almost 300 pounds. Smith gradually broke him in after he joined the Redskins in 2007, starting him off as a member of the wedge that blocks for the kickoff returner.

"He couldn't walk and chew gum, to be honest with you," Smith said. "It's something that he'd never done. He's an easy guy to coach because you don't ever have to tell him twice. He's a tireless worker, and he loves to play the game. There are a few guys in these programs that say, 'I'll do anything to get on the field.' He's one of them."

As Alexander's position on defense — and offense — changed, so did his role on special teams.

Coach Joe Gibbs used him as a lineman on both sides of the ball in 2007. Under coach Jim Zorn, Alexander played defensive end.

When coach Mike Shanahan installed the 3-4 scheme last season, Alexander moved to outside linebacker.

The position changes have required weight loss, and the resulting speed increase has carried over to special



ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Lorenzo Alexander's blend of size, speed and technique make him a matchup nightmare on kickoff coverage for the Redskins.

**"Special teams happens so fast that you've got to be able to close distances and play with good pad level. When you're a big guy you think you can just run over anybody. So between being smart and playing my leverage and understanding where everybody else fits, it has really helped."**

— Lorenzo Alexander, Redskins special-teamer

teams. He became a key member of the punt coverage unit, and then kickoff coverage. He's now around 265 pounds, a missile that few players want to get in front of to block.

"Speed on special teams is a factor, but big speed, especially," Smith said. "That's why he's special. He's a matchup nightmare for a lot of people because of his size, speed, attention to detail and technique."

And technique is such a big part of it. There's so much more to covering kicks than just sprinting 50 yards and slamming into a blocker.

"Special teams happens so fast that

you've got to be able to close distances and play with good pad level," Alexander said. "When you're a big guy you think you can just run over anybody. So between being smart and playing my leverage and understanding where everybody else fits, it has really helped."

That understanding comes from watching film. Where fans might see 11 guys chasing the guy with the ball, Alexander sees a blocking scheme that can be conquered.

Want to get technical about kickoff coverage? Alexander is more than willing.

"You've got to understand who's blocking you," he said. "If the guard is blocking you, it's going to be a middle return. If the tackle comes across my face, I know the ball is going away, so then I've got to squeeze a lot more. If I know it's a bloop kick, I'm squeezing right now to the ball."

So it's no coincidence that he led the Redskins last season with 20 special teams tackles, 13 of which were solo.

"He'll not only beat you with his physical skills, but he'll outprepare you as well," Smith said. "When you get that combination, you're special."

## SPECIAL TEAMS

## Key specialists

**KR:** Brandon Banks

**PR:** Brandon Banks

**K:** Graham Gano

**P:** Sav Rocca

**LS:** Nick Sundberg

**Special strength:** Lorenzo Alexander leads a kickoff coverage unit that ranked in the NFL's top five in kickoff return-yard average in each of the past five seasons. Add Gano's strong leg, and the Redskins have an advantage in determining field position.

**Special weakness:** The Redskins' annual merry-go-round of veteran punters stopped on Rocca, 37, who Philadelphia opted not to re-sign. He averaged almost three yards more than Redskins punters did last season, and he must continue that form.

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

## NEWCOMERS

## Best of the rest

**RB** Tim Hightower

**FS** Oshiomogho Atogwe

**RDE** Stephen Bowen

**WR** Jabar Gaffney

**OLB** Ryan Kerrigan

**RG** Chris Chester

**CB** Josh Wilson

## Notable departures

**RB** Clinton Portis

**QB** Donovan McNabb

**CB** Carlos Rogers

**C** Casey Rabach

**DL** Albert Haynesworth

**DE** Phillip Daniels

**NT** Ma'ake Kemoeatu

**DE** Vonnie Holliday

**OLB** Andre Carter

**LG** Derrick Dockery

**OLB** Chris Wilson

## Still in need

The Redskins won only 10 games in the past two seasons because they had major roster deficiencies. They have started fixing those holes, but depth remains an issue, especially on the offensive line. Washington simply can't withstand injuries there.

## Surprise rookie

First-round pick Ryan Kerrigan could surprise — for the wrong reasons. He got a late start on transitioning to outside linebacker from defensive end because of the lockout and a bone bruise in his knee. He did not appear to be an explosive, dominant pass rusher during the preseason.

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

## NEWCOMERS

## NOSE TACKLE TOES THE LINE

## Cofield a change from Haynesworth

By Stephen Whyne  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

To say 2010 was a lost season for the Washington Redskins' defensive line would be a huge understatement. Albert Haynesworth again was supposed to be the big man in the middle, but myriad problems limited him to eight games as his team limped to a 6-10 finish.

Haynesworth is gone, his mammoth seven-year, \$100 million contract from 2009 jettisoned to make way for someone — anyone — to fill his spot. But the Redskins consider themselves fortunate that among a host of new faces they picked up during roster roulette in the days after the lockout, they didn't just get anyone as a new nose tackle.

They got Barry Cofield — a player with leadership skills who not only fits coordinator Jim Haslett's scheme better but allows the Redskins to do much more on the defensive side of the ball.

"Coach Haslett has a great plan, and I think this year we have a lot of the pieces for him to work with," Cofield said. "The Skins did a great job of acquiring talent; now it's our job to go out and execute."

On defense, Washington is expected



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Teammates say new nose tackle Barry Cofield's athleticism allows him to do more than just stop the run.

to have five new starters: Cofield at nose tackle, Stephen Bowen at defensive end, first-round pick Ryan Kerrigan at outside linebacker, Josh Wilson at cornerback and Oshiomogho Atogwe at free safety. On offense, there will be a new starter at quarterback (Rex Grossman) and running back (Tim Hightower).

But the addition of Cofield could be the biggest splash the Redskins made — even though the six-year deal is worth just over a third of Haynesworth's at \$36 million and because the 27-year-old isn't hyped as the greatest defensive player

available. Instead, Cofield calls himself an "undersized" nose tackle even at 6-foot-4 and 306 pounds.

Teammates prefer the term "athletic," because Cofield can do a lot more from the middle than just clog it up.

"He's not your typical 3-4 nose tackle where he's just in there stopping the run," middle linebacker London Fletcher said. "He does a great job of that, but he also makes plays, he can rush the passer. I've been free to run to the football a lot more."

Last year, the Redskins finished tied for 25th in sacks with 29. Cofield's addition along a revamped line and an enhanced 3-4 defense should only help.

"I feel like we're going to get more pressure on the quarterback. I feel like we're going to be able to stop the run, which in turn makes teams throw the ball," cornerback DeAngelo Hall said. "Any time you've got a team that's going to throw the ball, me, myself, you feel good about your chances of the getting the ball. It's going to give us a chance to get more turnovers."

It's evident already in the preseason how big an impact the "undersized" Cofield can have on the Redskins' success. They allowed a combined 10 points against Pittsburgh and Indianapolis while surrendering the fewest yards of any team in the league. When Cofield was not playing well against Baltimore, the first-team defense gave up 14 points

and 200 yards.

"We were sloppy. I know I was sloppy — it starts with me, so I take a lot of blame for it," Cofield said. "I didn't play my best ball."

Cofield is only 27 and a newcomer around these parts, but his words seem to carry a certain amount of gravitas for the Redskins. He said that preseason experience was good to build adversity, and teammates seem to agree and follow his lead more often than not.

"I think he's a natural leader more than anything," Haslett said. "And he does it more by his play on the field. He doesn't say much. He's really smart. He picks things up really fast."

There's a reason younger and older teammates alike listen — because Cofield's presence provides more opportunities for others.

"From a nose tackle standpoint, he's keeping linemen out of my way. That's his main job," Fletcher said. "Don't let them get to me. It's not going to be where he's going to have a bunch of tackles. He don't need a bunch of tackles. Leave that to me!"

Cofield looks poised to help teammates pile up sacks while also getting a few himself — in other words providing big-time production in an "undersized" package.

"We're coming along well. We've got a lot of talent," Cofield said. "Put it all together and it's a recipe for success."

# REDSKINS GAME-BY-GAME SCHEDULE

## Sun, Sept. 11 vs. New York Giants (4:15 p.m., Fox)

A fitting matchup for the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this also is an opportunity for Washington to catch banged-up New York at less than full strength. The Redskins have lost nine of their past 10 against the Giants.

## Sun, Sept. 18 vs. Arizona Cardinals (1 p.m., Fox)

RB Tim Hightower gets a shot at the team that traded him in July for a late 2012 pick and a 35-year-old defensive end. This is QB Kevin Kolb's second start for a Cardinals team he joined in late July, so perhaps the Redskins can take advantage of his relative inexperience.

## Mon, Sept. 26 at Dallas Cowboys (8:30 p.m., ESPN)

The Redskins are 2-9 on Monday Night Football over the past 10 seasons, but one of those wins was a heart-stopping comeback at Dallas in 2005, made possible by two long touchdown catches by Santana Moss in the final minutes. Washington split with its archrival last season.

## Sun, Oct. 2 at St. Louis Rams (1 p.m., Fox)

Rams QB Sam Bradford took a major step forward as a rookie by beating the Redskins 30-16 in Week 3 last season. Atoning for that loss on short rest is essential for Washington to enter the bye week at least at 2-2 and with any hopes of contending.

## Sun, Oct. 16 vs. Philadelphia Eagles (1 p.m., Fox)

No more Donovan McNabb intrigue here. That's for Week 16. Instead, there are memories of last year's nationally televised nightmare: Eagles QB Mike Vick embarrassed Washington at FedEx Field on Monday night, accounting for six touchdowns in a 59-28 rout.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

If the Redskins get off to a decent start, they enter a key stretch Oct. 23 against No. 1 overall pick Cam Newton and the Panthers in Charlotte.

## Sun, Oct. 23 at Carolina Panthers (1 p.m., Fox)

The schedule really opens up here. If the Redskins are at least 3-2 at this point with some divisional wins, they can build momentum entering a brutal home stretch. Cam Newton is not as refined as Bradford was last year; no way the Redskins can afford to let a rookie quarterback beat them again.

## Sun, Oct. 30 vs. Buffalo Bills at Toronto (4:05 p.m., Fox)

The Redskins catch a bit of a break here. Although

Buffalo is only 90 minutes from Toronto, this is an attractive game for Redskins fans to travel to, and thus the Bills' home-field advantage will be weakened. It's a homecoming of sorts for FS Oshiomogho Atogwe, who grew up in Windsor, Ontario.

## Sun, Nov. 6 vs. San Francisco 49ers (1 p.m., Fox)

This is a must-win game if the Redskins are to contend. New 49ers coach Jim Harbaugh can relate to the Redskins' quarterback conundrum. He juggled former No. 1 pick Alex Smith, veteran Josh McCown and rookie Colin Kaepernick in the preseason.

## Sun, Nov. 13 at Miami Dolphins (1 p.m., Fox)

You think QB John Beck might have this one circled? The Dolphins drafted him 40th overall in 2007, but he fell out of favor when the front office and coaching staff were overhauled after a 1-15 season. Beck would love to stick it to a team that still hasn't solved its quarterback situation. Of course, his revenge motive may be moot as long as Rex Grossman is the starter.

## Sun, Nov. 20 vs. Dallas Cowboys (1 p.m., Fox)

Coming off four straight games in which the Redskins could be favored, they have to protect home field against a division rival. DE Stephen Bowen gets a second crack at his former team, which never thought enough of him to make him a regular starter.

## Sun, Nov. 27 at Seattle Seahawks (4:05 p.m., Fox)

You'd be hard-pressed to find a more difficult finishing schedule than the Redskins'. Four of their final six opponents made the playoffs last season, and the Giants went 10-6. The noise at Century-Link Field makes Seattle's home-field advantage among the best in the NFL.

## Sun, Dec. 4 vs. New York Jets (1 p.m., CBS)

This is the Redskins' first game against the quarterback they coveted in the 2009 draft. Mark Sanchez might have worn burgundy and gold. Instead, he's played in the AFC championship game in both of his NFL seasons.

## Sun, Dec. 11 vs. New England Patriots (1 p.m., CBS)

This one is for those who love a good chess match. Mike Shanahan and Bill Belichick have five Lombardi trophies between them. Shanahan and Belichick are friends, and Shanahan even visited Patriots practices during his hiatus in 2009.

## Sun, Dec. 18 at New York Giants (1 p.m., Fox)

The Redskins have beaten the Giants only once in their past 10 meetings. New York typically runs the ball well and pressures the quarterback against Washington. NT Barry Cofield's defection to the Redskins could help change that.

## Sat, Dec. 24 vs. Minnesota Vikings (1 p.m., Fox)

If you don't want to relive Donovan McNabb's disastrous season in Washington, you might want to leave town early for your holiday vacation. Imagine if either team is in playoff contention. This one will be personal for McNabb, and he stuck it to Philly in a similar situation last October.

## Sun, Jan. 1 at Philadelphia Eagles (1 p.m., Fox)

Not exactly the easiest finishing matchup. The Eagles loaded up on high-profile free agents in the offseason. Washington will have a say in how it's remembered among free agent-heavy teams: The 2000 Redskins, who flopped, or the 1994 49ers, who won it all.

Compiled by Rich Campbell

### Arizona Cardinals

- Sept. 11 Carolina, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Washington, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Seattle, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 2 N.Y. Giants, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 BYE
- Oct. 23 Pittsburgh, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at Baltimore, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 St. Louis, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at San Francisco, 4:05 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at St. Louis, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Dallas, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 11 San Francisco, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 18 Cleveland, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Seattle, 4:15 p.m.

### Atlanta Falcons

- Sept. 11 at Chicago, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Philadelphia, 8:20 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Tampa Bay, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Seattle, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Green Bay, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 at Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 BYE
- Nov. 6 at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 New Orleans, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at Houston, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 15 Jacksonville, 8:20 p.m.
- Dec. 26 at New Orleans, 8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.

### Buffalo Bills

- Sept. 11 at Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Oakland, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 New England, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at N.Y. Giants, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 BYE
- Oct. 30 Washington, 4:05 p.m.<sup>1</sup>
- Nov. 6 N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at Dallas, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at Miami, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 18 Miami, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 24 Denver, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 at New England, 1 p.m.

### Carolina Panthers

- Sept. 11 at Arizona, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Green Bay, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Chicago, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 New Orleans, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Washington, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 BYE
- Nov. 13 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.

### Chicago Bears

- Sept. 11 Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at New Orleans, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Green Bay, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 2 Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 10 at Detroit, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Minnesota, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.<sup>2</sup>
- Oct. 30 BYE
- Nov. 7 at Philadelphia, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 13 Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at Oakland, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Denver, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 18 Seattle, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 25 at Green Bay, 8:20 p.m.
- Jan. 1 at Minnesota, 1 p.m.

### Cincinnati Bengals

- Sept. 11 at Cleveland, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Denver, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 25 San Francisco, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 BYE
- Oct. 30 at Seattle, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 6 at Tennessee, 4:05 p.m.
- Nov. 13 Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at Baltimore, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 Cleveland, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Houston, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at St. Louis, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 24 Arizona, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Baltimore, 1 p.m.

### Cleveland Browns

- Sept. 11 Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Miami, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 BYE
- Oct. 16 at Oakland, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Seattle, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at San Francisco, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 6 at Houston, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 St. Louis, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Baltimore, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 8 at Pittsburgh, 8:20 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Arizona, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at Baltimore, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.

### Dallas Cowboys

- Sept. 11 at N.Y. Jets, 8:20 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at San Francisco, 4:05 p.m.
- Sept. 26 Washington, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 2 Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 BYE
- Oct. 16 at New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 23 St. Louis, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at Philadelphia, 8:20 p.m.

### Denver Broncos

- Sept. 12 Oakland, 10:15 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Cincinnati, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Green Bay, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 9 San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 16 BYE
- Oct. 23 at Miami, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 Detroit, 4:05 p.m.
- Nov. 6 at Oakland, 4:05 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 17 N.Y. Jets, 8:20 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at Minnesota, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Chicago, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 18 New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Kansas City, 4:15 p.m.

### Detroit Lions

- Sept. 11 at Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Dallas, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 10 Chicago, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 16 San Francisco, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at Denver, 4:05 p.m.
- Nov. 6 BYE
- Nov. 13 at Chicago, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 24 Green Bay, 12:30 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at New Orleans, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Minnesota, 4 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Oakland, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 24 San Diego, 4:05 p.m.
- Jan. 1 at Green Bay, 1 p.m.

### Green Bay Packers

- Sept. 8 New Orleans, 8:30 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Chicago, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 2 Denver, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Atlanta, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 16 St. Louis, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 at Minnesota, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 30 BYE
- Nov. 6 at San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 14 Minnesota, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 20 Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 24 at Detroit, 12:30 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at N.Y. Giants, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Oakland, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 25 Chicago, 8:20 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Detroit, 1 p.m.

### Houston Texans

- Sept. 11 Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Miami, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at New Orleans, 1 p.m.

## 2011 SCHEDULES

- Oct. 2 Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Oakland, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Baltimore, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 23 at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 BYE
- Nov. 27 at Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 22 at Indianapolis, 8:20 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Tennessee, 1 p.m.

### Indianapolis Colts

- Sept. 11 at Houston, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Cleveland, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Pittsburgh, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 3 at Tampa Bay, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 at New Orleans, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 BYE
- Nov. 27 Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at New England, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Dec. 11 at Baltimore, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 22 Houston, 8:20 p.m.
- Jan. 1 at Jacksonville, 1 p.m.

### Jacksonville Jaguars

- Sept. 11 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 New Orleans, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Baltimore, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at Houston, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 BYE
- Nov. 13 at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at Cleveland, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 Houston, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 5 San Diego, 8:30 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 15 at Atlanta, 8:20 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Indianapolis, 1 p.m.

### Kansas City Chiefs

- Sept. 11 Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at San Diego, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 2 Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 BYE
- Oct. 23 at Oakland, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 31 San Diego, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 6 Miami, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 Denver, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 21 at New England, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 27 Pittsburgh, 8:20 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at Chicago, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 Green Bay, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 24 Oakland, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 at Denver, 4:15 p.m.

### Miami Dolphins

- Sept. 12 New England, 7 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Houston, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Cleveland, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 9 BYE
- Oct. 17 at N.Y. Jets, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Denver, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at N.Y. Giants, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 at Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 Washington, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 24 at Dallas, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Oakland, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at New England, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.

### Minnesota Vikings

- Sept. 11 at San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Arizona, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Chicago, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Green Bay, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 BYE
- Nov. 14 at Green Bay, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 20 Oakland, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Denver, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 New Orleans, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at Washington, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Chicago, 1 p.m.

### New England Patriots

- Sept. 12 at Miami, 7 p.m.
- Sept. 18 San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Oakland, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 9 N.Y. Jets, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Dallas, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 23 BYE
- Oct. 30 at Pittsburgh, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 6 N.Y. Giants, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at N.Y. Jets, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Nov. 21 Kansas City, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 27 at Philadelphia, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Indianapolis, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Dec. 11 at Washington, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Denver, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 24 Miami, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Buffalo, 1 p.m.

### New Orleans Saints

- Sept. 8 at Green Bay, 8:30 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Chicago, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 Houston, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Carolina, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Tampa Bay, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Indianapolis, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 30 at St. Louis, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at Atlanta, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 BYE

- Nov. 28 N.Y. Giants, 8:30 p.m.
- Dec. 4 Detroit, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 26 Atlanta, 8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Carolina, 1 p.m.

### New York Giants

- Sept. 11 at Washington, 4:15 p.m.
- Sept. 19 St. Louis, 8:30 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Arizona, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Seattle, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 BYE
- Oct. 30 Miami, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 6 at New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at San Francisco, 4:15 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Nov. 20 Philadelphia, 8:20 p.m.
- Nov. 28 at New Orleans, 8:30 p.m.
- Dec. 4 San Diego, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Dallas, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Dec. 18 Washington, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Dallas, 1 p.m.

### New York Jets

- Sept. 11 Dallas, 8:20 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Oakland, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Baltimore, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 17 Miami, 8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 23 San Diego, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 30 BYE
- Nov. 6 at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 13 New England, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Nov. 17 at Denver, 8:20 p.m.
- Nov. 27 Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at Washington, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Philadelphia, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 24 Giants, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 at Miami, 1 p.m.

### Oakland Raiders

- Sept. 12 at Denver, 10:15 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 N.Y. Jets, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 2 New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Houston, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Cleveland, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 23 Kansas City, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 30 BYE
- Nov. 6 Denver, 4:05 p.m.
- Nov. 10 at San Diego, 8:20 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at Minnesota, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 27 Chicago, 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 4 at Miami, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Green Bay, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 at Kansas City, 1 p.m.
- Jan. 1 San Diego, 4:15 p.m.

### Philadelphia Eagles

- Sept. 11 at St. Louis, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 18 at Atlanta, 8:20 p.m.
- Sept. 25 N.Y. Giants, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 2 San Francisco, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 at Washington, 1 p.m.

- Oct. 23 BYE
- Oct. 30 Dallas, 8:20 p.m.
- Nov. 7 Chicago, 8:30 p.m.
- Nov. 13 Arizona, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 at N.Y. Giants, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Nov. 27 New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 1 at Seattle, 8:20 p.m.
- Dec. 11 at Miami, 1 p.m.
- Dec. 18 N.Y. Jets, 4:15 p.m.
- Dec. 24 at Dallas, 4:15 p.m.
- Jan. 1 Washington, 1 p.m.

### Pittsburgh Steelers

- Sept. 11 at Baltimore, 4:05 p.m.
- Sept. 18 Seattle, 1 p.m.
- Sept. 25 at Indianapolis, 8:20 p.m.
- Oct. 2 at Houston, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 9 Tennessee, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 16 Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
- Oct. 23 at Arizona, 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 30 New England, 4:15 p.m.
- Nov. 6 Baltimore, 8:20 p.m.
- Nov. 13 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
- Nov. 20 BYE
- Nov. 27 at Kansas City, 8:20 p.m.<sup>3</sup>
- Dec. 4 Cincinnati, 1 p.m.
-



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Ravens RB Ray Rice (above) figures to be a workhorse around the goal line with Willis McGahee now in Denver. The Eagles' Michael Vick (inset) is still a thrill-a-minute QB, but can his offensive line keep him upright? For yardage and TDs, you could do worse than hitching your wagon to Redskins RB Tim Hightower (below).

## FANTASY FOOTBALL

# Thin line separates genius, stupidity

By MATT PALLISTER  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The NFL season starts Thursday, which spares me from the obligatory advice column. And that's a good thing because fantasy football advice is much like relationship advice. No one really knows what they're talking about, and success is more dumb luck than anything.

I've never bought a significant other an appliance for a special occasion, but I have drafted a defense in the fourth round. I've won multiple league championships, but I inexplicably made a "Beep, Beep" noise one night when my pregnant wife scooted backward on the bed. Success and stupidity are intertwined.

With that in mind, and in honor of my wife's favorite player, John Elway (hoping this negates the "Beep, Beep" mention), here are seven observations on the upcoming season. Let's hope most of them do not turn out to be the fantasy equivalent of an anniversary vacuum cleaner.

- If you drafted Michael Vick, you better have a good backup. The quarterback's reckless style of play and the Eagles' porous offensive line guarantee he will get hurt at some point. Not to mention defenders will be looking to make their bones by getting after the league's newest \$100 million man. The leader of the "Dream Team" will be in every defensive coordinator's crosshairs. Also, if you drafted Michael Vick, you'll never meet our pug.

- Ray Rice will not disappoint this year. With legendary touchdown vulture Willis McGahee now in Denver, the hard-running Raven will reach the end zone at least 10 times and lead the league in yards from scrimmage. If he starts slow, don't worry. If you passed on him in the draft, swing a trade. Trust me. Would a guy who once protected Stan Humphries in a keeper league steer you wrong?

- I don't like Jamal Charles. Not personally; never met the man. I just think it's going to be tough for him to live up to the expectations. He's ranked as the No. 2 running back by ESPN. But he benefited greatly last year from being under the radar (Thomas Jones started the season as the primary back) and from Matt Cassel and Dwayne Bowe taking the pressure



off him with career years. The Chiefs looked terrible during the preseason, and I don't think that's a fluke. Then again, I once selected Marion Butts and Ricky Ervins as my starting running backs.

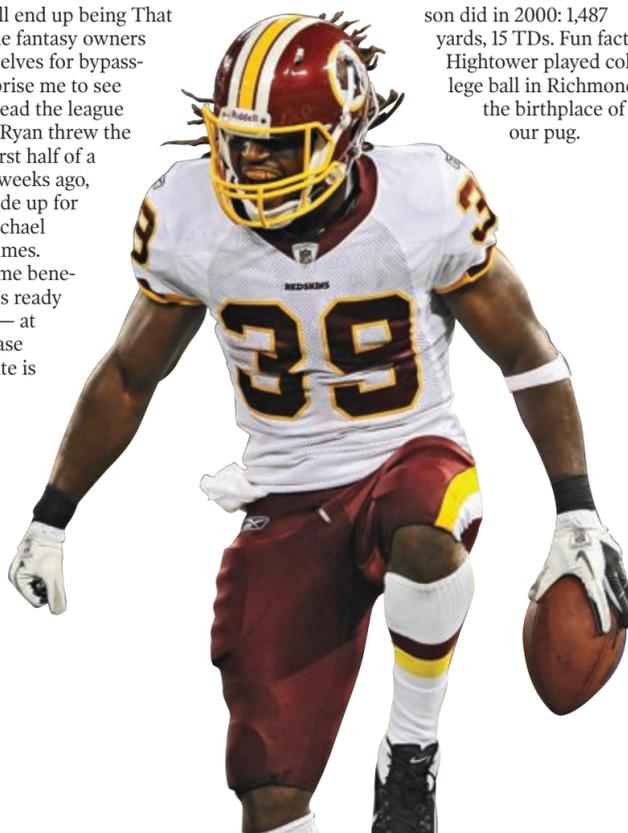
- Roddy White will end up being That Guy this year. The one fantasy owners will be kicking themselves for bypassing. It would not surprise me to see the Falcons receiver lead the league in touchdowns. Matt Ryan threw the ball 42 times in the first half of a preseason game two weeks ago, and Atlanta didn't trade up for Julio Jones to give Michael Turner the ball 400 times. White will be the prime beneficiary of a team that's ready to take the next step — at least offensively. In case you didn't know, White is a big fan of Michael Vick, so he, too, is on the list of people not

invited to our pug's next birthday; he'll be 6.

- My big hunch is that Mark Ingram is going to have a HUGE year. The Saints rookie is not particularly big, fast or elusive. But neither was Walter Payton. Actually, he reminds me of Emmitt Smith, another intangibles guy. Comparisons aside, a tough runner on a prolific offense is bound to score his share of touchdowns. This prediction is brought to you by a guy who was smart enough to take a flier on Kurt Warner in a 1999 fantasy draft, but dumb enough to trade him for Antonio Freeman six weeks into that MVP season.

- Don't believe the Matt Stafford hype. Even if he can stay healthy, the offense is too unbalanced for him to be a consistent fantasy producer. Yes, Calvin Johnson is great, and Nate Burleson is sneaky good. But the Lions can't run the ball. That means Stafford is always a target, and it's why the odds of him making it through 16 games are roughly the same as the chance that drafting Koren Robinson in the third round would prove successful. Yes, I did that.

- Tim Hightower will have the first significant fantasy season from a Redskin in years, becoming the latest running back to benefit from Mike Shanahan's system. He's no Terrell Davis, but with the coach needing to take the pressure off flighty starter Rex Grossman, and the offensive line performing much better than expected, he could have the type of season that Mike Anderson did in 2000: 1,487 yards, 15 TDs. Fun fact: Hightower played college ball in Richmond, the birthplace of our pug.



**Tim Hightower is no Terrell Davis, but with coach Mike Shanahan needing to take the pressure off flighty starter Rex Grossman, and the offensive line performing much better than expected, he could have the type of season that Mike Anderson did in 2000: 1,487 yards, 15 TDs.**

## BY THE NUMBERS

- Santana Moss needs 58 receptions to become just the fourth wideout to catch 500 passes as a Redskin. The other three: 888 Art Monk\*, 1980-93; 549 Gary Clark, 1985-92; 530 Charley Taylor\*, 1966-77

\* Hall of Fame

Note: Taylor caught 119 passes as a running back early in his career before switching to receiver 10 games into 1966.

- Brian Orakpo, the Redskins' Pro Bowl outside linebacker, has 19.5 sacks in his first two NFL seasons. That's as many as the Cowboys' DeMarcus Ware had (2005-06) and more than Julius Peppers did (19 in 2002-03). Since 2000, only seven pass rushers have had more in their first two years. The top 10:

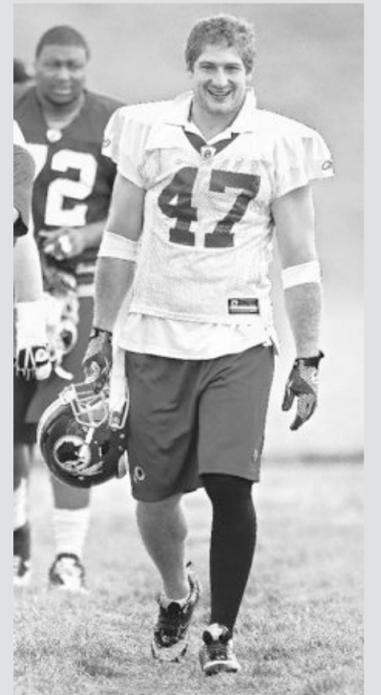
27 Shawne Merriman, Chargers, 2005-06  
24 Dwight Freeney, Colts, 2002-03  
23.5 Clay Matthews, Packers, 2009-10  
22.5 Terrell Suggs, Ravens, 2003-04  
22 Kevin Williams, Vikings, 2003-04  
21 Elvis Dumervil, Broncos, 2006-07  
20 Jared Allen, Chiefs, 2004-05

**19.5 Brian Orakpo, Redskins, 2009-10**

19.5 Cameron Wake, Dolphins, 2009-10

19.5 DeMarcus Ware, 2005-06

- Since 2004, the year Chris Cooley broke into the NFL, just eight tight ends have caught 300 or more passes. Cooley, a two-time Pro Bowler, is No. 4 on the list: 601 Tony Gonzalez, Chiefs/Falcons



ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**Since joining the NFL in 2003, Chris Cooley is fourth in the league among tight ends with 420 receptions.**

582 Jason Witten, Cowboys  
505 Antonio Gates, Chargers  
**420 Chris Cooley, Redskins**  
388 Jeremy Shockey, Giants/Saints  
364 Dallas Clark, Colts  
362 Kellen Winslow Jr., Browns/Bucs  
326 Todd Heap, Ravens

- Mike Shanahan had a great run with Denver from 1996 to '98, compiling a 46-10 record (playoffs included) and winning two Super Bowls. In his other 14 years as a coach, though — with the Raiders, Broncos and Redskins — he's a much more mortal 114-103 (.525), including just one postseason victory (in the second round against the Patriots in 2005).

- In the past decade (2001-10), only six teams have fewer wins than the Redskins (68) and only four have a worse division record (21-41, .339).

**The clubs with fewer wins:** Lions (39), Texans (55), Raiders (58), Browns (59), Bills (62), Cardinals (64). Note: The Raiders (2002) and the Cards (2008) have gone to the Super Bowl in this time. Also, the Texans didn't come into existence until '02.

**The clubs with worse division records:** Lions (12-50, .194), Texans (16-38, .296), Browns (19-45, .297), Bills (20-42, .323).

- The Redskins haven't had a 1,000-yard rusher since 2008, when Clinton Portis went for 1,487. Believe it or not, though, seven teams have gone even longer without one — the Lions (Kevin Jones, 1,133, 2004), Seahawks (Shaun Alexander, 1,880, 2005), Cowboys (Julius Jones, 1,084, 2006), Saints (Deuce McAllister, 1,057, 2006), Broncos (Tatum Bell, 1,025, 2006), Cardinals (Edgerrin James 1,222, 2007) and Colts (Joseph Addai, 1,072, 2007).

Compiled by Dan Daly

RAVENS 2011

# WILLIAMS' RISE NO SURPRISE TO HIM

By Jason Butt

SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**OWINGS MILLS, MD.** | Cary Williams was a little-known cornerback fighting for a roster spot when training camp started.

But as the preseason wraps up, Williams has emerged as a starter in Baltimore's defensive backfield. Needless to say, Williams' rise up the depth chart wasn't expected, especially with Domonique Foxworth back from ACL surgery and the Ravens re-signing Chris Carr.

"It's been a lot of work obtaining the dream," Williams said. "It's something I've always wanted to do since I was a little kid."



Williams

Compared to some of his starting mates, his dream has been quite different. The other 10 defensive starters all attended BCS colleges. These schools didn't recruit Williams, whose only major visit was to Auburn. A native of Hollywood, Fla., Williams originally landed at Fordham in New York City. After minimal playing time and butting heads with a position coach his freshman season, he transferred to Division II Washburn in Topeka, Kan.

He excelled at Washburn as he was named an All-American in 2007. He also is the only player in school history to score a touchdown on an interception, kickoff return and reception in the same season. But it wasn't until he secured a spot at the University of Kansas pro day — where he ran a faster 40 time than former Jayhawks corner Aqib Talib — that he caught the attention of NFL scouts.

"People have always doubted me," Williams said. "I've always been the small fry or the guy that didn't get as much attention. But I never wavered on anything. I've always had my goals. My mindset was to be in the NFL and I wouldn't let any negativity affect me getting to my goal and being where I'm at right now."

The Ravens had a draftable grade

## RAVENS PREVIEW

### The basics

**Offensive coordinator:** Cam Cameron

**Defensive coordinator:** Chuck Pagano

**Last season:** 12-4 (second in AFC North)

### Key players

**LT Bryant McKinnie:** The Ravens gave up 40 sacks a season ago. McKinnie's addition was made to keep pass rushers off of QB Joe Flacco.

**QB Joe Flacco:** It's Flacco's team with WR Derrick Mason, RB Willis McGahee, NT Kelly Gregg and TE Todd Heap gone. Flacco has taken more of a leadership role within the team this preseason.

**DT Haloti Ngata:** Ngata dropped 20 pounds during the lockout in an attempt to be in better shape at the end of the season. He's hoping to improve Baltimore's pass rush, which only generated 27 sacks a year ago.

**FB Vonta Leach:** Leach was brought in to help RB Ray Rice and the running game. Rice saw his yards per carry average drop by 1.3 yards from 2009 to 2010. Leach is hoping to lead the way to get Rice's numbers get back to where they were.

**OLB Terrell Suggs:** Suggs has performed better in even years, being a Pro Bowler in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010. Odd years seem to be his off years. He's hoping to break that trend in 2011.

### Good things will happen if

It all starts with the offensive line giving Flacco more time in the pocket. If it can, and Flacco can make plays downfield to receivers Anquan Boldin and Lee Evans, then that will help produce a more balanced offense with Ray Rice and Ricky Williams in the backfield.

### Bad things will happen if

Behind receivers Anquan Boldin and Lee Evans are rookies Torrey Smith and Tandon Doss. Both possess potential but need time to grow. If one of them goes down to injury then defenses will turn their attention to loading eight men in the box and stopping the Ravens' rushing attack.

### Fun fact

In between meetings and practices, the Ravens have another game on their mind: Cornhole. Defensive end Cory Redding introduced the game to his teammates and it's caught on. Punter Sam Koch is the best on the team at it,

while right tackle Michael Oher, defensive tackle Haloti Ngata and safety Haruki Nakamura are frequent players. Cornhole tournaments are often scheduled in the team's locker room.

### Schedule

**9/11 vs. Steelers:** Pittsburgh's won seven of the last 10 and has the upper hand in this bitter rivalry.

**9/18 at Titans:** The Ravens' biggest strength is their run defense, which will look to slow down superstar running back Chris Johnson.

**9/25 at Rams:** Baltimore was lucky to get the NFC West on its schedule. But traveling to St. Louis won't be easy.

**10/2 vs. Jets:** The Jets will be looking to avenge a tough 10-9 loss in opening week last year.

**10/16 vs. Texans:** The Ravens are fortunate to have a week off to prepare for one of the NFL's most dynamic offenses when healthy.

**10/24 at Jaguars:** Baltimore faces another tough rushing attack on its lone Monday night appearance.

**10/30 vs. Cardinals:** Is Kevin Kolb the answer for Arizona? Baltimore will find out midseason.

**11/6 at Steelers:** Baltimore's hoping to at least split both games this year. Losing two would give Pittsburgh the inside track to the AFC North title.

**11/13 at Seahawks:** It's never easy to travel to CenturyLink Field, arguably the loudest stadium in the NFL.

**11/20 vs. Bengals:** Of the rookie quarterbacks starting this season, Cincinnati has the biggest challenge with Andy Dalton at the helm.

**11/24 vs. 49ers:** Call it the Harbaugh Bowl. Brothers John and Jim Harbaugh coach against each other for the first time on Thanksgiving.

**12/4 at Browns:** Quarterback Colt McCoy has looked good this preseason. His running game, led by Peyton Hillis, certainly helps.

**12/11 vs. Colts:** The first of two late-season challenges, the Ravens' secondary will certainly be tested by Peyton Manning — if healthy.

**12/18 at Chargers:** A week after Indianapolis, the Ravens will face Philip Rivers, who won't be afraid to throw deep against Baltimore's defensive backs.

**12/24 vs. Browns:** To make a sure-fire run at the AFC North title, the Ravens will need to sweep Cleveland and Cincinnati. Here's their chance against the Browns.

**1/1 at Bengals:** Cincinnati will have had a whole season to work out its kinks by the season finale.

— Jason Butt

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

on Williams but were wary since he played at a small school. Others were interested, though, as the Titans took him in the seventh round of the 2008 draft.

Williams said he had plenty of ups and downs in Tennessee, being injured and spending the majority of his time on the practice squad. In No-

vember 2009, the Ravens were scouring practice squad talent in search of a special teams player with upside to contribute at any position. With previous scouting work, Williams was on the top of that list.

"The thing that was interesting about him when he came out was he had the measurables that intrigued

you," said Vincent Newsome, the Ravens director of pro personnel. "Essentially, what we ended up doing is saying let's watch another team develop him and see how he does."

Williams has seen time in 18 games and started one over the past two seasons with Baltimore. Heading into camp this year, he was seen as a spe-

cial teams asset. Now he's looking at locking down the opposition's top receiver. This preseason, he's gone toe-to-toe against Kansas City Chiefs receiver Dwayne Bowe and Washington Redskins wideout Santana Moss.

Against Bowe, he displayed solid technique in his drop before breaking on a pass and ripping the ball out of the tall receiver's hands. Against Moss, Williams was beat for what could have been a touchdown. But Williams used his length to catch up and do just enough to swipe the ball out of the veteran's hands.

Williams looked like the best corner on Baltimore's roster this preseason. He also saw extra time because of a hamstring injury to Carr and a slow rehab process for Foxworth. But doing it the old-fashioned way, Williams outworked his competition to earn the inside track to a starting spot.

"We always tell them don't count numbers," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "You never know what's going to happen. What it's based on is how you play. If you play well and do the things you need to do to be successful, then things will work out well for you."

Williams has turned into an ideal corner in first-year defensive coordinator Chuck Pagano's defensive scheme. At 6-foot-1, 190 pounds, Williams has the size and strength to jam bigger receivers. Combine Williams with rookie cornerback Jimmy Smith, listed at 6-foot-2 and 210 pounds, and you have a tandem that can aid the pass rush by being physical at the line of scrimmage.

Baltimore's opening game will be a huge test to see if Williams is ready for the NFL. The Ravens open with Pittsburgh, which has won seven of the past 10 meetings. Through his journey, Williams said he's thankful Baltimore took a chance on him when his time in Tennessee wasn't working out.

"The Ravens saw something Tennessee didn't see in me," Williams said. "But hey, that's how the NFL is. It's a business. But you know what they say, one man's trash is another man's treasure."



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ASSOCIATED PRESS

**The Colts have been able to count on Peyton Manning being the quarterback ever since the opening week of his rookie season in 1998. But the four-time MVP has been ruled out of Sunday's opener against the Texans, breaking his streak of 227 consecutive starts.**

**BUFFALO BILLS (4-12)**

**New faces:** DL Marcell Dareus, LB Nick Barnett, WR-KR Brad Smith, QB Tyler Thigpen, LB Shawne Merriman, acquired in November, but finished season on injured reserve.

**Key losses:** WR Lee Evans, LB Paul Posluszny, DB Donte Whitner.

**Strengths:** Dareus adds bulk to defensive front-three, providing run-stopping and pass-rushing presence alongside veteran DT Kyle Williams. Chan Gailey-led coaching staff already astute at devising offensive plays, added defensive specialist Dave Wannstedt as assistant head coach. Merriman, if healthy, adds potent pass-rushing dimension.

**Weaknesses:** Patchwork offensive line springing leaks and lacks experienced depth. Receivers young and without leader Evans. Once strong special teams undone by youth movement.

**Expectations:** Defense should be improved after finishing 32nd against run last year. Smith brings wildcat threat to offense, but QB Ryan Fitzpatrick may have tough time finding open receivers minus Evans, who drew double coverage. Too much to expect for Bills to make anything but modest gains competing in AFC East and in midst of another rebuilding phase.

**CINCINNATI BENGALS (4-12)**

**New faces:** QB Andy Dalton, QB Bruce Gradkowski, WR A.J. Green, CB Nate Clements, LB Manny Lawson, LB Thomas Howard.

**Key losses:** QB Carson Palmer, WR Chad Ochocinco, WR Terrell Owens, CB Johnathan Joseph.

**Strengths:** Young defensive line emerged at end of last season. RB Cedric Benson decided to stay, steadying running game.

**Weaknesses:** Many. Bengals likely going with rookie QB Dalton, running new offense that features rookie WR Green. Offensive line struggled last season, and didn't get much of an upgrade. Defense lost key player when Joseph decided he'd rather play for team with better chance of winning and went to Houston.

**Expectations:** Low, as usual. Bengals got rid of underperforming reality show receivers, letting Owens leave as free agent and trading Ochocinco to New England. Not much experience in receiving group, led by first-round pick Green. Dalton couldn't learn coordinator Jay Gruden's new offense because of NFL lockout and is expected to go through growing pains. Bengals tied franchise record by losing 10 in row last year, but gave coach Marvin Lewis contract extension. Lewis stated even though owner Mike Brown insisted there will be no significant changes.

**CLEVELAND BROWNS (5-11)**

**New faces:** Coach Pat Shurmur, RB Brandon Jackson, DB Dimitri Patterson, S Usama Young, OG John Greco, P Richmond McGee, DL Scott Paxson, DT Phil Taylor, WR Greg Little, DL Jabaal Sheard.

**Key losses:** FB Lawrence Vickers, CB Eric Wright, S Abram Elam, WR Chansi Stuckey, CB Brandon McDonald, LB Jason Trusnik, OL Floyd Womack.

**Strengths:** An offensive line that must protect QB Colt McCoy and open holes for RB Peyton Hillis. With Pro Bowl LT Joe Thomas and C Alex Mack, Browns have nice blend of experience, size, athleticism up front. Thomas didn't play up to his standards in 2010, but Mack emerged as one of league's elite interior blockers. Hillis rushed for 1,177 yards and burst into stardom in 2010.

**Weaknesses:** Browns still lack big-play receiver who scares defenses. Mohamed Massaquoi (2) and Brian Robiskie (3) combined for five TDs last season, and they lack speed to make defenses worry about deep ball. Rookie WR Greg Little has size, suspect hands and may still be rusty after serving seniorseason suspension at North Carolina.

**Expectations:** Shurmur is Browns' fifth coach since 1999, and Cleveland gig is his first as head man. He's installing same West Coast offense he used with Sam Bradford in St. Louis, a short-passing scheme Browns feel is perfectly suited for McCoy's accurate arm. McCoy has intangibles for success. Lack of depth leaves little margin for error and any major injuries will make it hard to close gap on division bullies Pittsburgh and Baltimore.

**DENVER BRONCOS (4-12)**

**New faces:** Coach John Fox, DE Von Miller, SS Rahim Moore, RT Orlando Franklin, RB Willis McGahee, TE Daniel Fells, DT Brodrick Bunkley, TE Julius Thomas.

**Key losses:** WR Jabar Gaffney, RT Ryan Harris, OL Russ Hochstein, TE Daniel

Graham, DL Justin Bannan, DL Jamal Williams.

**Strengths:** Pass rush is strong suit. Elvis Dumervil, 2009 NFL sacks champion, returns from torn chest muscle that sidelined him last season. He'll have pass-rushing partner in No. 2 overall draft pick Miller. Fox brings some stability to organization and history of winning while in Carolina.

**Weaknesses:** Draft was deep in defensive tackles and Broncos passed on all of them, choosing to plug gaping hole in middle through free agency. Lured Ty Warren to Denver, but he tore triceps in August and is out at least until November.

**Expectations:** Broncos would love to have crack at Stanford QB Andrew Luck in 2012 draft, but don't want kind of season that would help those chances. McGahee gives QB Kyle Orton, with Brady Quinn likely backup ahead of Tim Tebow, type of ground game he's been pining for. An end to their five-year drought might be much to ask, but anything over four wins shows they're heading in right direction under chief of football operations John Elway and Fox.

**HOUSTON TEXANS (6-10)**

**New faces:** Defensive coordinator Wade Phillips, CB Johnathan Joseph, S Daniele Manning, DE J.J. Watt, P Brad Maynard, FB Lawrence Vickers.

**Key losses:** FB Vonta Leach, S Bernard Pollard, P Matt Turk, QB Dan Orlovsky, LB Kevin Bentley, LB Zac Diles.

**Strengths:** Only team to rank in top 10 in both rushing (127.6 ypg) and passing (259 ypg) in 2010. Arian Foster led NFL in rushing (1,616 yards), and entire offensive line returns. WR Andre Johnson had high ankle sprain most of last season and still finished with 86 catches for 1,216 yards. Matt Schaub threw for 4,370 yards and 24 touchdowns.

**Weaknesses:** Pass defense, where Texans ranked last in NFL (267.5 ypg) and 23rd in sacks (30) in 2010. Coach Gary Kubiak hired Phillips to implement 3-4 scheme, and Texans lured free agents Joseph and Manning to shore up porous secondary. Mario Williams moves to OLB in new scheme, and Phillips envisions him morphing into DeMarcus Ware type.

**Expectations:** This better be year for Kubiak and Texans to make postseason for first time. Owner Bob McNair resisted calls from frustrated fans to fire Kubiak and clean house after Houston dropped eight of last 10 games. Kubiak rebuilt defensive staff and is counting on Phillips to make things work. Texans play four of first six games against playoff teams, but then play seven of last 10 against teams that finished .500 or worse.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS (10-6)**

**New faces:** DL Jamaal Anderson, DE Tyler Brayton, OT Anthony Costanzo, DT Tommie Harris, OT Ben Ijalana, DT Drake Nevis, LB Ernie Sims.

**Key losses:** CB Kelvin Hayden, OT Charlie Johnson, DT Dan Muir, S Bob Sanders, LB Clint Session.

**Strengths:** If healthy, a big if right now, Colts have only fourtime MVP at QB and likely deepest receiving corps in Peyton Manning era. Colts also have one of league's most feared pass-rushing tandems with Pro Bowlers Dwight Freeney and Robert Mathis.

**Weaknesses:** If Manning is out for an extended period of time, the talent gap under center will be a mile wide, which will make the rebuilding of the offensive line on the fly a distant second on the team's list of concerns. Colts still must improve ground game that hasn't averaged 4 yards per carry since 2006 Super Bowl-winning season, and must get better defending run, too.

**Expectations:** Depends on Manning. If healthy, Colts are Super Bowl contenders. If not, record-tying run of nine straight playoff appearances likely will end. There's little doubt Colts have a lot to prove after early playoff exit, and have most of their injured players back. But Manning's absence would leave a void that teammates cannot fill.

**JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS (8-8)**

**New faces:** LB Paul Posluszny, LB Clint

# AFC CAPSULES

Session, S Dawan Landry, CB Drew Coleman, DE Matt Roth, OL Jason Spitz, QB Blaine Gabbert, G Will Rackley, WR Cecil Shorts, P Matt Turk.

**Key losses:** QB David Garrard, WR Mike Sims-Walker, LB Justin Durant, LB Kirk Morrison, P Adam Podlesh.

**Strengths:** Behind Maurice Jones-Drew, Jaguars have been one of league's top running teams last five years. Jones-Drew had 1,324 yards rushing in 2010 despite playing with torn meniscus in right knee. Insists he's healthy and ready for big year. Needs to be with Garrard's surprise departure.

**Weaknesses:** Defense ranked 28th last season and allowed franchise record 419 points, so embarrassing that team owner Wayne Weaver stripped coach Jack Del Rio of defensive play-calling duties. Overhauled unit and replaced four starters. Journeyman Luke McCown now starter after Garrard out days before opener.

**Expectations:** Missed playoffs nine of last 11 years. Were in position for postseason berths in 2009 and 2010, but faded. Another collapse could cost Del Rio his job. Nonetheless, Jaguars believe if they play better defense, get Jones-Drew back to 100 percent and keep whoever's under center off his back (Garrard was sacked 117 times past three seasons) they can make run at AFC South title.

**KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (10-6)**

**New faces:** QB coach Jim Zorn, DT Kelly Gregg, OT Jared Gaither, FB Le'Ron McClain, WR Steve Breaston, LB Brandon Siler.

**Key losses:** Offensive coordinator Charlie Weis, OG Brian Waters, LB Mike Vrabel, DT Ron Edwards, DT Shaun Smith, WR Chris Chambers.

**Strengths:** NFL's top running game last season returns. Jamaal Charles (1,467 yards, five TDs) and Thomas Jones (896, six TDs) were excellent in 2010, and now have former All-Pro FB McClain paving way. Dexter McCCluster adds another element with speed and pass-catching ability.

**Weaknesses:** Defensive front struggled to stop rush last season. Chiefs brought in ex-Ravens tackle Kelly Gregg to help out, but that could be questionable move.

**Expectations:** Chiefs went from four wins in coach Todd Haley's first season to 10-6 last year, when they won AFC West but were routed 30-7 by Ravens in playoffs. May be improved this season, even if record doesn't reflect it. Chiefs have

perhaps toughest schedule in league with road games against Indianapolis, New England and Jets, and home games against Pittsburgh and Super Bowl champion Green Bay. If Chiefs stay healthy — they were exceptionally fortunate last season — playoffs are in reach.

**MIAMI DOLPHINS (7-9)**

**New faces:** RB Reggie Bush, RB Daniel Thomas, C Mike Pouncey, LB Kevin Burnett, T Marc Colombo, LB Jason Taylor, QB Matt Moore, TE-FB Charles Clay, WR Clyde Gates, RB Larry Johnson.

**Key losses:** RB Ronnie Brown, RB Ricky Williams, LB Channing Crowder, LB Tim Dobbins, QB Chad Pennington, QB Tyler Thigpen.

**Strengths:** Defense returns mostly intact after ranking fourth in NFL in yards per play and sixth in yards per game. Burnett represents upgrade over Crowder, and depth up front is bolstered by return of 2010 first-round pick Jared Odrick and fourth-round choice A.J. Edds, who had rookie seasons curtailed by injury.

**Weaknesses:** Mistake-prone QB Chad Henne benched briefly at midseason and threw 19 interceptions. He also lost support of two-time Pro Bowl receiver Brandon Marshall, who caught only three TD passes. Offensive line remains in flux, and it's unclear whether fragile Bush and unproven rookie Thomas will be upgrade over unproductive combo of Brown and Williams.

**Expectations:** Dolphins flirted with replacing Henne and coach Tony Sparano. Instead, both are back. Fans will likely be quick to turn on Henne, and Sparano is in danger of becoming first Dolphins coach to endure three consecutive losing seasons. Miami hopes Henne will benefit from

addition of Bush, who provides long-sought quick-strike threat. If Bush stays healthy and Henne shows even modest improvement, Dolphins have chance to finish above .500, but 10-defeat flop is also possible.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS (14-2)**

**New faces:** WR Chad Ochocinco, DL Andre Carter, DL Albert Haynesworth, DL Shaun Ellis, T Nate Solder.

**Key losses:** G Stephen Neal, DE Ty Warren, TE Alge Crumpler.

**Strengths:** Offense that led NFL with 32.4 ppg last year is outstanding. As usual, Tom Brady is key after winning last year's NFL MVP award with 36 TD passes and four interceptions. Addition of Ochocinco gives him three quality WRs along with Wes Welker and Deion Branch. Veteran offensive line blocks for RB BenJarvus Green-Ellis, coming off 1,000-yard rushing season, and Danny Woodhead, who made solid impact after signing early in season. Defensive line bolstered with Carter, Haynesworth and Ellis. At safety, third-year pro Patrick Chung emerging. Return of CB Leigh Bodden, who spent all last season on injured reserve, should help.

**Weaknesses:** Not many. Despite making last two Pro Bowls, S Brandon Meriweather was out. And third-down defense was worst in league.

**Expectations:** Very high. Brady appears fully recovered from surgery on his right foot in late January, just after 28-21 loss in first playoff game to Jets. Newcomers should help pass rush, coverage of receivers and third-down performance. But, as Patriots showed last year, having outstanding regular season doesn't always lead to postseason success.

**NEW YORK JETS (11-5)**

**New faces:** WR Plaxico Burress, WR Derrick Mason, DE Muhammad Wilkerson, DT Kenrick Ellis, WR-KR Jeremy Kerley.

**Key losses:** WR Braylon Edwards, WR Jericho Cotchery, WR-KR Brad Smith, DE Shaun Ellis, LB Jason Taylor, FB Tony Richardson, P Steve Weatherford, NT Kris Jenkins, RT Damien Woody.

**Strengths:** Solid secondary is back almost intact. After flirting with and losing out on CB Nnamdi Asomugha, Jets turned back to Antonio Cromartie and re-signed him to team with All-Pro CB Darrelle Revis. S Jim Leonard is healthy after breaking right leg late last season, and Jets brought back Eric Smith and Brodney Pool to stabilize safety position. Linebackers solid with playmaking David Harris and Bart Scott, along with Calvin Pace and Bryan Thomas.

**Weaknesses:** Aside from re-signed Antonio Holmes, QB Mark Sanchez has revamped group of wide receivers. Challenge will be developing rapport with Burress, who hasn't played in nearly three years and dealt with sprained ankle in training camp, and Mason, who spent last six seasons with Baltimore. Offensive line depth might be issue with Wayne Hunter stepping in at RT for retired Woody. Defensive line lacks experience, as rookies Wilkerson and Ellis will be called on.

**Expectations:** Goal remains same for coach Rex Ryan and Jets: Super Bowl win. New York has been in AFC championship game two straight years and Ryan insists this is season Jets make it over hump. Key will be whether Sanchez can take development to next level in third season.

**OAKLAND RAIDERS (8-8)**

**New faces:** Coach Hue Jackson, TE Kevin Boss, WR Denarius Moore, DB DeMarcus Van Dyke, OL Stefen Wisniewski, OL Joe Barksdale, TE David Ausberry, CB Chimdi Chekwa, QB Trent Edwards, QB Terrelle Pryor.

**Key losses:** CB Nnamdi Asomugha, TE Zach Miller, OL Robert Gallery, OL Langston Walker, QB Bruce Gradkowski.

**Strengths:** Jackson takes over after successful season as offensive coordinator when Raiders more than doubled scoring output to 410 points and finished sixth in scoring. Speed, led by RB Darren McFadden and big-play WR Jacoby Ford. Defensive line led by Pro Bowler Richard Seymour and DT Tommy Kelly, and pass-rushing LB Kamerion Wimbley helped Oakland finish tied for second with 47 sacks in 2010. P Shane Lechler and K Sebastian Janikowski among best in NFL.

**Weaknesses:** Biggest questions are offensive line, secondary. With Asomugha gone, Raiders thin at CB with no proven players behind veteran starters Stanford Routt and Chris Johnson. With Raiders expected to play plenty of man-to-man coverage, that puts heavy pressure on rookies Van Dyke and Chekwa, and second-year players Walter McFadden and Jeremy Ware. Offensive line must replace Gallery and Walker and improve on play from last year when QB Jason Campbell often was under heavy pressure.

**Expectations:** After snapping string of seven straight seasons with at least 11 losses, Raiders hoping for more improvement in Jackson's first season as head coach at any level. To do so they need Campbell to improve, reduce big plays allowed on defense and hope some young players step in and contribute immediately on offensive line and in secondary.

**PITTSBURGH STEELERS (12-4)**

**New faces:** WR Jericho Cotchery, TE John Gilmore, DT Cameron Heyward, DB Curtis Brown.

**Key losses:** TE Matt Spaeth, G Max Starks, T Flozell Adams.

**Strengths:** Steelers kept league's top scoring defense intact by re-signing CB Ike Taylor. Though easily oldest unit in NFL with nine starters at least 30 by end of season, defense remains one of best. Steelers failed to land Plaxico Burress in free agency, did sign Cotchery, who is recovering from back surgery and should fit in nicely with performance. But, as Patriots showed last year, having outstanding regular season doesn't always lead to postseason success.

**Weaknesses:** Offensive line, particularly LT and RG, remain issues. Re-signed veteran Jonathan Scott to protect QB Ben Roethlisberger's blind side and there could be additional trouble if starter Doug Legursky doesn't play well. Pass protection spotty during early preseason games, though Roethlisberger's mobility and habit for making plays outside pocket helps overcome some of that. Even with 2010 Defensive Player of Year Troy Polamalu healthy, second-year looked suspect when teams spread the field.

**Expectations:** Anything less than Vince Lombardi Trophy No. 7 will be considered disappointment in Steel City after Pittsburgh opted to keep core together rather than play aggressively in free agency.

**SAN DIEGO CHARGERS (9-7)**

**New faces:** LB Takeo Spikes, SS Bob Sanders, DE Corey Liuget, LB Travis LaBoy.

**Key losses:** QB Darren Sproles.

**Strengths:** QB Philip Rivers and his quick-strike offense, which can seemingly score at will. TE Antonio Gates gamely tried to play through painful foot injury before shutting it down late last season. He's still recovering as opening day approaches. Chargers will have WR Vincent Jackson available from start. Last year, he missed first 10 games during bitter contract dispute.

**Weaknesses:** Chargers must rebound from perhaps worst special teams performance in NFL history. Plus, just one playoff victory in last three seasons has fans doubting whether Norv Turner is capable of taking them to Super Bowl title.

**Expectations:** Playing amid speculation they'll bolt to Los Angeles after this season, Chargers think they're good enough to win Super Bowl. To do so, they have to reverse postseason slide that's seen them go from reaching AFC title game following 2007 season to not making playoffs last season.

**TENNESSEE TITANS (6-10)**

**New faces:** Coach Mike Munchak, QB Matt Hasselbeck, QB Jake Locker, DT Shaun Smith, LB Akeem Ayers, LB Barrett Ruud, S Jordan Babineaux.

**Key losses:** Coach Jeff Fisher, DE Jason Babin, DL coach Jim Washburn, QB Vince Young, LB Stephen Tulloch.

**Strengths:** RB Chris Johnson, offensive line back intact, WR Kenny Britt. Hasselbeck brings needed experience at QB and can tutor rookie Locker. Ruud is playmaker, as are CB Cortland Finnegan and S Michael Griffin.

**Weaknesses:** Britt's off-field issues are the primary concern now that Johnson and team reached four-year, \$52 million deal after protracted holdout.

**Expectations:** Munchak has done his best to eliminate distractions in and out of locker room. Team's first playoff berth since 2008 is goal, but doing that in AFC South could rest on whether Johnson is around for all of regular season.

Compiled by Associated Press



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Troy Polamalu leads the usual suspects on a Steelers defense that hopes to rebound from the team's loss in the Super Bowl.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Already a solid Super Bowl contender, the Eagles retooled their roster and have been declared the champion of free agency, for what that's worth. The Eagles added cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha (left), and defensive linemen Cullen Jenkins and Jason Babin to their defense, and wide receiver Steve Smith, running back Ronnie Brown and quarterback Vince Young to their offense.**

#### ARIZONA CARDINALS (5-11)

**New faces:** QB Kevin Kolb, TE Todd Heap, CB Patrick Peterson, OG Daryn Colledge, TE Jeff King, ILB Stewart Bradley, DE Vonnie Holliday, NT David Carter, OG Floyd Womack.

**Key losses:** CB Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, WR Steve Breaston, OG Alan Faneca.

**Strengths:** Passing offense, with Kolb and Larry Fitzgerald showing an immediate chemistry. Heap gives team an option it hasn't had previously. New coordinator Ray Horton considers front line of Darnell Dockett, Calais Campbell and Dan Williams strength of defense.

**Weaknesses:** Offensive line, particularly tackles, uncertain as Cardinals try to bolster running game with Beanie Wells still looking for breakout season. Pass rush suspect with aging outside LBs Joey Porter and Clark Haggans. Cardinals hope second-year pro O'Brien Schofield and rookie Sam Acho provide relief for old-timers. Secondary short-handed with safety Adrian Wilson sidelined by torn right biceps tendon.

**Expectations:** Arrival of Kolb, and his quick acceptance as leader of offense, has led some to believe Arizona could go from last to first in weak NFC West. Kolb says that's his expectation, too, and with he and Fitzgerald locked up to long-term contracts, they plan an extended partnership as long as young QB, with just seven starts, meets his own high standards.

#### ATLANTA FALCONS (13-3)

**New faces:** WR Julio Jones, DE Ray Edwards.

**Key losses:** OG Harvey Dahl, WR Michael Jenkins.

**Strengths:** Loaded with offensive stars QB Matt Ryan, WR Roddy White, RB Michael Turner and TE Tony Gonzalez, all Pro Bowlers. Adding first-round pick Jones gives them deep threat they lacked last season. Falcons ranked next-to-last in passing plays covering at least 20 yards, and Jones has speed and size to fix problem.

**Weaknesses:** Packers QB Aaron Rodgers carved up Falcons in 48-21 postseason rout, exposing defense that didn't bring much pressure outside of DE John Abraham. That should change with signing of Edwards — 16 1/2 sacks past two years with Vikings. Atlanta ranked 20th in league with 31 sacks in 2010, and Abraham had 13.

**Expectations:** Super Bowl or bust. Falcons didn't mortgage much of future acquiring Jones without expecting him to pay immediate dividends. Early schedule brutal: four of first five games against NFC playoff teams, and other against Tampa Bay, which nearly got in. Falcons likely playoff bound for third time in four years if they come out of tough stretch at least 3-2.

#### CAROLINA PANTHERS (2-14)

**New faces:** Coach Ron Rivera, QB Cam Newton, TE Greg Olsen, WR Legedu Naanee, PK Olindo Mare.

**Key losses:** PK John Kasay.

**Strengths:** New coach, but Panthers have core players back from last season, including WR Steve Smith, RB DeAngelo Williams and LBs Thomas Davis and James Anderson. Addition of Olsen in trade with Bears, could be plus. No. 1 overall pick Newton expected to battle for starting job with Jimmy Clausen.

**Weaknesses:** Team had worst record in league in 2010, and new coaching staff didn't have minicamps and OTAs to install new schemes because of lockout. Panthers last in league in scoring and total offense in 2010. DT Ron Edwards, acquired from the Chiefs, out for season with torn triceps. **Expectations:** Should improve off two-win season, and might surprise a few teams if they get some consistent play Newton or Clausen.

#### CHICAGO BEARS (11-5)

**New faces:** WR Roy Williams, RB Marion Barber, DL Vernon Gholston, WR Sam Hurd, DT Amobi Okoye, P Adam Podlesh, OL Chris Spencer, TE Matt Spaeth, OL Gabe Carimi.

**Key losses:** C Olin Kreutz, TE Greg Olsen, P Brad Maynard, DT Tommie Harris, S Danieal Manning.

**Strengths:** Defense. With Julius

Peppers, Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs, Bears have solid core. Return game still figures to be strength even with kickoffs moved to 35. Devin Hester remains threat any time he touches ball. Manning is gone, but Bears still deep on returns with Johnny Knox helping out.

**Weaknesses:** Offensive line. Even if six-time Pro Bowler Kreutz had re-signed, line would still be question mark. Bears allowed league-high 56 sacks, with Jay Cutler taking all but four. For now, Roberto Garza moves from RG to C, with newcomer Spencer a backup.

**Expectations:** For all OL problems line last year, Bears still reached NFC title game. The way Cutler was getting knocked around early made deep playoff run unlikely. Now? If line comes together, Bears will likely be in good shape. Help could come if Roy Williams rediscovers form that made him Pro Bowl receiver when Mike Martz was his offensive coordinator in Detroit.

#### DALLAS COWBOYS (6-10)

**New faces:** Defensive coordinator Rob Ryan, S Abram Elam, RT Tyron Smith, DE Kenyon Coleman, RB DeMarco Murray.

**Key losses:** RB Marion Barber, WR Roy Williams, RG Leonard Davis, RT Marc Colombo.

**Strengths:** Passing game (WRs Miles Austin and Dez Bryant, TE Jason Witten, healthy QB Tony Romo) and LB DeMarcus Ware (NFL sacks leader in 2010, 2008).

**Weaknesses:** Defense returns most of players from unit that allowed most points in franchise history. Offensive line in flux, with no more than two starters returning to same spots.

**Expectations:** After seeing Super Bowl hopes fizzle with 1-7 start last season, nobody is even talking playoffs. But they did go 5-3 over second half, when Jason Garrett took over as coach. He heads into first full season in charge intent on laying foundation for doing things his way. Big question mark is defense, and whether Ryan's aggressive, unpredictable scheme can revive club's 2009 form.

#### DETROIT LIONS (6-10)

**New faces:** LB Stephen Tulloch, LB Justin Durant, CB Eric Wright, DT Nick Fairley, WR Titus Young.

**Key losses:** LB Julian Peterson, DE Turk McBride, RB Kevin Smith.

**Strengths:** Defensive line. All-Pro Ndamukong Suh (2010 Defensive Rookie of the Year), Corey Williams, Kyle Vanden Bosch and Cliff Avril powerful enough last season to hide some of the team's lackluster back seven. Solid at wide receiver with Calvin Johnson and Nate Burleson.

**Weaknesses:** Secondary. Wright added, though he gave up many big plays in Cleveland and was slowed in training camp by groin injury. Same ailment, potentially nagging one, slowed other starting CB Chris Houston in August. S Louis Delmas makes big hits, but can't seem to stay healthy. S Amari Spivey might've been replaced if team could've addressed all needs in shortened offseason.

**Expectations:** Respectability. Detroit hasn't had winning record since 2000 and hasn't made playoffs since 1999. If a lot goes well — particularly health at QB and CB — droughts could end. Lions had impressive end of 2010 season, beating Green Bay, Chicago and Tampa Bay while each was competing for playoff positioning, and Minnesota despite QB Matthew Stafford being injured (right shoulder). Stafford is back, seemingly healthy, after playing three games last season.

## NFC CAPSULES

#### GREEN BAY PACKERS (10-6)

**New faces:** OL Derek Sherrod, WR/RS Randall Cobb, RB/RS Alex Green.

**Key losses:** DE Cullen Jenkins, LG Daryn Colledge, LB Nick Barnett, LB Brandon Chillar, LB Brady Poppinga, RT Mark Tauscher.

**Strengths:** Super Bowl champs bring back majority of team. Offense, led by QB Aaron Rodgers, could be even more dangerous with TE Jermichael Finley and RB Ryan Grant returning from injuries. Defense fully comfortable with Dom Capers' scheme.

**Weaknesses:** Packers have had some trouble with pass protection early in preseason as they look for replacement for Colledge at LG. Sherrod got first crack but veteran T.J. Lang could win job.

**Expectations:** Packers know it's difficult for Super Bowl champions to repeat but believe they can. If complacency creeps in, Packers can remind themselves they barely made playoffs before dominant run to Super Bowl.

#### MINNESOTA VIKINGS (6-10)

**New faces:** Coach Leslie Frazier, QB Donovan McNabb, QB Christian Ponder, WR Michael Jenkins, DT Remi Ayodele, TE Kyle Rudolph, LT Charlie Johnson.

**Key losses:** QB Brett Favre, DE Ray

Edwards, LB Ben Leber, DT Pat Williams, WR Sidney Rice, LT Bryant McKinnie.

**Strengths:** Dynamic playmakers. With RB Adrian Peterson, WR Percy Harvin, DE Jared Allen and LB Chad Greenway, Vikings have talented group at skill positions. Kicking game solid with Ryan Longwell and punter Chris Kluwe.

**Weaknesses:** Age. CB Antoine Winfield, DT Kevin Williams, LG Steve Hutchinson and McNabb are in twilight of careers. OL is significant concern with departure of mainstay McKinnie, who showed up to training camp overweight, and uncertainty of RG Anthony Herrera, coming off reconstructive knee surgery. Johnson has had rough preseason in McKinnie's place. McNabb has played 16 games only once in last seven years. Can line protect him and open holes for Peterson? Secondary also uncertain with CB Cedric Griffin coming off second torn ACL, one on each knee, in last two years. Unproven safeties Husain Abdullah, Jamarca Sanford, Tyrell Johnson, Mistrail Raymond competing for two starting spots.

**Expectations:** Frazier and Vikings have fresh start without Favre and fired coach Brad Childress. Division should be tough, and winning record will be difficult.

#### NEW ORLEANS SAINTS (11-5)

**New faces:** RB Darren Sproles, RB Mark Ingram, C Olin Kreutz, DT Shaun Rogers, DT Aubrayo Franklin, DE Cameron Jordan.

**Key losses:** RB Reggie Bush, C Jonathan Goodwin, S Darren Sharper, DT Remi Ayodele.

**Strengths:** Running game deep with speedy, versatile Sproles and young, powerful Ingram joining Pierre Thomas. QB Drew Brees has main receivers returning to proven passing game. Saints also strong in pass coverage last season and should be again with all starting DBs back: Jabari Greer, Tracy Porter, Roman Harper and Malcolm Jenkins.

**Weaknesses:** Saints hoped they addressed run defense and pass rush with drafting of Jordan and free-agent signings of Rogers and Franklin. Kick and punt coverage other areas to improve.

**Expectations:** Saints riddled with injuries at key positions last season yet won 11 games and made playoffs. Only 18 months since their Super Bowl triumph, with most key players back and healthy, and with new additions meant to improve depth, Saints expect to be among NFC's elite.

#### NEW YORK GIANTS (10-6)

**New faces:** C David Baas, P Steve Weatherford, DT Marvin Austin.

**Key losses:** WR Steve Smith, TE Kevin Boss, C Shaun O'Hara, G Rich Seubert, DT Barry Colfield, LB Chase Blackburn, CB Terrell Thomas (season-ending knee injury in preseason game).

**Strengths:** Defensive line has chance to be as good as 2007 with rush from DEs Justin Tuck, second-year pro Jason Pierre-Paul and Osi Umenyiora when he comes back from knee surgery. Despite losing Boss and Smith, Hakeem Nicks and Mario Manningham — combined 20 TD catches in 2010 — provide big-time targets for Eli Manning.

**Weaknesses:** Without Boss, no tight end who can block and catch. Offensive line questionable with decisions to save money and cut O'Hara and Seubert. Baas need time to jell with line anchored by G Chris Snee. Special teams shaky past two years, although Weatherford might stabilize punting if he beats out Matt

Dodge. Loss of leading tackler Thomas (torn ACL) big blow to Big Blue.

**Expectations:** Return to playoffs after two-year absence. Giants have enough talent to do it and save coach Tom Coughlin's job, but only if coordinator Perry Fewell's defense plays well, offensive line comes together and team cuts down on turnovers.

#### PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (10-6)

**New faces:** CB Nnamdi Asomugha, CB Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, DE Jason Babin, QB Vince Young, DT Cullen Jenkins, WR Steve Smith, RB Ronnie Brown, WR Johnnie Lee Higgins, TE Donald Lee, OL Ryan Harris, DT Anthony Hargrove, OL Evan Mathis, DT Derek Landri, DE Chris Wilson, S Jarrad Page.

**Key losses:** K David Akers, QB Kevin Kolb, LB Stewart Bradley, S Quintin Mikell, P Sav Rocca.

**Strengths:** Eagles have solid core of skill players, including Michael Vick, DeSean Jackson, Jeremy Maclin, LeSean McCoy and Brent Celek. They have star-studded secondary that features three Pro Bowl cornerbacks: Asomugha, Rodgers-Cromartie and Asante Samuel. Defensive line has improved with addition of Babin and Jenkins to go with Trent Cole and Mike Patterson.

**Weaknesses:** Linebacking corps inexperienced, especially starting MLB Casey Matthews. Safeties also young and unproven. Eagles have rookies at kicker and punter. Patterson had convulsions during camp, but expected back for season. So is Maclin, who also was ill during preseason.

**Expectations:** Super Bowl. After spending freely in free agency and loading up on big-name acquisitions, management made goals clear. Eagles have nine playoff appearances, six division titles and reached five NFC championship games in past 12 years. Still looking for first championship since 1960.

#### ST. LOUIS RAMS (7-9)

**New faces:** Offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels, WR Mike Sims-Walker, G Harvey Dahl, RB Cadillac Williams, RB Jerious Norwood, S Quintin Mikell, LB Ben Leber, LB Brady Poppinga, LB Zac Diles, DT Justin Bannan, CB Al Harris.

**Key losses:** Offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur, S Oshiomogho Atogwe, LB Larry Grant, LB David Vobora, WR Mark Clayton, TE Daniel Fells, FB Mike Karney, DT Clifton Ryan.

**Strengths:** Backfield. QB Sam Bradford was NFL Offensive Rookie of Year and emerged as leader organizing informal offseason workouts. RB Steven Jackson comes off sixth consecutive 1,000-yard season and still on top of his game. Williams and Norwood provide quality backups for first time. MLB James Laurinaitis has led team in tackles both of his seasons and Leber and Poppinga beef up talent pool on outside. PK Josh Brown, who hit 60-yard field goal in preseason, and P Donnie Jones are among best at positions.

**Weaknesses:** Despite upgrades at wide receiver, Rams still lack true No. 1. Secondary might be bit thin. Tight end unproven, although second-round pick Lance Kendricks has been impressive.

**Expectations:** Six-win improvement last year had Rams in contention until final week in weak NFC West. It was huge leap coming off dismal three-year stretch in which they totaled six wins. They appear poised to post franchise's first winning season since 2003, last of big years under coach Mike Martz and Greatest Show on Turf.

#### SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS (6-10)

**New faces:** Coach Jim Harbaugh and staff, PK David Akers, WR Braylon Edwards, C Jonathan Goodwin, QB Colin Kaepernick, S Donte Whitner, S Madieu Williams.

**Key losses:** NT Aubrayo Franklin, CB Nate Clements, LB Takeo Spikes, C David Baas, K Joe Nedney.

**Strengths:** Stopping run, and new coordinator Vic Fangio is calling on All-Pro linebacker Patrick Willis to be more blitzing presence. Harbaugh has deep secondary, with plenty of options at safety. Two-time Pro Bowl RB Frank Gore is back after missing

final five games of 2010 with fractured hip.

**Weaknesses:** Experienced OL has yet to perform with consistency coaches hoping for. Last year's two first-round picks, Anthony Davis and Mike Iupati, started every game and must continue to grow in West Coast offense.

**Expectations:** Counting on QB Alex Smith to finally produce under direction of former NFL QB Harbaugh. But 2005 No. 1 overall pick has been booed by local fans and even heard it at team's recent FanFest at Candlestick Park. If Gore stays healthy, he believes he can carry the load at age 28. How Isaac Sopoaga responds to greater responsibility as NT will factor into defense's success, too. Niners believed a year ago they would win NFC West, then went 0-5. Fast start is paramount.

#### SEATTLE SEAHAWKS (7-9)

**New faces:** QB Tarvaris Jackson, WR Sidney Rice, OL Robert Gallery, OL James Carpenter, OL John Moffitt, TE Zach Miller, DL Alan Branch, DL Jimmy Wilkerson.

**Key losses:** QB Matt Hasselbeck, OL Sean Locklear, OL Chris Spencer, LB Lofa Tatupu, SS Lawyer Milloy, FS Jordan Babineaux.

**Strengths:** Receivers, defensive line, linebackers. Run defense should be better thanks to additions of Wilkerson and Branch. Enough talent around Jackson in Williams, Rice and Miller, so if the QB can avoid mistakes that occurred when he was with Vikings, offense could be strong.

**Weaknesses:** Quarterback if Jackson struggles, offensive line inexperience, defensive leadership. Risk was asking defensive captain Lofa Tatupu to take pay cut. He didn't and LB was released, although David Hawthorne is younger and healthier. Secondary is major question with starting safeties Earl Thomas and Kam Chancellor in their second seasons.

**Expectations:** Coach Pete Carroll and GM John Schneider took major gamble by cutting Hasselbeck after decade in Seattle and going with Jackson, who is familiar with offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell from their time in Minnesota. Fixing last year's woeful run game is responsibility of new assistant head coach Tom Cable. Having RB Marshawn Lynch for entire season should help. Seahawks became first division champs with losing record last season. Even with upgrades, there are enough questions and a tougher schedule where seven wins might be best in Carroll's second season.

#### TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS (10-6)

**New faces:** DE Adrian Clayborn, DE Da'Quan Bowers, LB Mason Foster, P Michael Koenen.

**Key losses:** LB Barrett Ruud, RB Cadillac Williams, DE Stylez G. White.

**Strengths:** Third-year QB Josh Freeman's development in first year as full-time starter was key to Bucs going from three wins in 2009 to 10 last season. He completed 61.4 percent for 3,451 yards, 25 touchdowns and six interceptions. Bucs have done nice job surrounding 23-year-old QB with skill players, including WRs Mike Williams and Arrelious Benn, RB LeGarrette Blount and TE Kellen Winslow. Re-signing free agents Davin Joseph and Jeremy Trueblood preserved continuity on improving offensive line.

**Weaknesses:** Inconsistent pass rush produced just 26 sacks, not good in NFC South, where you're chasing teams led by Matt Ryan and Drew Brees. Used top two picks in past two drafts to rebuild defensive line tackles Gerald McCoy and Brian Price in 2010 and ends Adrian Clayborn and Da'Quan Bowers and needs unit to grow up fast.

**Expectations:** Coach Raheem Morris raised eyebrows when he declared at beginning of last season that NFL's least experienced team was embarking on "race to 10" wins. Turns out he was right, although it wasn't enough to earn first playoff berth since 2007. League's youngest coach is aiming higher in 2011.

Compiled by Associated Press



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Recovered from the shoulder injury that ended his 2010 season, Tony Romo will get a chance to keep the Cowboys' momentum going under Jason Garrett.