

Week 9



- Snyder: San Francisco handles its QB better. R2
- Good isn't quite good enough for the defense. R3

49ers 19, Redskins 11



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SECTION R

"I'm not saying that John [Beck] played the perfect game - I'm not trying to go that way - but as a head coach, you know that you've got to have 11 pieces of the puzzle. And if you don't, everybody looks pretty ordinary."

— Mike Shanahan



ROD LAMKEY JR./THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ABOVE: Redskins receiver Terrence Austin fumbles as he's tackled by 49ers linebacker Patrick Willis during the fourth quarter. **BELOW:** Redskins quarterback John Beck keeps his arm limber in the third quarter as coach Mike Shanahan patrols the sideline. Beck threw for a touchdown and was intercepted once while making his third straight start (all losses) after Shanahan decided to go with him over Rex Grossman.

SLIPPING AWAY

It seems team is ready to come apart at seams



DAN DALY

It's all coming apart for the Washington Redskins. You can feel it with every incomplete pass, every stuffed run, every missed tackle, every senseless penalty. Mike Shanahan's grand plan, whatever it was, is looking

more and more like the jottings of the Nutty Professor. Maybe it's time to start calling him Sherman instead of Shanny — and calling the Redskins the Klumps.

The Klumps lost to the San Francisco 49ers 19-11 Sunday at FedEx Field and, frankly, it wasn't that close. The week before, it was Buffalo 23, Klumps 0. Ask yourself: Have the Klumps — I mean the Redskins — ever seemed further from winning a football game? Victory is so distant, it might be beyond the reach of the Hubble telescope.

What makes it even harder to

» see DALY | R2



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Mistakes continue to plague Washington as losing streak hits four

By RICH CAMPBELL
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Terrence Austin stood in solitude at his stall inside a quiet Washington Redskins' locker room late Sunday afternoon, stewing over his mistakes that contributed to their 19-11 loss to the San Francisco 49ers.

There was his illegal crackback block that cost the Redskins' offense 15 yards near the end of the third quarter. He also lost a fumble in the fourth.

Coach Mike Shanahan believes young players' miscues, plenty of which marked this ugly defeat, are the foundation for future success. But that was no consolation for the second-year wide receiver after Washington's fourth straight loss.

Austin pulled his chain over his head, made sure the pendant — a football with a 'T' affixed to the middle — was facing forward and sighed.

"I think that that's just a nice way to put it," Austin said. "Coach believes in us, and he understands that's going to be tough, but I'll take it personal. We understand that we've got to fill in for the guys that's been gone because of injury, but it's part of being professionals. We've just got to pay a lot more attention to detail, including me."

This is what Shanahan's second season has come to. What began so promisingly with three wins in the first four games has devolved into an evaluative exercise by the halfway point.

» see REDSKINS | R3

UNFLAGGING SUPPORT FROM STAR-SPANGLED FANS



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Erin Thompson (aka Betskins Ross) and her husband, Tim Thompson (aka Uncle Skins), observe the national anthem before Sunday's game. **Photo gallery:** www.washingtontimes.com/multimedia

49ers' model shines a light on Shanahan's miscalculations



DERON SNYDER

In terms of quarterbacks who played college football in the state of Utah, it appears that the Washington Redskins have the wrong one. While few in the NFL thought much of either former Brigham Young star John Beck or former Utah star Alex Smith entering this season, the Redskins might squeal in joy if they employed the latter rather than the former.

Look at the San Francisco 49ers' formula for success, which has netted them a near-perfect record after Sunday's 19-11 victory at FedEx Field: Strong ground game + stout defense + solid special teams = 7-1.

The quarterback's part in the equation is simple: don't screw it up.

The Niners entered Sunday with the NFL's fewest pass attempts per game, 26.4. Smith has responded with his best season ever. He had a career passer rating of 72.1 before coach John Harbaugh took over. At kickoff, Smith's rating for the season was 95.7. He recorded a 109.7 for the game, eclipsing the century mark for the third time this year.

That's the type of performance Redskins coach Mike Shanahan envisioned for Beck. But so far there's no indication that Beck can be even a poor man's Smith. And this year's Smith is a lot better than previous models.

"I'm just playing better football," Smith said after completing 17 of 24 passes for 200 yards, one touchdown and no interceptions. "There's no magic. Coaches are putting us in great situations and guys around me are playing football at a high level. I think they deserve the credit."

Shanahan thought he could get away with Beck and/or Rex Grossman, largely because he thought the other elements would be in place. His renowned zone-blocking running game supposedly would churn out yardage like San Francisco. Niners halfback Frank Gore, the league's fifth-leading rusher entering Sunday, rushed for 107 yards against Washington, his fifth consecutive game with at least 100 yards.

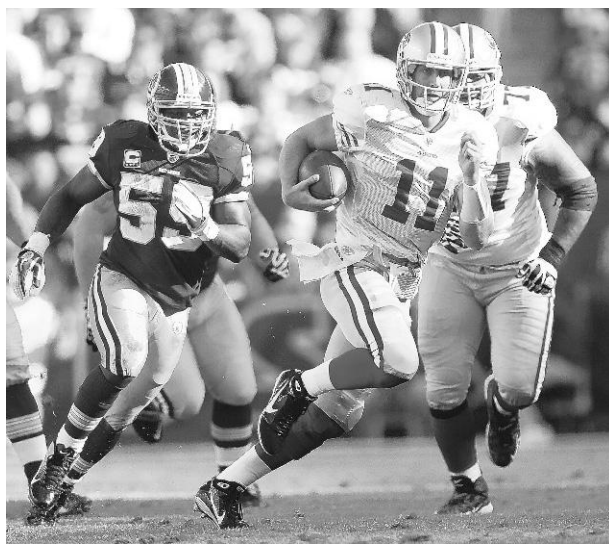
The Redskins rushed for less than half of Gore's total, netting just 52 yards.

Shanahan has caught plenty of heat for gambling on these quarterbacks, and rightfully so. But he compounded that miscalculation by failing to build a stronger offensive line. Beck and/or Grossman were going to need a reliable ground attack to enjoy any success, and it hasn't materialized.

Shanahan either thought too highly of his scheme, overestimated the O-line talent, missed out on better alternatives or all of the above. The lack of a running game plays right into a defense's hands, which are eager to swat or swipe the uninspiring passes that follow.

"Balance with the run and the pass game, using the run to set up the play-action — that's what we go for when we head into a game," said Beck, who completed 14 passes to halfback Roy Helu and a combined 16 to everyone else. "But I think some of it might be skewed because of the situation at the end of the game where you're trying to come back and put points on the board fast. You have to throw the ball more and try to get it in chunks."

Ask Smith how that used to work out for him. He threw for nearly 2,900 yards in 2006 ... when the Niners fin-



PRATIK SHAH/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

San Francisco quarterback Alex Smith provides the type of production the Redskins wish they could get out of John Beck.

ished 7-9. Unless you're Aaron Rodgers, Tom Brady, Peyton Manning, Drew Brees and the like, the ratio of wins often decreases as passing yards increase.

Case in point: Beck threw for 116 of his 254 yards in the fourth quarter.

That's one reason Smith doesn't mind the talk that he's a caretaker and Harbaugh doesn't trust him to throw much.

"When we were losing and behind in the third and fourth quarters, I threw for a lot of yards in years past," Smith said. "When you're ahead and up by multiple scores in the third and fourth quarters, you're going to run the ball. People can say whatever they want about yardage, numbers and things like that, but we're winning games."

The Redskins' defense has played well enough to win games and cover up for the shortcomings at quarterback. Ditto for the special teams, especially Sav Rocca, whose booming punts help overcome less-than-spectacular returns by Brandon Banks and fingers-crossed field goal attempts by Graham Gano.

Gano came through with a franchise-record 59-yard field goal. The defense, saddled with short fields on four of the Niners' five scoring drives, yielded but one touchdown.

But the Redskins' quarterbacks aren't good enough to succeed with the stool that's missing one of three legs — a running game. They might not be good enough, anyway, but we'll never know at this rate.

At least the Niners have found out what Smith can do with proper support.

"Alex has been easy to coach," Harbaugh said. "He's just so smart, talented, and he's very tough. He does everything you'd want a team guy to do in that position. I only judge him by one thing — like a pitcher in baseball — wins and losses. He's the guy out there doing it."

Much like Beck (and Grossman), Smith has been dissed throughout his career. But he'd look real good in burgundy and gold right now.

Especially if he brought the Niners running game with him.

DALY

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stomach is that the 49ers were in the same place the Redskins were a year ago — 6-10 and searching for answers. In fact, they were worse off than the Redskins, hypothetically, because they fired their coach and, because of the lockout, weren't able to spend the offseason at the Jim Harbaugh Football Academy.

It doesn't appear to have hurt the 49ers. They're 7-1 and probably the biggest surprise in the league. The Redskins, meanwhile, are 3-5, losers of four straight, and beginning to raise eyebrows of a different sort — for the sheer ineptitude of their offense as much as anything.

Seven days after suffering the first shutout of Shanahan's head coaching career, they managed only a franchise-record 59-yard Graham Gano field goal for the first 58 minutes and didn't get inside the San Francisco 30 until their final drive, when the Niners were merely backpedaling. The 2011 Redskins haven't drowned yet, not officially, but as Trent Williams put it, "It's up to our neck."

It was hard to tell, watching John Beck and Co., whether they were trying to score or merely trying to keep the quarterback from being sacked 10 times again (as he was against the Bills). Beck rarely held the ball for long, being content to dump it off to receivers for short gains that generally led to punts. A byproduct of this Small Ball was that rookie Roy Helu, a *running back*, set a club mark by catching 14 passes (for 105 yards) — and bumped Art Monk (13 on two occasions) to No. 2. Swell, just swell.

Of course, offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan, thanks to a wave of injuries, is functioning with less than a full deck. Indeed, three rookies got their first NFL starts Sunday — Helu, wide receiver Leonard Hankerson and left guard Maurice Hurt, who began the season on the practice squad. By afternoon's end, right tackle Jammal Brown (groin) was out and Sean Locklear, who had filled in on the left side the previous two weeks, was in. In such situations, simplicity is the key. There's

never any excuse, though, for being simply awful, which the offense has been for the past month.

With the Redskins forced to "go young" — younger than Mike Shanahan ever imagined — the coach's mantra has changed. He's no longer talking about this season very much. Instead, he's talking about "young guys" who are "gaining valuable experience" so they can become important contributors "down the road." That's a big change from early October, when the Redskins were 3-1 and leading the NFC East.

Shanahan is right when he says that nobody expected a Redskins renaissance "to happen overnight." But folks did expect that, by the middle of Year 2, the offense wouldn't look so "ragtag" (Shanny's word for Sunday's performance). He is, after all, one of the great X's-and-O's men of his time (and is paid handsomely for it). Is this really the best he can do midway through his second season — dink, dunk, punt?

It's reasonable to ask, too, how a seventh-round pick (Hurt) who wasn't even good enough to make the final roster could end up starting at left guard in Week 9. It suggests the Redskins aren't just the victims of bad luck (in the form of injuries); it suggests they're also the victims of atrocious planning. Let's not forget, they've lost only one guard this year: Kory Lichtensteiger. How do you lose one guard and end up starting a practice squadder in Week 9? Answer: By (a) not carrying any backup guards on your 53-man squad and (b) misjudging the ability of center Will Montgomery to help out at the position in a pinch.

So the Redskins' losing streak is at four. They have a worse record at this stage (3-5) than they did last season (4-4). And their next opponents, the 1-7 Miami Dolphins, suddenly don't look so beatable after bludgeoning the Kansas City Chiefs 31-3 on Sunday.

Yes, it's all coming apart for the Redskins. They seem destined, in these remaining weeks, to be reminded of all the things they're still missing — a quarterback, a stable offensive line, a go-to receiver ... you can go right down the list. For the Redskins, it's already Next Year.

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