

Week 14



- Snyder: Offensive output likely an aberration. R2
- Too much Gronkowski for Washington to handle. R3

# Patriots 34, Redskins 27



MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2011 ☆☆☆

The Washington Times

washingtontimes.com/sports/football



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# SHORT OF SUCCESS



PRESTON KERES/SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

## Washington's offense holds it own against Brady & Co. until stumbling at the finish

By RICH CAMPBELL  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Think back six weeks ago when the Washington Redskins' offense was so pitiful that its progress was measured in completions and first downs. Three-and-outs, sacks and turnovers were the expectation. Victory seemed impossible.

If those were the Redskins' darkest times, then the past few weeks have been their most exasperating. That's how quarterback Rex Grossman sees it, at least. The offense is functional again, but victory remains elusive because the Redskins lack the ability to finish games.

So when they went toe-to-toe Sunday with the New England Patriots only to fall short in the final seconds and lose 34-27, it seemed worse than those bleak afternoons back around Halloween.

"It can be more frustrating when that happens," Grossman said. "But you're trying to build something, and there's something to build off of. You can look at it both ways. It's so disappointing that we had our chances to win but we didn't get it done."

The Redskins (4-9) lost for the eighth time in their past nine games and ensured their third consecutive losing season. There was plenty of good throughout Sunday's game, but

ultimately the bad triumphed.

Washington was in position to upstage one of the NFL's superpowers and steal a win that would serve as a modest consolation in this lost season. The Redskins drove to the Patriots' 9-yard line with 29 seconds remaining. On third-and-goal, Grossman tried a short pass to Santana Moss across the middle. It went through Moss' hands and into linebacker Jerod Mayo's grasp.

"You're always disappointed when you can't finish a game," coach Mike Shanahan said. "I thought we did a number of good things today, but at the end of the day we fell a little bit short."

Mayo's interception marred one of the Redskins' finest games of the year. You can't really call it a breakthrough, especially considering the Patriots entered the game with the NFL's worst-ranked defense, but there's no denying that Grossman and running back Roy Helu have improved the standard from those miserable midseason losses to Buffalo and San Francisco.

The offense scored more points than it had in any game this season, beating the previous high of 23 it scored against Seattle two games ago. The Redskins totaled a season-high 463 yards.

That was no small feat, either. Un-

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**LEFT:** Redskins receiver Santana Moss eludes Patriots strong safety James Ihedigbo on a 49-yard touchdown catch that gave Washington its first lead. **ABOVE:** Linebacker Jerod Mayo's interception of a pass intended for Moss sealed New England's victory in the final seconds of the game.



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Donte' Stallworth's 51-yard reception in the first quarter was one of the Redskins' many big plays in Sunday's loss.

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## Where has this been all season?



DAN DALY

the cries of despair from their fans as one defeat was piled atop another. Jabar Gaffney was so excited to catch a

touchdown pass against his former club that he did the FedEx Leap into the stands behind the end zone. Granted, he got a little too much lift and landed in the seats instead of on the ledge, but these things can happen when you're going toe to toe with one of the NFL's elite.

As the day went on, other Redskins released their Inner Child — showing, as Rex Grossman put it, that "it's fun to go out there and play football." Whether it was hurling themselves into the crowd after scores, twirling the ball on the ground after first downs or otherwise celebrating big plays, the Redskins didn't hold anything back.

"We were pumped up," Gaffney said. "Had a good team coming in here, a chance to show we could play with the best."

For 60 minutes, the last-place Redskins did play with the best, too. Indeed, with 1:09 left, they thought they had tied New England 34-34 on a 5-yard TD throw from Grossman to Santana Moss. Alas, Moss was called for pushing off, and Grossman's next pass went off Moss' hands and into those of Jerod Mayo, the Patriots' Pro Bowl linebacker. Thus did one of the most entertaining Sundays in many moons at FedEx Field end in a 34-27 loss.

## A LANDOVER LEAP



ANDREW HARNIK / THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Washington Redskins wide receiver Jabar Gaffney celebrates with fans in the end zone after his 9-yard touchdown catch in the first quarter of Sunday's 34-27 loss to the New England Patriots at FedEx Field.

## Don't be swayed by scoring surge



DERON SNYDER

That certainly was fun, way more entertaining (and competitive) than anyone imagined. Too bad the Washington Redskins can't play New England every week.

Sure, the Patriots generate a lot of offense. But they yield a bunch, too. They were the perfect remedy for an inconsistent Redskins attack that posted its most points and most yardage all season, albeit in a 34-27 loss Sunday at FedEx Field.

No one expected a shootout between Tom "Captain America" Brady and Rex Grossman because the latter misfires and shoots his team in the foot too often. But the Redskins couldn't ask for a more susceptible opponent if their offense ever started to click.

The Patriots' scoring prowess might skew their defensive numbers a bit, as teams hopelessly behind can pile up inconsequential yards. But New England without the ball doesn't remind anyone of Baltimore. Opportunities figured to abound against the Patriots — ranked dead last in the NFL in yards per game. The only questions involved the Redskins' ability to capitalize.

They did, to a point, amassing 463 yards. There were a slew of big plays, eight passes that covered at least 20 yards (including a 51-yard bomb to Donte Stallworth) and three runs that covered at least 15 yards. Rookie halfback Roy Helu rushed for 126 yards. Stallworth (96 yards) and Jabar Gaffney (92 yards) had huge days against their former team.

"They're both very good players," Grossman said. "I'm glad the Patriots got rid of them."

But lots of players look good against New England. So don't get too carried away by Sunday's production.

The Redskins still settled for field goals when touchdowns are necessary against Brady. They still committed mistakes and a turnover in the red zone. They still failed to a play when they absolutely had to have it.

The effort would've been good enough to beat plenty of other teams. Washington's offense might have had trouble sleeping Saturday night, eager to face New England (The opposite reason might have led to difficulties for the Redskins' defense getting a good night's rest).

"We knew they played a lot of zone and there are a lot of open spaces out there," Gaffney said. "It's just about getting into



PRATIK SHAH/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Redskins' offense was humming along so well Sunday that even David Anderson, a receiver who was not on the roster at the beginning of the season, got into the scoring act with a 6-yard touchdown catch in the third quarter. While entertaining, much of the firepower can be attributed to the Patriots' pass defense, which has allowed many teams to score plenty of points.

them. We felt like we could, and we executed pretty good today."

Sunday provided something to build on, especially when you consider the reshuffled offensive line that's also missing tight end Fred Davis. Coach Mike Shanahan and his offensive coordinator will have to figure out how much of the success was a result of the Patriots' weak defense versus progress from Grossman, Helu, et al.

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Just don't tell Stallworth that the Redskins' output gets an asterisk.

"This is the NFL," he said. "It's anybody's game on any day. No one gave us a chance to win or be in this game. We played well, just not well enough in the end."

There's no denying that they played surprisingly well, which might explain Gaffney landing on his butt after a celebratory leap into the stands. Unaccustomed to such frolicking, the fans were caught off guard and failed to catch him.

Next week, Washington gets another shot at moving the ball and putting up points against a less-than-stout defense when it faces the New York Giants. Successful teams beat the teams they're sup-

posed to beat.

For now, the Redskins can accumulate moral victories by playing well against teams that are vulnerable.

"I typically go into every game thinking it's about the offense's execution rather than what the defense is doing," Grossman said. "But there are definitely some weeks where you look at your plays and how they are going to stack up, and I thought we could get some good plays with the passing game."

If they couldn't do that against one of the league's worst secondaries, the situation is bleaker than we thought.

Helu is proving his worth as an every-down back. Gaffney and Jabar are among a number of Grossman's viable targets. The offensive line is coming together through injuries and suspensions. And Grossman is playing his position well enough to keep the Redskins competitive.

"We're all judged by winning and losing," Shanahan said. "We moved the ball fairly well and scored a few points."

But it's better to move the ball, score points and lose, than it is to lose without accomplishing the first two feats.

If losing is inevitable — not saying that it is (just saying) — the Redskins might as well provide some excitement and entertainment in the process.

It always helps when a porous defense plays along.

## DALY

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But back to our original "if." Where has this fight, this feistiness been all season? The Redskins, after all, had no business being in this game in the fourth quarter. They were already without Fred Davis and Trent Williams because of suspensions and assorted others (e.g. LaRon Landry) because of injuries; then Jammal Brown, one of their few semihealthy offensive linemen, further complicated matters when he tweaked his groin in warm-ups and couldn't play.

It figured to be a long day, especially after New England took a quick 7-0 lead on a defensive touchdown (set up by old friend Andre Carter's sack/forced fumble). There just didn't seem to be any way the offense-challenged Redskins could keep up with the high-scoring Pats, who put up 30 points against just about everybody.

But no one likes to be embarrassed, and surely that was in the back of the Redskins' minds as they geared up for New England. The Patriots, during their near-perfect 2007 season, had whopped them 52-7, and they were quite capable of whomping them just as badly this season. Tom Brady, last I checked, is still Tom Brady, Wes Welker is still Wes Welker . . . and Rob Gronkowski is like no tight end you've ever seen.

So the Redskins brought their A game — or what's left of their A game, after all these casualties — and, miraculously, matched New England score for score. The biggest shock was seeing Grossman and Co. gain chunks of yardage, something they haven't done all year. In their second series, Grossman lobbed a 51-yard bomb to Donte Stallworth to set up a Graham Gano field goal. Not long afterward, Brandon Banks connected with Moss on an end-around pass for a 49-yard TD that put the home team ahead 17-14.

A trick play. Imagine that. It was the first pass, in fact, since Mike Shanahan took over as coach that wasn't thrown by a quarterback. Yup, the Redskins came at the Patriots with everything they had, spiritually and strategically. And lo and behold, it enabled them to hang with a club that's in the running for the first seed in the AFC.

It helped, of course, that they caught Brady on one of those rare afternoons when he actually looks mortal — at times. Brady's numbers were still terrific (22 of 37 for 357 yards and three touchdowns), but he was off target more than usual and was intercepted in the end zone by Josh Wilson in the late going when he had a chance to put the game away. (Though, in his defense, the pass was well within the reach of receiver Tiquan Underwood, who was outbattled for the ball.)

Then there's the New England secondary — nothing special to begin with — which, because of injuries, has been forced to use wideouts (Matthew Slater and Julian Edelman) to cover opposing receivers. Gaffney, Stallworth and Moss were running free all day, as Washington (293) just missed becoming the ninth team this season to throw for 300 yards against the Patriots.

Incredibly, it was there for the taking for the Redskins. Shanahan said he was even considering going for the two-point conversion — and the win — if Moss' touchdown hadn't been called back. The coach and his players were leaving no stone unturned in their pursuit of victory.

Hallelujah. But why couldn't the first 12 games have been like that? Why did it take utter desperation — and a visit from Bill Belichick's wrecking crew — for the Redskins to play the way they should have been playing all along?

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