

Week 1



- Reshaped defense comes up big in victory, R2
- Rookie defenders make major impact in debut, R3



Redskins 28, Giants 14

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ROD LAMKEY JR. / THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Rookie linebacker Ryan Kerrigan returns an interception for a touchdown early in the third quarter. Kerrigan started the play by tipping a pass by Giants quarterback Eli Manning.

ONE GIANT STEP

Big play leads to reversal of fortune



DAN DALY

Losing can become a habit. It certainly has for the Washington Redskins as far as the New York Giants are concerned. In recent years, the Giants have been the lock without a key, the puzzle without a solution, the cigarette and the blindfold.

Before Sunday's opener at FedEx Field, the Redskins had dropped six straight to Tom Coughlin's bunch and nine of 10. They had lost by a lot. They

had lost by a little. But almost always, they had lost. What, they've been asking themselves, is it going to take to put a stop to that? The Giants aren't that much better than us. Or are they?

As it turned out, all it took to change the course of this series — for an afternoon, at least — was some big plays by players unburdened by the past. Rookies such as Ryan Kerrigan and Chris Neild, the Redskins' first and last draft picks. Free agent pickups such as Jabar Gaffney, Stephen Bowen and Sav Rocca. And let's not forget Tim Hightower, who the Arizona Cardinals, next week's opponent, were nice enough to send this way in a trade.

Collectively, that group produced three of the Redskins' four touchdowns, three of their four sacks, 72 of their 74 rushing yards and four beautifully placed punts inside the 20 to help the home team pull away to a 28-14 win. In terms of instant impact, you can't ask for much more.

It was Kerrigan, still settling in at his new outside linebacker spot, who made the single biggest play. Three snaps into the second half, he batted a pass by Eli Manning, gathered the ball in at the New York 9 and, depending on your point of view,

» see DALY | R3



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Redskins running back Tim Hightower gets a lift from tight end Fred Davis after a touchdown. Gallery, www.washingtontimes.com/multimedia.

Confident Grossman leads way as Washington receives contributions from all over

By RICH CAMPBELL
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Jabar Gaffney had seen this Rex Grossman before. The two of them were on top of the college football world at the University of Florida back in 2001. Grossman-to-Gaffney was one of the nastiest quarterback-receiver combinations in the country.

So when Grossman said he was "feelin' like I was in Florida again" after leading the Washington Redskins to a 28-14 season-opening win over the New York Giants on Sunday, Gaffney was right with him.

"That's exactly what it looks like," Gaffney said. "Just like we were in college — nothing but confidence in his eyes."

Grossman showed some of the form that made him the 2001 Heisman Trophy runner-up. He overcame a rocky start and, for at least one week, validated coach Mike Shanahan's decision to start him at quarterback over John Beck.

He finished 21-of-34 passing with 305 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions. His 110.5 passer rating was the fourth-best of his 42 NFL games.

"I thought Rex played an excellent game [against] a lot of pressure up front, very talented football team; they play extremely hard," Shanahan said. "It's really hard to get big plays in the passing game against a defensive front that puts a lot of pressure on the quarterback."

It was high praise from a coach who is normally subdued, who has to watch the film before saying anything about anything. But this was the Grossman who Shanahan believes is capable of engineering a playoff push.

Grossman headlined a stirring start to Shanahan's second season at the helm, as the Redskins beat their NFC East rivals for the first time in

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—Mike Shanahan

» see REDSKINS | R3

OPENING DAY SNAPSHOTS



PRATIK SHAH/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The New York Giants kick off to the Washington Redskins to start the 2011 season. The game was a matchup of the cities most directly affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks.



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Scott Ryan and his girlfriend, Amy Rider, react to the 9/11 tribute before the Redskins and New York Giants clashed in a divisional matchup.



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell (left) is greeted by fans as he walks down a tunnel at FedEx Field following pregame ceremonies. Mr. Powell served as an honorary captain for the Redskins.

Season starts with a verdict for the defense



DERON SNYDER

The Redskins' offense was in a lose-lose situation entering Sunday's season-opener against the Giants. Rex Grossman & Co. could have shined against the injury-depleted

New York defense and elicited a huge so-what? The Giants' starting middle linebacker was third string a few days ago. Two of their best defensive linemen spent the day in street clothes. Their top defensive back went down with a season-ending knee injury in the pre-season.

Under those circumstances, you'd expect Washington to crank out some yards and put up some points. If so, big deal. Conversely, failing to produce against an injury-ravaged unit wouldn't bode well for the new-look 'O' and their much-maligned QB. And they would have heard about their ineptitude all week long.

But the Redskins' defense wasn't going to be graded on a curve for Sunday's effort. There would be no points deducted for holding down an undermanned foe. Instead, coordinator Jim Haslett's

troops had an unadulterated chance to make a positive impression and begin their road to redemption after last season's horrific performance.

Statement delivered. First step taken.

They pitched a shutout in the second half of Washington's 28-14 victory, yielding just one drive longer than 15 yards. Rookie Ryan Kerrigan returned an interception for a touchdown, and fellow rookie Chris Neild contributed two sacks. Linebacker London Fletcher and cornerback Josh Wilson stuffed halfback Ahmad Bradshaw on fourth-and-1 with the Redskins clinging to a seven-point lead.

Everywhere you looked, the Redskins were making plays on defense. Some were drafted last April, like Kerrigan and Neild. Others were holdovers, like Fletcher and safety Reed Doughty, who led the team with eight tackles. Still others were free agent acquisitions, like Wilson and defensive end Stephen Bowen, who was credited with a sack and two quarterback hits.

When we last saw the Redskins' defense, it was finishing a season in which it ranked 31st out of 32 NFL teams, a sharp decline from its top-10 ranking the previous three seasons.

"We went from a 4-3 defense — and a very successful 4-3 defense — and making the transition

takes awhile," Fletcher said. "Last year, some of the plays the Giants ran today would've been big plays. But this year, having the scheme under our belts and the addition of the new guys makes a big difference."

Maybe it's just that simple, where a little more familiarity, a little more talent and a little more youthful energy equals a whole lot more improvement. Maybe coach Mike Shanahan's vision of an active, ball-hawking, havoc-wreaking defense is en route to becoming a reality. One game is too early to tell for sure, but Redskins nose tackle Barry Cofield isn't waiting for additional evidence. His verdict is in.

"We're convinced of that," Cofield said, asked if his unit can rank among the best. "That's what we believe and that's what Haslett preaches. We compare ourselves to the great 3-4 defenses across the league, compare ourselves man-to-man at every position, and we don't sell ourselves short."

They certainly came up short early in the game, yielding touchdown drives of 70 and 85 yards through the Giants' first five possessions. Doughty and cornerback Kevin Barnes were burnt on a 68-yard pass from Manning to Hakeem Nicks, setting up the Giants' first score. And Manning went 4-for-4 for 58 yards on New York's other scoring drive, late in the first

half. But that pretty much concluded the Giants' highlight reel. Washington gave up just two first downs after intermission before linebacker Brian Orakpo blocked a field goal attempt with 5:04 remaining. On the previous play, Doughty tackled Bradshaw for a 2-yard loss on third-and-1.

Orakpo said aside from the newcomers, the defense is pretty much the same with "a few tweaks here and there," and they're just focused on themselves — not outsiders' impressions. He said his unit wasn't fazed when Grossman took a sack and fumbled, setting up a short field for the Giants' would-be game-tying touchdown drive.

"We were laughing when the 'O' turned the ball over," he said. "We were ready to go."

They proved it by holding the Giants to three-and-out, forcing them into the blocked field goal attempt. There would be no let-down against the team that has dominated the rivalry recently. It was a great day for the defense, but beating the Giants was the most important outcome, by any means necessary.

"It was a good test for us because they've had our number," Orakpo said.

The defense passed its test and has begun posting some (good) numbers of its own.

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	1	0	0	1.000	41	7
Miami	0	0	0	.000	0	0
New England	0	0	0	.000	0	0
N.Y. Jets	0	0	0	.000	0	0

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	1	0	0	1.000	34	7
Jacksonville	1	0	0	1.000	16	14
Tennessee	0	1	0	.000	14	16
Indianapolis	0	1	0	.000	7	34

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	1	0	0	1.000	35	7
Cincinnati	1	0	0	1.000	27	17
Cleveland	0	1	0	.000	17	27
Pittsburgh	0	1	0	.000	7	35

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
San Diego	1	0	0	1.000	24	17
Denver	0	0	0	.000	0	0
Oakland	0	0	0	.000	0	0
Kansas City	0	1	0	.000	7	41

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Washington	1	0	0	1.000	28	14
Philadelphia	1	0	0	1.000	31	13
Dallas	0	0	0	.000	0	0
N.Y. Giants	0	1	0	.000	14	28

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Carolina	0	1	0	.000	21	28
New Orleans	0	1	0	.000	34	42
Tampa Bay	0	1	0	.000	20	27
Atlanta	0	1	0	.000	12	30

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Chicago	1	0	0	1.000	30	12
Detroit	1	0	0	1.000	27	20
Green Bay	1	0	0	1.000	42	34
Minnesota	0	1	0	.000	17	24

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Arizona	1	0	0	1.000	28	21
San Francisco	1	0	0	1.000	33	17
Seattle	0	1	0	.000	17	33
St. Louis	0	1	0	.000	13	31

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