Foreword

WHILE I WAS GROWING UP in Houston, my whole life was about football. I loved playing pickup games in the neighborhood and competing in school games. When the Dolphins and the Vikings came to Houston in 1974 to play in Super Bowl VIII, I walked several miles by myself just to watch players get off the bus. I saw Chuck Foreman, Sammy White, Jim Marshall, Fran Tarkenton, and other star players. That was the biggest thing in my life.

When the Redskins drafted me in 1981, I learned fast that I wasn't the only person who loved the game of football. People in Washington do, too, and they're so passionate about the team I played with for a decade, the Redskins. I wore the burgundy and gold at a time when Redskins wins were so common. I was honored to be part of such a great organization, and I feel like I'm still a part of it.

These days, I hear so many Redskins fans talk about the great players that stand out in the team's history going back to the days at Griffith Stadium: Sammy Baugh, Eddie LeBaron, Gene Brito. People also talk to me about Bobby Mitchell, Sonny Jurgensen, Charley Taylor, and Brig Owens. My name is mentioned in that same category, and I am proud to be part of such a hallowed group. There's a common denominator. People put their issues aside—black, white, rich, or poor, and they have a common admiration for the Redskins. That's all part of the team's loyal and fanatical fan base.

The Redskins have a rich history and have been a part of the fabric of the nation's capital for along time. As one of the NFL's original teams, they have also made a huge contribution to the league's storied history. All of that comes alive in *The Redskins Encyclopedia,* which tells the Redskins' story in a comprehensive and entertaining way. It's an information bonanza that makes you want to keep reading. Redskins fans are special, and they deserve a book like this.

Dexter Manley

Introduction

WASHINGTON, D.C., as the popular belief goes, is not a a true sports town in the mold of, say, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, or Chicago. The nation's capital is a four pro-sport city—football, baseball, basketball, and hockey—but there's something fascinating about the way one team dwarfs the others in popularity and is a local cultural phenomenon, to boot. That team has sold out all of its home games for the past four decades and has established such a grip on the National Capital Region that a win puts an extra skip in the community's step and fuels the sales of thousands of additional newspapers on Monday morning, but a loss triggers many long faces.

That team is the Washington Redskins.

The Redskins are a Washington icon along the lines of the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court. The three most scrutinized people in the city are the president, the Redskins' coach, and the Redskins' quarterback—not necessarily in that order. "Hail to the Redskins," some would argue, is a more popular song in Washington today than the salute to the president, "Hail to the Chief." True, D.C. is not a sports town. But it is a Redskins town!

"The Redskins in this town are a unique property," said Rick "Doc" Walker, a local sports media personality who played tight end for the Redskins in the 1980s. "It's a tremendous relationship."

"The Redskins are a significant part of the history and spirit of the capital region community," said former Virginia senator George Allen, the son of famed Redskins coach George Allen. "The spirit of the song 'Fight on, Fight on, Til you have won, Sons of Washington'—that was the spirit of this whole region after the Pentagon was hit on September 11th."

The Redskins' reputation as the crown jewel of the local sports scene is a product of the team's status as the oldest and most storied sports franchise in town, in addition to having one of the richest traditions in the National Football League. In the 75 years since settling in Boston in 1932 (before moving to the nation's capital in 1937), the Redskins have won five NFL championships, including three Super Bowls, while making 21 postseason appearances. All three Super Bowl wins came during their glory days in the 1980s and early 1990s, when the Redskins were one of the league's elite teams season after season, a distinction that's still fresh in the minds of many Redskins fans. The Wizards, the Capitals, and the Nationals, by comparison, have one championship among them since they've been in Washington. (The Washington Senators won the World Series in 1924. They left the nation's capital in 1971, and the area was without a baseball team until the Nationals began play in 2005.)

There have been lean Redskins years, such as the post-World War II playoff drought, which lasted a quarter-century, and a stretch of mediocrity that has extended through most of the 1990s and into the early years of the 21st century. Throughout these down periods, however, the area's enthusiasm for its treasured football franchise has barely waned.

The regional phenomenon of this team and its supporters is the theme of *The Redskins Encyclopedia.* This book not only captures the history of the Redskins but explains why a city and a sports team came to be so intertwined, and why the identity of one would simply seem odd without the other.

In a metropolitan area that is diverse economically, racially, religiously, and culturally, the Redskins are the great unifier. The region is loaded with lawyers, lobbyists, and government bureaucrats and contractors, along with hosts of other white-collar employees, and so much of what happens revolves around politics, a hotbed of divisiveness.

"One of the things I loved about the Redskins is their fan base," said a Redskins great from the 1980s, colorful defensive end Dexter Manley. "There's such great tradition. We all seemed to come together for the same common denominator—to win. You could say in Washington everyone is so happy when the Redskins win. They would bring a Republican and Democrat together, and I bet they could settle a bill in a minute."

Diron Talbert, a Redskins defensive tackle in the 1970s, made this astute observation: "Washington really needs for that franchise to always be a winner because it is such a negative, negative town due to the politics. The city is much different than a lot of other cities to play in because everything is so negative. Yet, it really boosts the people and fans whenever the team is doing good. It's like it rejuvenates everybody."

Talbert told of an important detail that the city's mayor in the early 1970s, Walter Washington, shared during a visit to Redskin Park: "He said, 'On Sunday when you guys are playing, the crime rate is very low in the District.' He just laughed like hell, and so did we."

The Redskins captivated the area from the time they set foot in the nation's capital. They won the league championship in 1937 and stand as the only NFL team to do so in its inaugural season in a new city. Their coach at the time, Ray Flaherty, praised Redskins supporters after his squad beat the Bears in the 1937 championship game.

"It's not merely the contrast between Washington and Boston fans," Flaherty said in the *Washington Evening Star.* "It's the fact that the sentiment in Washington is a thing apart, something which couldn't be imagined. Believe you me, this has been the happiest football season of my life. Even if we had

lost yesterday, the memory of those Washington fans would have been sufficient to cheer me through the next nine months until we return."

The Redskins' mystique was born. The team won two NFL titles and appeared in six championship games during that early golden era, which saw the emergence of the franchise's first perennial superstar, Sammy Baugh. Today, he's part of an esteemed list of Redskins who are indelibly linked with the franchise, players such as Sonny Jurgensen, Bobby Mitchell, Charley Taylor, Joe Theismann, John Riggins, Art Monk, and Darrell Green. Their biographies are in this book, as are the stories of many other players, season-by-season breakdowns, and scores of highlights and anecdotes that illuminate the team's history.

You'll also learn that the Redskins have built one of the most rabid fan bases in all of sports. Every Redskins home game has been sold out from 1966 to the present. Many people who bought Redskins season tickets in the franchise's early years have handed them down to members of their family like a treasured heirloom, and thousands of people are on the team's season ticket waiting list.

"One thing about the fans here in Washington, they've been there forever," Redskins coach Joe Gibbs said. "Those guys that have those tickets—it wasn't somebody who came in here late and grabbed one. We've got a fan base that really understands what the Redskins are all about. They've been there year in and year out. They know good football, they know bad football. They're going to let you know it when they don't like it, and they're also going to make that stadium a place that other teams will have a tough time in—if we're doing our part playing and coaching."

The Redskins' fan base actually spreads beyond the Washington area. They were the southernmost NFL team for many years and thus gained staunch supporters in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, among other parts of the region. That following has dissipated since other franchises have emerged in the South, but pockets of diehard Redskins fans still exist in the South Atlantic states. Large pro-Redskins contingents can also be found in cities such as Phoenix and St. Louis. There is even a Redskins fan club in England.

Supporters of other NFL teams, most notably the Cowboys and Giants, are scattered throughout the D.C. metro area, but

The Redskins have sold out all of their home games for the past four decades.

they are just flyspecks in a region that bleeds burgundy and gold. After the Redskins defeated Denver in Super Bowl XXII, 650,000 fans showed up for a parade in Washington to celebrate the win. Get this: Nearly 50,000 turned out to watch a *scrimmage* between the Redskins and the Ravens at FedExField in August 2006. Redskins receiver Brandon Lloyd said none of his *regular-season games* with the San Francisco 49ers the year before drew 50,000 fans.

Go to the parking lot at FedExField prior to a Redskins home game, and you'll see a sea of burgundy and gold. Thousands of ardent Redskins fans are wearing jerseys of their favorite players, and others are dressed in imaginative Redskins attire, such as Ian Godfrey, who wears a full Indian headdress with rubber shoulder pads, a burgundy Redskins jersey, white football pants, and Redskins shoes. His face is painted burgundy and gold. Then there's John Carter, whose license plate reads CB H8R—"Cowboy Hater"—and Jim and Vicki Brigman, who run a Redskins fan club in Atlanta and have driven to Washington for a Redskins-Cowboys game. Many vehicles in the lot are painted burgundy and gold, including a couple of school buses, one of which says "Redskins 12th man" on the side.

What makes a Redskins fan?

"It's for the love of the game," Carter said. "You've got to feel like you're a part of it, and the only way to feel like you're a part of it is to buy the stuff, wear their clothes, and support the Redskins even through good times and bad times."

Samu Quereshi, a native Washingtonian who maintains a vast collection of Redskins memorabilia in the basement of his house in Bethesda, Maryland, put it this way: "The Redskins were just ingrained in my heart and soul at a young age. I started to pay close attention to them in 1971, George Allen's first year, then in '72 they're in a Super Bowl. We've been really blessed to have all of these competitive years and all of the playoff years. There's a pride in the team and a real pride in the tradition for me."

Redskins fans are hungry for news about their team, and competition is fierce among media outlets in the Washington area, one of the largest media markets in the country, when reporting on the squad. The first item on the local television news after a Redskins game is often a report on the game and its implications. The area's two major broadsheet newspapers, the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times,* often run Redskins game coverage on the front page. Even the benching of quarterback Mark Brunell and the subsequent promotion of Jason Campbell to the starting role in 2006 was reflected on the front page of those two papers, along with the *Washington Examiner.* (The *Post* ran a letter from a disgruntled Washington-area resident on November 25, 2006, saying that there was too much Redskins coverage above the fold on the front page and that such news should be relegated to the sports section.) During the season, callers bombard the phone lines of the area's all-sports radio stations, WTEM and Triple X ESPN radio.

Perhaps Jim Murray, the late Pulitzer Prize–winning sports columnist for the *Los Angeles Times,* best described who the Redskins really are. The Cowboys have been known as "America's Team" since the early 1970s, but Murray was convinced that another team deserved that title. On the day the Redskins beat the Dolphins in Super Bowl XVII in Pasadena, California, on January 30, 1983, he wrote the following:

> This team saw Slingin' Sammy Baugh, Sonny Jurgensen, Whiskey Kilmer.
>
> Cliff Battles ranged behind its line long before John Riggins did, Frank Filchock passed here. Riley Smith blocked. Bobby Mitchell used to disappear here. Charley Taylor ran long, gorgeous pass routes and plucked the ball from an opponent's ear just as he crossed the goal line. Larry Brown, with a hearing aid in his helmet, crunched lines here. "Bullet Bill" Dudley caught punts here.
>
> The Washington Redskins are a venerable team steeped in tradition. They're as much a part of Americana as Lee's horse or Sheridan's cavalry. They've got their own song, they were the first to have their own band and cheerleaders.
>
> They should be "America's Team."

So Hail to the Redskins!
Hail Victory!
Braves on the Warpath,
Fight for old D.C.!