



PHOTO/WADE NASH
Carolina defenders Renaldo Turnbull (97) and Ray Seals (99) trip up San Francisco fullback William Floyd during the 49ers' 34-21 win Monday at Ericsson Stadium.

Redskins quiet about torrid start

By Joseph White
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ASHBURN, Va. — The Washington Redskins have been here before, on a winning roll with the league's most surprising defense. Given what happened last time, it's no surprise no one's acting cocky about the 3-1 start.

"We've got to look at what we did last year, starting off 7-1 and then folding," linebacker Marcus Patton said Monday as the team reviewed its 24-12 victory over Jacksonville. "You have to keep that in mind and keep everything in perspective."

One year ago, the Redskins were 3-1 and allowing a league-best 10 points per game — despite a questionable defensive line that was giving up plenty of yards. This September, it's eerily similar: The won-loss record is the same, and the 12 points-per-game allowed ranks third in the league, even though the defense is 29th against the run.

So, if approached by a fan on the street, what would a member of the Redskins say to a fan who wants to know why this year will be different from last, when the team collapsed to finish 9-7 and out of the playoffs? "I'd say we've grown. We've

developed more," guard Tre Johnson said. "We're a more mature team. We have to remember what happened last year. We definitely won't repeat that."

There are other reasons to be optimistic. Last year, the Redskins had an easy first-half schedule, followed by a back-breaking run in November. This year, the schedule gets easier as it goes along. Excluding the two games against Dallas, the Redskins' remaining opponents have a combined record of 13-24. And, while several changes are paying dividends, the addition of one player on defense has made a world of difference.

Cris Dishman, a free agent from the Oilers, has teamed with Darrell Green to form the best cornerback tandem in the league. With those two playing man-to-man, the Redskins are able to move strong safety Jesse Campbell behind the thin defensive line to make an eight-man front against the run.

"We've got two great corners out there that can cover and hold teams down," Patton said. "Put them up one-on-one, bring the safety down for the run defense. He's definitely had a major, major impact on the defense."

As a result, the Redskins are not only overwhelmingly No. 1 against the pass — 40 yards per game better than anyone else — they are containing the run even if they don't always win the battle at the line of scrimmage. The defense has not allowed a play of more than 25 yards all season and has given up only three touchdowns — none in the last two games. The Jaguars came into Sunday's game leading the NFL in scoring offense, but managed only four field goals.

"I'm not really a statistical kind of guy," Green said. "But I think the bottom line is you keep them out of the end zone."

The offense still isn't fully in gear, but Gus Frerotte had his best game of the season Sunday and Terry Allen was back to his usual 100-yard self after a tentative outing two weeks earlier against Arizona. Also, the Redskins are the only NFL team successfully converting more than 50 percent of their third downs.

In the locker room after the game, many Redskins said they felt they weren't taken seriously by the Jaguars. Now, with a game at Philadelphia followed by a Monday night showdown with Dallas, there's a chance to earn some big-time respect.

Panthers need answers

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smooth out the rough spots. Any place would be a good place to start.

"We know we're not doing things offensively nor defensively, so those can be corrected," Carrier said.

Between Collins' struggles and the offensive line being unable to help Carolina move the ball, the Panthers' conservative offense isn't producing enough points or avoiding mistakes. It also means the defense is spending more time on the field.

"It's very hard, especially for the defense," rookie receiver Rae Carruth said. "They can't keep coming out there and bailing us out. The 49ers ran the ball over 50 times and the defense had to take a pounding. If we can't get out on the field and drive the ball

and let them get a rest, it's not going to happen for us."

Although Capers wouldn't name a starter for Minnesota, Carrier said the offense could function with Collins or Beurlein at the helm.

"That's not my decision," Carrier said. "If Steve's the quarterback, I'm happy; if Kerry's the quarterback, I'm just as happy. We're blessed to have two guys who can play and run this organization. Whichever way it is, I'm going to try to make plays for them."

San Francisco's two-game lead isn't permanent, Davis insists. Carolina can still make a run at first place, but it'll take more than the Panthers have shown over the first five weeks.

"It's a one-game hole right now," Davis said. "They all count the

same — 16 weeks. It's that simple. We have to correct the mistakes we're making — in a hurry. You have to correct that mind set and understand what winning is about and find a way to get it done. We have no choice, and guys had better understand that."

Orioles are ready

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the World Series with the New York Yankees last year and has a habit of reaching back for a little bit more in the postseason.

"When the big time comes, the big pitchers step it up," Johnson said. "(Orel) Hershiser will be the first to tell you the toughest time for him is during the early part of the season because it's hard to get focused. But in the postseason you're concentration level is really high and your ability to execute is a lot better."

The Orioles this season somehow found a way to perform at their best in important situations — turning up the intensity as if operating with a switch. For example:

- Coming off two straight lopsided losses to Boston, the Orioles won three straight in Atlanta in a heavily-publicized encounter that many viewed as a preview to the World Series.

- After going 3-7 at home immediately following the All-Star break and letting its lead to shrink to 3 1/2 games, Baltimore went on a 9-1 tear to move 6 games ahead.

- Facing eight games against New York in an 11-day span, the

Orioles won the first three to open up a 9 1/2-game lead.

The Orioles then slipped into cruise control until that day in Toronto, when Johnson pleaded with the team for a better effort. The result? A victory over Roger Clemens, setting up the clincher the next night. Now, in the postseason, the Orioles are ready to pump up the intensity once more.

"There's a fine line between being flat and being rested and healthy," Cal Ripken said.

"The energy level will naturally go up in the playoffs. It's just a matter of everyone feeling confident and everyone getting their own act together individually. When that happens, we have the capability to be a very good team."

Larry Herndon played on the 1984 Detroit Tigers, the last AL team before Baltimore to play the entire season in first place. That team won the World Series and Herndon, now a batting coach with Detroit, sees no reason why the Orioles can't do likewise.

"Once the playoffs start it's a whole different ballgame; it starts all over," Herndon said. "I don't think the Orioles will have any trouble getting back to the level they were all season."

Wallace, Blazers agree to terms

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player as you'll find in this league," Dunleavy said.

"I'm glad he has the contract behind him so he feels comfortable enough where we can experiment with certain things.

"I think he can be an all-star power forward. I think he can play small forward. I think he can play center. He's got great length. He's got some of the quickest feet I've seen on any player. He's got a strong low-post game. And he can shoot from 3-point range. He's got a wide spectrum of talents."

Wallace came to Portland with a reputation as an emotional player prone to technical fouls. But Dunleavy said Wallace's attitude is one of his strong points.

"The organization shows they are willing to commit to players who have not only the talent, but the passion for the game," Dunleavy said.

Wallace's 3-month-old son cried in the background as the signing was announced. He recently also won custody of his older son in a legal battle. Wallace will earn \$2.3 million in the upcoming season, then his new deal will kick in the following year and extend through the 2003-04 season.

Wallace's agent, Bill Strickland, said concern that the NBA's collective bargaining agreement with the players might be altered in reopened negotiations was a factor in the decision to sign a contract extension. But the overriding reason, Strickland said, was Wallace's desire to stay in Portland.

Wallace said he's just relieved to have the matter out of the way.

"Every time now when I go into the supermarket or if I'm out on the street, I don't have to hear, 'Are you going to sign? Are you going to stay?'"

The Blazers open their training camp Friday at Linfield College in McMinnville.

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