

“They were breaking their necks trying to rack up Baugh,” Flaherty once said. “That’s what made the screen pass go. It had been nullified downfield, but we put it in behind the line of scrimmage, and the Bears didn’t know how to stop it.”

In a 14–6 win over the Bears in the 1942 championship game, Flaherty implemented a novel two-platoon system on offense. One unit featured Baugh’s passing from the single-wing formation and the other unit, with Frankie Filchock at tailback, was predicated on a pounding running game. Defenses were bewildered.

Flaherty was more than an Xs and Os man. He was adroit at motivating his players, using words and psychological tactics to round their minds into game shape. Depending on the situation, he would berate, cajole, or flatter just like the great motivator he was often compared with, Notre Dame coach Knute Rockne. Like Rockne, Flaherty was known for his tough pregame pep talks.

“We’ve seen him whip a laggard into a fury with a verbal lashing that might have fetched another coach a punch in the nose,” *Washington Post* sportswriter Shirley Povich wrote on October 12, 1940. “We’ve seen him play on his players’ personal pride to get the same effect that on another day he would gain by threats. We’ve heard him, on occasion, tell his squad of pros bluntly that they’re getting good wages for only 60 minutes of football a week and, dammit, to give him that 60 minutes this afternoon.”

Flaherty could also be a man of a few words that carried considerable weight. Case in point: Prior to the 1942 championship game, the coach wrote on the locker-room chalkboard a subtle reminder of Washington’s loss to the Bears in the 1940



Flaherty (right) and Redskins owner George Preston Marshall are all smiles on December 8, 1939, as the coach inks a new five-year contract reportedly worth \$10,000 a year.

title game: “73–0.” He also made a rousing speech that had his players in a frenzy by kickoff.

“Flaherty told us he didn’t care whether we won the game or not but to just beat the living [expletive] out of them,” Shugart said. “He kind of got choked up, and [assistant coach] Turk Edwards started to say something, and the same thing happened. I always said that if somebody hadn’t opened the door, we would have run right through it to get out onto the field.”

Flaherty left the Redskins after the 1942 season to serve as a U.S. Navy lieutenant during World War II. He’d made a deal with Marshall that he could return to the Redskins once the war was over, but that didn’t happen. Instead, he became the first “name coach” from the NFL to join the new All-America Football Conference, where he coached the New York Yankees for three seasons and the Chicago Rockets for one. His Yankees reached two championship games, both losses to the Cleveland Browns. He retired from coaching in 1949 with a career record of 80–39–5 (.679 winning percentage).

“He was a good motivator and disciplinarian, and he was strictly a fundamentals man,” said Ace Parker, a Hall of Fame quarterback for the old Brooklyn Dodgers from 1937 to 1941. “That’s why he had good teams. He stressed fundamentals and wanted them carried out. It wasn’t just the haphazard way of doing it.”

The Flaherty Years

NFL				
Year	Team	Record	%	Postseason
1936	Boston	7–5	.583	0–1 (Lost in NFL championship game)
1937	Wash	8–3	.727	1–0 (NFL champions)
1938	Wash	6–3–2	.636	0–0
1939	Wash	8–2–1	.772	0–0
1940	Wash	9–2	.818	0–1 (Lost in NFL championship game)
1941	Wash	6–5	.545	0–0
1942	Wash	10–1	.909	1–0 (NFL champions)
Totals		54–21–3	.711	2–2

AAFC				
Year	Team	Record	%	Postseason
1946	NY-A	10–3–1	.750	0–1 (Lost in AAFC championship game)
1947	NY-A	11–2–1	.821	0–1 (Lost in AAFC championship game)
1948	NY-A	1–3–0	.250	0–0
1949	Ch-A	4–8–0	.333	0–0
Totals		26–16–2	.614	0–2

JOE GIBBS

Most Celebrated Coach in Redskins History

Head Coach, San Diego State • **NFL Career:** 1981–92, 2004–06 (15 seasons) • **Redskins Years:** 1981–92, 2004–06 (15) • **HOF Induction:** 1996 • **Born:** November 25, 1940 (Mocksville, N.C.)

His name is synonymous with the Washington Redskins like that of no other coach in team history: Joe Jackson Gibbs.



Joe Gibbs I and Joe Gibbs II

Gibbs is the most celebrated coach to ever lead the burgundy and gold. He's the only Redskins coach to win a Super Bowl—he has three rings, in fact—and has made nine playoff appearances in 15 seasons at the helm of the franchise. His winning percentages for the regular season (.625, 145–87) and postseason (.739, 17–6) are among the best in NFL history.

Gibbs achieved virtually all of his success in the 12-season period from 1981 to 1992, when the Redskins were one of the league's elite teams and showed traits of a dynasty. In addition to appearing in four Super Bowls, they won five NFC East titles and had 10 winning seasons.

By the time he stepped down, in March 1993, Gibbs was the most revered man in the nation's capital. He also was regarded as one of the greatest NFL coaches of all time largely by virtue of his unique ability to win three Super Bowls with three different quarterbacks, none of whom will ever make the Hall of Fame. He also won Super Bowls in two strike-shortened seasons, another monumental feat. Essentially, Gibbs was a model by which other NFL coaches were measured. He was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in 1996.

His coaching career in D.C. has been a tale of two vastly different periods, however. After an 11-year hiatus during which his racing team was busy capturing NASCAR championships, Gibbs returned in January 2004. In the past three seasons, though, he has experienced his two worst years ever, marks of 6–10 in 2004 and 5–11 in 2006 sandwiched around a 10–6 team that reached the second round of the playoffs in 2005.

Gibbs's goal on making his comeback was to return the Redskins to glory. They had posted only two winning seasons and one playoff appearance since he left, and people were saying if anyone could do it, he could. But he was not where he

hoped to be, and where Redskins fans expected him to be, after three seasons back.

"You get upset when something like this happens," Gibbs said at a news conference to wrap up the 2006 season. "It's certainly a tough thing to go through. I have an obligation to our fans, our owner. As I said when I came here, I want to get us back to winning. None of us liked this year. But that's what it is. How far off are we, everybody's going to have their opinion. When you finish a year like this, there's going to be a lot of negative stuff to it. That's just part of the NFL. That's the life we live.

"Our fans kind of know where we are. They know we went 5–11. They're disappointed. For me, I'm determined to do what's best for the Redskins at all times. Not for one year, not for two years, not for five years. What would be the best thing for the Redskins in every situation."

One his long-time lieutenants, Joe Bugel, said that the situation has been very difficult for Gibbs "because he feels like he's letting the owner down and our great fans and the football team." Bugel, a member of the Gibbs-I staff who has assisted him for the past three seasons on offense, added that the issue of whether Gibbs may have tarnished his legacy never comes up. "The only thing we talk about is winning the next game," Bugel said. "If anybody can right this ship, it's Joe Gibbs."

More than four decades ago, a coach named Don Coryell also had lots of confidence in Joe Gibbs. After playing linebacker, tight end, and guard at San Diego State for three seasons in the early 1960s under Coryell, Gibbs was hired by him for his first assistant coaching job in 1964. Gibbs was a graduate assistant for two seasons before being promoted to offensive line coach in 1966, when the Aztecs finished 11–0 and captured the consensus Division II national championship.

“I saw he was going to be a really fine coach,” said Coryell, who used the passing game to wreak havoc on offenses and later became known as “Air Coryell.” “He had a way of talking to people, and he was so industrious and fired up that all these good traits you want in a player rubbed off on the fellows he had. He just did a terrific job, unbelievable for a young kid like that. I had a jewel in Joe Gibbs.”

Gibbs later assisted on offense at Florida State, Southern California, and Arkansas, before reuniting with Coryell as the St. Louis Cardinals’ offensive backfield coach in 1973, when “Air Coryell” first hit the NFL’s radar screens. After five seasons there and a season as the offensive coordinator in Tampa Bay, Gibbs coached in San Diego under Coryell in 1979 and 1980, completing his 17-season assistant coaching apprenticeship.

As an assistant, Gibbs worked under a quartet of astute coaching minds: Coryell, John McKay (Southern Cal), and Frank Broyles (Arkansas)—all of whom are in the College Football Hall of Fame—and Bill Peterson (Florida State). He gleaned valuable direction from each one and assisted teams that had winning records in 14 of his 17 seasons.

In his last two seasons in San Diego, Gibbs called plays for one of the most explosive offenses in NFL history. So, on arriving in Washington in 1981, the 40-year-old man was being counted on to inject a similar excitement into an offense that often struggled under prior coach Jack Pardee. The Redskins opened the 1981 season 0–5, but Gibbs, thinking his job was on the line, made a memorable adjustment.

Having relied mostly on a pass-oriented attack, he balanced out the offense by calling for the single-back, two-tight end setup he had learned from his mentor, Coryell. The Redskins rebounded to finish 8–8 and rode their momentum in 1982 to capture Super Bowl XVII.

The Gibbs dynasty was born. He earned NFL Coach of the Year honors in 1982 and again in 1983, when the Redskins appeared in Super Bowl XVIII, becoming the first coach in two decades to receive that distinction two years in a row. Meanwhile, the master tactician implemented dazzling innovations and schemes. As then-Redskins quarterback Joe Theismann put it, Gibbs experimented with something new on offense week after week because he was always “curious about his own genius.”

“He revealed a sort of offensive genius that I never saw coming,” long-time *Sports Illustrated* pro football writer Paul Zimmerman said. “It wasn’t so much with the Hogs or the ground attack. It was the ‘bunch’ formation they used to use, which was quite innovative. They had three receivers all running complicated patterns at the same time. All hell breaks loose, and they go every which way. It was quite a sophisticated passing system. After seeing him use it, I said this guy’s really got a touch, he’s really got some innovative ability. That’s what put him over the top—his innovative ability.”

Then-Redskins radio play-by-play man Frank Herzog found it fun to watch how Gibbs and his staff made deft adjustments at halftime that led to so many victories. “Teams would come out with the same approach offensively or defensively, while the Redskins would come out and, boom, they’d win the ball game,” Herzog said. “It got to where you’d think at halftime what they were going to do to second-guess and adjust.”

Two of Gibbs’s fiercest coaching rivals at the time, the Giants’ Bill Parcells and the Bears’ Mike Ditka, described him as the best coach they ever faced. “He understood the game as well as anybody,” said Ditka, who coached the Bears from 1982



Gibbs played guard, linebacker, and tight end in the early 1960s at San Diego State. His first assistant coaching stop was at San Diego State from 1964 to 1966. “I thought I had a jewel in Joe Gibbs,” said Gibbs’s mentor, Don Coryell, the Aztecs’ head coach at the time. “He was a great coach and really, really helped the ball club.”

to 1992 and went 1–2 against Gibbs in the playoffs. “When you watched what Joe Gibbs did on offense, he gave you a lot of icing and glitter and glamour, but it was basic. When it was all added up, he was going to block and protect the quarterback. He also had a core of good players, basic players that he loved and trusted, and they trusted him.”

In addition to his cleverness with Xs and Os, Gibbs became synonymous with an indefatigable work ethic, meticulous game preparation, wily organizational, leadership and motivational skills, a fierce competitiveness, and a lust for perfection. In a reflection of their coach, his players were well-disciplined, unselfish, and rarely beat themselves with silly penalties, turnovers, and mental mistakes.

It all defined the Joe Gibbs’s doctrine on winning. “Coach Gibbs laid a foundation, and anytime you’re going to have a championship in anything, you have to have a foundation,” said Darryl Grant, a defensive tackle who played under Gibbs for 10 seasons. “He based his foundation on family. That was one of the principles that we had: We’re a family, we’re a unit, we’re there to win games. Gibbs always preached that we stick together. We stood up for each other. Everybody didn’t always love each other, but once we got on the field, we meant business. We were there to cover for each other. We were one.”

“He was a great verbal leader, very charismatic, very smart,” Grant added. “He’s a guy who, with his words, could rile you up to move just about any mountain, and you respected that about him. We knew he was right, and we went out and did the things he said to do.”

After retiring and spending more than a decade operating Joe Gibbs Racing, a period that included a stop at NBC as an NFL studio analyst, Gibbs signed on with the Redskins in 2004 as head coach and team president; he took charge of player-personnel decisions. But it’s been a Herculean struggle at times, and he’s been vilified in the media and by fans. During the 2004 and 2006 seasons, for example, he was criticized for waiting too long to bench aging and erratic quarterback Mark Brunell. Both times the delay may have cost the Redskins a legitimate shot at the playoffs.

Gibbs has also taken heat for a series of questionable player-personnel moves (general managers Bobby Beathard and Charley Casserly handled personnel issues during Gibbs-I), for being conservative with on-the-field decisions, for losing a host of games decided by three points or less (he’s 6–10, compared with 31–13 during Gibbs-I), and for penalties and mental mistakes that have sometimes crippled his squad. In comparison, his teams in the 1980s and early 1990s rarely beat themselves.

Frustration in his voice and on his face has been noticeable. “It’s been a tough year for him because he puts so much into it as far as wanting to be the best and taking the Redskins back to where they were in the past when they won all those titles,” Redskins linebacker Marcus Washington said at the end of the 2006 season. “Sometimes he spends the night here. Not a lot of coaches around the league work that hard. He really inspires you because after a couple of tough losses he’ll be fired up, and he’ll be able to create some positives out of those negatives.”

In Bugel’s eyes, Gibbs is as intense as he always was. “You can describe Joe Gibbs in one word: passion,” Bugel said. “He relays that to the players. I can see no difference back in the ’80s and the 2000s right now. He’s the same man. He coaches

the same way. He puts in 20 hours a day at the office. Nothing’s changed.”

Neither has his status in Canton. Hall of Fame officials say his spot is eternally secure and that only a note may be added to his bio about his coaching record in the twenty-first century. In the only other situation in which a Hall of Famer returned to the game after being inducted, when the great Cleveland Browns coach Paul Brown made a comeback as the Bengals’ coach, a line that he later coached in Cincinnati was added to his bio.

“What I really like about him is he’s a Hall of Fame coach, but he’s not too proud to say, ‘I made a mistake here, I should have done this or we need to do more of this,’” Marcus Washington said. “If you’re willing to change a little and admit if you’re wrong somewhere and learn from that . . . He lets you know, ‘I’m not going to quit, I’m going to continue to work ’till we get to where we want to be.’ I think he can get us there.”

KEN HOUSTON

Hard-Hitting Safety Left Legacy as One of the Greatest Ever

S, No. 27, Prairie View A&M • 6–3, 197 • **NFL Career:** 1967–80 (14 seasons) • **Redskins Years:** 1973–80 (8) • **HOF Induction:** 1986 • **NFL 1970s All-Decade Team** and **NFL 75th Anniversary Team** • **Born:** November 12, 1944 (Lufkin, Tex.)

Upon hearing the news, Ken Houston said he felt a “numbness.” It was May 1973, and the Houston Oilers’ All-Pro safety just learned he had been traded. He was disappointed, to say the least.

“Nobody wants to be traded,” he said. “You have fans and loyalty. I was living in Houston, and I didn’t think at that particular time that they would trade me with the career I’d had in Houston. So I asked [general manager] Sid Gillman who he traded me to, and he told me the Redskins. I felt good about that because if you were not a Redskin, everybody watched them.”

The Redskins were fresh off an appearance in Super Bowl VII, and with Houston anchoring the defensive backfield, they made the playoffs three more times in the 1970s. All the while, he fortified a distinguished career. A first-ballot inductee into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1986, he was named in 1994 to the NFL’s 75th anniversary team as one of three greatest safeties to ever play the game, along with Larry Wilson and Ronnie Lott.

Houston’s numbers support his recognition. In 14 seasons, six with the Oilers and his last eight with the Redskins, he was named to two all-star teams in the old American Football League, followed by 10 straight Pro Bowls. The perennial All-Pro intercepted 49 passes for 898 yards and returned nine for touchdowns, an all-time NFL record at the time that has since been broken. He’s tied for first in most interceptions returned for touchdowns in one season (four) and in one game (two). He also scored on a fumble recovery, a blocked field goal and a punt return.

Houston is remembered, too, for his vicious hits that rattled a few running backs and wide receivers. Positioned mostly at strong safety, the 6–3, 200-pounder hunted opponents down with his long, fluid strides and popped them with a flying forearm, often corralling players around the neck. The clothesline tackle has since been outlawed.

The Gibbs Years

Year	Team	Record	%	Postseason
1981	Wash	8–8	.500	0–0
1982	Wash	8–1	.889	4–0 (Won Super Bowl XVII)
1983	Wash	14–2	.875	2–1 (Lost Super Bowl XVIII)
1984	Wash	11–5	.688	0–1
1985	Wash	10–6	.625	0–0
1986	Wash	12–4	.750	2–1
1987	Wash	11–4	.734	3–0 (Won Super Bowl XXII)
1988	Wash	7–9	.438	0–0
1989	Wash	10–6	.625	0–0
1990	Wash	10–6	.625	1–1
1991	Wash	14–2	.875	3–0 (Won Super Bowl XXVI)
1992	Wash	9–7	.563	1–1
2004	Wash	6–10	.375	0–0
2005	Wash	10–6	.625	1–1
2006	Wash	5–11	.313	0–0
Totals		145–87	.625	17–6