

# Andy Reid: An appreciation

By William C. Kashatus

Only the most die-hard Eagle fans will be able to stomach the remainder of this season. After last weekend's humiliating 31-6 defeat at the hands of the Washington Redskins, the Birds had dropped six in a row. That put their record at 3-7 with just six games remaining, starting with tonight's against the Carolina Panthers.

Sportswriters and fans have blamed head coach Andy Reid for the nightmarish year. They point to his questionable draft picks, game mismanagement, and poor choices of assistant coaches.

What they fail to recognize is that the actual source of their anger and frustration is the unreasonable expectation that the team will win on a consistent basis over a prolonged period of time. Ironically, it was Reid who created that lofty expectation.

Today's younger Eagles fans didn't experience the horrible teams of the mid- to late 1960s and early '70s. Those were the years of my boyhood, when head coach Joe Kuharich wasted the team's top-tier talent. Even with Hall of Famers and perennial Pro-Bowlers Sonny Jurgensen and Tommy McDonald, Kuharich posted a 28-41-1

record during his five seasons in Philadelphia.

His successors Jerry Williams, Eddie Khayat, and Mike McCormack weren't much better. Their teams were unable to post a single winning season over more than a decade. They consisted of washed-up stars, forgettable quarterbacks, and even a linebacker who once set himself on fire on a teammate's dare. Back then, the Eagles were so pathetic that losing by a single touchdown was a moral victory to be celebrated.

Many fans are also too young to remember the golden era of Dick Vermeil's squads of the late '70s and early '80s. Led by quarterback Ron Jaworski, those Eagles earned three playoff berths and won an NFC Championship. But all the mediocre teams that followed should not be forgotten. Between 1983 and 1985, the fans became so indifferent that you could get seats on the 50-yard line on game day.

The arrival of head coach Buddy Ryan in 1986 revived the team and the fan base. But even with such star performers as quarterback Randall Cunningham and the "Gang Green" defense, the Eagles failed to win a single playoff game during Ryan's tenure. Nor did they do much better under Rich Kotite and Ray Rhoads, qual-

ifying for the playoffs three times in eight seasons but never getting past the second round.

The point is that before Andy Reid was hired in 1999, Eagles fans expected to lose. And even if the team did reach the playoffs, it couldn't be expected to go very deep.

But during Reid's 14 seasons in Philadelphia, the Eagles have captured six division titles and an NFC Championship. Those teams were defined by an offense that emphasized the pass, a stingy and punishing defense, and a head coach who took the blame for his players when they performed poorly.

The formula was successful for so long that it's been difficult for Reid to change, even now that he lacks the personnel that made the strategy possible.

It seems clear that this will be Andy Reid's final year with the Eagles. Nevertheless, he created an expectation of winning consistently and over a longer period of time than Philadelphia — or many other NFL cities — has ever enjoyed. For that, he deserves a little more appreciation than he's received.

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