



Fight for Old DC: George Preston Marshall, the Integration of the Washington Redskins, and the Rise of a New NFL

Andrew O'Toole

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In 1932 laundry-store tycoon George Preston Marshall became part owner of the Boston Braves franchise in the National Football League. To separate his franchise from the baseball team, he renamed it the Redskins in 1933 and then in 1937 moved his team to Washington DC, where the team won two NFL championships over the next decade. But it was off the field that Marshall made his lasting impact. An innovator, he achieved many “firsts” in professional football. His team was the first to telecast all its games, have its own fight song and a halftime show, and assemble its own marching band and cheerleading squad. He viewed football as an entertainment business and accordingly made changes to increase scoring and improve the fan experience.

But along with innovation, there was controversy. Marshall was a proud son of the South, and as the fifties came to a close, his team remained the only franchise in the three major league sports to not have a single black player. Marshall came under pressure from Congress and the NFL and its president, Pete Rozelle, as league expansion and new television contract possibilities forced the issue on the reluctant owner. Outside forces finally pushed Marshall to trade for Bobby Mitchell, the team’s first black player, in 1962. With the story of Marshall’s holdout as the backdrop, *Fight for Old DC* chronicles these pivotal years when the NFL began its ascent to the top of the nation’s sporting interest.

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