

# Don WARREN

By Michael Richman  
Redskins Insider Correspondent

The Washington Redskins of the 1980s and early 1990s, one of the NFL's elite franchises of that era, thrived with a hard-working, no-nonsense mentality. There wasn't much glitz and glamour. Players replaced what they lacked in athletic talent with a fierce determination to succeed.

Don Warren epitomized the team's personality. He wasn't the league's most talented tight end, nor the quickest, fastest or strongest. But he put in a rigorous day's work for 14 NFL seasons – all when wearing the Redskins burgundy and gold.

The Redskins profited from Warren's commitment. He started 182 of 193 games in his career, including four Super Bowls and all of a possible 19 playoff games. He earned championship rings from the Redskins wins in Super Bowls XVII, XXII and XXVI.

"Donnie is one of the hardest workers we've got," coach Joe Gibbs, the primary architect of the Redskins dominance, once said. "He's constantly working in the weight room. He embodies what you love as a coach."

At the same time, Warren credited Gibbs and general manager Bobby Beathard with creating the team's blue-collar makeup. Both men sought to acquire many unheralded draft picks and free agents who could be molded into overachievers and, ultimately, winners.

"Those are the type of personalities that we had, and that Gibbs and Beathard looked for," Warren, 45, told *Redskins Insider*. "Look at [offensive tackle] Joe Jacoby, he wasn't even drafted. He was a free agent. Even [center] Jeff Bostic, he got cut from Philly. Then he ends up starting for us in two years. It was their personality, and they were all hard-working guys. That's what made us click."

Jacoby, a four-time Pro Bowler, was a candidate for induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame this year. Bostic made the Pro Bowl once.

Warren played for the Redskins from 1979 to 1992, catching 244 passes, the team's eighth-best all-time mark, for 2,536 yards. He's one of only four Redskins to play in three different decades, a list including quarterback Sammy Baugh, linebacker Monte Coleman and cornerback Darrel Green.

Blocking was Warren's forte. In fact, he was a vital cog in the single-back, double-tight end setup that defined the team's offense throughout the Gibbs 12-season regime.

The Redskins were 0-5 in 1981, Gibbs' first season in Washington, when the coach first deployed the strategy. He'd decided to switch from a pass-oriented system to a ground-based attack centered on future Hall of Fame running back John Riggins. With Riggins as the lone back, Warren lined up on the line of scrimmage or in the backfield as an "H-back" and often went in motion. Rookie Clint Didier, more of a pass-catching tight end, set up on the other side of the line.

Warren opened hole after hole for Riggins, the team's key offensive weapon. The Redskins won eight of their last 11 games in 1981 and carried their momentum into 1982, capturing Super Bowl VXXII with a 27-17 win over the Dolphins. The Redskins dynasty was thus launched, and Warren played a huge role in it. Washington went 140-65 in 12 seasons under Gibbs, including a 16-5 record in eight playoff appearances.

"That offense was fun because it gave you a lot of movement and flexibility," Warren said. "At times, I was a fullback in short-yardage and goal line situations. Sometimes, being the tight end in those situations, I couldn't hear the signals from the end of the end of the line. So I liked lining up in the backfield, where I was basically a human battering ram. I had fun doing that."

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Teammates would say, 'We're going to take care of everybody except the middle linebacker, so he's yours.' I liked that aspect of football. Hey, either he wins or you win."

Like many others, Warren believes the Redskins' wins wouldn't have come so rapidly without Gibbs' own brilliant work ethic. The Hall of Fame coach logged 100-hour work weeks to craft game plans, concentrating on the most minute details. He slept on a cot in his Redskins Park office at least three nights a week.

"You'd think people like him come along all the time, but they don't," Warren said. "The guy is a perfectionist. The thing I learned about him more than anything is that he's pure. He left no stones unturned when diagramming situations, blitzes, people picking up strong safety, free safety, linebackers coming. There was never a situation in a game where something came up, and we didn't know how to handle it. That's because of his hard work and understanding of the game."

While Gibbs handled the Xs and Os, Beathard spotted the talent. The general manager first saw Warren, a San Diego State product, playing in the East-West Shrine all-star game after the 1978 season, and later told him that the Redskins needed a tight end. The Redskins lacked picks in the first three rounds of the 1979 draft and, sure enough, selected Warren in the fourth round. He was the 103<sup>rd</sup> pick overall.

Under coach Jack Pardee, he caught 26 passes in 1979 and a career-high 31 in 1980. But when Gibbs came, Warren's receiving numbers began to decline as he took on a larger role in the running game. He averaged 16 catches per year in 12 seasons under Gibbs.

Warren said it never bothered him that the Redskins neglected him in their passing offense. He often stayed in to block on passing downs. But Warren respected Gibbs' schemes, knowing they had championship written all over them.

"Gibbs once said to me, 'Sorry you're not catching a lot of balls, but I hope you understand, I hope you realize how important you are to this football team,'" Warren said. " 'You basically have to stay in and help us out, so we can get big plays. Don't get frustrated about not catching a lot of balls.' I told him that if I can play, get Super Bowl rings, make a lot of money and be part of this great team, I'm going to do whatever I can."

Warren realized each of those objectives in grand fashion. But he never earned Pro Bowl honors, and he didn't appreciate how other tight ends who caught a lot of balls but blocked poorly sometimes did. He therefore admired Giants tight end Mark Bavaro, a great pass catcher and blocker who made the Pro Bowl in 1986 and 1987.

"Bavaro was one of the best tight ends to play the game because he could catch the ball and was a hell of a blocker," Warren said. "He put out the effort to block, whereas for a lot of these guys, it was a joke when it came to blocking."

These days, Warren is a security guard at Centreville High School in Centreville, Va. He's also the offensive coordinator on the Wildcats football team, which won the state AAA championship last season, and the head varsity baseball coach. His son, Blake, a star on the football team who earned a full scholarship to play at Virginia Tech in 2001, also plays baseball. Another son, Brett, is a sophomore at Centreville who plays only football. His youngest son, Beau, is an aspiring athlete, too.

Warren, a California native who played baseball at Royal Oak High School in Los Angeles, likes coaching football more. But he sees a fundamental link between both sports. Each one calls for the coach to unite the players in a team-oriented scenario, much like Gibbs did with the Redskins.

"I don't see a ton of differences between the two sports," he said. "Everybody says baseball is a more individual sport. I don't think that's the case at all."

Always a subscriber to the team concept, Warren should know.

### DON WARREN

#### Tight End

Warren, Donald James

6-4, 242

Col: Mt. San Antonio JC CA; San Diego State

HS: Royal Oak [Covina, CA]

Born: 5 / 5 / 1956, Bellingham, WA

Drafted: 1979 Round 4 Was

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| Year       | Team       | GM  | NO  | YDS  | AVG  | TD |
|------------|------------|-----|-----|------|------|----|
| 1979       | Washington | 16  | 26  | 303  | 11.7 | 0  |
| 1980       | Washington | 13  | 31  | 323  | 10.4 | 0  |
| 1981       | Washington | 16  | 29  | 335  | 11.6 | 1  |
| 1982       | Washington | 9   | 27  | 310  | 11.5 | 0  |
| 1983       | Washington | 13  | 20  | 225  | 11.3 | 2  |
| 1984       | Washington | 16  | 18  | 192  | 10.7 | 0  |
| 1985       | Washington | 16  | 15  | 163  | 10.9 | 1  |
| 1986       | Washington | 16  | 20  | 164  | 8.2  | 1  |
| 1987       | Washington | 12  | 7   | 43   | 6.1  | 0  |
| 1988       | Washington | 14  | 12  | 112  | 9.3  | 0  |
| 1989       | Washington | 15  | 15  | 167  | 11.1 | 1  |
| 1990       | Washington | 16  | 15  | 123  | 8.2  | 1  |
| 1991       | Washington | 10  | 5   | 51   | 10.2 | 0  |
| 1992       | Washington | 11  | 4   | 25   | 6.3  | 0  |
| 14 seasons |            | 193 | 244 | 2536 | 10.4 | 7  |