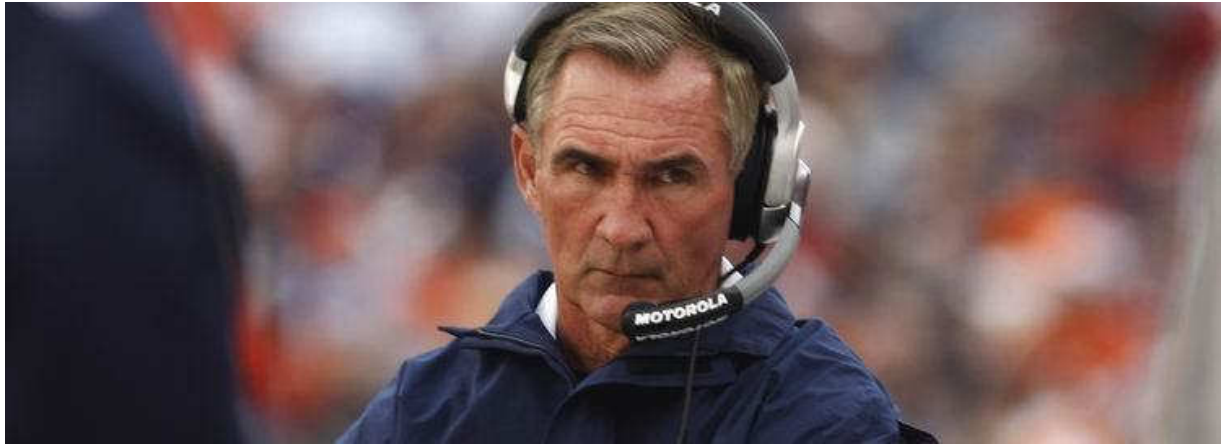


Shanahan Brings Discipline, Leadership...And 'The Stare'



By Larry Weisman
Redskins.com
Posted: January 6, 2010

He will look at you, into you and through you.

Return that gaze at risk to your retinas.

We saw it for years on the Denver Broncos' sideline. Mike Shanahan, displeased, focusing his peepers on an offending player and sending laser beams across the field.

It's the stare.

More cutting than words, more powerful than a torrent of obscenity, more withering than the wintry wind.

It's the stare. It speaks of authority, power, leadership, all of that in absolute terms. It says "do not cross me." It says "heed me." It says "fear me."

It works.

Shanahan began locking his particular type of vision on the Redskins organization on Wednesday.

"I promise I won't disappoint you," he said during his introductory news conference.

Looking, looking, looking. The Redskins' new executive vice president for football operations and head coach will have things his way and the stare figures heavily in him establishing authority.

“It is a trademark of success and a sign of his intensity,” said general manager Bruce Allen. “It is not an act.”

Allen reached out to Shanahan on Sunday night, as the Redskins finished a 4-12 season with a 23-20 loss in San Diego. He wanted, he says, someone “to lead our players, to control our coaches.”

If Shanahan built a reputation for anything in Denver, it was his belief in overseeing all facets of the operation.

Affable now, he will be far less so when he begins working out players and running practices.

His son, Kyle, who will be the Redskins offensive coordinator, has talked about this in the past. In 2006, when he was on the Houston Texans’ staff and preparing for a game against his father’s Broncos, he said he would not look across the field on game day. Dear old dad, he said, had an evil stare that can be intimidating. Kyle said he needed to work on his own piercing gaze.

Once again, he can study at the feet of the master.

The winners in football develop their own motivational techniques, methods of delivering their message and instilling discipline. They convey their passion in a variety of ways.

Tony Dungy spoke quietly to his team when he wanted its attention. He won a Super Bowl. Vince Lombardi won a few championships and, as one player said, “When he tells you to sit, you don’t even look for a chair.” Bill Cowher won a Super Bowl and no one can forget the emotion on that mug, from the prominent jaw set in anger to the spit flying as he verbally undressed the perpetrator of a blown assignment. Jon Gruden won a Super Bowl, his voice a grating growl, his puss distorted by the various agonies and ecstasies of the day.

“Mike has that look,” Allen said. “The players will feel it.”

They need to feel it.

Many of them talked about the lack of discipline and accountability in the locker room as Jim Zorn’s two-year tenure as coach unwound. Rock Cartwright mentioned “rules guys” and “guidelines” guys, meaning those who adhered to the program’s dictates and those who skirted them with no fear of retribution.

So while some studied diligently, showed up on time and dealt with their individual issues through proper channels, others exhibited less attention to meeting times, practice, standard operating procedure. As defensive end Phillip Daniels put it: “Discipline will win you four or five games.”

The Redskins won only four games. It’s not hard to imagine them winning several more had there been sufficient structure and a price to pay for their willful ways.

“Mike will make the players aware of the rules. They need to be made aware of the rules,” Allen said.

Shanahan will bring to a halt the threat of physical confrontations between the players that stem from the greatest sin of all – finger-pointing. He will stop the internecine sniping in the media that wrecks harmony and takes energy away from the complex task of preparing to play and win games. He will lead and players will follow or work elsewhere.

“You’re looking for that consistency, for discipline in your program,” Shanahan says. “If we have any problems in our program, it stays in house.”

Shanahan, 57, won consecutive Super Bowls with the Broncos and another as offensive coordinator for the San Francisco 49ers. His Broncos teams made the playoffs seven times in 14 seasons and had only two losing years.

He has a record to stand on. A method. A plan.

Better still, he has that stare. For now all eyes are on him. Soon his eyes will be on all.