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Game day: Onside kick turns momentum

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ST. LOUIS -- Two weeks ago, kicker Scott Bentley was at home watching Monday Night Football. Now he is part of a star-studded Redskins team.

Washington led 25-20 when Bentley recovered his own onside kick that helped change the game's momentum. The trick? Not too far, not too short, just right.

"If you hit any part of the ball the wrong way, it's not going to work," said Bentley. "If it doesn't go 10 yards, it's not going to work. If it goes 15 yards, it's not going to work. You have to hit in that 10- to 12-yard range.

"It seemed like it took forever, because I wanted to make sure I got into position. If you are sitting 10 to 12 yards, the ball will come right into your arms. You can shield the defenders yourself."

At the end of the game, he proudly showcased his bloody right hand.

"It felt good to get some blood -- to get down and dirty since kickers don't normally get any blood," Bentley said.

After a few days with the Redskins, Bentley proved his worth.

"I wanted to earn the respect and confidence of my teammates and my coaches," he said.

Bentley said he worked on kicking the ball deep left, which gave the Rams trouble as the Redskins' coverage team was able to get down the field quickly.

Just like Daniel Snyder's millions spent in signing bonuses, this onside kick was a risk. But it paid off.

"You've got to look and make a decision, is it worth the gamble, because it is a gamble," Washington coach Norv Turner said. "But this football team, we felt if we could eliminate or cut down one of their series -- one of their times touching the football -- then that would help us."

The Redskins went on to kick a field goal after the onside kick and then recovered Tony Horne's fumble on the ensuing kickoff to set up another field goal.

"And keeping the ball out of their hands is the best way of slowing them down," Turner said.

This was a must-win game for Washington -- a team most picked to win the NFC title.

Who would have thought the Redskins' 44-year-old kicker, Eddie Murray, would help keep Washington (7-4) in the game. After all, he is their fourth in line this season. The Rams led 13-3, but a 10-point run put them back in the game. George threw a 19-yard touchdown pass to James Thrash that Murray followed up on the next possession with a 47-yard field goal to tie the game at 13. Murray was 4-for-4 on field-goal attempts.

"It was a big victory for us," Redskins quarterback Jeff George. "We had our backs against the wall. We knew that if we went 6-5, we didn't want to be there. It felt good to move up and down the field."

Dawn Reiss covers the NFL for TSN's Ultimate Road trip. Email her at tsndawn@aol.com. ^

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