

The Washington Redskins' owner's box (M6) is not the best seat in the house. That's probably M7, the visiting clubowner's box next door. It is closer to the 50-yard line on the west side of D.C. Stadium. M6, which is harsh and hot under the fluorescent lights, tucked under awkward, green steel beams, shows you a piece of the 35 and stares into the northeast coffin corner.

But the 20 guests or so in M6 are down close to the action, sitting on Navy gray foamrubber armchairs that would look at home in a destroyer's wardroom and there's beer and cokes (fetched on a silver tray by Edward Bennett Williams' chauffeur) and the view you get is a lot better than watching on the tube, where the TV cameras squeeze the action together and make even the worst-busted plays look like The Best of Busby Berkeley. Still, on the night of the Colt game, Ed Williams up in his box and 50,000 other pro football fans got one play all wrong.

Nine minutes into the game, Bill Briggs ran down the field on a kickoff and hit Colt rookie Bo Rein on the dead run. You could hear them connect over in Anacostia and 50,000 fans went "ooooooooh" in that sympathetic-smug way hometowners always have. Williams, who had been watching the game with an uncharacteristic passivity (a Gogolak field goal had just received five slow Zen handclaps), smiled and

turned to Art Buchwald or somebody sitting up behind him and said "It looks like Mister Briggs is going to make the team this year."

Mister Briggs made a bus ride home to Hyattsville, instead. The next week, Ed Williams went up to Carlyle and watched the game films with the coaches. Neither Briggs nor Rein was looking where the hell he was going when the big smack came, it turned out, and it was curtains for the Redskins veteran, although his release wasn't announced for another week.

Ed Williams is relating a little of this over breakfast at the Metropolitan Club. Like the downtown streets outside, the dining room is empty. It is not quite 8 a.m. on a hot Saturday morning. There will be a game in Raleigh that night against the Chicago Bears and the Nation's premier defense attorney will fly down there in the afternoon and go to Coach Otto Graham's hotel room and the two men will talk right through dinner.

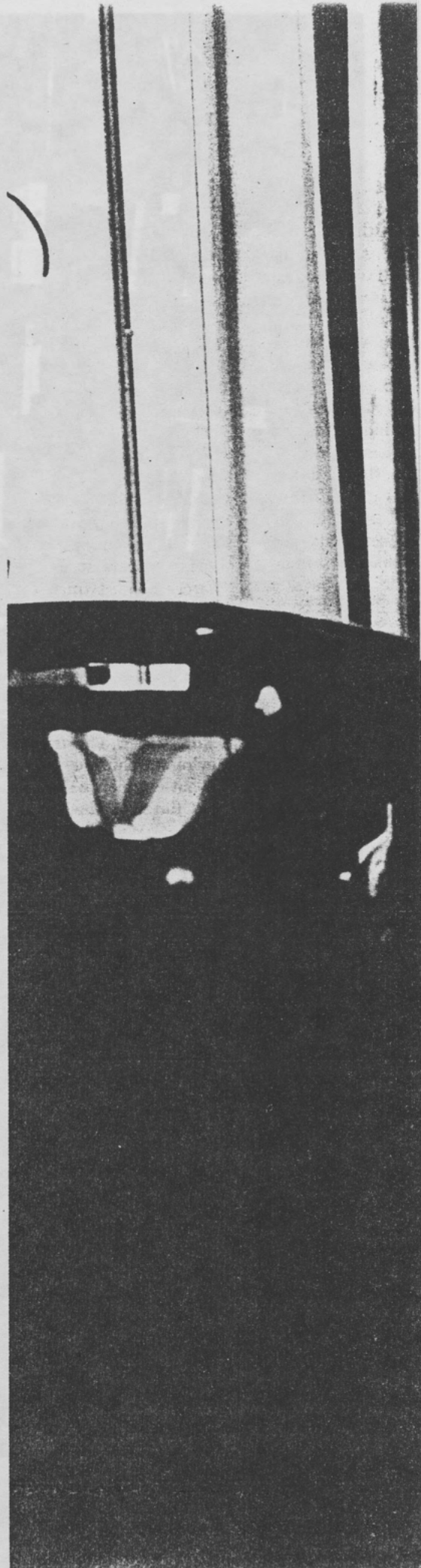
He calls Saturday "the best day." Partly because his law offices in the Hill Building will be empty and the phones will be quiet and he can look through the week's mail and think about the astonishing variety of cases on his calendar (sample clients: Standard of New Jersey, Elijah Muhammed, "lots" of death row appellants).

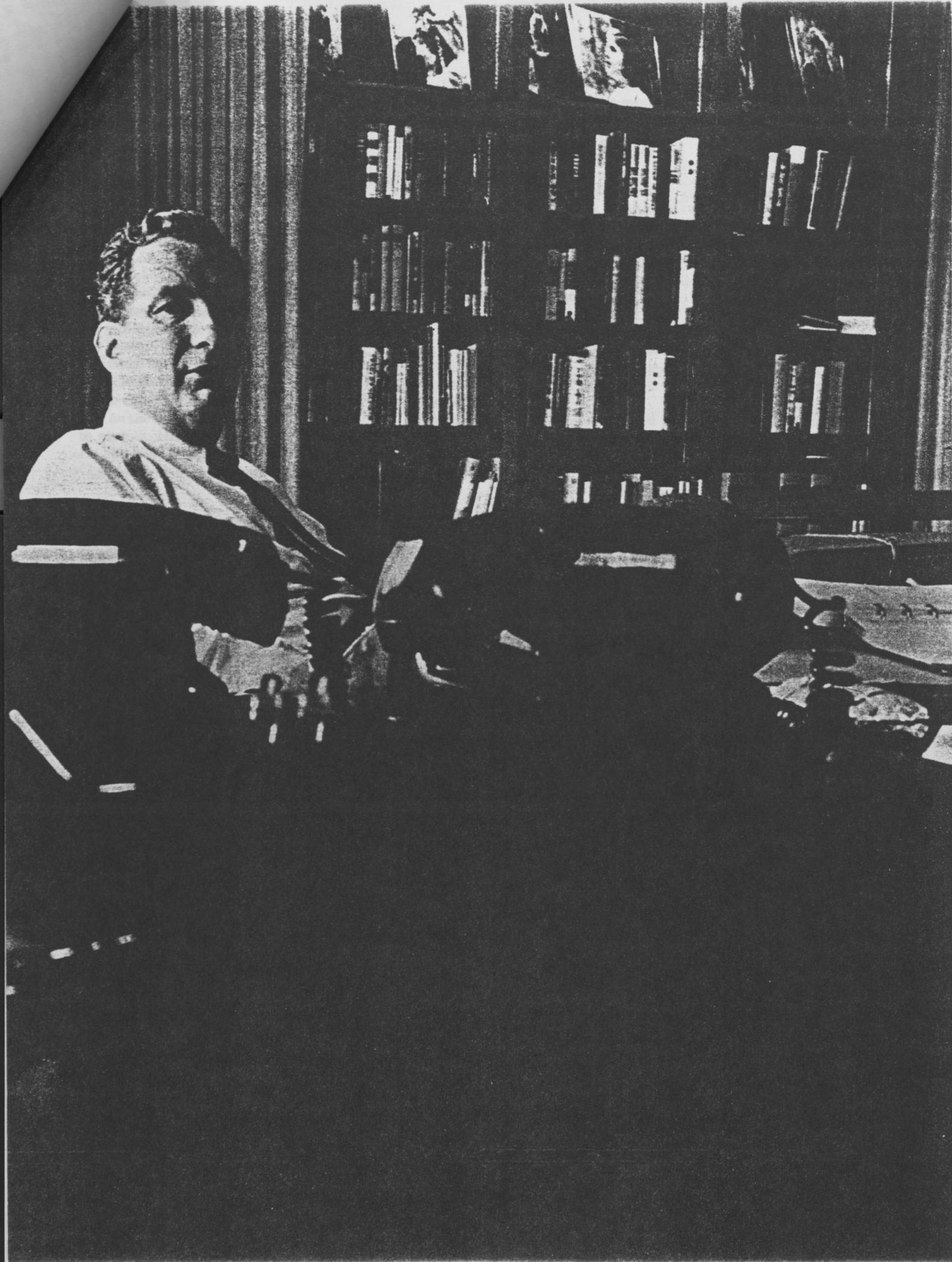
But partly it is because for six months

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Ed Williams Looks at His Redskins

By John Carmody





Ed Williams' Redskins

Continued

during the National Football League season, Ed Williams uses these Saturday afternoons with Otto Graham to try to attain that elusive "excellence" he has been seeking for the Redskins since he took over the club's presidency three years ago. Excellence, of course, means winning in the Williams vocabulary or, at the very least, hating like hell to lose. He has built one of the most interesting reputations in America on his own excellence and in the last year it has become evident to his friends that the Redskins' failure to move into the win column has started to get to him.

The flavor of an Ed Williams conversation on the day of a Redskins game is hard to capture. His mind is all over the map. He had just, he says, bet \$10 to \$100 that "Lyndon will be the nominee. You can't

pass up 10 to 1." And then for two minutes he will poormouth the talent shortage in the NFL, slip momentarily on the banana peel of owner optimism ("but that's all changed with the Redskins. We had a talent hiatus that was the result of poor management six or seven years ago. But that's all changed. We have a good organization now. Our personnel has changed as much or more than any other club in the league"). But then he will add: "We're moving. But not fast enough for my taste."

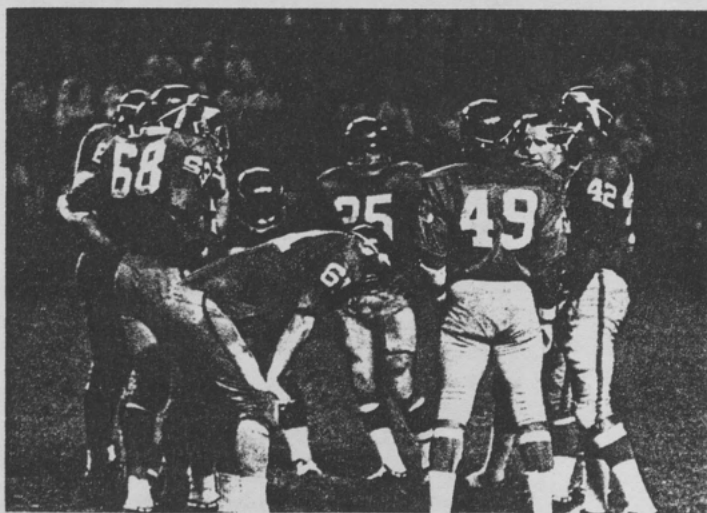
"Here's the thing," he'll say. "There are so few organizations in any field that are totally committed to excellence these days. We'd win right now with the men we've got if they were all committed to excellence."

Ed Williams, at 48, is much too old to sigh but you can see that mental shake of the head as he wonders inside why his highly-paid ballplayers aren't out there —

winning. Does he ever give this speech to the ballclub in those before-the-game talks he makes? "I never talk to them," he says. "You shoot your bolt if you go around giving inspirational chats. I don't know where that story got started."

Ed Williams talks very quietly, very quickly. He is one of the best wristwatch-watchers in town. He'll probably run to his own funeral. But when he gets on a favorite subject, for a few minutes the rush is forgotten in the fervor. Like the social meaning of the Redskins.

He is a man who is very proud of the fact that he has been concerned about civil rights and wrongs for 20 years. But it is a tough-minded concern. "I told Gene McCarthy at lunch on Wednesday, sitting right at that table there," he will say, "how come you tell those kids of yours to stay away from Chicago, Gene, and at the same time you're going like this (he makes big,



ingathering hand motions) to them? Gene just smiled."

"We're in trouble in this country," he goes on. "You know baseball — aside from the boredom — is really going to be up against it in five years. All those stadiums in the bad part of town and they've turned baseball into a night game. We've had a taste of it in the exhibitions. I'm watching that Detroit game. Those tickets aren't moving."

"I keep telling the players that this city's problem is their problem. And damn it, they're going to be involved. I want Bobby Mitchell and Charlie Taylor out there helping. But how can they help if the team isn't a winner? Do you realize what a winning team could do to help bring this town together?"

Williams has organized a job placement bureau for the team. ("I don't want the players to take those jobs where somebody's exploiting them while they're big and there's no future.")

Williams knows very well that most professional players do not finish college. He has seen to it that his placement man is furnished with the college records of the players and the first order of business, before there is any talk about a career job with an investment house, is that they return to local schools for that degree.

Says Williams: "This player came in to the placement man a couple of days ago and Joe Rutgens was there and the pitch was made to have this player go to American U. and finish up and Joe said 'That's right, you need that piece of paper.'"

"And the player turned on Joe and says: 'Does you think that because you has that piece of paper after four years and I don't have that piece of paper after four years that you is smarter than I is?' And Joe says: 'I does.'"

Williams laughs. But three days after he tells the story, the paper reveals the ball-player in question has been released.

Williams is a little guarded when it comes to discussing his relationship with Coach Graham. "I'm not intruding on his expertise in the game but in his judgment in matters in other things," Williams explains.

"There are just a lot of things a head coach shouldn't have to concern himself with. This damned thing has gotten so highly sophisticated. We don't have anybody living off the game. Men like Halas and Mara, the owners of the '40s, the economics of it now frighten them.

Williams cheerfully admits, though, that some of his personal trades have soured. Like Joe Don Looney, whom he bought from the Detroit Lions and is now playing for the U.S. Army in Vietnam. "I've got this Continental and the damned

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Ed Williams' Redskins

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thing was in the shop about 25 times and I finally called Bill (William Clay) Ford in Detroit and I said 'I thought you were my friend, Bill, but you sold me two lemons in one year.' "

He also admits that a backfield choice his idol Vince Lombardi also wanted turned out to be so dumb he had to be coached daily on which way to run for the goal line.

Williams the defense attorney comes through very strongly when he relates how he leaned on a couple of local newspapermen who had succumbed to a rumor ("I think the Dallas Cowboys started it because they wanted him") that one Redskin came to town with a serious arrest record. "I put up a \$10,000 reward after we checked the thing out and I called in these guys and said 'put up or shut up.'" They shut up.

By now, Williams is psyching himself pretty good for that night's game. The enthusiasms he has called up just talking about the team are bubbling over. When he gets to his richly-appointed, surprisingly small office he reaches under his desk and pulls out a well-thumbed 1968 official NFL Record Manual.

It is open to the 1967 Redskins scores. "Read those," he says. "We lost three games in 76 seconds last year. But just look at those scores. Not one of them is really bad."

He packs some Walnut tobacco into a pipe. "It got so there last season, my 10-year-old Bennett was sitting in the box and we were leading the 49ers 31-28 with 28 seconds left and he turned to me and said: 'Hey, dad. Is this where the bad part begins?' He thought it was some kind of morality play."

Ed Williams begins to go through his Saturday mail. He opens up a CBS-TV poster advertising an upcoming special on Vince Lombardi, the Green Bay Packer genius.

"I tried to get him for the Redskins," says Williams. "But he wanted a piece of the club and I don't have the authority to slice up the stock."

He takes out a Redskins press book. "Look how we've done. Look at the record under Nixon. 1961: One, 12 and 1. 1962: Five, seven and two. 1963: Three and 11. 1964: Six and eight. Now look at this." He points to the years since he parlayed his 3.8 per cent of the Redskins stock into the presidency. "1965: Six and eight. Seven and seven in 1966. Five, six and three last year."



"I've at least gotten old enough that I know these exhibition games don't mean a tinker's damn.

"But we're on the rise. We made that shift to get a tight end. And our runners aren't really that bad. That kid Allen is going to be a great one. I just don't want to believe that we are going to lose this year. I don't."

By now Edward Bennett Williams, 10 hours away from game time, is psyching himself *very* good. "I wouldn't want to predict what's going to happen. But this is it. This is the best Redskin team assembled in a decade."

He bites on his pipe and nods his head to an unseen jury. "Yeah," says Edward Bennett Williams.

Sitting in M6, up front, flanked by his wife and Sonny Jurgensen (who has rolled up a sleeve to show a youngster where he receives injections of phenylbutazone for his sore arm), the game-time Ed Williams is what a friend calls "up tight."

He has been out of his chair three times, to greet Mrs. Carroll Rosenbloom, the Colt owner's wife and to point down to the field to show her where his 14-year-old son Joby is an equipment manager. And he has stood up and shaken hands with Don Kellert, the retired Colt general manager and he has yelled for a program.

But mostly he has been withdrawn, unsmiling. A french-cuffed hand strokes the back of the head on every third-down play.

As the game progresses and the Redskins stay in there with the very tough Colts, Williams starts to relax. When Jurgensen points to a Redskins halfback and says he runs like Art Buchwald, Williams passes on the joke. "I was going to cut that guy," he says. When the runner makes a few yards, Buchwald stands up and yells "How to go, Arty" and Williams joins in the mock cheering.

At half time he retires to the directors' room where the visitors have a few drinks. Williams is only sipping a beer during the game. With minutes to go, the Redskins are ahead and Williams' elation is showing. According to his close friends, it is a very deep, special elation. Very little on the outside. He doesn't chatter. Then, with seconds to go, the Colts win with a field goal. It is the same script from 1967 and Edward Bennett Williams, speaking to nobody, suddenly disappears down a stairway to find his son Joby.

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Ed Williams' Redskins

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His friends know that Ed Williams does not take the elevator because — a polite man — he simply finds it impossible to be polite after such a loss. He is a man who will suddenly tell a stranger "Since I've been president of the Redskins we've been 18, 21 and 3" and he apparently has acted this withdrawn way after all 21 losses. Later he will be able to laugh and say "I really go into the depression tank." But on the night of the loss, he finds his son in the locker room and they walk out of the stadium and climb into the Continental behind Leroy Washington and go home.

Edward Bennett Williams is a man whose life is remarkably rich. He has a national reputation. The most interesting men in public life seek him out as a friend. He has a handsome family. And a profession he loves and which has been hugely rewarding.

These things aside, his personal style of life makes him uniquely fitted to be president of one of only 16 NFL franchises. The professional football game today is undoubtedly the number one grownup's toy in America. It draws the most fans, the attention of all the right people, and offers a kind of transcontinental, electronic, big-time excitement that seems to epitomize the best of the bad times we live in.

You control an NFL club, you control a piece of an autumn dream that reaches millions. No matter that it's only a kid's game all fleshed out with violence and money and 10 million candlepower showbiz pizzazz. It still comes down to winning and losing every Sunday afternoon while millions of people watch your failures and triumphs in their living rooms. Edward Bennett Williams is a winner. The NFL is a winner. His franchise will be a winner. It's like he says, psyching himself on a Saturday morning, biting on his pipe, his mind already shifting to the antitrust actions, the fraud cases, the death row appeals. "Otto knows he's got to win." Yeah.

John Carmody is managing editor of Potomac.

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