

# Anybody remember Les Steckel?

*This story is being written after Denver Broncos head football coach Josh McDope announced that he was benching his Pro Bowl wide receiver Brandon Marshall for some double secret but unstated infraction - and before the final game of the 2009 season in which the Broncos had to defeat the woeful Kansas City Chiefs to have any chance at making the playoffs. We'll see how relevant the story is after that game.*

may have served as the model for Broncos head hoodie Josh McDaniels.

When Bud Grant decided to retire in 1983, after 17 years as head coach of the Minnesota Vikings, the team chose an assistant coach, Les Steckel, to take over head coaching duties.

Steckel had served in Vietnam as an infantry officer in the Marine Corps and was a Golden Gloves boxing champion and graduated with triple degrees from the University of Kansas in 1968. He retired from the USMC Reserves after thirty years at the rank of Colonel. He also later became president of Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Les Steckel was no shrinking violet. He stressed discipline and conditioning. In his first training camp with the Vikings, he immediately held an "Iron Man" competition and, while getting a lot of media attention, he seemed to alienate players used to the Bud Grant style of coaching.

Les Steckel had been a college assistant coach at the University of Colorado and Navy before being hired by the 49ers as an assistant coach in 1978. He was an assistant coach with the Vikings from 1979 - 1983. When Bud Grant retired the first time, Steckel became head coach of the Vikes.

Inheriting a mediocre team (reminiscent of the one McDaniels took over from Mike Shanahan), Steckel made it much worse. Much, much worse. In his only season as head coach, the Vikings went 3-13. That 3-13 record is the team's worst in their history - in almost half a century. Steckel was serious, spit-shined and never wore a hoodie as does McDope. After one season, Steckel was fired and Bud Grant came out of retirement to coach the Vikings to the same 7-9 record they'd had in the season before Steckel became head coach.

McDaniels is not going to be fired after one season. Pat Bowlen has too much at stake as an owner to fire the untested and unproven kid. But, to sit one of the NFL's best wide receivers in a game you must win, without the benching involving some criminal behavior, is the height of foolishness and recklessness. Can the Broncos win without Marshall. Later ...

As a longtime Minnesota resident but never a Minnesota Vikings fan, I watched as the Vikes grew from an expansion team in 1961 into a successful franchise that has made four losing Super Bowl appearances. Those early Vikings teams were competitive even though the first two seasons' records were 3-11 and 2-11-1. Before the end of their first decade in the NFL, the Vikes went 12-2 in 1969 and played in Super Bowl IV (actually the final NFL-AFL Championship Game before the merger - subsequent championship games would be called the "Super Bowl").

*Notes: In the Vikings first draft, they chose University of Wyoming safety Chuck Lamson in the fourth round. They had chosen Fran Tarkenton with their third round pick, just ahead of Lamson. Place kicker Mike Mercer was chosen in the 15th round and went on to play for six teams in ten seasons in the NFL/AFL. Lamson played five seasons in the NFL, with 11 interceptions, one for a touchdown. In that expansion draft, each existing team was allowed to protect 30 players on their 38 man roster, then the Vikings could choose three players of the eight unprotected. The Dallas Cowboys were exempt because they had just joined the NFL in 1960. Teams froze only 25 players before the Cowboys took three players from each roster a year earlier.*

*On December 3, 1961, this writer attended the Vikings game against the Los Angeles Rams. Most memorable about the day was how cold it was at Metropolitan Stadium that day. By the way, the game was one of three home games won by the Vikings that year, a 42-21 pounding of the Rams. There was considerable doubt on that frozen day in Minnesota whether the young fan would ever live to become a newspaper publisher in Cheyenne, Wyoming later in his life.*

Bud Grant, the Superior, Wisconsin super athlete, who was an all-around athlete (a nine letter winner at the University of Minnesota), having been on the Minneapolis Lakers bench for their 1950 NBA championship, was hired in 1967 and led the Vikings through the 1983 season. Grant was the Vikings head coach for each of their Super Bowl appearances, the final one being in Super Bowl XI, after the 1976 season. They have not returned since.

Finally, we get to Les Steckel.

The reason Steckel's name came to my mind is that he was a gung-ho, my way or the highway, head football coach who

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## "I didn't write that letter to the editor"

The name was hers. But the words were someone else's.

The scurrilous and error-filled letter to the WTE was signed with a name that, while appearing to be a common one, is rare in Cheyenne. In fact, the caller to the Herald whose name it is told me she was the only one with the name that she or the newspaper could find. After the letter.

Yet, the newspaper printed the missive.

They used to confirm that letters were actually written by a person with a name that matched the one on the letter and would not print a letter that claimed facts that were unverifiable. And they used to be reluctant to print letters accusing people of wrongdoing - whether illegal behavior or questionable conduct.

The Sunday, December 27, 2009 letter started right off with an erroneous charge that the WTE could have dismissed. Instead they printed the letter with that and other misrepresentations and lies.

The letter writer said that the City was "demanding pay cuts and RIFs for city employees." Neither is true. A "furlough" means an employee is required to take a day (or more) off without pay. But the hourly wage or salary is unaffected and the employee returns to his/her job at the same pay level as before. RIFing means to eliminate a position and terminate the employment of an employee.

Both of those statements are lies. But, it is so much easier to lie if you're using someone else's name.

My source told me that the WTE did contact the telephone no. provided to confirm the identity of the letter writer. I would guess the conversation went something like this:

WTE: Hello. This is BM from the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle. I want to confirm you wrote the letter to the editor that we received today.

Liar: Who?

WTE: The Wyoming Tribune-Eagle.

Liar: I don't know what that is.

WTE: The Wyoming Tribune-Eagle. The

diminishing daily newspaper in Cheyenne.

Liar: I still don't know who you are.

WTE: Nonetheless, are you KW and did you send us a letter to the editor that is full of unfounded and unsupported accusations about city government?

Liar: Am I who again?

WTE: KW.

Liar: No, I'm LP and I live out here in Burns and don't know anything about Cheyenne city government and care less.

WTE: So you're not KW? But, this is the telephone no. provided on the letter and you're a regular anonymous poster on our website forum. We know you write crap like was in this letter.

Liar: Oh. Did you ask if I'm KW? Oh, that KW. Yes, I'm KW. I misunderstood you. I thought you were asking me if I was who I really am and I couldn't figure out how you knew. How you found out.

WTE: It sounds almost like you're not KW - the name at the bottom of this piece of tripe. Are you? Cause if you're not, we're not going to print the letter. If you say you are, however, we'll print it even though it's filled with libelous statements about public employees and elected officials. One last time. Are you KW or not?

Liar: So, you won't print it if I tell the truth ... I mean, if I tell you who I really am or you'd change the name so what few friends I have know I wrote the garbage that is untrue and they'd see my real name as the sender of the letter? Okay. I'm KW. I swear to the Black Helicopter Squadron that I am KW. 'Bye.

So, no one can say the WTE doesn't confirm the identity of letter writers who spew vitriol and falsehoods.

In the correction the WTE offered January 1, all they said is the letter was not written by the KW who works for the State of Wyoming. They know who wrote the letter. They called his telephone no. to confirm he was KW and he lied to them and told them he was. They should have printed his name. Maybe I will in the next issue of the Cheyenne Herald. Why not?

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