



**BY GREG BENSON**

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A new dawn is rising above the Raider Nation. Never before in its storied history has the franchise undergone such a dramatic transformation.

Since the legendary Al Davis took over as head coach and general manager in 1963, 18 different head coaches took their shot at re-developing the team over the decades — only three stand out as difference-makers: John Madden, Tom Flores and Jon Gruden.

With the passing of Mr. Davis last October, his son, Mark, now begins a true new era for his father's franchise.

Having spent his life on the sidelines of this fabulous football fantasy, the younger Davis, 57, knows who he can depend on for solid advice.

You know Madden won't mince many words; and Ron Wolf, a close friend of his father's and former Green Bay Packers general manager, has been analyzing pro talent since the '60s. Heck, the guy was in on the drafting of Art Shell and Gene Upshaw for crying out loud.

It was Wolf who first recognized, in 1994, the keen sensibilities of this University of Tennessee grad student/personnel assistant while on a scouting trip to Knoxville to check out running back Charlie Garner. Wolf was then the general manager for the Green Bay Packers, and he hired the promising protégé to be his right-hand man as a pro personnel assistant. In 1997, Wolf promoted him to director of pro personnel.

Since then, the former footballer rose through the Green Bay ranks to oversee the Packers' entire scouting efforts — a big reason why they have achieved their successes over the past 18 years (189-99 record and 12 playoff appearances, winning two out of their three Super Bowls).

So, when it came down to choosing a new leader to carry on the torch of his father's treasured team, all fingers pointed toward Wolf's prodigy, Reggie McKenzie. For the first time in nearly 50 years, a new general manager took charge of the Oakland Raiders on Jan. 10, 2012.

McKenzie wasted no time in cleaning house and appointing personnel. On Jan. 30, he tapped Denver Broncos defensive coordinator Dennis Allen for head coach — followed by a massive reorganization of front office staff, coaches and player personnel.

McKenzie, 49, is no stranger to the Silver and Black, having played inside linebacker for the team from 1985-88. After his seven NFL seasons on the field (4 with the Raiders, 2 with the

Phoenix Cardinals and one with the 49ers), he even entered the coaching ranks for a few years.

Raider Nation may have a bright future on the horizon with Reggie's raising of the torch. However, he was severely hampered coming in to this season with meager draft picks and a shallow talent pool.



While starting quarterback Carson Palmer seems solid for now, it will be fifth-year running back Darren McFadden carrying most of the offensive weight. Maintaining that heavy workload has proven to be a bit troublesome for the fleet-footed phenom. He missed nine games last year due to a foot injury, and has yet to have a full season without being hobbled.

McFadden does appear to be healthier than ever right now, gaining 38 all-purpose yards in the first three plays against Dallas Monday night.

Well, the battle for betterment continues Friday night with the Raiders next facing the Arizona Cardinals in a quick, four-day turnaround.

**CAPTION 1: New Oakland Raiders General Manager Reggie McKenzie and owner Mark Davis engage in a pregame discussion prior to Monday night's game versus the Dallas Cowboys.**

**CAPTION 2: Running back Darren McFadden cools off after a pre-game warm up on Monday night.**

*PHOTOS BY GREG BENSON*

