By Greg Benson

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Tight ends are a quarterback's best friend. As the most versatile position in football, these guys are basically wide receivers in a lineman's body. They can shore up the line with pass protection, open holes for running backs, peel off as a safety valve or run out as an extra

receiver. Their size and strength creates a mismatch on linebackers and defensive backs — creating a big target for a quarterback under pressure.

The position has greatly evolved since the likes of Mike Ditka and John Mackey knuckled the line. These guys were the first to exploit the advantages a pass-catching tight end provides.

While most tight ends are still utilized for their blocking skills, more and more, we are seeing the hybrids emerge — “jokers” as Jon Gruden calls them — who add an extra dimension to the passing game.

That wild card in the 53-man deck for the Raiders is starting tight end Brandon Myers.

Now in his fourth year out of Iowa, the 6-3, 256-pound high school hardwood hero leads the team in receptions (69) and total yards (721). That’s quite a leap from last year’s total of 16 for 151.

“Brandon has done a nice job for us in the passing game,” said head coach Dennis Allen. “Obviously our quarterback feels comfortable with him.”

Myers continues to show improvement with each game but will have a tough matchup tonight, as the 3-9 Raiders face the 9-3 Denver Broncos at O.co Coliseum.

CAPTION: Oakland Raiders tight end Brandon Myers leads the team in receptions and total yards.

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