

SUPER BOWL 37

"The 49ers will find they have made a mistake," Baldinger says. "Steve did a great job bringing back the team after it was not very good a few years ago. When you have someone with that kind of talent, you don't let him go."

Gruden's quick effect upon the Bucs will only reinforce the status of the head-coaching role. How do you measure the value of a Super Bowl victory? Certainly, the \$8 million they sent to the Raiders has become a small price.

"We do two things in the NFL: We play games and we sell stuff," Ravens vice president Kevin Byrne says. "It is a lot easier to sell stuff if you win. After our Super Bowl, we easily sold out our remaining 1,800 season tickets. Those who were hesitating to renew called and said they would get the check right over. You get more attention from national companies who want to be associated with you. You have a better chance of selling your big-ticket suites. You can't put a price tag on what all this is worth."

Certainly, the league already has anticipated a potential fall-out from the Gruden episode. Commissioner Paul Tagliabue issued a statement in which he seemed to ban future trades for coaches involving draft choices, fearing a distortion of the draft system. But McKay, co-chairman of the NFL's powerful competition committee, says Tagliabue already reviews all these deals anyway and future ones "will" could happen. He just wants to make sure everyone realizes he'll be looking at them carefully. McKay expects the competition committee to examine this issue in the offseason and possibly make recommendations.

"There are still a lot of people in the league who think that [Gruden] trade was goofy," Mueller says. "And this Super Bowl hasn't changed their minds. You could say the Raiders really got the better of the deal, a Super Bowl, all those draft choices, \$8 million, a new coach that they aren't paying that high."

Of course, the Glazer family thinks their mid-night agreement with Davis to obtain Gruden is anything but goofy. "What he has done this year is nothing short of incredible," says Joel Glazer, the club's executive vice president and son of team owner Malcolm. "He is truly one in a million."

For a while in Super Bowl 37, Gruden wasn't proving his worth. Both offenses were awful, and neither quarterback was sharp. The Bucs appeared on the verge of wasting a quick defensive start because of Johnson's erratic passing. But unlike the Raiders, who were determined to win by passing, Gruden was much more flexible.

In the second quarter, with the Bucs ahead 6-3 and the ball at the Raiders' 27, Gruden called four

straight running plays, the last a 2-yard touchdown by Mike Alstott. On the next possession, Gruden mixed six rushes with four passes and the Bucs drove 77 yards to score again—this time on a 5-yard pass to Keenan McCardell. Now it was 20-3, the kind of lead that allows their defense to become overpowering.

Gannon lamented afterward that the Raiders also wanted to run more, but it was Gruden who succeeded. Running back Michael Pittman finished with 124 yards, his first 100-plus effort in his last 44 games as a pro. And the Bucs amassed 150 yards on the ground, more than enough to make up for the shaky Johnson.

There surely was nothing shaky about the Bucs' defense. The Raiders hoped to spread the field horizontally, expose the uncovered areas in the Tampa

Bay zones and piece together lengthy drives, as they had all year. But the Bucs, known for their cover 2 scheme, played more cover 3 (spreading three players across the back of the zone defense instead of two) than normal. That confused Gannon, who would take his usual three-step drop, start to throw, pull back and find a Tampa Bay lineman in his face. "He was hesitant; you could see he was confused," says safety Dexter Jackson, who had two interceptions and was the game's MVP.

"But this is speed no one can really prepare for properly."

"It is not just speed of foot," Baldinger says. "It is the speed of their thinking, of their recognition of plays, of their ability to recover." The more Gannon tested that speed, the more he got burned. Nickel back Dwight Smith returned an interception for a 44-yard score in the third quarter. Then late in the fourth, Brooks brought back another for a 44-yard touchdown, followed by Smith's second TD, this one on a 50-yard interception return. It was an exclamation point on a season in which the Bucs led the league in total defense and fewest points allowed.

This is a historic defense, one of the best of the past 30 years, and it is coordinator Monte Kiffin's masterpiece. But even here, Gruden had a role. "He challenged us from the very beginning to be better," Sapp says. Gruden told them not to become bored with domination. "He is the consummate salesman," offensive line coach Bill Muir says. "His enthusiasm is infectious. He can sell you like he is a carnival barker and this is a \$1.25 snake oil bottle that will cure everything."

Now, Gruden, so full of passion, could sell anything and everything to the players and folks of Tampa Bay. "Do you love football?" he'll ask his athletes every day. Oh, my, yes, they do. And the intensity of this romance is only going to increase every season.

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E-mail senior writer Paul Attner at pattner@sportingnews.com.



For Marcus Knight and Raider Nation, the game was nothing but one big downer.

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An inside look at how coach Jon Gruden and the Bucs prepared themselves to be Super Bowl champions

BY DAN POMPEI

