

st-laid plans

In the Thursday practice before the Super Bowl, the Bucs' offense walked up to the line of scrimmage. Coach Jon Gruden got the attention of his team by announcing, "This play right here wins the Super Bowl. This is the play."

Quarterback Brad Johnson hit receiver Keenan McCardell down the right sideline on a go route. The play was intended to take advantage of Raiders left cornerback Charles Woodson, who had not been playing up to his capabilities because he has a metal plate holding together a fracture in his leg. "Charles is a guy who's hurt right now," Gruden said. "He's

one of the game's best corners. I have great respect for him, but you have to challenge those guys when they're playing up in bump-and-run coverage."



And on the third play of Super Bowl 37, that is exactly what the Bucs did, running the play that was supposed to win the game. And sure enough, McCardell streaked by Woodson. But as Johnson was about to unload the ball, Raiders defensive end Regan Upshaw hit him. The pass was several yards shy of McCardell, and Woodson had an easy interception that led to three points.

"It didn't work out the way we thought," Gruden said after the game, "but some of the plays did

Jurevicius took advantage of favorable matchups against the Raiders' linebackers—just as the Bucs' coaches anticipated he would.

work." Actually, just about everything else worked out the way Gruden and the Bucs planned it in their 48-21 victory.

So how did it get to the point where Bucs defensive lineman Warren Sapp was dancing in the locker room wearing nothing but a jock strap and the smile of a champion? Preparation.

The Bucs were so well prepared for one Raiders play that safety John Lynch called it before it happened. The result was Dexter Jackson's second interception of the game. "I was in the slot with (Jerry) Porter one-on-one, so I told Dexter cover me, and he did," Lynch said. "I ended up coming off on the smash, but Dexter got over there."

The Raiders' formation and their situation tipped Lynch, who had seen the exact same play from the exact same formation in a similar situation in practice earlier in the week. "We were so well prepared today," Lynch said. "It's uncanny how the plays we ran in practice showed up, same formation, same motion."

The Bucs knew Rich Gannon as well as they possibly could know a quarterback they hadn't faced in years. For that, they can thank Gruden, who took the highly unusual step of playing the role of Gannon on the scout team during Thursday's practice. As the pool reporter for the Bucs, I witnessed this performance, but Gruden asked that I not write about it until after the Super Bowl. Then he said, "What did you think? How did I look?" Asked who practiced well, he said, "I can't talk about it, but I had a hell of a day today."

As it turned out, Gruden played Gannon better than Gannon, the player whose career he resurrected when he brought him to Oakland. Gruden audibled repeatedly on most plays. Every one of his passes was catchable, and the only two incompletions

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were drops. "I think that was because we were laughing so hard," Lynch said.

It was the highlight of the week for the Bucs, who responded to the end of Gruden's drive with a round of applause. Said Lynch, "We had a lot of fun with it, but we also got a lot done out of it. One of the things he said is Rich hates bad plays, and he likes to (audible) up to three times to get out of them, whereas some quarterbacks you're lucky to get one audible. He tried to simulate that. I think it was probably the highlight of his career."

Gruden, in his imitation of Gannon, also was pump-faking as if he were being swarmed by bees. This is something the Bucs talked about in meetings, and they weren't overly concerned about Gannon's pump fakes. During the game, the Bucs dropped to spots on the field and didn't react to the fakes. The Bucs knew their pass rush wouldn't give Gannon much time to pump. Tampa Bay sacked Gannon five times.

Gruden also made it a point of emphasis to isolate receiver Joe Jurevicius on the Raiders' linebackers. It worked three times for 67 yards. The Bucs'

