

SUPER BOWL 31

coaches knew that once they got the running game going, the Raiders would have to widen their linebackers in order to be in position to react to pass plays. That set the table for Jurevicius to run slants and get behind the linebackers.

The week had not started with as much promise for the Bucs. After beating the Eagles in the NFC championship game Sunday night, they flew back to Tampa. But they had to wait four hours on the tarmac in Philadelphia until all their equipment could be loaded onto the plane. Normally, the equipment is transported back by truck, but in this circumstance it had to come back with the team so it could be loaded for the trip to San Diego. The players didn't get to their homes until 2 a.m. Monday. Many of them hardly slept.

By Monday afternoon, the players were flying to San Diego, although the coaching staff stayed behind to work on the game plan. Gruden never went to bed Sunday or Monday. He worked on the coaches' chartered red-eye flight to San Diego on Monday night. His sleep total for the week by Wednesday morning was two hours. It's no wonder he had the flu and was taking an antibiotic.

For their initial practice of the week on Wednesday, the Bucs were sluggish from the improbable victory and the long journey. Gruden felt the staff was a little behind in preparation because of the travel, but he was wired. So was defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin, who tried to get the juices going by messing with strength coach Johnny Parker at the start of practice. "Come on, Oakland is stretching like professionals right now!" Kiffin yelled. "Look at Derrick Brooks! He's not stretching right!"

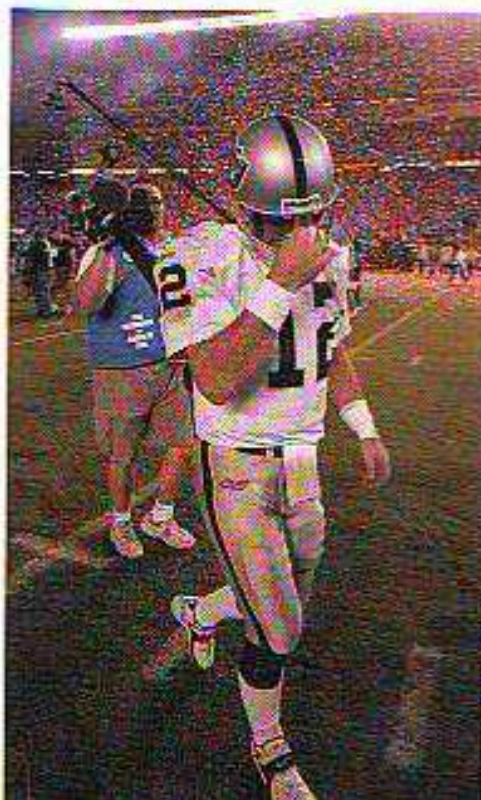
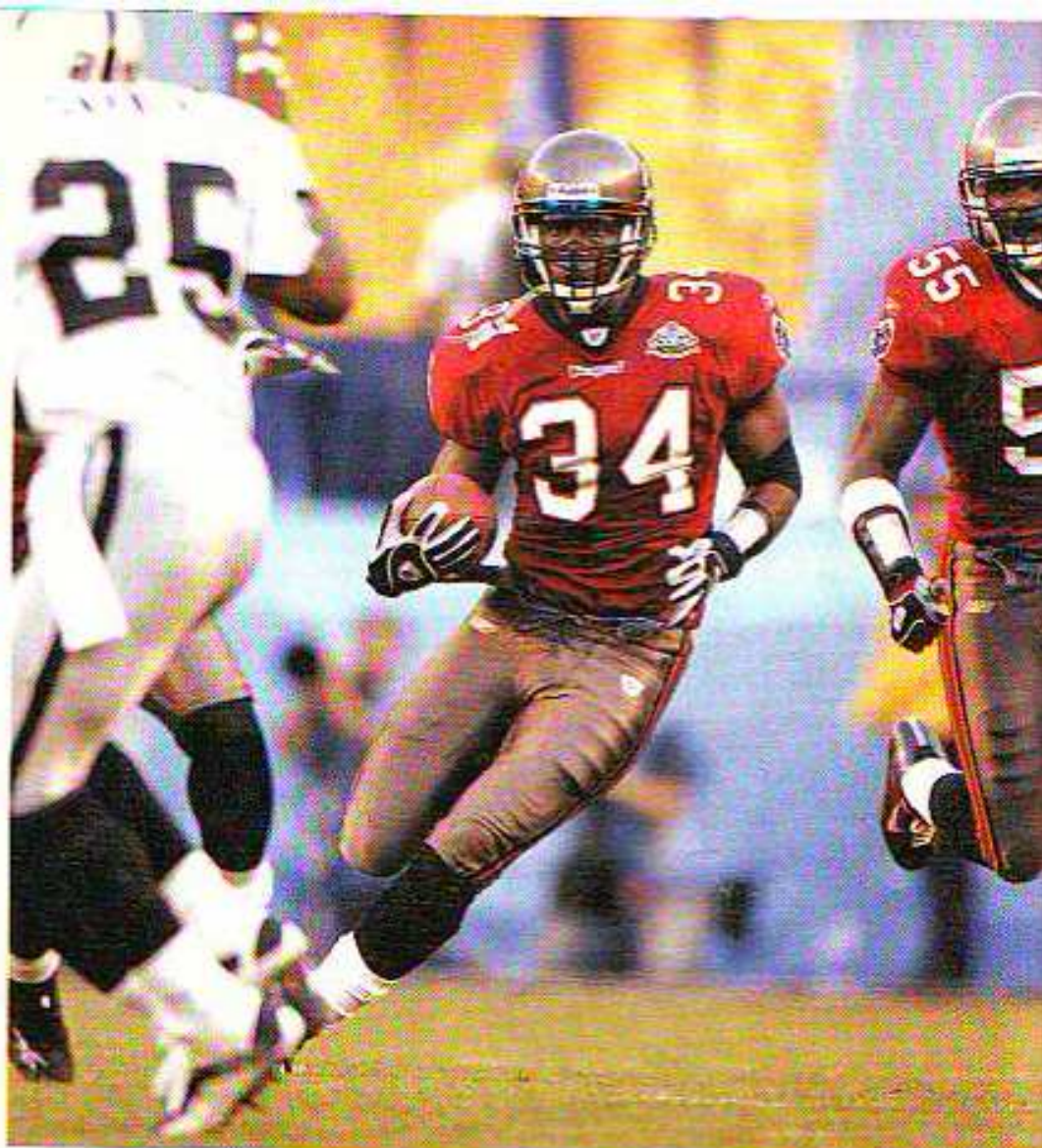
On Thursday, Gruden told his team how important practice that day would be. He asked Lynch to speak as well.

"Hey," Lynch told his teammates, "everybody knows the opportunity we have in front of us. Don't take this practice for granted. Make every play exact and precise. Let's make it our best practice of the year."

Lynch later said it was the team's best practice of the year. The Bucs were fired up and full of life. Gruden was particularly feisty. When one of his scout-team players failed to accurately portray one of the Raiders' defenders, Gruden yelled, "Come on, the guy is 58 years old!"

During a special teams portion of practice, Jackson hit cornerback Corey Ivy in the back, and Ivy went at Jackson. They brawled before coaches could separate them. The fight gave the Bucs a spark, players said. "During the Super Bowl week, going back in history, somebody usually gets into it," Jackson said after the game in front of his locker, which was just to the left of Ivy's locker. Jackson had a typed cheat sheet on his wristband. Further up his forearm was a bandage where an IV needle had been. "(Fighting) shows you want to win and that you have the emotion you need."

20 SPORTING NEWS



Jackson (34) got a good idea where Gannon would throw the ball from practicing against the coach who knows Gannon best. The Bucs finished with five interceptions.

By Thursday, Gruden was beginning to relax more. That night, he slept more than four hours, which is his version of pulling a Rip Van Winkle.

On Saturday afternoon, Gruden had a little free time. So he invited offensive coordinator Bill Mixon and Mark Artzaga, his assistant in charge of football operations, up to Room 2806 at the Torrey Pines Hilton. In Gruden's suite, they enjoyed the views of the Pacific Ocean and the golf course beneath them. They had some conversation about how they could be on the verge of their greatest moment and reflected on how some of the Raiders' players had badmouthed Gruden. The coach eventually dozed off sleeping for an hour before a phone call woke him up.

When he spoke to his team that night, he wasn't particularly emotional or as inspirational as he can be. That night, before the biggest game of his life, he slept for six entire hours.

This was a man who knew he had prepared well.

E-mail senior writer Dan Pompei at dpompei@sportingnews.com.