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Book penned by trio offers entertaining insight into life of Raiders icon Al Davis

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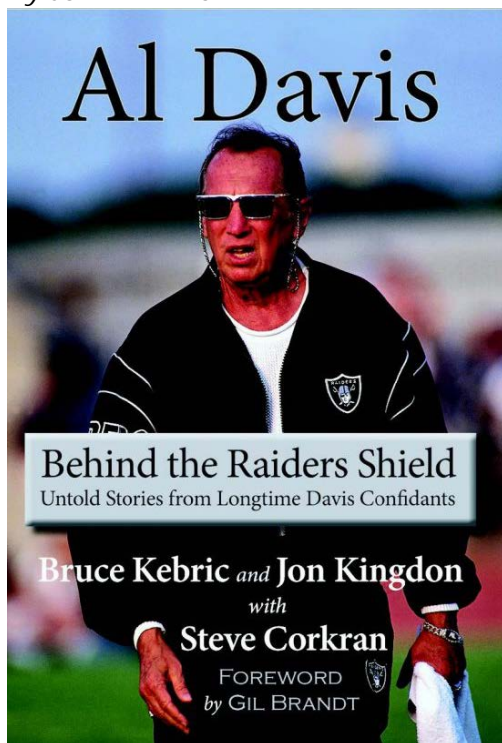


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Two longtime employees of the Oakland Raiders, Bruce Kebric and Jon Kingdon, have collaborated with former Raiders beat writer Steve Corkran to publish a book detailing the behind the scenes machinations of their former boss, Al Davis.

The book is titled "Al Davis: Behind the Raiders Shield." Corkran - along with the pair of Davis confidants Kebric and Kingdon - details the inner workings of the enigmatic force behind one of the most controversial professional sports teams of all time.

Kebric spent 31 years assisting Davis with personnel issues and coaching hires, while Kingdon, who currently writes for this newspaper, began in 1978 and eventually became the team's Director of College Scouting from 1993-2012. Corkran covered the Raiders in some capacity from 1995-2014 for the Contra Costa Times, Oakland Tribune and San Jose Mercury News.

When Corkran teamed forces with Kebric and Kingdon, he issued one caveat: "It has to be warts and all."

The genius of Al Davis is certainly here to see, evidenced by surprise finds in the draft, miraculous personnel decisions, five Super Bowl appearances (three wins), a Team of the Decade designation, and an organization that continues to draw unbending loyalty from its fans.

But the warts are definitely on display. The book draws a portrait of a man obsessed with football, a stubborn,

irascible owner whose motto was "Just win, Baby."

The book is written mostly in a journalistic rapid-fire bullet point style, with names, dates, statistics, and 40-yard dash times flying at a dizzying pace. On one page alone, we time travel from 1963, to 1967, 1979 and 1990!

The authors decided to organize the book through themes rather than chronologically, but it would have been nice to include an index to help with navigation.

The book is at its best when it slows down and focuses on one story, such as the chapter on John Matuszak (aka "The Tooz"). Kingdon relates spending an evening with the 6-foot-8, 272-pound wild man.

The Tooz drank seven tall cans of beer, numerous triple Crown Royals that fans bought for him, and then delivered a stirring speech to the booster club.

After another stop at a bar and several more Crown Royals, Kingdon was relieved to find that not only did Matuszak get home safely, but made it to practice the next day, showing no ill effects.

The Tooz was only one of many players Davis rescued from the NFL trash heap after other teams gave up on them, helping to create the Raider image of outcasts and renegades.

For those obsessed with NFL football, the book offers a wealth of information and insight into the inner workings of the draft and the relative "genius" label that Al Davis garnered through his draft day operations.

Davis also earned that reputation for some of his moves, including having a keen insight for switching players from one position to another. A prime example is when Davis took Billy Cannon - one of the AFL's top rushers - and turned him into a productive tight end.

The book chronicles both the successes and failures of Davis's picks, and the methods he used to decide on a player. He often ignored the wisdom of his scouts while looking for the strongest arm at quarterback or the fastest 40-yard time for each position.

Perhaps his biggest blunder was picking Todd Marinovich, a quarterback from USC with drug problems and a questionable work ethic, over Brett Favre, whom the scouts preferred. Favre went on to a Hall-of-Fame career, while Marinovich was out of the league in two years.

Davis would often scapegoat a staff member who had agreed with him on a pick and very rarely admitted a mistake.

Since the book deals almost exclusively with Davis's life in professional sports, the reader is left wondering what his early years were like and how they influenced the type of person he eventually became.

Speaking about the book, Kingdon, who has lived in Lafayette since the Raiders moved back from Los Angeles after the 1995 season, related that the focus was on the Al Davis they knew. For those interested in his background, Kingdon recommends a 1991 publication, "Slick: The Silver and Black Life of Al Davis."

Asked how they lasted so long with Davis, Kingdon responded, "If you did your job and didn't embarrass the organization, Al was very loyal to you. It was a challenge and fun to try and keep up with him. He was a very bright man."

After running the book by five major publishers, the trio formed Rather Be Feared Publishing and self-published. They are now in their second printing. The book is available in hardback, kindle, or audible form through Amazon, or can be purchased at behindtheshield.net.

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