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Upcoming CAPA 'Nutcracker' vows to wow
Submitted by Lynn Davis



California Academy of Performing Arts performers from "The Nutcracker." Photo Kate Fim

Join Clara as her Christmas Eve dream comes true and snow falls onstage, a magical Christmas tree grows and grows, an army of mice battle toy soldiers and sumptuous treats and toys come to life in the California Academy of Performing Arts presentation of "The Nutcracker" at the Campolindo Performing Arts Center from Dec. 15-17.

This Lamorinda family tradition for 25 years is a feast for the eyes, filled with surprises and delights for all ages. The story is narrated as it unfolds, guiding young viewers through the beautiful ballet and making it much more enjoyable for little ones (and grown-ups) who might not be familiar with the timeless story of Clara and her magical Christmas Eve dream.

Anything is possible with enough talent and enthusiasm, and both are abundant in this extraordinary group of young dancers. This production is huge, with more than 100 local performers, sumptuous sets, live narration, and absolutely gorgeous costumes, many of which are hand-sewn in Russia.

While the studio demands excellence and precision in the dancing, it also seeks to involve ballet students of all ages, adding to the spirit of the performances: 6- and 7-year-olds are enchanting as the spun-sugar Christmas angels; and advanced high school ballerinas take on the more demanding, classic roles of the Snow Queen, Rose Queen, and Sugar Plum Fairy. Local high school football players and other athletes even appear as party guests!

Two Performances will be held at 5:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. on Friday Dec. 15, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Saturday Dec. 16 and at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. on Sunday Dec. 17 at the Campolindo Performing Arts Center.

Tickets for the general public are \$20 and can be purchased at www.capashows.eventbrite.com.

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

By John Miller

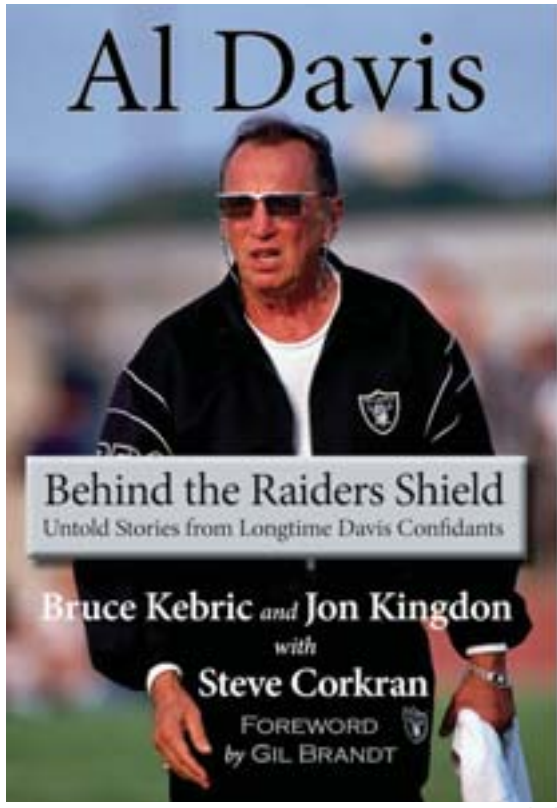


Image provided

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.

... continued on page B4

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