

Agent Bob LaMonte: ‘The Godfather’ for Gruden, McVay, other coaches

By **Liz Mullen**, Staff Writer February 5, 2018



Bob LaMonte (far right) with three of his longtime clients (from left): Kansas City’s Andy Reid, Mike Holmgren and Jon Gruden, who recently returned to coaching with the Oakland Raiders. Photo: PSR INC.

When Bob LaMonte was trying to get his client, Sean McVay, a job as a head coach in the NFL, a lot of people told him he was crazy.

“Everyone tells me last year — at this time or earlier — that McVay is too young,” said LaMonte, owner and founder of Professional Sports Representation Inc. “That no one will hire a 30-year-old coach.”

LaMonte’s retort? “I say, ‘If you don’t hire him this year, he’ll be hired next year and you will be making the biggest mistake of your life.’”

The Los Angeles Rams made McVay the youngest head coach in NFL history when they hired him in January 2017, just before his 31st birthday. A year later, he’s credited with turning the franchise around and taking the Rams to the playoffs for the first time since 2004.

McVay’s success is just part of an amazing year for LaMonte. Surprisingly, it’s not even his biggest story. LaMonte, 72, represents 50 clients who include some of the most successful coaches, general managers and up-and-coming offensive and defensive coordinators in the NFL. Here’s a snapshot of just his last *month*.

- He brokered the deal to return Jon Gruden, his longtime client, to the sidelines as head coach of the Oakland Raiders in what’s been reported to be a record 10-year, \$100 million contract.
- McVay was named NFL Coach of the Year by Sporting News and the Pro Football Writers of America.
- Client Pat Shurmur was named head coach of the New York Giants four days after being named PFWA Assistant Coach of the Year for his work as offensive coordinator of the Minnesota Vikings.
- Client Howie Roseman, executive vice president of football operations for the Philadelphia Eagles, won PFWA Executive of the Year for building the roster that took the Eagles to the Super Bowl.

■ He represented either the head coach or one of the coordinators from six of the 12 teams to make this year's NFL playoffs and was guaranteed a winning client from the Super Bowl since he reps Eagles head coach Doug Pederson and New England offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels.

■ And to top it off, McDaniels is widely expected to be the next coach of the Indianapolis Colts, which would give LaMonte eight NFL head coaches, or a quarter of the league, as well as eight GMs.

Thirty years after he first started representing coaches, LaMonte may well be running the hottest independent sports talent agency in the country. And his hot streak started with the biggest, perhaps most surprising coaching reunion ever.

The Gruden Deal

The Gruden deal to return as coach of the Raiders is the biggest coup of LaMonte's year. It's also reportedly the biggest contract for a coach in NFL history.

LaMonte is coy about that aspect. "I will only say it is the contract for the ages," he says in a matter-of-fact tone.

When pressed, he admits it's a 10-year deal that Gruden received no equity stake in the team and the contract is indeed a record.

PSR clients

NFL head coaches

- Jay Gruden, Washington Redskins
- Jon Gruden, Oakland Raiders
- Sean McDermott, Buffalo Bills
- Sean McVay, Los Angeles Rams
- Doug Pederson, Philadelphia Eagles
- Andy Reid, Kansas City Chiefs
- Pat Shurmur, New York Giants

NFL general managers

- Chris Ballard, Indianapolis Colts
- Steve Keim, Arizona Cardinals
- Jason Licht, Tampa Bay Buccaneers
- Mike Maccagnan, New York Jets
- Howie Roseman, Philadelphia Eagles
- Rick Spielman, Minnesota Vikings
- Tom Telesco, Los Angeles Chargers
- Brett Veach, Kansas City Chiefs

Source: Professional Sports Representation

That means it wasn't LaMonte's first go-round with a signature deal for Gruden, who first coached the Raiders from 1998-2001. Before returning to the Raiders, Gruden's deal with ESPN reportedly made him the highest-paid personality at that network, at more than \$6 million a year.

Asked if Gruden was being paid that much by ESPN, LaMonte said, "I don't comment on that, but trust me, you're a little light there. That will never happen again, by the way. You will never get a seven- or eight-year deal for that kind of money in history for any broadcaster."

LaMonte has represented Gruden for nearly three decades. In 2009 after Gruden was fired by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who he took to a Super Bowl title six years earlier, LaMonte advised him to get into broadcasting, with a goal to "brand him as the 21st century version of John Madden," he said.

But during Gruden's nine years with ESPN, NFL teams, as well as power five college football programs, kept calling to gauge his interest in coaching. LaMonte always stuck by their broadcasting plan.

"Every single year — are you kidding?" he said of the different inquiries. "Jon Gruden — he's a star child. If Sean McVay was in the same position now doing broadcasting, how many job offers do you think he'd have? You can't even count them."

When the Raiders called, LaMonte finally advised him to say yes, for several reasons. At the top of the list? Gruden was getting bored in the broadcast booth and needed to scratch the itch to coach again.

“Gruden told me so many times, ‘It’s unbelievable!’” LaMonte said. “He said, ‘You are the only agent in the world who would tell me to turn down millions and millions of dollars and I would do it.’”

Not An Agent

LaMonte will tell you that he’s not an agent. And that he doesn’t recruit. And that his clients are not clients, they’re family.

You hear those kinds of things from a lot of agents. Thing is, LaMonte’s clients say the same thing about him.

“He’s almost like a father figure to me,” McVay said.

Before the Rams, LaMonte negotiated McVay’s deal to become offensive coordinator of the Washington Redskins, and during the past five years would text him after every game. McVay has always wondered how LaMonte has the time to do that with so many clients in the league.

That type of personal touch is one of the ways LaMonte helps clients navigate their career paths.

“What I think Bob does such a good job of is he helps train his clients to get ready for interviews, but he forces them to make it their own,” McVay said. “This isn’t like, ‘This is how you go do it,’ This is, ‘What are the traits and characteristics about you? What are some of the things that you personify as a leader that you want to become the identity of the team?’”

LaMonte admits that he almost passed on McVay, his latest wunderkind. McVay asked for a sit-down years ago, and LaMonte nearly said no. The veteran agent has rules about who he’ll meet, and at age 26, McVay was too young and didn’t have the experience that LaMonte looks for in a potential client.

But LaMonte knew McVay’s grandfather, John McVay, head of player personnel for the 49ers in the 1980s who helped build one of the most successful dynasties in NFL history. And there was something about the young McVay’s voice of the phone, an energy LaMonte liked.

So they met.

“And I am 15 minutes into the conversation and I say [to myself], ‘That’s the next Jon Gruden. Period. End of sentence,’” LaMonte remembered. “What I saw in him was an extraordinarily dynamic human being at such a young age. He was off the charts.”

The Godfather

LaMonte is Sicilian, and when he talks about his clients and his agency, he uses the Italian phrase “la famiglia” — the family.

He’s been called “The Godfather” of the NFL. That may sound corny, but people who have done business with him say he’s known for his honesty and keeping his word.

“The thing, to me, about Bob LaMonte was there was really no baloney about the negotiation,” said Ron Wolf, former Green Bay Packers general manager who’s in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Wolf has known LaMonte

for nearly 40 years and negotiated on the other side of the table from him when he represented both players and coaches.

There was always a give and take, Wolf said, but LaMonte never made ridiculous demands.

“With Bob, he was a dealmaker, not a dealbreaker,” he said. “And to me, that is his strong suit.”

PSR Inc. is a family business and LaMonte’s wife, Lynn, has worked with him for more than 30 years. Lynn LaMonte says one of the reasons that works is they’re opposites: Lynn is an introvert and Bob an extrovert. “He is a character,” she admits.

The trait that makes him successful, though, is his vision, she says. “He has this ... great vision in the business of what is going to happen and where things are going,” she said.

The best example of that: LaMonte started out as a high school history teacher and football coach, and only became an agent because a former student he’d coached, quarterback Rich Campbell, asked him to represent him. Campbell was the No. 6 overall pick in the 1981 NFL draft. LaMonte represented some baseball players as well, but in 1988 he had what he called “an epiphany.”

LaMonte decided he would represent coaches instead of players. Representing coaches is a hot business these days, but it wasn’t that way in ’88 when LaMonte started doing it. The average NFL head coach salary then was \$295,000. Today, it’s \$5 million.

Back then, most coaches didn’t have agents and didn’t want them, either. But LaMonte signed Mike Holmgren, a friend dating to his high school coaching days (see related story), as his first client in the late ’80s, and things have skyrocketed ever since.

Star Power

Today, LaMonte represents an enviable list of coaches and executives. He’s mainly focused on the NFL, but he has a few college clients as well, including Wyoming head coach Craig Bohl, who discovered and recruited Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz when he was at North Dakota State and Josh Allen, the Wyoming quarterback who’s expected to be a first-round pick this April.

LaMonte also represents Coquese Washington, women’s basketball coach at Penn State. “She’s phenomenal,” he says. “She’s the diamond in the tiara.”

LaMonte loves his clients like a parent, and uses astronomical phrases when talking about them.

“Star Child” is LaMonte’s nickname for Gruden. “And that’s exactly what McVay is,” he adds. “Young, handsome, brilliant. Enormous energy.”

Coaches like Gruden and McVay don’t come along every day, according to LaMonte. “The greatest mistake that owners in the NFL are making now is they are all trying to get the next Sean McVay,” he says. “That’s not out there. He’s a generational find.”

There are not a lot of Bob LaMontes out there, either. And people who know LaMonte say most of what he says about his clients is also true of himself.

“As soon as you meet him, you can feel he’s got a great amount of charisma,” McVay said. “He’s got a presence about himself. He’s bigger than the room.”