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The Matchmaker

Agent Bob LaMonte represents NFL coaches on the rise

L. Jon Wertheim

In his previous life as a teacher at Santa Teresa High in **San Jose**, **Bob LaMonte** took a special interest in diplomatic history. Fascinated by how leaders obtain and retain power, he would always include readings of **Machiavelli** on his syllabus. In the late 1970s he and a colleague, **Mike Holmgren**, would meet for lunch, and when **LaMonte** wasn't holding forth on the principles of empire building, the two men, who were also assistant football coaches, discussed blocking schemes. One afternoon **Holmgren** arrived looking anguished. "I have the chance to be a coordinator at **San Francisco State**," he said. "Should I take it?" **LaMonte** replied, "Go for it." Then he posed a question of his own to **Holmgren**. A former student was preparing for the **NFL** draft and had asked **LaMonte** to represent him. Should he try to be an agent? "Bob," **Holmgren** said, "I think you'd be great."

A quarter century later **Holmgren** is coach and executive vice president of football operations for the **Seattle Seahawks**, after having won Super Bowl XXXI as coach of the **Green Bay Packers**. As for **LaMonte**, he has carved out a princely niche: agent to young coaches on the make. His clients include **Holmgren**, **Jon Gruden** of the **Tampa Bay Buccaneers**, **Andy Reid** of the **Philadelphia Eagles**, **John Fox** of the **Carolina Panthers**, **Mike Sherman** of the **Packers** and **Jim Mora Jr.** of the **Atlanta Falcons** as well as 12 coordinators and four general managers. "I consider Bob to be a very important power player but also a very productive one," says **Eagles** owner **Jeffrey Lurie**. "In virtually every situation he's working with the team on behalf of his client, not against it. That gives a whole different meaning to the term power broker."

In six of the past seven years at least one of **LaMonte's** charges has been promoted to his first head job in the pros. After a client is granted an interview, **LaMonte** puts him through a vigorous preparation process, arming him with a thick three-ringed binder that covers topics from media relations to financial planning to ownership. "The key letters aren't X and O, they're CEO," says **LaMonte**, 59. "[Ownership] knows you know football, so why waste time with that? You have two to five hours to show them you can run an organization." Time and again, **LaMonte's** clients—**Reid**, **Sherman** and **Fox**, to name three—have started the job search as little-known candidates and then won over management during interviews. "I tried to develop a picture of the entire team and the entire operation," recalls **Reid**, who has more wins than any other coach since the start of the 2000 season.

Once his clients are hired, **LaMonte** works to expand their spheres of influence. In 2001 **LaMonte** negotiated a deal in which **Reid** took over as the **Eagles'** executive VP of football operations, joining **Holmgren** and **Sherman** as **LaMonte** coaching clients who also have control over personnel decisions. **LaMonte** insists that in a perfect world, coaches and general managers can coexist—"What Mike [**Holmgren**] and **Ron Wolf** had in **Green Bay** was ideal," he says—but he won't apologize for helping his coaches amass power. "If you're driving the race car at 220 mph, you want to know who's changing the oil," he says. "In the **NFL**, having no control is death."

If **LaMonte's** tactics don't fit the agent profession's blustery stereotype, neither does his lifestyle. His unassuming offices are in **Reno**, and the company's only other full-time employee is his wife, Lynn. Reflexively self-effacing, he rarely gives interviews and scoffs at the suggestion that he is a major player in the **NFL**. "We're putting a pretty dress on a pretty girl," he says. "But if she gets to be prom queen—if our guys become successful **NFL** head coaches—we've done our jobs."

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