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LaMonte is agent to the NFL coaching stars

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In a sport that fires roughly 20 percent of its head coaches every year, it pays to be a well-prepared and well-connected assistant when the NFL carousel stops briefly to interview new blood each January.

For the past 26 years, Bob LaMonte, a 67-year-old superagent among those who represent NFL coaches and front-office executives, has been a pioneer in that regard. In that time, the average head coaching salary has gone from about \$250,000 to more than \$3.5 million, an increase caused by a number of factors, including the efforts of Professional Sports Representation, a business that LaMonte started with his wife more than three decades ago.

"I represented players from 1978 to '88, and then I began to see that no one had ever represented coaches as a negotiator who actually hammered out deals and went hammer and tongs with ownership," LaMonte said. "People have at least said we drove that market. Whether we did or not, that's not for me to say."

According to his website, LaMonte has negotiated more than \$1.25 billion in professional sports contracts. He represents coaches and front office executives from 26 NFL teams, including Vikings General Manager Rick Spielman and the past two Vikings head coaches, Brad Childress and the recently fired Leslie Frazier.

Seven head coaches were fired during or after the 2013 regular season. Three vacancies have been filled, including the one in Washington, where the Redskins hired Bengals offensive coordinator Jay Gruden, this year's "hot" NFL assistant and, not coincidentally, one of LaMonte's clients.

Spielman was in Cincinnati preparing to be Gruden's third interview in as many days when the Redskins called in LaMonte to close the deal on Gruden, the younger brother of Jon Gruden, the Super Bowl-winning former NFL coach and, yes, another LaMonte client.

Meanwhile, Broncos offensive coordinator Adam Gase, another hot assistant and LaMonte client as well, will wait for Denver's season to end before interviewing with teams. Gase is one of 11 candidates in whom the Vikings have expressed interest.

If Gase gets a head coaching job this season, he'll be the second Broncos offensive coordinator to do so in two years, joining Mike McCoy, now the head coach in San Diego. Naturally, McCoy is a LaMonte client. So, too, is Broncos head coach John Fox and Chargers General Manager Tom Telesco, the guy who hired McCoy.

How it all started

LaMonte and Mike Holmgren grew up together in San Francisco. Yes, that Mike Holmgren.

"We became best friends," LaMonte said.

LaMonte played football at the University of Santa Clara, where he earned a history degree. He went on to San Jose State, where he taught while earning his master's degree in United States Diplomatic History/Labor History. From there, he went to Oak Grove High School in San Jose, Calif., where he taught U.S. history and coached varsity football.

In 1975, Holmgren needed a job. LaMonte hired him to teach history and coach football. An unlikely path to the top of the NFL had unknowingly begun.

LaMonte's involvement with the NFL began in the spring of 1981 when he represented California quarterback Rich Campbell, a former student of his and the sixth overall draft pick of the Packers that year. Seven years later, LaMonte became Holmgren's agent when the latter was 49ers offensive coordinator. Four years after that, Holmgren was hired as Packers head coach and, well, the rest is history that includes winning the Lombardi Trophy.

"The only question was whether Mike should become the coach and I become the agent," LaMonte joked. "But it worked out pretty well this way."

As Holmgren's coaching tree matured, LaMonte was there to catch and train the apples that began to fall. Apples such as Andy Reid and Jon



Agent Bob LaMonte (left, with then-Broncos coach Josh McDaniels and Denver owner Pat Bowlen in 2009) represents coaches and front-office personnel from 26 NFL teams.

David Zalubowski, Associated Press

Gruden.

Then, as Reid's tree developed, LaMonte was there for guys such as Childress. Eventually, Frazier followed suit, asking LaMonte to represent him in 2010 after Frazier claimed he had interviewed for six jobs in three years and lost each one of them to LaMonte clients.

'It's not the X's and O's ...'

In his book, "Winning the NFL Way: Leadership Lessons from Football's Top Head Coaches," LaMonte wrote his favorite line when it comes to explaining what he focuses on during the several weeks it takes to train young assistants for their head coaching interviews.

"It's not the X's and O's, it's the CEOs," said LaMonte, repeating the line from his book. "Teams are hiring someone who is going to run a multi-million dollar operation. We concentrate on the ability to show leadership and demonstrate that you can manage an entire organization."

LaMonte's clients are known for being painstakingly detailed. A prime example was Mike Sherman, who walked into his interview with the Packers with a huge binder filled with every possible detail, including an hour-by-hour schedule for each of the next 52 weeks.

Exhausting process

When McCoy was the hot assistant a year ago, he was allowed, per NFL rules, to interview with four teams for only four hours apiece during the Broncos' playoff bye week. Also per NFL rules, the Broncos were able to dictate where and when those interviews took place.

"The Broncos said it could happen the Saturday and Sunday of the playoff bye week, and they had to take place in Denver," LaMonte said. "So we had four owner's jets at a private air strip in Denver."

McCoy was put up in a nearby hotel room and was scheduled to meet with the Eagles, Bears, Cardinals and Bills over two days.

"People just don't realize how hard these interviews are," LaMonte said. "They can be 10, 12 hours if they're out of the playoffs and four if they're still in the playoffs. But remember, if they're still in the playoffs, they're also getting ready for a game at the same time."

In McCoy's case, he made it through two of his four scheduled interviews and then told LaMonte he could do only one more the following day. The Bills flew home without an interview.

Meanwhile, the Chargers weren't in the picture at that point because Telesco hadn't been hired. Days after LaMonte hammered out Telesco's deal, Telesco was in a jet in Denver waiting to take McCoy back to San Diego if the Broncos were upset in the divisional round, which they were, in double overtime by the Ravens.

LaMonte enjoys cultivating the next generation of head coaches, but that doesn't mean he has enjoyed seeing 83 coaching changes — an average of six per year — since 2000.

"I would call it completely nuts," LaMonte said. "I mean not even close. Nuts. It's real simple. What I would say is patience is no longer a virtue."

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