

KEY MAN

Rich Gannon had to wait 12 years to become a star

Q uarterback Rich Gannon holds the key to the Oakland Raiders' success. Literally. Rich, age 35, has his own key to the Raider practice facility in Alameda, California. He usually arrives at work at six in the morning to study game films. "That's something I need to do to get ready for Sundays," he says.

The payoff: Rich has been one of the NFL's best QBs since becoming a Raider in 1999. Last season, he passed for 3,430 yards and 28 touchdowns, and ran for 529 yards (second among QBs). He also led the Raiders to their first AFC championship game since 1991.

"Rich is our leader," says receiver Tim Brown. "It's not just the things he says. It's the plays he makes and the way he handles himself."

For the first 12 seasons of his career, Rich had a hard time becoming *any* team's leader. He was a backup and occasional starter for the Minnesota Vikings, Washington Redskins, and Kansas City Chiefs. "Nothing's ever come easy," says Rich. "I had to fight and claw just to get on the field."

Between 1987 and 1998, Rich won 31 of the 58 games he started. But his coaches never had total confidence in him.

Then Raider coach Jon Gruden gave Rich a chance to start full-time in 1999. Rich soon impressed his new team with his scrambling, passing, and hard work. "He's on top of every detail," says Raider quarterback coach David Shaw. "It's like [he's] another coach on the field."

Rich has played in the Pro Bowl the past two seasons, sending a clear message to the teams who gave up on him. "I want to let [some coaches] know that their decisions might not have been the best," he says.

The "Key Man" is making his point. Since joining Oakland, Rich is 5-1 against his former teams.

— by Justin Tejada

No Knock On Wood

**WOODROW
DANTZLER** has
developed into the
total QB package

Woodrow Dantzler remembers the spring day when everything fell into place for him as a quarterback. He had been mostly a backup QB for the Clemson University Tigers as a freshman and sophomore. He had the speed and moves to elude tacklers. But he wasn't where he needed to be in terms of reading defenses and nailing receivers.

Woodrow worked hard on his passing accuracy and studied defenses in the off-season. The experience he gained during practice became his top teacher.

"The more work he got, the more he improved," says Clemson head coach Tommy Bowden.

Then came a scrimmage two springs ago. Woodrow's passes hit their mark. He read the defense clearly and made smart decisions based on what he saw. "Everything came together," says Woodrow.

Says Coach Bowden: "It was like a light came on."

Woodrow started as a junior last season and led the Tigers to a roaring 8-0 start and a 9-3 season. He played the final four games on an injured left ankle and still finished with 1,871 passing yards and 1,028 rushing yards. He was just 129 passing yards short of becoming the first college player to pass for 2,000 yards and rush for 1,000 in a single season. People went from saying "Woodrow who?" to mentioning him as a Heisman Trophy candidate.

This season, Clemson fans hope Woodrow hits the 2000/1000 mark. But part of being the total package is learning not to get caught up in the hype. "As soon as you think you're all-world, you fall flat on your face," he says.

— by Sachin Shenolikar



MANNY MULLAN (GRACETY); ROBERT BUCK (JEYER); BOB ROSATO (DRAPER, IVERSON); MEL LEVINE (DOLLS)

Knock On Wood/ Key Man

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1. Woodrow Dantzler plays for what college?
2. Woodrow started at quarterback his freshman and sophomore years. True or False
3. How many yards did Woodrow pass and run for in his junior year?
4. What two parts of Woodrow's game improved between his sophomore and junior years?
5. Woodrow won the Heisman Trophy his junior year. True or False
6. Between 1987 and 1998 what was Rich Gannon's record as a starter?
7. Rich became Oakland's starting quarterback in what year?
8. The raider's coach in 1999 was?
9. What teams has Rich played for?
10. Since joining Oakland, what is his record against his former team?