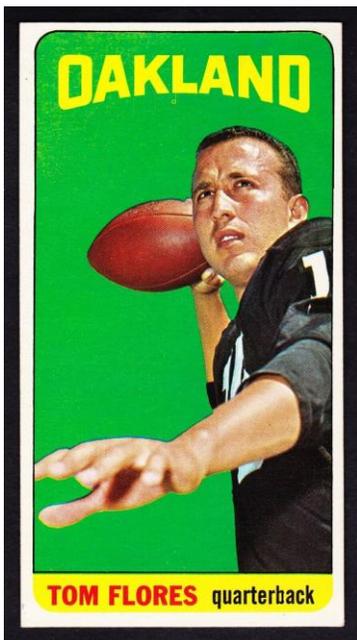


Tom Flores

This article was written by Rich Shmelter

From being the team's first quarterback, to a two-time Super Bowl winning head coach, Tom Flores ran the gamut of every level of competition during his affiliation with the Silver and Black. Through it all, Flores has emerged from the experience a champion and Raider icon. Along with Hall of Famer Mike Ditka, he remains the only other person throughout the history of professional football to win Super Bowls as a player, assistant coach, and head coach.



Besides brief stops in other locales, the bulk of Flores' personal and professional life was spent in the confines of California. His initiation into the golden state of California came with his birth on March 21, 1937 in Sanger, a town located in the San Joaquin Valley. His parents were farm workers of extremely limited monetary means, and when Tom was a child, he went to work in the fields along with his parents picking fruit and earning pennies for each tray he filled. The hard work instilled a solid work ethic in Flores, and he looked to carry that intestinal fortitude into future endeavors.

Athletics quickly proved to be one of his fortes, and Flores became a three-sport star in football, basketball, and baseball. After establishing himself as a prep star at Sanger High School, Flores decided to continue his education and athletic pursuits. He first went to



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Fresno City College, where he quarterbacked the team in 1954 and 1955. In 1955, he was elected team captain, and earned honorable mention as a Junior College All-American. His quarterback skills were soon put to good use at the College of the Pacific for the next two seasons. In 1956, he gained increased status by being the sixth-ranked passer in the country, and fourth in total offensive production. For his efforts, Flores was selected honorable mention All-Pacific Coast and All-American. On top of starring on the gridiron, he also lettered in basketball and baseball, all while earning a bachelor's degree in Education.

It appeared that landing a spot on an NFL roster was a foregone conclusion for Flores at this point, but a shoulder injury suffered at Pacific stymied the pro scout's pursuit of employing him. Undaunted, he looked to become a teacher, but was offered a contract with the Calgary Stampeders of the Canadian Football League in 1958. However, his damaged shoulder continued to flare up north of the border, and he was unable to show his talents. A tryout with the Washington Redskins the following year also proved futile due to the shoulder. Not long after his trip to the nation's capital, Flores chose to undergo surgery to repair his shoulder and become a teacher.

Just when Flores was set to lead the youth from the classroom, events altered his course. In 1960, the American Football league was set to begin play, and it gave opportunities to many eager to continue their gridiron dreams.

Flores' journey to becoming a life-long legend of the Silver and Black began with a simple recommendation. Ernie George was an assistant on Oakland's first coaching staff and a former coach at Pacific. George received a sterling recommendation regarding Flores from Pacific graduate and NFL quarterback Eddie LeBaron. George discussed the idea of bringing Flores to camp with head coach Eddie Erdelatz, and the rest is Raider history.

The 23-year old signal caller with a shoulder good as new arrived in camp, and after beating out twelve other quarterback candidates, he was given the reins of the Oakland offense. In receiving the starting position, he earned the distinction of becoming the first Hispanic quarterback in pro football history, and the AFL's completion percentage leader in 1960. He also earned the nickname "the Iceman" for his ability to remain calm under pressure while standing up to pass rushes. After a second-place finish in the same category the following year, Flores was forced to sit out the 1962 season due to contracting non-contagious tuberculosis.

In the Raiders breakout season in 1963, new head coach Al Davis started Flores off slowly, allowing him the time to regain his strength and form. By season's end, he showed his old form by leading the team to eight wins in nine games to finish the



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campaign at 10-4. In 1967, with Oakland on the cusp of their first championship, Flores was traded to the Buffalo Bills. After serving as a backup for two seasons, Flores went to Kansas City to perform in the same capacity. Despite missing out on the Raiders' rise to power in '67, Flores was able to experience the sweet smell of success when the Chiefs won Super Bowl IV, and he retired as a player following the 1970 season. Flores was one of only twenty men who played during the entire 10-year run of the American Football League. For his career, "the Iceman" threw for 11,959 yards and 92 touchdowns while finishing as the AFL's fifth ranked all-time passer.

In 1971, Flores decided to return to teaching once again, however, instead of a high school curriculum, it was X's and O's that filled his lessons. The Buffalo Bills gave him his first opportunity at coaching by making Flores an assistant in charge of quarterbacks. Famous playwright Eugene O'Neil reached theater immortality with his successful "The Iceman Cometh". In February of 1972, the football equivalent to O'Neil's masterpiece could have been called "The Iceman Returneth". For after a five-year absence from the Oakland organization, Flores was welcomed back into the Silver and Black fold with his appointment as the receivers coach where he had the privilege of working with former teammate, and future hall of famer, Fred Biletnikoff and soon-to-be Raider legend, Cliff Branch. During his time as an assistant under John Madden, the Raiders won five AFC Western Division titles, one AFC championship, and Super Bowl XI. Upon Madden's retirement following the 1978 season, Flores seemed the most likely candidate to replace him as head coach.

Taking over the helm after a legend like Madden seemed to be an intimidating proposal, but Flores was ready for the challenge, and in time, he became just as revered not only in the football community, but in his ethnic community as well, becoming the first Hispanic head coach in the professional ranks.

Tom Flores looked at his new challenge without the slightest bit of apprehension. He had no problem taking over, and truly was the perfect fit for the job. After fourteen years of affiliation with the Raiders, he knew the system, and the players knew and respected the soft-spoken gentleman, who was able to convey his passion and philosophies upon his band of renegades. He had the most knowledge about the Raider organization than any other head coach in team history, and it seemed to be his destiny to lead them to great heights. Flores proved very astute at preparing the team, and those that worked and played for him were astonished at just how much football knowledge he possessed.

After nearly missing the playoffs in his first year as head coach, the Raiders began the 1980 season at 2-3, and rumors began to surface that Flores was on the hot seat, and could be fired if the fall from grace continued. From that point on, Flores righted the wrongs, and the team went on to finish at 11-5, and then proceeded to become the first



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wild card team to win the Super Bowl in one of the greatest Cinderella stories the football world had ever witnessed. Three years later, Flores once again stood on the victory podium to accept yet another Vince Lombardi trophy. In his first five seasons at the helm, Flores posted a 55-27 regular season record, and an 8-1 post-season mark on the way to two Super Bowl championships, which were the only ones that the AFC reined victorious, throughout the 1980's. He also was selected as the NFL Coach of the Year in 1982 when he guided the Raiders to an 8-1 record during the strike-shortened season.

The Raiders made playoff appearances following the '84 and '85 campaigns but made early exits each time. By 1987, Flores saw the team beginning to deteriorate, as age and poor draft picks were slowly draining the team of its luster. After going 5-11 that year, Flores saw a huge re-building project facing him, and decided that he did not want to go through the hassle and stepped away from the sideline and into an executive position in the Raiders' front office.

On January 20, 1988, Tom Flores appeared before the Los Angeles media donned in suit and tie, with his Super Bowl XVIII ring on his finger. He was surrounded by Raider greats of the past and Al Davis by his side, with the Raider emblem directly behind him. It was then that he officially announced his retirement as head coach of the Silver and Black. When asked if he had any advice for his successor, in true Raider fashion, he said, "Just win baby."

The following year, Flores traveled to the great northwest to assume the role of president and general manager of the Seattle Seahawks. He eventually returned to the sideline in 1992, but after three unsuccessful seasons coaching the Seahawks, he once again retired from coaching, this time permanently with a lifetime record of 97-87.

Flores realized that silver and black ran through his bloodstream, and once again came back to the organization as a broadcaster and was teamed with Greg Papa on radio coverage of all Raider games. In that capacity, he was able to share a wealth of experience from every aspect of this great organization. Through it all, Mr. Tom Flores was, and forever will remain, a gentleman and Raider legend.