



Shell recently returned to Maryland-Eastern Shore to take part in a youth football camp. The camp is part of a plan to eventually bring football back to that campus. UMES dropped its football program in 1980.

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Raiders

For most people, summertime is that time of year to chill out, time to get a little R&R. But if you're the head coach of a pro football team, your summer schedule is booked solid. As another season approaches, you're involved in numerous brainstorming sessions with your assistants. A lot of your energies are devoted to analyzing and evaluating rookies and free agents. Time is crucial. Pre-season camp starts in three weeks. A month or so after that, the real season begins.

Welcome to the world of Art Shell, head football coach of the Los Angeles Raiders.

Shell, 43, is the NFL's youngest gridmaster. He is also the first black head coach on the pro circuit since the days of Fritz Pollard, who guided the Hammond (Ind.) Pros from 1925. The Maryland State (now Maryland-Eastern Shore) alumnus was very aware of the race issue when he accepted the Raiders job in Oct. '89. But at this juncture, he feels that skin color is no longer an issue.

"At first, there was a lot of emphasis on

me being a black head coach," Shell admitted. "For some people, it will always be an issue. But three weeks after I became the head coach, the beat writers in LA stopped referring

rates the achievers from the dreamers. When it comes to the bottom line, Shell has delivered.

Entering his third year as the team chief, the dudes in Silver and Black are 19-9 in regu-

*"What a lot of people forget is that we had a lot of young players who had never been to the playoffs before. You can talk about post-season, but once it starts, it's a different situation. You have to play at a higher level to win. Now our people understand what it takes to get to the playoffs. They also know what it takes to get over the hump once you get there."*

— Art Shell

to me as a black head coach. Now I'm known only as Art Shell, coach of the Raiders. To me, that's progress."

Regardless of color, the bottom line in the NFL is winning. It's the barometer that sepa-

lar season play. In the three-and-a-half seasons before he assumed command, the team was 21-30.

Last year the Raiders finished at 13-5, won the AFC West and fell one game short of

playing in Super Bowl XXV. Shell reaped some benefits along the way, being named NFL Coach of the Year and becoming the first black head coach to take his team to the playoffs.

Under Shell, a member of pro football's Hall of Fame (class of '89), the Raiders have resurfaced as one of the NFL's dominant teams. Prior to last season, the Raiders had been absent from the playoffs since '85. The memory of coming so close to getting in the big game is still fresh in the Raiders minds.

But the question is: Will LA use a demoralizing 51-3 AFC title game loss to Buffalo as motivation to strengthen its resolve to win it all in '91?

"We should be OK this year," Shell said. "But the most important thing is getting this team out of training camp healthy. We'll be decent."

Decent?

After the Raiders exited the post-season

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