

# The Gruden

*by* Larry Strattner

"What are you doing over there? I thought Fantasy Football was over?"

"Over for me, that's for sure. I lost about five months ago."

"So what now with the computer? You have a new fetish?"

"Ha. That's funny. Fetish? Nah, just writing a letter."

"A letter? To who? You can barely spell your own name."

"Good one. Clever. It's a letter to John Gruden."

"Who's John Gruden?"

"He's a fired football coach. He has an office in a strip mall where he watches game tapes."

"Game tapes? What are game tapes?"

"Just what they sound like. Recordings of games. In his case, football games."

"Recordings? In a strip mall?"

"Yeah, well, I suppose it sounds a little weird, but other fired football coaches come there too and watch tapes with him. It gives them a sense of belonging after being fired."

"Why would you write a letter to a man like John Gruden?"

"It's actually not really a letter from me. It's more about Oscar."

"Oscar? What about Oscar? Your son is only fourteen months old. Why you write a letter about Oscar to a total stranger?"

"I think Oscar's NFL head coach material. I was wondering if he could go over to the fired coaches get together. You know, watch some film. Kind of get into the way those guys are, get comfortable with the coaching thing, the NFL atmosphere."

"Have you taken leave of your god damn senses? You've done some schizoid things since I've known you, but this one takes the cake. You aren't sending any god damn letter to John Gruden."

"Whoa, whoa. Get hold of yourself. If you knew anything about football you seen this makes perfect sense. Relax, let me explain."

"Make it fast and make it good or you'll find the Tefal logo on the bottom of this frying pan decorating your forehead."

"Watch out! It's the spitfire I married! Okay, Babe, here it is, simple, to the point. Yesterday I'm playing with Oscar, right? And something happens he doesn't like, okay? Well, he tilts his head down and looks at me out of the tops of his eyes and gives me that grrrrrr face, like a pissed off pit bull. I can't believe that face. I want to laugh but I don't. The face is deadly serious, intense. It stops me cold. I think, I've seen this face before. Where have I seen this face before? And it hits me, John Gruden, on the sidelines, coaching an NFL game when things aren't going his way, that's where. If you're a player seeing that face you know you better get going, and win. Suddenly I know. Oscar is NFL head coach material! He has the stuff they're made of! John Gruden will see it in an instant! They'll love Oscar at the fired coaches meeting!"

"Oscar is fourteen months old, you nit wit! Didn't you hear me? You are not, and I repeat not, mailing that letter."

"Oh yeah? I'm signing it here. I'm folding it now. Putting it in the envelope. Getting a stamp..."

BONG!

