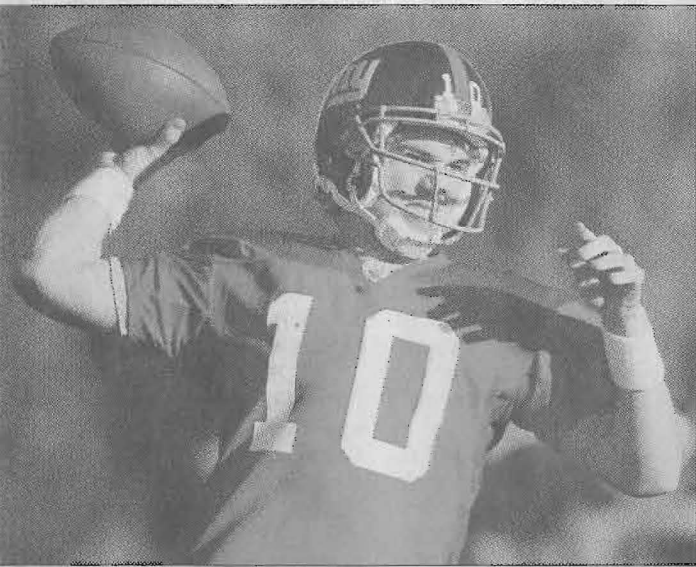


SPOTLIGHT Giants offensive coordinator began pro coaching apprenticeship with CFL's Alouettes

Gilbride's road to the Bowl ran through Montreal

CAM COLE CANWEST NEWS SERVICE



LUCY NICHOLSON REUTERS

"Eli is like one of those overnight success stories they talk about in Hollywood, that have been quietly working at it for years," offensive coordinator Kevin Gilbride says of Giants pivot Manning.

GLENDALE, ARIZ. - If you subscribe to the "six degrees of separation" theory that it's a damned small world out there, consider the case of Kevin Gilbride, whose budding coaching career in pro football was rudely interrupted by the folding of the Alouettes the day before they were to open the 1987 season.

Now Gilbride finds himself, at the end of the 2007 campaign, coordinating the offence of the New York Giants, who will try to spoil the New England Patriots' perfect season Sunday in Super Bowl XLII.

"Ah, Vancouver," he said yesterday, spying a reporter's credential tag. "Great city. I loved going in there when I was in Ottawa, we used to stay at

the Holiday Inn overlooking the water where the seaplanes would take off and land. ..."

There is scarcely a detail Gilbride doesn't recall about his days in the CFL, starting as a guest coach with the Saskatchewan Roughriders, moving to Ottawa as Joe Moss's offensive coordinator in 1985-86, jumping to Montreal on coach Joe Faragalli's promise of great things to come under new GM Norm Kimball. ...

"We were in the airport, flying over to Toronto for our opening game, and got called back to Olympic Stadium to be told it was over," Gilbride said. "We'd already gone through training camp and preseason, and all of a sudden, no more team."

Pay close attention now, there'll be a test later:

✦ Gilbride played quarterback at little Southern Connecticut State, where the previous starting pivot had been Chris Palmer. Palmer is Eli Manning's quarterback coach with the Giants, a job Gilbride held for three seasons until he took over the offensive coordinator's job from John Hufnagel in Game 16 a year ago. Hufnagel, the old CFL quarterback, is head coach of the Calgary Stampeders.

✦ When Gilbride got the call to go to Ottawa in 1985, Moss told him he'd be expected to use the run-and-shoot offence.

Please see GILBRIDE, Page C3
Giants punter Feagles puts boot to long Bowl drought, Page C3

GILBRIDE

Coach has high praise for Moon

CONTINUED FROM C1

"Only I didn't know anything about the run-and-shoot," Gilbride said, "so I had to learn it by watching film and talking to (the offence's inventor) Mouse Davis and (his disciple) June Jones, and that led to,

a couple of years later, when June left the Houston Oilers to go to Detroit, he recommended me. Otherwise, it never would have happened."

✦ In Houston, Gilbride coached Warren Moon, the Hall of Fame former Edmonton quarterback who's enshrined in Hamilton and Canton, Ohio. Gilbride attended both ceremonies. Moon flew him and his wife to the Pro Bowl in Hawaii for five straight years (1989-93) as a token of thanks to the offensive coordinator.

All these years later, Gilbride still speaks reverently of Moon's luminous talent.

"I guess because it was my first foray into (the NFL), I didn't realize how good he was. I didn't realize how different he was from anybody else. How driven he was to be good. He could do it all, he could run when he had to run, he was an extremely accurate passer and he understood things about the game, about the personalities of the players, how to keep them all involved," Gilbride said.

BOWL PHOTOS

Check out our gallery of photos as Super Bowl XLII preparations begin in earnest for the Patriots and Giants.

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✦ Palmer, meanwhile, who also worked briefly in Montreal as the Concordes' offensive-line coach in 1983, joined Gilbride in Houston.

✦ Each of them at one point coached Tom Brady's predecessor, Drew Bledsoe, to impressive seasons - Palmer in New England, Gilbride with Buffalo - and Palmer succeeded Gilbride as offensive coordinator under current Giants head coach Tom Coughlin in Jacksonville in the 1990s. Gilbride's second year there, the expansion Jags made it to the AFC championship game.

✦ Palmer tutored Dallas quarterback Tony Romo from obscurity to the Pro Bowl a year ago, and has experienced similar success with Manning.

"Eli is like one of those overnight success stories they

"(We) are playing at a level that's allowing people to see what a talented guy he is."

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR KEVIN GILBRIDE,
ON GIANTS QUARTERBACK ELI MANNING

talk about in Hollywood, that have been quietly working at it for years," Gilbride said. "If there's a difference in the last five weeks, it's probably that he just hasn't made a bad decision. And the pieces around him are playing at a level that's allowing people to see what a talented guy he is."

Confused yet?

It does get to be a blur, Gilbride said. The 22 years he has spent in pro ball - he was out of work in 2001, after two years in Pittsburgh, and worked as a TV analyst for ESPN in the U.S. and Sportsnet in Canada - have flown by, he said.

There have been bumps along the way, like getting fired after 22 games in his only head-coaching stint, with the San Diego Chargers in 1997-98. And most famously, getting punched in the jaw by his own head coach, Buddy Ryan, while the 1993 Oilers were on an 11-game win streak.

Ryan didn't like Gilbride's run-and-shoot offence, calling it the "chuck-and-duck" and derided Gilbride's efforts until their mutual dislike erupted during a win over the Jets. But Gilbride prefers to recall the good days.

"Mark Brunell carried us to the AFC championship in Jacksonville. Eli has taken us to the Super Bowl. But Warren was unbelievable in Houston, and that team probably should have gone further, a lot of times. It sure wasn't Warren's fault we didn't.

"What this season has taught me is how fine a line there is between the teams that get here and the ones that don't."

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