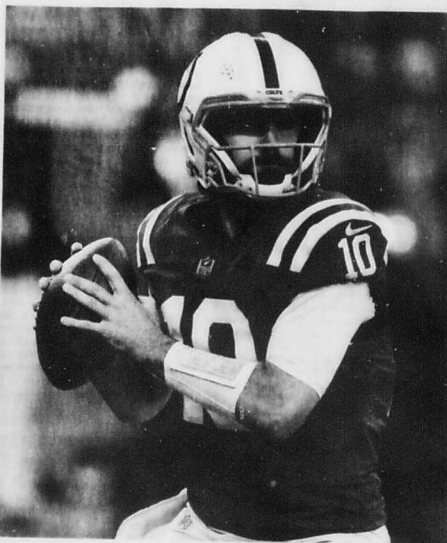
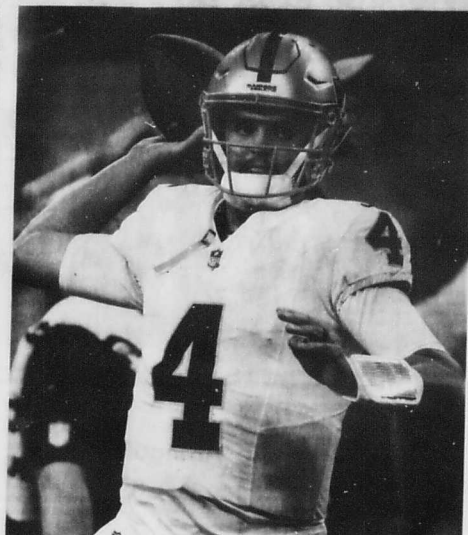


RAIDERS ORGANIZED TEAM ACTIVITIES » NINE THINGS TO WATCH



Quarterback Gardner Minshew passed for 3,305 yards and 15 touchdowns last season for the Indianapolis Colts, completing 62.2% of his passes while being intercepted nine times.



Las Vegas Raiders quarterback Aidan O'Connell had an 83.9% passing rating as a rookie last season, completing 62.1% of his passes for 2,218 yards and 12 touchdowns with seven interceptions.

Which way will they throw?

By VIC TAFUR and TASHAN REED

The schedule is in, and now the Las Vegas Raiders have a little less than four months to get ready for the season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers. They have workouts the next three weeks before a three-day minicamp starting June 11. After that, the Raiders will be off until veterans report to training camp on July 23 in Costa Mesa, Calif.

Here's what we will be watching.

The quarterback competition

It'll be a two-way battle between second-year quarterback Aidan O'Connell and veteran journeyman Gardner Minshew II. O'Connell is the incumbent starter and will hold that role to start OTAs, but Minshew will have every opportunity to win the job. "Aidan has already kind of taken the bull by the horns and he's leading the way, and Minshew's right there doing it as well," coach Antonio Pierce said earlier this month. "We're going to stick to the process but, as I said before, Aidan's earned the right to go out there and get the first snap."

The Raiders attempted to trade up in the first round of the NFL draft to take a quarterback but failed to complete a deal. After the Chicago Bears, Washington Commanders and New England Patriots all stayed put and drafted quarterbacks with the top three picks, they stayed at No. 13 and drafted tight end Brock Bowers.

"If we felt there was a quarterback out there that was better than we had, or could potentially be better, certainly we would have done something," general manager Tom Telesco said after the draft. "But it didn't line up."

That leaves O'Connell, 26, and Minshew, 28, to duke it out through OTAs and training camp. It's possible neither player ends up being the long-term solution at quarterback. Both were mostly mediocre over double-digit starts last season. Still, the Raiders are hopeful that one of them will at least be able to play at a solid level in 2024.

Who starts to separate themselves at cornerback?

The Raiders have not signed a free-agent cornerback yet so that leaves Brandon Facyson trying to hold off Jakorian Bennett and a pair of draft picks for one starting spot. Jack Jones will be the starter on the other side and Nate Hobbs is expected to be in the slot. Facyson missed 13 games last season with a knee injury but started nine games in 2021 and four for the Indianapolis Colts in '22. Pierce said he has been impressed by second-year player Bennett this offseason, but the Raiders still drafted Decamerion Richardson in the fourth round (and M.J. DeVore in the seventh).

Richardson is 6-foot-2 and ran a 4.3 40-yard dash.

"And then when you talk to him, you're talking about a guy that just loves ball, all ball, all ball," Pierce said two weeks ago at rookie camp. "He's about ball and his horse here. He's a sponge, and we can mold him to what we want."

"When we looked at the draft, we wanted to get bigger, we wanted to get longer, we wanted to get faster and we wanted to get tougher, and he fits all those."

The Raiders signed QB Gardner Minshew in free agency, but incumbent Aidan O'Connell will get first crack at the starting job.



Georgia tight end Brock Bowers (19) breaks away from UAB linebacker Nikita Eason Jr. to score a touchdown after catching a pass during a game on Sept. 23, 2023, in Athens, Ga.

Makeup of the interior O-line

The Raiders appear set to start Kolton Miller at left tackle, Andre James at center, Dylan Parham and Jackson Powers-Johnson at guard and Thayer Munford Jr. at right tackle. Cody Whitehair and Andrew Peat will provide depth at guard. Peat can also play offensive tackle and could serve as the swing tackle if rookie offensive tackle DJ Glaze isn't up to the task.

What's yet to be determined is on which side of the line Parham and Powers-Johnson will line up. Parham started the last two years at left guard but could switch to right guard. Powers-Johnson spent most of his time at Oregon lined up at right guard and center, but he was working at left guard during rookie minicamp. It wouldn't be surprising if the coaching staff worked each player at both spots as they determine the best fit.

Peat, a former Pro Bowl selection with the New Orleans Saints, will work on the left side, according to Pierce.

The implementation of Luke Getzy's offense

Getzy ran the ball a lot with the Bears last season, and Pierce has often said that's an important part of the game to them, so don't expect the Raiders to suddenly start throwing the ball 20 times a week to Davante Adams and Brock Bowers. They will line up in a lot of 12 personnel with two tight ends, now that they have Bowers and Michael Mayer, and Bowers will also line up in the slot, outside and even in the backfield.

Getzy was the passing game coordinator with Adams and Aaron Rodgers back in

Green Bay, so there is some creativity buried there. And obviously, when the Raiders hired Getzy after the Bears fired him, it's clear they thought quarterback Justin Fields was the problem in Chicago and not Getzy.

How Bowers is used alongside Michael Mayer

Bowers was listed as a tight end but lined up all over the place during his career at Georgia. He played 52.5% of his snaps as a slot receiver, 36.6% as an inline tight end, 9.5 percent as an outside receiver and he even logged snaps in the backfield as an H-back. Assistant GM Champ Kelly referred to Bowers as a "playmaker and offensive weapon," which indicates that Getzy plans to use him in a similar fashion.

The Raiders don't plan to just park Mayer, their 2023 second-round pick, on the bench. His statistics weren't eye-popping, but he came on strong as a receiver and blocker their skill set changes defensively what you like to do and what you want to do. Hopefully, our 12 personnel will do that this season."

"Both of them can do a lot of things for you," Pierce said. "But, more importantly, who's matching up on the other side against us? Is it a linebacker, is it a safety, is it a nickel, is it a corner? ... Their body types and their skill set changes defensively what you like to do and what you want to do. Hopefully, our 12 personnel will do that this season."

What other rookies can crack the lineup?

Besides Bowers and Powers-Johnson, the Raiders hope Glaze and Robinson also develop into starters one day, though that will

be tough this fall. Pierce has also been effusive in his praise for fifth-round pick Tommy Eichenberg out of Ohio State.

"Old school football, smash mouth, no fare dodging, preying on the lead, leader, captain, green dot," Pierce said. "He played in a system and on a team that has won, has been close to winning national championships and been there, played some really good players. But more important is presence. When you walk around, you feel a linebacker. He feels and looks like a linebacker. And he creates more size for us and depth."

"I mean you look at guys like Robert Spillane, you look at (D'Vine) Dabie, look at Luke Masterson and what they've been able to do, get this young guy in here with those guys and let him grow and learn from them, the future is bright."

Is Zanir White the bell cow?

White certainly looked like a lead back when he stepped in for an injured Josh Jacobs and started the final four games last season. He had 84 carries (7-first) for 397 yards (third) during that span. Despite that, the Raiders still felt they needed to bring back Ameer Abdullah, sign No. 2 running back Alexander Mattison and draft their third-down back of the future in Dylan Laube this offseason.

Telesco believes in a running-back-by-committee approach, but it'll be up to the coaching staff to determine how each is deployed. If the other running backs aren't as effective as White, they won't shy away from feeding him the ball.

Can defense improve and can that chemistry carry Raiders?

Not only did the Raiders hold onto defensive coordinator Patrick Graham, but they're returning nine of 11 starters from a defense that was surprisingly good last season. They finished ninth in scoring defense and arguably played like the best defense in the league throughout Pierce's nine-game stretch as interim coach. After adding star defensive tackle Christian Wilkins, this defense has the potential to be great.

The Raiders are lacking an answer at outside cornerback, but that's the defense's only glaring weakness on paper. The defense consistently carried the team last season, but that only resulted in an 8-9 record. They'll need more help from the offense for the team to achieve its goal of making the playoffs.

Is WR room set, or can a guy like Lideatrick Griffin crack it?

Michael Gallup was signed as a free agent, and the former Dallas Cowboys receiver will step into the departed Hunter Renfrow's shoes. He'll add depth alongside Adams, Jakobi Meyers and Tre Tucker and, considering all the tight ends they have (Bowers, Meyer and Harrison Bryant), the former Cleveland Browns backup whom the Raiders gave \$2.9 million guaranteed, most of the playing time and targets are probably accounted for.

But keep your eye on Lideatrick "Talu" Griffin.

The undrafted, 5-foot-10 rookie out of Mississippi State caught seven passes for 236 yards in a game last season and led college football with a kickoff return average of 32.3 yards in 2022.