

Broncos preview 2018: Veteran play-caller Bill Musgrave counted on to improve offense

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

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His playing and coaching careers have taken him to all four time zones over the past 33 years, but Bill Musgrave's Denver Post Gold Helmet Award has stayed put in Grand Junction.

"It's in the family room at my folks' house," he said during a recent interview. "Right next to my little brother's."

In 1985, Bill won the award, given out annually to the state's top high school player since 1951, followed by his brother, Doug, in 1987.

Musgrave returned to his home state last year as the Broncos' quarterbacks coach before serving as offensive coordinator for the final six games. Now in the full-time role and with several new players at his disposal, Musgrave's experience and creativity are being counted on to give the Broncos hope for a worst-to-first season.

Musgrave's first task is to reverse a decline. The offense went from second in scoring in 2014 to 19th, 22nd and 27th. The quarterbacks, coordinators and tailbacks changed and the results kept getting worse. Enter Musgrave, who is a full-time coordinator in the NFL for the fifth time.

"He has a good feel for who does what the best and getting the quarterback in the best situations to take advantage of their strengths," said general manager John Elway, whom Musgrave backed up at quarterback in 1995-96. "He's very flexible. He's had a wide variety of coaches he's worked with so he has a lot of depth with offensive football."

It will be up to Musgrave to put new quarterback Case Keenum in the best situations and also trust several young players who have never taken a snap in a regular season game — tailback Royce Freeman, tight end Jake Butt and receivers Courtland Sutton and DaeSean Hamilton — to make plays when defenses pay extra attention to veteran receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

Musgrave's approach appears to be more cerebral than bombast. During training camp practices, his voice could never be heard. If he was upset, he didn't show it. But if there was a teaching point to be made, he stuck his head into the huddle.

"Billy's a great communicator, especially on game day," head coach Vance Joseph said. "As he calls the play, he kind of explains the play to the quarterback. He's very calm and provides easy plays for the quarterback."

Relayed Joseph's analysis about his communication skills, Musgrave said: "I'm not sure that's a strength, but I really enjoy the teaching component because players are like students, they learn differently and one of the challenges as coaches is to find out how they learn best."

If the second preseason game is any indication, Musgrave will provide multiple looks to challenge defenses. In three series with Keenum, Musgrave used five different personnel groupings, including those with two backs and two tight ends. He likes having fullback Andy Janovich. He likes using Butt or starting tight end Jeff Heurman in the backfield. And he really likes using pre-snap movement.

But the emergence of Sutton could allow Musgrave to use a base “11” (three receiver/one back/one tight end) offense. That falls in line with his last year in Oakland (2016), when he had Amari Cooper, Michael Crabtree and Seth Roberts.

In his final game as the Raiders’ play-caller — against Houston in the playoffs — Musgrave used “11” personnel on 68 of 73 snaps. But there were many variations. Sometimes, the tight end was a sixth offensive lineman to help pass protect. He would also empty the backfield and put the tailback in the slot.

“It’s a concept-based offense so we’re not going to put in 1,000 new plays,” Broncos receivers coach Zach Azzanni said. “It will be a lot of the same plays, but run 1,000 different ways.”

Broncos cornerback Chris Harris said the defense used to “hate” facing Musgrave’s offenses in Oakland.

“We used to call him, ‘Mad Scientist,’ ” Harris said.

Musgrave has been in the lab since he chose Oregon over Yale out of high school.

“Just wanted to see how I stacked up in the Pac-10,” Musgrave said.

Musgrave set 15 school records for the Ducks and his pro football resume includes many of the sport’s luminaries.

Musgrave was drafted by Jimmy Johnson (Dallas, 1991). He backed up Joe Montana (San Francisco, 1991), Steve Young (San Francisco, 1993-94) and Elway. His bosses have included George Seifert (Carolina, 1999-2000), Joe Gibbs (Washington, 2005) and Chip Kelly (Philadelphia, 2014). His time as a 49ers player also overlapped with offensive coordinator Mike Shanahan before he was hired as the Broncos’ coach.

“The gentlemen I’ve worked for, whether it’s been (Shanahan), Joe Gibbs, Al Groh (at Virginia), Mike Smith (in Atlanta), Ray Rhodes (in Philadelphia), I’ve been very fortunate,” Musgrave said. “I learned that there are just so many different ways to skin a cat.”

Musgrave has coached quarterbacks Matt Ryan, Derek Carr and Nick Foles and coordinated offenses that included receiver Percy Harvin and tailback Adrian Peterson in Minnesota and 1,000-yard receiving seasons from Jimmy Smith and Muhsin Muhammad in Jacksonville and Carolina, respectively. The Broncos hope all of those experiences help Musgrave lead a much needed offensive revival.

“Like anyone who is a veteran coach, we think we can play all of the instruments,” tight ends coach Geep Chryst said. “But Billy can. He’s been around the block a couple of times.”

Broncos coach Vance Joseph quickly moves on from Paxton Lynch

By Ryan O'Halloran

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Broncos coach Vance Joseph had to answer one final Paxton Lynch question after Monday's practice. And he was ready with a response.

"Paxton's gone — that story is gone with him," Joseph said. "We have a big game Sunday (against Seattle). We have three quarterbacks we feel good about. That story should be gone with (Lynch). I wish him well."

While the Broncos went through their first practice since establishing a 53-man roster, the NFL Network reported Lynch, who cleared waivers to make him a free agent, was on his way to Buffalo and a workout with the Bills.

The Broncos gave up on Lynch, their 2016 first-round pick, after four career starts when they claimed Washington Redskins quarterback Kevin Hogan on Sunday. Hogan is third on the depth chart behind Case Keenum and Chad Kelly.

Hogan flew from Washington to Denver on Sunday night.

"Kind of a whirlwind," Hogan said. "But good to be out here."

The Broncos are Hogan's fourth team since entering the NFL in 2016. He was drafted and released by Cleveland, signed by Kansas City, traded to and waived by the Redskins and acquired by the Broncos.

Hogan said learning so many offenses in a short period of time helps "a little bit" with the transition.

"You start to see some familiarity," he said. "A lot of teams, if (another team) has success with plays, they'll try to replicate that. For me, it's trying to learn what's different and feel comfortable with it."

Hogan was 43-of-67 passing for 462 yards, five touchdowns, two interceptions and a 96.7 rating for the Redskins this preseason. He completed 7-of-9 pass attempts for 88 yards and two touchdowns against the Broncos on Aug. 24, perhaps placing him on general manager John Elway's radar.

The Redskins waived Hogan when they decided to go with two quarterbacks (Alex Smith and Colt McCoy).

"I felt like I went out and made some plays, was able to move the ball and was efficient," Hogan said. "Things didn't work out in Washington, but I'm glad I'm here. First day in the books, and I'm excited about it."

Royce Freeman will be Broncos' first starting rookie running back since Terrell Davis

By Kyle Fredrickson

Denver Post

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The Broncos welcomed their 2018 rookie class to the NFL with a series of introductions this summer at team headquarters. A chance for first-year players to adapt and coaches to observe.

Second-round wide receiver Courtland Sutton recalled one specific meeting when rookies discussed game strategy. Up next, third-round running back Royce Freeman, a 6-foot, 229-pound, elusive battering ram with 60 collegiate rushing touchdowns to his name at Oregon.

Freeman was asked to describe his favorite play.

"The Power. ... I like to punish people."

"As soon I heard him say that," Sutton said, "I was like, 'We're gonna be good.'"

A first impression was validated Monday, the opening practice with Denver's completed 53-man roster intact, when coach Vance Joseph confirmed Freeman will start when the Broncos hosts Seattle in Sunday's regular-season opener. Freeman is on track to become the first Broncos rookie running back to start since 1995, when Hall of Famer Terrell Davis ran for 70 yards and a touchdown in his Broncos debut. No pressure.

"It's an honor to be mentioned with a man of that caliber and a player with that type of legacy around here," Freeman said. "It just makes you want to work harder."

Freeman needed just 15 total preseason carries over three games to prove he belonged atop the depth chart. He showcased explosion with 5.6 yards per run and three touchdowns, sure hands out of the backfield and attention to detail as an every-down blocker. Devontae Booker and Phillip Lindsay proved more suited as third-down or situational running backs with speed and exceptional pass-catching ability.

Joseph said the starting decision came down to "maturity" and that Freeman "can carry the load from a physical standpoint and mental standpoint." Those are words typically used to describe veteran players. Freeman turns just 23 in February. Then again, few positions in the NFL are less experience-dependent than running back.

Rookies were named NFL rushing champions in consecutive seasons — 2017 Kareem Hunt (1,327), 2016 Ezekiel Elliott (1,631) — and dating to 2012, 15 rookies have rushed at least 200 times and nine reached 1,000 yards. First-year running backs have discovered success in Denver over the years, too, with Clinton Portis (2002), Mike Anderson (2000), Olandis Gary (1999), Davis (1995) and Bobby Humphrey (1989) each eclipsing 1,000 yards rushing as rookies.

This season, Freeman is one of four NFL running backs expected to start, or contribute significantly, beginning in Week 1. He joins Saquon Barkley (Giants), Rashaad Penny (Seahawks) and Kerryon Johnson (Lions).

When asked why rookie running backs can adapt so quickly, Freeman said: "I think it's just dedication, getting into the playbook and hard work. Nobody wants anything given to them." A mentality Freeman displayed throughout Broncos practices and preseason games.

"We put on film and we're watching receivers stuff and you see Coach point out: 'Look how hard this guy (Freeman) is going. He knows how to practice,'" Sutton said. "To have a rookie who comes in who already knows how to do that, I think a lot of people in our class are already like that. I think we're turning a lot of heads."

Lindsay, a former Pac-12 rival with Freeman in college, added: "It's not a surprise to me."

Freeman reacted to Monday's depth chart news with a stoic demeanor. He repeatedly thanked teammates and coaches before pointing the conversation back to his need for improvement. As he told fellow rookies back in summer, there's just one thing he's interested in this season.

Punishing opponents.

First up, Seattle.

YOUNG GUNS

The top-producing rookie Broncos' running backs in team history.

Year; Player; Single-season rushing yards

2002; Clinton Portis; 1,508

2000; Mike Anderson; 1,487

1999; Olandis Gary; 1,159

1989; Bobby Humphrey; 1,151

1995; Terrell Davis; 1,117

The top-producing rookie NFL running backs in league history.

Year; Player; Team; Single-season rushing yards

1983; Eric Dickerson; Rams; 1,808

1981; George Rogers; Saints; 1,674

2016; Ezekiel Elliott; Cowboys; 1,631

2012; Alfred Morris; Redskins; 1,613

1979; Otis Anderson; Cardinals; 1,605

Broncos preview 2018: Veteran O-Line presence brings stability and production up front

By Kyle Fredrickson

Denver Post

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Connor McGovern is like many third-year NFL offensive linemen. Often dominant but just as often out-of-step adjusting to the demands of moving 300-pound rushers out of the way.

But in the heat of Broncos' training camp, when the 25-year-old Denver right guard returned to the sidelines with the first-team offensive line, a pair of voices brought clarity to his confusion.

"You come back after a four-play set and (teammates) remember every single play and every single thing that happened on the play," McGovern said. "With those guys, you come back and talk through everything, and the next time you see it, you get it right."

Those photographic memories belong to left guard Ronald Leary and right tackle Jared Veldheer, both veterans. If Denver hopes to plug a leaky front that allowed 52 sacks last season, the health and leadership of Leary and Veldheer are essential. Leary, 29, and Veldheer, 31, have combined to play 15 years and start 159 regular season games.

One could argue a worst-to-first turnaround for the Broncos is only possible if the culture change starts in the trenches. It's exactly why the Broncos brought in Sean Kugler as the new offensive line coach (guards/centers) to lead in tandem with assistant Chris Strausser (tackles).

"We're ironing out all the little mistakes as we go along," Leary said. "We can become a great up-tempo team."

The groundwork for improvement starts with consistency, something Denver has lacked up front the past two years. The Broncos, bit by the injury bug a season ago, started four different right tackles, two left guards and two right guards. Leary missed the final five games with a back issue. Denver acquired Veldheer in the offseason from the Cardinals.

When healthy, the pecking order along the line is clear, with left tackle Garrett Bolles, Leary at left guard, center Matt Paradis, McGovern at right guard and Veldheer at right tackle. The Broncos also believe they are developing quality depth, especially with players such as fourth-year pro Max Garcia, who trained at center and both guard slots during training camp.

But it's Paradis who anchors the group with 51 consecutive starts.

"I love playing with Matt," quarterback Case Keenum said. "He's on top of his game. He's excellent pre-snap identifying defenses. He does a heck of a job getting those guys all on the same page. It's been a nice security blanket for me as a quarterback to know that he's taking care of a lot of the protection stuff. In the heat of the battle, it's nice to have a guy you can lean on like that."

On the opposite side of that spectrum is the up-and-down track record of Bolles. Denver's No. 20 overall pick in the 2017 NFL draft started every game during a wobbly rookie season. His 10 holding penalties were the most by any NFL player last season. Broncos' coaches still have high expectations of what he can do, however.

"(Bolles) did a nice job this offseason and really, it was the first true offseason he's had," Strausser told The Denver Post. "His rookie year, there was a lot of stuff he was trying to figure out. For him to have a full offseason and be focused and get locked into what his goals were, he made some good progress. It helps him to be somewhere for a second year and to hear the same language and play with the same guys. But he still, at this point, he has some rookie instincts stuff he will work through."

Lining up beside Leary every snap should help expedite the learning process.

"Ron is a big calming presence," Kugler told The Denver Post. "Ron's the type of guy that won't go over there and chew him out; he's going to go over and say, 'Here's what we did wrong, let's correct it for the next (play).' That's really good for a young player like Garrett."

If Keenum is truly the quarterback savior that Broncos' fans envision, then he must stay healthy and be equipped with a running game that keeps opposing defenses honest, such as happened in Minnesota a year ago.

"When you have five guys you feel good about, it allows you to play five together for a long period of time so you can gain some chemistry, so you can play well together," head coach Vance Joseph said. "That's key with offensive line play, having great chemistry."

Broncos notes: Hogan happy he's a Bronco, captain Case, Carlos speaks

By Mike Klis
9 News
Sept. 4, 2018

Kevin Hogan has appeared in eight regular-season games through his first two NFL seasons and his team lost them all.

Don't blame Hogan. His team was the Cleveland Browns who went a combined 1-31 the previous two years.

To the Broncos, they consider this negative experience to be a positive. To wit: Hogan got knocked around, as all Browns quarterbacks did, and yet not only survived to play for a third season, he played well during the recent preseason for Washington.

In one of those preseason games, Hogan threw two, fourth quarter touchdown passes against the Broncos.

Hogan is a Bronco now after the team claimed him on waivers Sunday.

"I'm just really happy to be here," Hogan said after his first Broncos practice Monday. "I had a great first day today. I got to meet everyone -- the players and the coaches. I have a great room in the QB room and a great locker room here, so I'm just excited. I kind of got my feet under me at practice and walked through tempo stuff."

Hogan begins as the team's No. 3 quarterback behind Case Keenum and Chad Kelly. When he learns the playbook and offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave's system, Hogan is expected to push the zero-experienced Kelly for the Broncos' No. 2 QB position.

"I like what they do," Hogan said. "Just watching Case and Chad in the locker room today, it's a really cool system. I can't wait to go out there, try it and learn the basics, first, so that I can go out there and execute."

Captain Case, Captain Todd

Broncos' players voted on team captains Monday. The offensive captains were Keenum and center Matt Paradis, the defensive will be led by inside linebacker Todd Davis and outside linebacker Von Miller and the special teams' captains were kicker Brandon McManus and Andy Janovich.

Miller and McManus are repeat captains. Keenum got the most votes. Davis got the loudest ovation from his teammates when his captaincy was announced.

Considering the Denver D also includes the likes of Chris Harris Jr., Derek Wolfe, Domata Peko Sr. and Brandon Marshall, Davis' award is impressive.

“For me, it’s a huge honor for this great group of guys to see me as somebody that’s a leader and somebody that they’ll follow into battle,” Davis said. “That’s huge for me. Now I just have to step up, continue to be that guy that works hard every single day—day-in and day-out—and do my best for all of my guys in the locker room.”

Carlos reprieve

Not many third-round draft picks have had a slower start to an NFL career than Broncos receiver Carlos Henderson. But he knows it could be worse. He could be former Broncos receiver Carlos Henderson.

“Whatever the team wants me to do, I’m just ready to help the team,” Henderson said in the Broncos’ locker room Monday. “I’m ready to give it all for the team. I’m lucky to be here, glad to be here. Appreciate them for welcoming me back.”

Henderson had a shaky rookie offseason in 2017 to the point when he struggled in the preseason opener at Chicago, the team was quick to place him on season-ending injured reserve with a thumb injury that did require surgery.

Soon after the season, he was arrested in Louisiana on a marijuana possession charge – which led to the league suspending him for one game.

For a while, it seemed doubtful Henderson would never serve his penalty. Bothered by a hamstring during the offseason, Henderson did not report to Broncos’ training camp on July 24. He stayed away four weeks before informing general manager John Elway he was ready to play football again.

“It was some personal stuff I was dealing with,” Henderson said. “There was just some stuff, but I got it together and everything’s good now.”

Henderson stayed away from the team until Sunday when Elway and head coach Vance Joseph showed some compassion for the 23-year-old by bringing him back on to the practice squad.

It’s the bottom, but it’s inside the building. He marked the occasion by wearing his Sunday’s best suit to the locker room.

However, he was immediately put on the practice squad/suspended list where for one week he can attend meetings and workout in the weight room but can’t practice. A great place to start, in other words.

“I want to see Carlos grow up,” Joseph said. “I want to see Carlos do NFL things—have great meetings, have great practices, have great days in the weight room. Just do those things first for us.

“Obviously, the football player Carlos, he’s talented, so that part I don’t worry about. I want him to grow up and become a pro.”

Bronco Bits

Now former Broncos quarterback Paxton Lynch cleared waivers Monday, which was expected because a claim would have meant his new team picking up his \$1.311 million fully-guaranteed salary this year and \$600,000 guaranteed of a \$1.74 million salary next year.

Now, Lynch is a free agent which means a team can sign him for a \$630,000 salary with the Broncos picking up the rest. Lynch has visits scheduled with five teams, beginning with Buffalo on Tuesday. ...

Broncos' No. 3 cornerback Tramaine Brock was excused from practice Monday to attend to a family matter. He will be back for the next practice Wednesday.

Rookie starting running back Royce Freeman honored in low-key way

By Mike Klis
9 News
Sept. 4, 2018

For a rookie, Royce Freeman sure was grown up about it.

He was told Monday morning before the start of practice that he was now the Broncos' No. 1 running back, which means starting in the season opener Sunday against the Seattle Seahawks. Asked repeatedly, in various ways, what it meant to him and how it felt, Freeman spoke in a low monotone accompanied by flatline-like emotion.

"It's an honor," he said, finally flashing a humble smile. "Just like anything to be named a starter for this football team definitely is something that means a lot to me but I feel like I have to go out there and work hard."

Freeman will be the Broncos' first rookie running back to start week 1 since Terrell Davis in 1995. Davis had a sensational four-year run that led to two Super Bowl titles and eventual induction into Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"It's an honor to be mentioned with men of that caliber, with players with that type of legacy around here," Freeman said. "It makes you want to work harder and honestly, take it day by day and not get too far ahead of yourself."

Freeman replaces Devontae Booker, the third-year back who had been the starter through the first three preseason games. Which was news to Booker.

"I haven't really heard anything about it," Booker said. "I don't know. I'm supportive either way, I'll just go out there and do my job and continue to be me."

Freeman was a four-year starter for the Oregon Ducks, who averaged 1,405 yards and 15 touchdowns a season. The Broncos took him with their No. 71 overall draft pick in the third round, a slot that gave him a \$997,020 signing bonus and \$480,000 first-year salary.

In the preseason, Freeman rushed for 84 yards and three touchdowns on 15 carries for a 5.6-yard average. Booker rushed for 33 yards on 9 carries for a 3.7-yard average. His two-year career average is 3.6 yards per carry.

Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said he would use all three backs – Freeman, Booker in passing downs and undrafted rookie Phillip Lindsay – against a Seattle defense that ranked 19th against the run last year with 114 yards a game.

But for the estimated 59.3 million people who played in a fantasy football league last year, Freeman is your guy. Don't worry about his youth. In fact, embrace it. The league's leading rushing rusher last year

was Kansas City rookie Kareem Hunt. The league's rushing title in 2016 went to Dallas rookie Ezekiel Elliott. Rams rookie Todd Gurley II was the third-leading rusher in 2015.

The Broncos had no qualms about giving Freeman starter responsibility.

"First of all, his maturity," Joseph said. "He can carry the load from a physical standpoint and a mental standpoint. He was really good in pass pro, so that's your biggest worry about having a young halfback playing with a veteran quarterback—it's the pass-pro issues. He's shown the IQ and the maturity to be a great pass-pro guy, on third downs especially."

Case Keenum to get first real taste of new job in Broncos' opener

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Since John Elway threw his last pass as the Denver Broncos quarterback during Super Bowl XXXIII in January 1999, six different quarterbacks have started the team's season openers that have followed.

As the guy whom Elway the general manager has selected to repair the Broncos' quarterback troubles, Case Keenum will be the seventh on Sunday as the Broncos open the 2018 season at home against the Seattle Seahawks.

"Case, he's been the guy everybody hoped he was," Broncos linebacker Von Miller said. "He's been in charge, you can tell, that leader. He knows what to do and how to do it. He's ready for playing here."

While Peyton Manning signing as a free agent as a Pro Football Hall of Famer-in-waiting might always be the gold standard of arrivals in the post-Elway era for the Broncos, the expectations swirling around Keenum aren't all that far behind what they were for Manning. And some of it is might simply be the situation Keenum now finds himself in.

He was selected, after all, by Elway, chosen as the quarterback of the (near) future after the Broncos suffered through the misery of a 5-11 season in 2017 that included an eight-game losing streak. And losing seasons are not something the team's faithful have had to deal with that much -- or have much patience about, for that matter.

The Broncos have been to more Super Bowls during Pat Bowlen's tenure as the owner than they have had losing seasons, and they haven't had back-to-back losing seasons since 1971-1972.

"You know when you get here what kind of history, what kind of tradition the team has," Keenum said. "Everybody knows I wore [Elway's] jersey when I was a kid, had his pictures on my wall. But you walk through the building and you know, right away, what's expected, and that's exactly the kind of situation I want to be in."

The inaugural voyages have gone pretty well for the post-Elway starters. Of the six quarterbacks to have started the combined 19 season openers since Elway's retirement, only Brian Griese didn't win his first opening day start with the team.

However, Griese, with three touchdown passes and no interceptions in a 38-21 loss to the Miami Dolphins to start the 1999 season, might have actually had the best day as a passer in those games. But Jake Plummer, Jay Cutler, Kyle Orton, Manning and Trevor Siemian won their first opening day starts with the Broncos.

And Plummer, Orton and Manning all had arrived to the team as the "new" guy, like Keenum, either by trade (Orton) or free agency (Plummer and Manning).

"You just want to come in and show guys you're ready to work, you're ready to fight for them, no matter what," Plummer said. "You get to know guys as time goes on, but right away, you want them to know you'll work your ass off and that no matter what you'll compete as hard as you can, even when it doesn't go right. I think Case is that kind of player."

Both Elway and head coach Vance Joseph have said Keenum's bumpy ride in the NFL, to go with his experience in the playoffs, was what appealed to them as the Broncos starter.

Keenum has been waived three times in his career, been traded and waited until now, his sixth NFL season, to be a team's unquestioned starter in a season opener. He is coming off his best season as a professional, when he threw for 3,547 yards and 22 touchdowns in 15 games for the Minnesota Vikings in relief of the injured Sam Bradford.

"He's just been through some things," Joseph said. "He knows the job comes with tough things, and you have to have the mentality to recover from tough things."

Keenum offered his take.

"It has shaped me," Keenum said. "You work, you study, you just keep competing, trying to get better. You believe in yourself and no matter what you keep competing. That's the job, beyond moving the chains and scoring points: You work, you compete and you want to be a part of winning."

Royce Freeman, the rookie RB who loves to inflict pain on defenders, lands at No. 1 on Broncos' depth chart

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
Sept. 4, 2018

Maybe age is just a number. It is to the Broncos, because the team with the youngest running back corps in the league just appointed the youngest rusher in the room to be its new No. 1.

Royce Freeman, 22, moved up to the top spot on the team's revised depth chart, becoming the first rookie to start at the position since Hall of Famer Terrell Davis in 1995.

"He can carry the load from a physical standpoint and a mental standpoint," coach Vance Joseph said. "He was really good in pass (protection), so that's your biggest worry about having a young halfback playing with a veteran quarterback — it's the pass-pro issues. He's shown the IQ and the maturity to be a great pass-pro guy, on third downs especially."

Devontae Booker, a fourth-round pick and most veteran Broncos back, was listed as the team's No. 1 rusher at the start of camp primarily because of his two years' experience and six starts.

But his production never matched the coaching staff's praise. In 29 games over the past two seasons, Booker totaled 911 yards and five rushing touchdowns and averaged 3.6 yards per carry.

The switch to Freeman puts the rookie in a position that many believed he would assume for the start of the season, if not early in the year, as the Broncos targeted a different mold of player in the draft and hit their mark with many of their selections.

The Broncos' class of 2018, including undrafted rookie back Phillip Lindsay, put many players on notice. After roster cuts, those rookies have solidified their places on the team entering Week 1. Freeman is one of two true starters this year, along with outside linebacker Bradley Chubb.

"It's an honor," Freeman said. "To be named a starter for a football team is definitely something that means a lot to me. Now, I just have to go out there and work hard."

At 229 pounds, Freeman has the power of a linebacker combined with 4.5 speed, a knack for shedding tackles and a nose for contact. When he was formally introduced at Dove Valley in April, he told a crowd of reporters that his style is predicated on delivering the blow to defenders. His emphasis, as taught by his former college running backs coach, Donte' Pimbleton, is "to inflict pain."

"Royce is just a guy who wants to come in and work," said receiver and fellow rookie Courtland Sutton. "From Day 1, I remember we went to some introduction thing and, it's funny, they were asking Royce what his favorite run play was, and he was like, 'The power. ... I like to punish people.'"

"I soon as I heard that, I was like, we're gonna be good. We're going to be fine."

Freeman's numbers in college offered the Broncos the hope that he could hit the 1,000-yard mark, and perhaps even exceed it, in his first year. Denver has had three 1,000-yard backs over the past 10 years and none in consecutive seasons. C.J. Anderson was the last, barely crossing the threshold last year with 1,007 yards. Knowshon Moreno had 1,038 in 2013, and Willis McGahee had 1,199 in 2011.

Since the NFL-AFL merger in 1970, two Broncos rookies have cracked the top 10 in first-year rushing yards: Clinton Portis ranked seventh with 1,508 yards in 2002, and Mike Anderson was eighth with 1,487 in 2000.

Freeman averaged more than 1,400 yards a season at Oregon. He was also the Ducks' all-team leader in rushing yards (5,621), all-purpose yards (6,435), rushing touchdowns (60), carries (947), total touchdowns (64), points scored (384) and 100-yard games (31).

He left Oregon ranked among the NCAA's all-time rushing yardage leaders.

Although Freeman's massive workload in college might have given some teams pause before the draft, it gave the Broncos proof and hope.

"He had a lot of work, and he stayed healthy through the work," Joseph said. "That's an issue for most young backs. Can they carry the load for 16 weeks? I think with his background, his body type, he should be able to carry the load for 16 weeks."

Although Booker drops on the depth chart, backs' playing time is dependent on the weekly game plans. The Broncos have packages for each, especially for Lindsay, who has impressed with his ability to catch passes out of the backfield, but also for Booker, who is likely to be in on third downs, Joseph said.

For now, though, it's Freeman, a rookie whose durability and production are paramount to the Broncos' revamped offense, leading the way.

Freeman's response: "It makes me want to work harder."

Adam Jones, Phillip Lindsay highlight number changes

By Troy Renck
KMGH
Sept. 4, 2018

With the Broncos roster set, players began playing the numbers game Monday.

Several players switched jersey numbers, most notably cornerback Adam Jones and running back Phillip Lindsay. With future Hall of Famer Champ Bailey's blessing, Jones switched to No. 24. Jones is the first to don the digits since Bailey left the Broncos following the 2013 season. Bailey said on his Instagram account last week that he was cool with Jones wearing the number. Jones looked up to Bailey, and wore No. 24 in previous NFL stops because of him.

The 34-year-old figures to have a role Sunday on special teams, returning punts and kicks, and in subpackages defensively.

Lindsay, a former CU star, wore No. 2 in training camp. That is not allowed during the season. He switched to No. 30, made famous by Hall of Famer Terrell Davis.

New quarterback Kevin Hogan, pictured above, is wearing No. 9. Because it will be asked, Hogan is the clear No. 3 on the depth chart behind starter Case Keenum and backup Chad Kelly.

Others who switched: Running back Royce Freeman (No. 28), David Williams (No. 33), safety Trey Marshall (No. 36) and linebacker Josey Jewell (No. 47).

Footnotes

All players were accounted for at practice, save for cornerback Tramaine Brock. He was excused because of a personal issue. The Broncos officially added outside linebacker Jeff Holland and guard Avery Gennesy. Receiver Carlos Henderson will be added after he serves his one-game suspension this week.

Royce Freeman named Broncos starter in first release of depth chart

By Troy Renck
KMGH
Sept. 4, 2018

What preseason games screamed, the depth chart confirmed.

The Broncos will start Royce Freeman at running back in the season opener, a source told Denver7. The rookie moved ahead of Devontae Booker with a strong exhibition performance. He finished with three touchdowns, including two of more than 20 yards. Booker continued to show the inability to break tackles or make a defender miss at the line of scrimmage, a criticism that has dogged him since his rookie season.

I have been writing that Freeman was expected to be the top guy for more than a week. Monday, it became official.

"First of all, his maturity. He can carry the load from a physical standpoint and a mental standpoint," coach Vance Joseph said. "He was really good in pass pro, so that's your biggest worry about having a young halfback playing with a veteran quarterback—it's the pass-pro issues. He's shown the IQ and the maturity to be a great pass-pro guy, on third downs especially."

He will become the Broncos first rookie runningback to start the opener since Terrell Davis in 1995. In his debut against Buffalo, Davis rushed 20 times for 70 yards and one touchdown.

"It's an honor to be mentioned with him," Freeman said. "You have to tell yourself that you belong."

Freeman rushed 84 yards on 15 carries, a 5.6 average. Booker has compiled 3.6 yards per attempt in the first two years of his career. The Broncos are leaning heavily on the 2018 draft to execute a U-turn and camouflage more 2017 mistakes than Revlon. As Denver looks to ramp up an offense that averaged 18.1 points per game last season, rookies Courtland Sutton, DaeSean Hamilton, Freeman will boast prominent roles.

Joseph insisted over the past week that the starting running back is a matter of semantics. He expects Freeman and Booker to play. However, Freeman's ascension is notable. He was drafted with the idea that he could replace 1,000-yard rusher C.J. Anderson. He has done nothing to quell the optimism since the Broncos selected him the third round out of Oregon, where he left school as one of the most accomplished offensive players.

Broncos name captains

A new team featured new captains: (Offense) Case Keenum, Matt Paradis; (Defense) Von Miller, Todd Davis; (Special Teams) Brandon McManus, Andy Janovich.

Broncos make rookie Royce Freeman starting running back

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
Sept. 4, 2018

Royce Freeman is set to become the first rookie running back to start a season opener for the Denver Broncos since Hall of Famer Terrell Davis in 1995.

"It's an honor to be mentioned with a man of that caliber, a player with that type of legacy around here," Freeman said.

Coach Vance Joseph chose the third-round pick from Oregon as his starter Monday ahead of veteran Devontae Booker and fellow rookie Phillip Lindsay, who coincidentally was handed Davis' old No. 30 jersey.

"That being said, it's going to be by packages, also," Joseph said. "So, Royce is our leading runner, but on third down you'll probably see Booker and obviously having a package for Phillips is going to be important."

Freeman reacted with humility after his position coach, Curtis Modkins, informed him he'd start Sunday against Seattle.

"It's an honor to be named a starter for this football team," Freeman said. "It makes me want to work harder."

Freeman had plenty of miles on his football odometer coming out of Oregon, where he was a four-year starter and rushed 947 times for 5,621 yards and 60 touchdowns in addition to catching 79 passes for 815 yards and four TDs.

General manager John Elway said that proved he's durable, and Freeman also proved his worth as a pass protector for Case Keenum during training camp and the preseason.

Joseph lauded Freeman's maturity, saying he can "carry the load from a physical standpoint and a mental standpoint. He was really good in 'pass-pro.' That's your biggest worry about having a young halfback playing with a veteran quarterback, but he's shown the IQ and the maturity to be a great 'pass-pro' guy."

Joseph said Freeman's build and resume — he packs 238 pounds on his 6-foot frame and started 45 games in college — show he can handle heavy workloads, too.

"That's what he showed at Oregon. He was their main guy. He had a lot of work. He stayed healthy through the work. And that's also an issue for most young backs, can they carry the load for 16 weeks?" Joseph said. "And I think with his background, his body type, he should be able to carry the load for 16 weeks."

Freeman was second-string behind Booker in the preseason, but he led the team with three touchdown runs, one in each of Denver's first three preseason games before sitting out the exhibition finale.

OUT OF SIGHT: Joseph shut down a question about how hard it was to cut a former first-round quarterback when the Broncos jettisoned Paxton Lynch on Sunday.

"Paxton's gone," Joseph said. "So, that story's gone with him.

"We have a big game on Sunday. We have three quarterbacks in our house that we feel good about," Joseph added. "But Paxton, that's gone. That story should be gone with him — I wish him well."

The Broncos on Monday welcomed new No. 3 QB Kevin Hogan, the former Stanford signal caller who replaced Lynch on the roster Sunday and began learning from Keenum and backup Chad Kelly.

"Kevin fits what our quarterbacks look like," Joseph said. "He's an athletic guy. He has a good arm. He's very, very smart. He's fast with the ball. So, he fits the profile of what Chad and Case look like physically. So, he was a good fit for us."

CAPTAINSHIPS: The Broncos elected captains on Monday, including three first-time honorees: linebacker Todd Davis, special teams ace Andy Janovich, and center Matt Paradis.

Other captains are star LB Von Miller, Keenum and kicker Brandon McManus.

"All six guys are deserving the honor and I'm excited about those guys leading our team," Joseph said.

Notes: Third CB Tramaine Brock (personal reasons) was the only player absent from practice, but Joseph said he'll return Wednesday. ... Joseph said he hopes to have S Su'a Cravens back by midseason. Cravens needs arthroscopic surgery on his left knee and went on IR. ... The Broncos brought back WR Carlos Henderson to their practice squad. The 2017 third-round draft pick skipped training camp for personal reasons. "I want to see Carlos grow up," Joseph said. "I want to see Carlos do NFL things and have great meetings, have great practice, have great days in the weight room. Just do those things for us first."

Not many remain among the starters when Seattle and Denver met in Super Bowl XLVIII

By Doug Fitzgerald
Colorado Springs Gazette
Sept. 4, 2018

It hasn't been that long since the Seattle Seahawks trounced the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XLVIII.

In fact, it was 1,674 days ago.

The teams, though, bear little resemblance to the squads that met that afternoon on Feb. 2, 2014 in New Jersey.

Of the Broncos starters (according to pro-football-reference.com), only DeMaryius Thomas remains. The rest are with other teams or out of the NFL.

Quarterback Russell Wilson, wide receiver Doug Baldwin and lineman J.R. Sweezy remain among Seattle's offensive starters. Linebackers K.J. Wright and Bobby Wagner remain on defense. Cornerback Byron Maxwell signed away as a free agent but has since returned. Safety Earl Thomas is holding out for a new contract.

One other Seattle starter, Clinton McDonald, is trying to earn a spot on the Broncos' defensive line, having been signed away from Tampa Bay as a free agent this past offseason.

"He's a unicorn": It's a matter of time for future NFL and Broncos star Courtland Sutton

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
Sept. 4, 2018

They come along only once in a while, rarely enough that it's obvious when they do. They're sudden. They're different. And their God-given physical talent is merely half of the equation.

Courtland Sutton is one. He pops, then he beams. He's Clinton Portis, Chris Harris Jr., Brandon Marshall, the wide receiver. There's a spirit and enthusiasm about them, noticeable when and even long before they suit up in pads.

"Courtland, he's got life in him," said Steve Stigall, director of football operations at Southern Methodist, where Sutton played four seasons before he was drafted in the second round by the Broncos.

"He's a unicorn," Stigall said. "Guys like him, there's just not many."

Put it this way: Sutton has yet to make an NFL catch — that's coming Sunday against the Seattle Seahawks — and he already has a U.S. President in his corner. It was back in the spring, just days before the NFL draft, when George W. Bush flashed a smile and told his cousin, Broncos president Joe Ellis: "You guys are going to take my guy, Courtland Sutton!"

Texas recognizes Texas. And the NFL soon will recognize Sutton as one of the most dangerous wide receivers rocking a pair of cleats. Watch. It's coming, and soon. Sutton is 6-foot-4, 216 pounds, and the best thing to happen to the Broncos since Super Bowl 50. He's 22 and a guy we'll be talking about when he's 62.

Is that too much for a rookie?

This isn't just any rookie we're talking about.

"Ultimately, for myself, when I walk away from the game, I want people to talk about me in the same conversation as Calvin Johnson, Larry Fitzgerald, E-Man (Emmanuel Sanders), Demaryius Thomas — the guys who came into the league and made a statement for themselves," Sutton told me on Monday. "Guys respect their name, now and forever. That's the point I want to get to. When people talk about Courtland Sutton, I want them to say, 'That guy is one of the best to ever play the position.' That's what I want to be, and I'm going to work every day to make that happen."

Five months into his Broncos career and I've yet to see Sutton without a smile glued to his face, one of his fishing-net hands on someone's shoulder, or the slightest suggestion he's had a bad day.

Courtland Sutton doesn't get bad days. Bad days get Courtland Sutton.

"I was in Houston with (star wide receiver DeAndre) Hopkins as a rookie — very comparable," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said.

Woo, boy. That's a mouthful.

And it's not too much.

Peep the film from the Broncos' third preseason game, against the Redskins. Second-and-10, ball's on their own 25-yard line, Sutton's matched up with a former All-Pro cornerback, Josh Norman. And Courtland slips and almost falls at the line of scrimmage! No matter. After regaining his balance, Sutton blows past Norman and skies for a 27-yard reception. Easy peasy — in his third NFL appearance.

"It was a good opportunity for me to see where I'm at, against the best in the league," Sutton said of the Norman play. "In college, coach (Chad Morris) would always tell us that we're playing against nameless, faceless opponents. It doesn't matter who you're lined up against. I just saw it as an opportunity to go out and make a play. If I don't do my part, it hurts our offense and ultimately hurts our team. I never want to be a guy who's hurting my team."

It says here this rookie class will shape the Broncos franchise for the next half-dozen to dozen years, give or take a contract extension or three. Royce Freeman on Monday was named the first rookie to start for the Broncos at running back in Week 1 since Terrell Davis in 1995. The Broncos need help at linebacker, and here's a hunch Josey Jewell wins a starting job at some point during his rookie season. Pass-rusher Bradley Chubb should inject new zip into Von Miller's career. DaeSean Hamilton operates like an old pro, and Phillip Lindsay, well, he's Phillip Lindsay.

Sutton? Gifted. Invested. Different. His first full day as a Bronco — April 28, 2018 — Sutton strode into the UCHHealth Training Center with a bubbly personality everyone noticed. I asked what in life gets him fired up for the day ahead.

"I'm fired up about life," Sutton said then.

For a Broncos locker room that had grown stale, that kind of spirit is exactly what they needed.

Where does it all come from?

His parents, to start. Sutton said Ryian and Phelicia Marshall are his role models — football-wise and life-wise. His mom "is one of the most loving, selfless people you'll ever meet," he says. Each Christmas she buys at least one gift for every one of his cousins. "And I have a huge family," he says. His father works as a lineman for an electrical company near his hometown of Brenham, Texas.

"I remember there would be times when it was raining and lightning and thundering so bad outside. And he'd get a call to go work on the electrical poles, the worst place you could be," Courtland said. "But that's where I get my work ethic from. The man just worked his butt off."

Same for Courtland. Prior to his freshman year of high school, his parents said the money for his school clothes would come from his own pocket. So they put Courtland and his younger cousin to work building and fixing the fencing around their extended family's nearby farm.

“You wanna talk about hard work....” Sutton said, his voice trailing off. “If a bull had broken through the fence, we had to go fix the fence, no matter whose bull it was. Somebody’s cows got out, we had to help each other out. But you know what? A lot of those life lessons I have today I learned on the farm.”

His fishing rods — a favorite possession — just arrived here last week. Courtland also adopted a Cocker Spaniel. Rounding out the welcome-to-Colorado care package was Sutton’s first major purchase, a new Jeep Wrangler that he drove to the office on Monday, just in time for Week 1.

“Since I’m in Denver, I got to make sure I fit into the system out here,” Sutton said with a laugh. “And it fits me, you know? I’m not really a Maserati guy. That’s not my style.”

Courtland Sutton is more Von than vain.

“He’s not trying to impress anybody with what he wears or what he owns or how he looks,” Stigall says. “He’s living life.”

Sutton’s NFL life begins Sunday against the Seahawks. He’s No. 14, and you won’t miss him.

Broncos sign OLB Jeff Holland and G Avery Gennesy to practice squad

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

Sept. 4, 2018

The Denver Broncos on Monday signed outside linebacker Jeff Holland and guard Avery Gennesy to their practice squad, it was announced. Additionally, wide receiver Carlos Henderson was placed on the practice squad/suspended list.

Gennesy (6-3, 318 pounds) is a first-year player who spent a portion of his rookie season in 2017 on Jacksonville's practice squad after being signed by the club as a college free agent from Texas A&M University. He competed with Cleveland during the preseason in 2018 before being waived by the Browns on Aug. 31.

Broncos announce number changes ahead of season opener

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 4, 2018

The Broncos announced new numbers for a handful of players on Monday as the regular-season opener approaches.

The following players changed their numbers:

Cornerback Adam Jones (now wearing No. 24), running back Royce Freeman (No. 28), running back Phillip Lindsay (No. 30), running back Dave Williams (No. 33), safety Trey Marshall (No. 36) and linebacker Josey Jewell (No. 47).

New quarterback Kevin Hogan will wear No. 9, while practice-squad player Avery Gennesy will wear No. 67.

Royce Freeman named Broncos' starting running back

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

Sept. 4, 2018

Rookie Royce Freeman will start for the Broncos at running back, Head Coach Vance Joseph announced Monday.

Freeman had held the Broncos' second-string running back role since the team released its initial depth chart in early August.

"Royce Freeman is the starting running back for our football team," Joseph said. "That being said, it's going to be by packages also. Royce is our leading runner, but on third downs you'll probably see [Devontae] Booker and obviously having a package for Phillip [Lindsay]'s going to be important to each game plan we have each week."

Freeman carried the ball 15 times for 84 yards and three touchdowns in the preseason.

"He can carry the load from a physical standpoint and a mental standpoint," Joseph said. "He was really good in pass [protection]. That's your biggest worry about having a young halfback playing with a veteran quarterback — the pass [protection] issues. He's shown the IQ and the maturity to be a great pass [protection] guy on third downs, especially."

Cravens could return midseason from IR; Brock misses practice

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 4, 2018

The Broncos hope Su'a Cravens can return to the team's active roster after Week 8, Head Coach Vance Joseph said Monday.

Cravens, who was placed on IR on Sunday and will undergo a procedure on his knee, would be eligible to return from injured reserve in time for the Broncos' Week 9 game against Houston.

After the way Cravens played Thursday against Arizona, Joseph hoped he could help the team much sooner.

"Su'a played really well Thursday," Joseph said. "He looked explosive, he tackled well. He looked good in space. As a high safety, he looked really good. So I was really impressed with Su'a. I was hoping his knee would respond the right way so he could play for us on Sunday, but it did not. He needs a scope to get it cleaned up. He'll be back in hopefully two months."

The Broncos were otherwise healthy for their Monday practice.

Cornerback Tramaine Brock was the only player who did not participate in the session. He was excused from practice with a personal matter but will return Wednesday, Joseph said.

Broncos announce captains for 2018 season

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 4, 2018

As the Broncos jogged off the practice field Monday, Head Coach Vance Joseph gathered his players in the team meeting room to announce the captains of this year's team.

Quarterback Case Keenum and center Matt Paradis will lead the offense, linebacker Todd Davis and outside linebacker Von Miller will guide the defense and kicker Brandon McManus and fullback Andy Janovich will represent special teams.

The six players — four of whom are first-time captains with the Broncos — were voted on by their teammates.

"All six guys are deserving of the honor and I'm excited about those guys leading our team," Joseph said.

Davis, a fifth-year player who has a team-high 179 tackles over the last two seasons, didn't downplay the honor when asked about it on Monday.

"For me, it's a huge honor for this great group of guys to see me as somebody that's a leader and somebody that they'll follow into battle," Davis said. "That's huge for me. Now I just have to step up, continue to be that guy that works hard every single day — day in and day out — and do my best for all of my guys in the locker room."

Davis joins Miller — a second-time captain — as a defensive leader.

"I'm proud of Todd," Joseph said. "Todd has done things right since I've been here for two years. He's been a guy that we can count on. I'm really pleased that he became one of our captains."

Paradis joins Davis as a first-year captain, and his durability and toughness are likely reasons why he was chosen by his teammates. In his three seasons with the Broncos, Paradis has not missed a single snap. Only two other NFL players have matched that feat over the last three years.

"He's been a model teammate," said Joseph of Paradis. "He's engaged every day in meetings and on the practice field, so he's also deserving."

And then there's Keenum, who has spent the offseason aiming to earn his teammates' trust. As Joseph said Monday, Keenum has clearly accomplished that task.

"Case won by a long shot," Joseph said. "His teammates really believe in him. He's our quarterback. He's our leader — not just [as the] quarterback, but in the locker room, the man he is. His teammates have respect for him."

Rookie wide receiver Courtland Sutton made that quite clear when asked whether it was an easy decision to vote Keenum as one of the offense's captains.

"One-hundred percent," Sutton said. "Everyone looks at their quarterback as the guy [they] want to be their leader. ... You've got a guy that goes out and he works his butt off to prove that point. And it's not just, you're a captain because you're a quarterback. He works his butt off to earn that title, because he comes in and goes to work every single day. And he leads — not only by example — but [through] his words [and] everything he does.

"He's a leader. He's a captain. He's a guy I know I want to follow for sure."

Now with his fourth NFL team, Kevin Hogan looks to continue his development in Denver

By Zach Pereles
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 4, 2018

Kevin Hogan has only been a Denver Bronco for a little over a day, but he has plenty of good memories of Colorado.

As a redshirt freshman at Stanford in 2012, Hogan had seen minimal action until the Cardinal headed to Boulder in early November to face the University of Colorado. With the offense struggling under then-starter Josh Nunes, Hogan was inserted on the contest's third drive.

Stanford scored on each of its next six offensive possessions — including five touchdowns — and by the end of the game, Hogan had become Stanford's answer at the game's most important position. Three months later, he was a Rose Bowl champion.

For now, though, he's back to square one and just focusing on learning the system.

"I'm just really happy to be here," said Hogan following Monday's practice. "I had a great first day today. I got to meet everyone — the players and the coaches. I have a great room in the QB room and a great locker room here, so I'm just excited. I kind of got my feet under me at practice and walked through tempo stuff. Again, just really happy to be here."

The Broncos were awarded Hogan off waivers on Sunday after he was released by the Washington Redskins. Just a week-and-a-half earlier, Hogan had directed Washington to two late touchdown drives against Denver in the third preseason game. He finished the contest 7 of 9 for 88 yards and two scores. It may have left a good impression on his new employer.

Though he's only played in eight regular-season NFL contests, Hogan (6-foot-3, 218 pounds) fits what Head Coach Vance Joseph is looking for in a quarterback. He holds the Stanford record for career rushing yards by a quarterback (1,249) and has averaged nearly 10 yards per carry on 18 rushing attempts as a pro.

"Kevin fits what our quarterbacks look like," Joseph said. "He's an athletic guy, he has a good arm, he's very, very smart. He's fast with the ball. He fits the profile of what Case and Chad look like physically. He was a good fit for us."

While nearly all of his new surroundings are unfamiliar, Hogan does share an alma mater — Stanford — with the man responsible for picking him up: John Elway.

"I got to meet him a couple of times when he'd come around to either a practice or a game," Hogan said. "I got to say hello and spend some time. The Stanford network is special. [We] always look out for each other."

As the third-string quarterback, Hogan will have limited reps, and he likely will not dress on game days. Just 48 hours ago, Hogan was across the country waiting to hear whether he had made the Redskins' roster, so things have moved quickly for the 25-year-old. It's something he's become used to: The Broncos are his fourth team in just over two seasons.

Still, he speaks on his new organization just like a seasoned veteran would, emphasizing a step-by-step approach.

"I'm going to listen to the coaches, see what they want me to learn first and how they want me to pick it up," Hogan said. "For me, it was going through the run game today. I'm going to go over pass protections this afternoon and try to get into the pass game a little bit. But first and foremost, you've got to be able to run the ball and get to the right plays. That's what I'm going to exercise first, and then protecting myself and getting into the pass game to get the ball down field to the playmakers. Little by little I'm going to try and get this offense under control."

NFL 2018: 10 brewing controversies including, yes, the new helmet rule

By Frank Schwab
Yahoo Sports
Sept. 4, 2018

The NFL can seem like a soap opera at times.

Because there's such immense interest in the league, every story seems to become a big deal. Some stories are bigger than others.

We know there will be controversy this season, whether it's player vs. player, player vs. team or a new rule that replaces our catch rule angst. We'll avoid the anthem/President Donald Trump/Jerry Jones angles (which we know are coming) for this list of the top 10 brewing controversies as we head into the NFL season:

10. Jon Gruden already under pressure

Before the Oakland Raiders ever took the field for their first game, Jon Gruden put even more pressure on himself than his \$100 million contract ever could. His strange offseason had everyone talking. He cut punter Marquette King because he apparently didn't think his personality was a fit. He traded a third-round pick for troubled Martavis Bryant, who was suspended again and cut. He signed a bunch of old veterans while benching or cutting plenty of recent Raiders draft picks. Then the move that will follow him, good or bad, for his entire tenure: Trading Khalil Mack to the Bears. If the Raiders start slow, there will be a ton of heat on a coach who will still have more than nine-and-a-half years left on his record deal.

9. Vance Joseph's job security in Denver

Joseph was almost one-and-done for the Broncos, though he could always be excused for a bad quarterback situation. That changes now that general manager John Elway got quarterback Case Keenum in free agency. If the Broncos get off to a slow start, keep an eye on Joseph in Denver. He doesn't have a ton of job security.

8. Jalen Ramsey vs. everyone

Ramsey has put the target on his own back. While it's great for the game to have a star with some personality, the NFL doesn't take kindly to someone who likes to talk. And the Jacksonville Jaguars All-Pro cornerback likes to talk. Remember the fight with normally mild-mannered A.J. Green last season? It wouldn't be a surprise to see something similar happen this season.

7. Second-guessing the Alex Smith-Patrick Mahomes decision

While it was inevitable, let's not act like the Chiefs trading Alex Smith wasn't a gamble. Smith led the NFL in passer rating last season. They were a dangerous team heading into the playoffs, until a terrible second half in a wild-card game against the Tennessee Titans. Mahomes played well in the preseason, but if he struggles as a first-year starter, there will be second-guessing about moving on from Smith.

6. The Giants' conundrum if Eli Manning struggles

This could be a multi-year entry. The Giants watched Manning slide for the second straight season, and still passed on a quarterback with the No. 2 overall pick to take running back Saquon Barkley. Maybe Barkley and a healthy Odell Beckham will help 37-year-old Manning bounce back. If not, and if third overall pick Sam Darnold plays well for the New York Jets, we'll hear about that decision for a long time. And it won't be easy for the Giants to find a replacement if they decide to move on.

5. Le'Veon Bell playing on another franchise tag

While it's possible Bell signs a multi-year deal with the Steelers this offseason, that seems unlikely. A second franchise tag seems to be the end of the road for this relationship. Will Bell, who held out all of training camp and hasn't reported as of Monday afternoon, be as willing to log 431 touches, which is what he did including playoffs last season? He led the NFL in that category. Every carry and reception puts unwanted miles on his legs. Bell is finally on the verge of hitting free agency and getting the long-term deal he covets, which makes for a potentially uncomfortable situation.

4. Jameis Winston's uncertain future in Tampa

When Winston was suspended three games, it had to strain his relationship with the Buccaneers. What if Ryan Fitzpatrick plays really well when Winston is away? What if Winston struggles after three weeks off? Due to the suspension, and the fact that the Bucs are going to have to make an expensive decision about Winston's future very soon, which means that every bad (or great) game Winston has will be magnified.

3. Will there be any more Patriots strife?

It's possible we don't hear anything about Bill Belichick vs. Tom Brady/Rob Gronkowski this season. Gronkowski's new contract should help. A small thaw in the Alex Guerrero issue might too. But whether it was real or perceived, there was a lot of talk of Patriots friction for the first part of 2018. New England is very good at turning those types of things into non-issues, but it also seems we might not have heard the last of it.

2. Are the Browns really going to sit Baker Mayfield all season?

I'll say it over and over: It makes little sense why the Browns aren't starting Mayfield right away. He looked like he belonged through the preseason. We know he has talent. No. 1 overall picks don't sit anymore (unless it's Jared Goff with an overmatched coaching staff on the Los Angeles Rams). At some point this will be an issue. What if the Browns are just good enough to go, say, 7-9 with Tyrod Taylor? Would Mayfield sit all season? What a waste that would be for a franchise that needs to be more forward thinking.

1. The Helmet Rule

The stories about the helmet rule got a little out of control early in August when there wasn't much else to talk about. The NFL set out to make a lot of calls regarding the new rule early in the preseason, then adjust. That's what happened, and helmet rule calls went way down in the third and fourth preseason games. But now it's a talking point, and it'll quickly ignite once the first game is significantly altered by a helmet rule call. And it will happen. It's basically the new catch rule, and just wait for the first freak-out over it.

Colin Kaepernick was in demand, and here's why Nike made its 'most controversial move'

By Charles Robinson

Yahoo Sports

Sept. 4, 2018

Last spring, when NFL team owners were privately battling the collusion case brought against the league by former quarterback Colin Kaepernick, a curious debate began in some corners of the multibillion-dollar sports apparel industry.

It orbited around two questions: Was Kaepernick a sleeping giant as a marketing centerpiece; and if he was, why wasn't Nike doing anything with him?

In the wake of Kaepernick's new endorsement deal with Nike, which stands to pay him millions per year plus royalties, at least part of that debate has been resolved. The shoe and clothing giant definitely has big plans for Kaepernick, which one insider told Yahoo Sports includes a line built around him encompassing shoes, shirts, jerseys and other apparel.

Other suitors for Colin Kaepernick

Whether that gamble pays off remains to be seen. But Nike apparently wasn't the only shoe company that eyed a larger platform for Kaepernick. Industry insiders told Yahoo Sports that Adidas and Puma were among multiple brands that had conversations about potentially building around Kaepernick if Nike failed to renew his deal following a long stretch of endorsement inactivity.

"We talked about Colin in March. A lot, actually," one shoe industry executive said. "We all know the specific kind of deals NFL players are on with each other. His deal was running out and he had a shoe commitment that hadn't been done for whatever reason. I'm sure it was because of everything that was going on around him. But it looked like Nike was running out the clock on [his deal] because he didn't have a lot of time left and nothing was really happening with him. So there were some discussions for us about what kind of an endorser he could be.

"It's apparent that, you know, even though he isn't playing, he's still connecting with a lot of people. I also think he's exponentially more popular, and in some cases unpopular, than he ever was in the NFL."

Nike's enormous risk

Talks between Kaepernick and the executive's shoe company never materialized, apparently because Nike made a somewhat unexpected commitment to retain the quarterback in the late spring. But on Monday night, the executive applauded the Nike deal on a number of fronts. Chief among them: Putting a lightning-rod endorser on a centerpiece platform in spite of negative reaction, and doing it in spite of a lucrative deal with the NFL – whom Kaepernick is accusing of colluding against him in an ongoing arbitration case.

That can't be underestimated when Kaepernick's saga ages over time, either. If history looks back and finds the NFL settled on the wrong side of the ledger, Nike will sit in a much more favorable position. But it will have come with a risk that most corporations like Nike refuse to take.

“It’s the most controversial move [with an endorser] that Nike has ever made – especially if you’re going to craft something substantial around him,” the executive said. “I can’t think of anyone in the history of Nike that would come close. Especially when you consider where the country is at and the fact that [President Donald Trump] will be very critical when big companies do things he doesn’t like.

“Trump could tweet tomorrow for everyone to boycott Nike. I’m sure that was one of the first considerations before a new deal. ... But there’s the other side, where Colin Kaepernick could be the most powerful social persona that Nike ever signs. Not necessarily the most lucrative, but just the most powerful in terms of moving the social needle. That’s definitely part of the allure.”

Early impact on social media

Social media left little doubt of the impact the move could have on the brand, with Kaepernick and Nike dominating Twitter’s “trending” section from the moment the new endorsement plan was announced. It drew praise on Twitter from former CIA director John Brennan and, via Instagram, from NBA superstar LeBron James.

Nike had well over 1 million unique tweets in the first eight hours after news of the deal broke Monday afternoon. Meanwhile, Kaepernick’s first tweet about it hit 176,000 retweets and nearly 416,000 likes in that same span.

And those numbers don’t scratch the surface of the protracted debate that surrounds them – arguments that now include Nike as part of the equation. Undoubtedly, this is part of what Nike was looking for with this announcement. Possibly the first rousing moment of the sleeping marketing giant. It took Nike a few years of inactivity with Kaepernick to arrive at Monday’s seismic news, but that silence came to end in resounding fashion.

Colin Kaepernick Becomes Face of Nike's 30th Anniversary 'Just Do It' Campaign

By Charlotte Carroll

MMQB

Sept. 4, 2018

Colin Kaepernick will be the face of Nike's 30th anniversary "Just Do It" campaign, reports ESPN's Darren Rovell.

According to Rovell, Nike has been paying Kaepernick all along and "waiting for the right moment," which is now. Nike signed Kaepernick in 2011, but has not used him over the past two years.

"We believe Colin is one of the most inspirational athletes of this generation, who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the world forward," Gino Fisanotti, Nike's vice president of brand for North America, told ESPN.

Kaepernick tweeted the ad which has the words, "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything. #JustDolt."

Nike is the NFL's official uniform sponsor.

Other athletes in the new campaign include Serena Williams, Odell Beckham Jr., Shaquem Griffin and LeBron James.

The former 49ers quarterback began kneeling during the 'Star-Spangled Banner' in August 2016 as a means of protesting racial inequality and police brutality. Dozens of other NFL players, as well as numerous other athletes across America, ultimately joined him. The protests grew during the 2017 season after President Donald Trump criticized NFL players who chose to follow suit. Trump said owners should "fire" NFL players who protest the anthem and referred to them as "son[s] of b-----". Players responded by protesting en masse.

Kaepernick hasn't played since the 2016 season. He filed a grievance against the NFL for collusion in October 2017 after another team did not pick him up after opting out of his 49ers contract in March of the same year.

He won the summary judgment phase of his collusion case last week.

Paxton Lynch clears waivers; workouts next for QB

By Austin Knoblauch

NFL.com

Sept. 4, 2018

Paxton Lynch is officially a free agent.

The former first-round draft pick, who was waived by the Denver Broncos on Sunday after the team claimed Kevin Hogan, cleared waivers on Monday, a source informed of the situation told NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport.

Despite his two-plus seasons of struggles in Denver, the quarterback should generate some interest on the open market. He's expected to get a chance to workout for some teams in the weeks ahead, Rapoport reported.

The first of those teams? The Buffalo Bills. Rapoport reports Lynch will visit Western New York on Tuesday for a workout. The Bills announced Monday that Nathan Peterman will open the season as the starter with rookie Josh Allen as the backup.

There are teams who could still be in the backup quarterback market with their season openers fast approaching, but will Lynch get a second chance? He struggled mightily in the preseason, losing his job backing up Case Keenum to second-year signal-caller Chad Kelly while getting booed in front of the Mile High faithful.

Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders will be among those rooting for Lynch to succeed.

"Obviously, he just didn't do the job," Sanders said about Lynch in an interview with NFL.com's Nick Shook. "I was rooting for the guy. He's got all the intangibles in the world. Six-foot-6, 6-foot-7, big arm, can scramble, can run. I just think that for Paxton, he's just got to keep honing in on his mental skills, his study skills, how to go about playing the quarterback position, knowing your reads and checkdowns and also playing with a sense of confidence that runs through the offense, spreads through like a wildfire throughout the offense."

Phillip Lindsay asks Terrell Davis if he can 'rock' No. 30

By Thomas Warren

NFL.com

Sept. 4, 2018

Broncos rookie running back Phillip Lindsay figures if he's going to set off on what he hopes is a career fit for the Hall of Fame, what better way to do it than sporting the number of a legendary Broncos runner currently in Canton.

First, he called Terrell Davis to get his blessing.

Lindsay surely understands the gigantic expectations that number comes with in Denver but it sounds like he's ready to meet the challenge.

Lindsay wore No. 23 in college at Colorado where he went undrafted in 2017 after his senior season but the rookie earned a spot on the Broncos' 53-man roster with an impressive preseason showing out of the backfield and on special teams. He'll be third on the running back depth chart behind Royce Freeman and Devontae Booker to start the season but he'll likely get carries as the season progresses.

Special teams, though, could be where Lindsay makes his mark. Who knows? He might be one kickoff tackle away from becoming a household name. It worked out pretty well for the original number 30.

A pitched battle of London fields

By Daniel Kaplan

Sports Business Journal

Sept. 4, 2018

It's been an eventful year for the NFL's bold London experiment of annually playing multiple regular-season games in the British capital. First, in late April, Jacksonville Jaguars owner Shahid Khan announced a bid of approximately \$800 million to buy Wembley Stadium from the Football Association, soccer's governing body in England; then, in August, the English Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur confirmed reports that its heavily hyped new stadium in north London — which was to host 20 NFL games there in a 10-year period, starting this October — is behind schedule and will not be ready to open next month as planned. The Seahawks-Raiders game on Oct. 14 that had been scheduled for the new stadium will instead take place at Wembley.

Behind those major moves resides a tension between the league office and the Jaguars, who have been playing an annual regular-season game in London since 2013 and will continue to do so through at least 2020 under terms of an agreement reached in 2015. That tension stems from the fact that Khan never supported the NFL's 10-year commitment to Tottenham, which had been agreed to in 2015, believing the NFL should not play in the home of an EPL club (Wembley hosts England's national team, and although Hotspur is playing there while its new stadium is under construction, no EPL club regularly calls it home). The Jaguars, who have never objected to having more NFL games in London, will continue to play their games at Wembley Stadium no matter what happens with Tottenham's new stadium. However, with Wembley perhaps on the verge of being controlled by an NFL owner, it begs the question of whether Tottenham is a necessary option for the league.

"We just don't think an EPL stadium is where the NFL should play," Hussain Naqi, the Jaguars' senior vice president of international development, said in an interview earlier this summer at a coffee shop nearby the Jaguars' offices in the heart of London. The Jaguars, he said, believe the EPL is too tribal and asking fans of non-Tottenham teams to go to a rival team's grounds to see an NFL game is a step too far.

Naqi's boss, Jaguars President Mark Lamping, said in a separate interview recently, "There is still a tremendous amount of work to do regarding fan development in the U.K. It's critically important that the league doesn't alienate — doesn't take the risk of alienating — any portion of fans. Playing in a Premier League stadium risks that."

The NFL, however, said it is firmly committed to Tottenham. Indeed, when asked if the Wembley acquisition could be a precursor to the Jaguars moving permanently across the pond, the NFL's top international executive replied that should that happen the league would still play games at Tottenham.

"Why not?" said Mark Waller, NFL executive vice president of international. "Even if there is a team in London, I don't think that means that other teams would not [play there]. And if you were going to play in London, and you had the option to play in a brand-new stadium that wasn't owned by another NFL team, that might be a preferable option.

"Our job at the league is to serve the interests of all 32 owners, and so I don't think Shad's [proposed] acquisition of Wembley does anything negative at all to having the Tottenham option."

For now, there is no suggestion that Khan's likely purchase of Wembley will lead to the Jaguars moving to London, an idea that has been speculated about for years given their annual presence in the city and their difficulty growing in the Jacksonville market. (Khan, however, in June broached the idea of having his team play two games a year in London.) And inherent in any Wembley purchase will be the scheduling requirements of English national soccer team matches and other events that would require use of the 11-year-old stadium, which seats roughly 84,000 for NFL games.

That's a point Waller makes: Under terms of the sale of Wembley, Khan may be hamstrung in scheduling NFL games in his own stadium.

Waller also dismissed the notion that NFL fans of other EPL teams would stay away from Tottenham's new stadium. In 2015, the NFL international committee raised this very issue, Waller said, and a study commissioned by the league found that NFL fans in London would not be bothered by attending a game in an EPL stadium. The committee then gave the go-ahead for the league to invest about \$20 million into the Tottenham development, which will have an NFL field under the permanent pitch (the top field slides out for NFL games).

Told the Jaguars still held the position that playing in an EPL stadium is a mistake, Waller said only, "You always have to be respectful of other people's sentiments even if you don't agree with them."

Waller's conclusions have company. Nigel Phillips, president of the fan group Arsenal Supporters' Trust — Arsenal is Tottenham's main EPL rival — said, "I can't see any Arsenal NFL fans boycotting the Spurs' ground for matches."

Steve Martin, CEO of London-based M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment, agreed that it's a non-issue, surmising instead that it is Khan's ownership of Fulham, another EPL team, that is driving his opposition to having NFL teams at Tottenham. "Must be internal EPL politics," he said.

Whatever the case, Tottenham officials are not talking about the stadium. Approached in May, a spokesman for the club declined to comment on the matter and the NFL's arrangement there. Through the NFL, Tottenham the next month offered an interview but only if Wembley and the Jaguars were not topics of discussion. Sports Business Journal declined the offer.

Khan continues the process of seeking to buy Wembley, and although there are no hard key dates approaching, Lamping, who is negotiating for Khan, expressed confidence the deal would close.

Wherever the NFL plays in London, the appetite for the game is growing in that country. In 2018, the NFL will play three games at Wembley, marking the fifth straight year that the league has played at least that many games in England.

This year the NFL sold 50,000 "season tickets" — passes to all three games — which is up 50 percent from when the package was first offered two years ago. Of the first 21 games played in London, which date to 2007, all but one sold out, and that came in 2011 after the lockout delayed the selling window.

The Oct. 14 Seahawks-Raiders game that was scheduled for Tottenham and relocated to Wembley has not begun selling tickets, but an NFL U.K. spokesman said the league has every expectation it will quickly sell out. Individual tickets to the other two games — Titans vs. Chargers on Oct. 21 and Eagles vs. Jaguars on Oct. 28 — sold out the first day they were put on sale.

There are other signs of the league's growth in the U.K. February's Eagles-Patriots Super Bowl drew around 4 million viewers on the BBC and Sky Sports, the NFL said, which is especially impressive considering the game starts after 11 p.m. local time.

The league's internal research finds that there are 14.4 million NFL fans in the United Kingdom, or about 22 percent of the total population, a significant jump from the 9.7 million fans the league identified 10 years ago.

However, there remains a concern that the NFL in London is more a curious piece of Americana to be gawked at rather than a spectacle to be embraced.

"It's still the circus come to town," said Carsten Thode, chief strategy officer of Synergy, a London-based sports marketing agency that is a division of Engine.

When Synergy talked to its European sponsors, he added, none inquire about doing business with the NFL.

Nevertheless, the NFL has managed to carve out a place in London sporting culture.

"London likes an event, and the NFL games have become must-see events," said Tim Crow, former CEO of Synergy and now a London-based sports consultant. Crow even bestowed the ultimate compliment, saying he had no doubt London could support its own NFL team, and that a full-time team could start play with solid support right away.

All it would have to do is figure out where to play.

When will Chad Kelly start for the Broncos?

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
Sept. 4, 2018

Pro football remains a meritocracy, and there's no place where that statement is more true than in Denver. Especially at the quarterback position.

The team led by Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway won't hesitate to put the best guy on the field and, as they showed on Sunday, the worst guy out to pasture. Even if he arrived via the a trade up in the first round of the draft.

After Lynch losing a fair-and-square quarterback competition in 2016 and 2017 to former seventh-rounder Trevor Siemian, Lynch fell behind last year's Mr. Irrelevant. And Lynch has now fallen off the roster.

So with Chad Kelly bypassing the guy in whom Elway invested a first-round pick, the next question becomes whether, and when, Kelly will skip past free-agent arrival Case Keenum. Much of that depends on Keenum, and obviously plenty depends on Kelly. But Elway won't tip the scales in Keenum's favor simply because they paid Keenum a bunch of money. The moment Elway thinks Kelly gives the Broncos a better chance to win, Kelly will be the guy.

If/when that happens, it will be no more controversial than the decision to dump Lynch, the decision to bench Manning, the decision to let Brock Osweiler walk away, and the decision to make Tim Tebow run.

Paxton Lynch goes unclaimed on waivers

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
Sept. 4, 2018

The Broncos placed quarterback Paxton Lynch on waivers Sunday when they claimed Kevin Hogan and he became a free agent on Monday.

According to multiple reports, none of the league's other 31 teams claimed Lynch. That does not come as a major surprise as any claiming team would be on the hook for the remaining guaranteed money on Lynch's contract.

Those reports also indicate that Lynch will begin working out for other teams with Nicki Jhabvala of The Athletic reporting that four teams have reached out since Lynch was dumped by the team that took him in the first round of the 2016 draft.

None of those teams have been identified, but it likely won't be long before that comes to light now that Lynch is officially on the open market.