

Broncos Journal: Ron Leary ready despite preseason of stops and starts

By Ryan O'Halloran
The Denver Post
September 8, 2018

The development of Broncos left tackle Garrett Bolles is undoubtedly important and he will be tested Sunday by Seattle defensive end Frank Clark. Same for Connor McGovern settling in at right guard, a musical chairs position last year.

But left guard Ron Leary may be the lynchpin to the offensive line.

If he stays available and effective, the Broncos could accomplish their goal of being an offense that runs to set up the play-action pass and then once they get a lead, can extinguish the fourth quarter clock with that same run game.

If Leary is in and out of the lineup, the continuity the Broncos tried so hard to create in training camp will be semi-shattered.

No pressure, Ron.

"I think we're headed in the right direction," Leary said. "We've got a couple of new faces but this group right here is probably one of the hardest-working O-line groups I've been a part of."

The right direction would include getting 16 games from Leary, which he has done only once (2013). He will make Bolles better. He knows how to keep interior pass rushers away from quarterback Case Keenum. And he knows how to lead. When he's been on the field.

Leary, entering his seventh NFL season, missed the entire offseason program because of a knee injury that required surgery. Leary missed the first preseason game last month because of an ankle issue. And he missed the third preseason game when his knee flared up.

Those problems meant Leary is heading into the regular season with only 24 snaps, all against Chicago, including allowing a pressure when he was caught flat-footed while kicking out to pass protect.

Problem?

"That's all I needed," Leary said. "I've been playing for a while so I don't need a whole lot of preseason reps to be ready to play ball. My biggest thing is making sure my wind is right for Sunday."

Leary said he could have "definitely" played last week if the Broncos were in the regular season.

Any worry he would not be ready for Seattle?

"I wouldn't say I was concerned, but it took a little longer than I thought," Leary said. "That was a little frustrating. But I stayed the course last week and it was feeling really good. Now it feels great."

Leary was managed by coach Vance Joseph during camp, his 58 regular season starts a nod that he didn't need to be pushed in August. A left guard for Dallas before joining the Broncos, Leary played right guard for 11 games last year before a back injury shut him down.

The Broncos moved Leary back to his natural spot in the offseason, part of a reset that included trading for right tackle Jared Veldheer and settling in McGovern at right guard instead of trying to force free agent flop Menelik Watson into a new position. Watson was ultimately released.

"Right (guard) was a little uncomfortable at first," Leary said. "It's good to be back on the left. But if I had to play right in a pinch, I could do it at a high level."

Bolles wants Leary to stay on his inside hip.

"Ron's a heckuva player," Bolles said. "I'm grateful he's my guard. He's like my brother. We communicate on everything. It makes it easier for me knowing I have somebody next to me that protects me on the (defensive line twists and stunts). It's a special thing and it's going to get better and better."

Said Leary of Bolles: "The sky's the limit for him. He has all of the physical tools. He's not where he wants to be and that's a good thing."

Bolles is still a newbie, entering his second season. Leary is about to start his seventh year, but his excitement level is similar to a young player.

"I'm geeked for this game," he said. "Those emotions don't ever go away. When they do, it's time to leave the game."

Broncos tracker: Phillip Lindsay, Andy Janovich talk trash ahead of CU at Nebraska

By Ryan O'Halloran and Kyle Fredrickson
The Denver Post
September 8, 2018

12:27 p.m. — Locker room rivalry

Kyle Fredrickson ✓
@kylefredrickson

We've got a #CUBuffs vs. #Huskers split in the Broncos locker room, folks.

Andy Janovich (Neb '15): "Nebraska is going to win ... Phil is back there and he won't even bet money on it."

Phillip Lindsay (CU '17): "We're going to win, that's for sure ... Andy is lying to y'all."

The Colorado Buffaloes travel to face Nebraska on the college gridiron Sunday and two Broncos ball-carriers on opposite sides of the alumni spectrum are enjoying some friendly trash talk.

Fullback Andy Janovich (Nebraska, '15): "Nebraska is going to win. ... Phil is back there and he won't even bet money on it. ... I never got to play them or anything like that. I know a lot of guys that play at CU who think it's a huge rivalry. But I know a lot of guys who played at Nebraska that didn't see it as that. Kind of just a little-brother type thing."

Running back Phillip Lindsay (CU, '17): "Oh, we're going to win, that's for sure. I'm never going to go against my team. They're a talented team and they're ready. ... Andy is lying to y'all because I feel like we already had like a little bet going. The bet is already forgot. That's because he's scared. ... But it's all good."

— Kyle Fredrickson

11:12 a.m. — Broncos practice update

After wearing pads on Thursday, the Broncos practiced this morning without shoulder pads.

Coach Vance Joseph said all players are healthy.

If every player is healthy, the Broncos will have seven inactive players Sunday vs. Seattle. Our projection: QB Kevin Hogan, WR/PR Isaiah McKenzie (since Adam Jones is expected to handle PR), OL Sam Jones and OL Elijah Wilkinson, DE DeMarcus Walker, LB Alexander Johnson and CB Isaac Yiadom.

Yiadom would get a jersey if there is an issue with Brock.

— Ryan O'Halloran

8:52 a.m. — No call = Good call

Broncos offensive lineman Elijah Wilkinson was viewed as a long-shot entering camp and he worked on the third team throughout August. But his ability to play guard and tackle helped him earn a roster spot.

An undrafted free agent last year, Wilkinson started 2017 on the Broncos' practice squad before appearing in nine games.

Wilkinson said he was working at No. 2 left tackle in practice this week.

"I'm just trying to find a home and start to get used to it and get comfortable," he said. "I played left tackle in college (at Massachusetts) and played it in the games. It's something you just have to flip your mind on."

Flip your mind because Wilkinson also played guard in the preseason.

"Oh yeah, definitely a different mindset," he said. "You're facing different body types, different moves, different everything. Each time inside, you're facing bigger guys who are stronger who have less quickness but more power and get on you quicker."

Wilkinson waited out Saturday to see if he made the team.

"No call was the best call," he said with a laugh. "I was sitting around and the phone was on. But after 2 (p.m.), all of the final cuts had been made and I was like, 'Oh, wow, I made it.' I was hoping for the best and I found out the best news without getting a call."

— Ryan O'Halloran

First NFL test for Broncos' Bradley Chubb: Sack Russell Wilson. "The pressure is going to be fun."

By Kyle Fredrickson
The Denver Post
September 8, 2018

Bradley Chubb sat in the Broncos film room studying tape of Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson making defenders look silly with the slightest hip shake to sprint outside the pocket.

Chubb's first challenge as a rookie NFL edge rusher Sunday? Catch the most uncatchable.

"(Wilson) is the best movement quarterback in this entire league," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said.

Chubb can draw on experience for his first regular-season start with a college resume that features sacks against a variety of exceptionally mobile ACC quarterbacks through four seasons at N.C. State. The opposing passer who most resembles Wilson? "I'd say Lamar," Chubb said.

Lamar, of course, being former Louisville quarterback Lamar Jackson, the 2016 Heisman Trophy winner and 2018 first-round NFL draft pick by the Ravens who faced Chubb last fall. On the second snap from scrimmage in a 39-25 Wolfpack victory, Chubb squared up the left tackle, charged past with a swim move, wrapped up Jackson's right ankle and sacked him before he escaped the pocket.

"You've got to make sure there are not plays where he can leak out," Chubb said. "Once you get to him, you've just got to gather your feet and you can't dive at him because he'll make you miss very quickly."

Now, here's the big difference on Sunday: Jackson shows promise as an elusive NFL quarterback; Wilson has nothing left to prove. But you don't have to tell Chubb. When at North Carolina State — where Wilson also played three seasons — Chubb once bumped into the Super Bowl-winning quarterback. He asked for a photo. "Took the picture," Chubb said, "then he had to be on his way."

Their meeting at Mile High, at least between whistles, will be decidedly less cordial.

"When you have a quarterback like that, it makes the challenge harder," Chubb said, "and the pressure is going to be fun."

But the Broncos won't be smiling should Wilson have it his way. Since 2012, his rookie season, Wilson ranks second to only Cam Newton in quarterback rushing yards (3,275). His extension of plays outside the pocket and accuracy on the run over six seasons are legendary — and usually occur when the Seahawks' need it most. In the fourth quarter last season, Wilson completed 94-of-139 passes (67 percent) for 1,442 yards, 19 touchdowns and one interception to compile a 138.2 passer rating, according to Pro Football Focus.

"Nobody likes playing Russell Wilson — he's elite, best of the best," Broncos linebacker Von Miller said. "As a pass rusher, you want a guy that when you get to him and you touch him, he'll lay down for you. Russell is the complete opposite. ... This is going to be a tough one for us."

Those looking for solutions should turn to Broncos nose tackle Domata Peko. The longest-tenured NFL player on Denver's roster (12 seasons) has faced just about every quarterback in the league. He compares Wilson to former AFC North rival Ben Roethlisberger in Pittsburgh. Different body styles — Wilson: 5-11, 215 / Big Ben: 6-5, 240 — but the same problems. Both are tough to bring down. Peko said: "You have to maintain your pass-rush lanes and you have to keep him contained."

The Broncos' answer may be constantly applying pressure.

"That's the cool thing about having Von and Chubb and Shane (Ray) and Shaq (Barrett), they can really get after him and then having big (Derek) Wolfe inside," Peko said. "We have a good plan for them. That's the key to the game."

Broncos general manager John Elway touted a plethora of pass rushers as a good problem to have when introducing Chubb as Denver's No. 5 overall pick. Keeping Wilson in check will require a total team effort. And, while pressure exists for Chubb to immediately contribute, the learning curve for even elite edge rushers can be steep. New Bears' linebacker Khalil Mack, the highest paid defensive player in the league (six years, \$141 million), had only four sacks in his rookie season.

"The biggest thing for (Chubb) is don't make it more than what it is," defensive coordinator Joe Woods said. "Just go play football. Play it the way you've been playing it your whole life. It's nothing special. A run is a run, a pass is a pass. I'm sure he's going to be probably a little bit nervous at the start of the game, but I think he'll be fine."

Twist of fate: Denver's defense helped Hogan audition for job

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 8, 2018

Funny thing is, No. 3 quarterbacks don't usually play in preseason game No. 3.

Had Kevin Hogan not got in the game against the Broncos as Washington's No. 3 quarterback two weeks ago, who knows? Paxton Lynch might still be the Broncos' quarterback behind Case Keenum and Chad Kelly on the depth chart.

"Yeah, unfortunately -- or fortunately, I guess -- you guys were knocking around Colt so they got him out early," Hogan said.

Alex Smith, Washington's starting quarterback, came out relatively early in the second quarter. Colt McCoy, cemented as Washington's backup after he got a one-year contract extension at the onset of training camp, was sacked by the likes of Bradley Chubb, Von Miller and Shane Ray. So, McCoy was pulled for his own safety after the third quarter.

Hogan came in for what appeared to be mop-up duty with his team down, 26-3 with a little more than 10 minutes left in the game. Instead, Hogan was terrific, completing 7 of 9 for 88 yards and two touchdowns. Hogan also played well in Washington's fourth preseason game against the Ravens.

Hogan knew going into Washington's training camp and preseason schedule that Smith and McCoy were 1-2. So, he did what professional players are supposed to do and focus on putting his best performance possible on film for others to view. Broncos general manager John Elway was impressed enough to claim Hogan off waivers and cut Lynch.

"You can go out there and be All Pro, All World in practice but until you get in a game and the bullets are flying and react under pressure, you can't really tell," Hogan said. "So that's something I looked forward to during the preseason was getting out and executing the offense in a live game."

Preseason performance was one reason why Hogan wound up with the Broncos but there were two others not related to sharing an alma mater with Elway. One, the Stanford product played eight games the previous two seasons with the pitiful Cleveland Browns. He got knocked around, beat up and the results weren't pretty. Which made Hogan all the more attractive.

Getting roughed up is a rite of passage for NFL quarterbacks. See Keenum's history before he broke through last year.

"I've seen a lot of situations that young quarterbacks don't see, and I've learned from it, learned from my mistakes," Hogan said. "It didn't work in Washington but I'm here for a reason and I'm excited. We've got a good group in there."

Washington's offensive system was the other reason why Hogan wound up in Denver. Washington's head coach, Jay Gruden, was trained in the similar West Coast style as Broncos' offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave.

If the Broncos were going to bring in a new quarterback a few days before the start of the regular season, they needed to shorten the learning curve a tad.

"There are definitely similarities," Hogan said. "There's a lot of the same concepts. Sometimes there are different names but the concept and the read makes learning much easier.

"Don't go me wrong there's still a lot to learn. There's a lot of things here that I haven't seen before. And it's awesome. But I'm excited. It makes sense and now it's just learning it."

Hogan won't dress for the Broncos' season opener against Seattle as Keenum and Kelly will be the two active quarterbacks. It will likely be the setup for game 2 next week against Oakland.

What happens from there depends on what happens in games 1 and 2. Hogan understands that if a guy can go from mopping up a preseason game in Washington one week to making Denver's 53-man roster the next, he might as well get ready.

Von Miller must take over if Broncos are to beat Russell Wilson and Seahawks

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 8, 2018

For starters, yes Case Keenum must play well in his first game for the Broncos.

But the key to the game Sunday against Seattle is stopping the other quarterback. The Broncos have just the player. No, we're not talking about their No. 5 overall draft pick rookie. We're talking about their No. 2 overall pick in the 2011 draft.

Von Miller must take over this game if the Broncos are to stop Russell Wilson.

"You know what? I say that every single game," Miller said. "I say that every single game. It doesn't always turn out like that. But the games where it does turn out like that, it's always special."

It's not that Wilson can't be sacked. In fact, quarterbacks who extend plays are often among the most sacked. Wilson was tied for the third-most sacked quarterback in 2015 with 45, tied for second in 2016 with 41, and was fourth last year with 43.

But it's those times he does escape that lead to big plays and big plays lead to victories.

The NFL is loaded with mobile quarterbacks. But there is mobile and there is elusive. Wilson is the most elusive quarterback in the league and has been for going on seven years.

"As a pass rusher you want a guy that when you get to him, and you touch him, they lay down," Miller said. "Russell is completely the opposite. Nobody likes playing Russell Wilson."

Miller can get to Wilson. They've met previously in one game, back in 2014 at Seattle. Miller got a sack. Wilson got the 26-20 win. (Miller was injured and didn't play in the 2013-season Super Bowl).

Since Miller was the Broncos' No. 2 overall pick in 2011, he has averaged 11.93 sacks a season. This year's No. 5 pick rookie is Bradley Chubb, Miller's new pass-rush mate. Miller sensed it was best to not offer Chubb any advice as he is about to make his NFL debut.

"When you're working with young guys, you can't make the situation bigger than what it is because they'll make it bigger than what it is," Miller said. "And you can't make it smaller than what it is, because they'll make it smaller than what it is."

"You just have to be even keel, and this is how I approach every single game. I just pull them along with me. I tell them what I'm looking at and I tell them how I'm feeling. It started yesterday with Wednesday, and I just lead by example when it comes to that. You can't really explain it to them."

"Bradley, he's an elite player, he'll feel it out immediately. He'll feel the difference between preseason and the regular season immediately. He's a great player to be able to adjust and continue to make plays

as well. I know that the type of impact that my words will have to say, 'Hey man, it's just another game.' Or you tell them, 'We've got to be on point this game. We have to make sure...' You have to watch what you say to rookies. You've just got to go out there and let them play."

The preseason lifted confidence Keenum and the Broncos' offense will play well Sunday. The question is whether Von Miller and the Denver D can contain the other guy.

Broncos Country, this Sunday is 'Orange Sunday'

By Alexander Kirk

9 News

September 8, 2018

Denver Broncos fans are encouraged to wear orange for the regular-season home opener on Sunday as part of "Orange Sunday."

The Denver Broncos open the season against the Seattle Seahawks at 2:25 p.m. Sunday at Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

First responders will sing the national anthem, unfurl the American Flag before the game and play a flag football game at halftime, the Broncos announced Friday.

Ring of Famer Karl Mecklenburg and Reuben Droughns will coach the Law Enforcement Team while Ring of Famer Rod Smith and Ebenezer Ekuban will coach the Fire/Rescue Team during Sunday's flag football game.

If you're headed to the stadium Sunday, all parking lots will open at 8 a.m. and the Mile High Monument in the north lots will open at 10 a.m.

The Broncos official pre-game tailgate, Mile High Village, will open at 11:30 a.m. and is free for all ticketed fans at Gate 4.

All stadium gates will open at 12:30 p.m. with kickoff set for 2:25 p.m.

Broncos rally towels made from recycled plastic bottles

By Janet Oravetz

9 News

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This Sunday at the Denver Broncos regular season home opener, fans who are 21 and older will receive an orange rally towel.

The orange towels, which are presented by Bud Light, are made from recycled plastic bottles.

According to a news release from the team, it's believed to be the NFL's first promotional giveaway made entirely from recycled materials.

The team's release detailed how bottles are transformed into other materials such as fabric.

Locally they're taken from Broncos Stadium at Mile High to the Waste Management – Denver Recycling Center on Franklin Street. From there the bottles are taken to a Materials Recovery Facility and sold to one of the plastic processing plants in the U.S.

After processing, the plant sells flakes or pellets to yarn manufacturers who then sell the yard to fabric weavers and knitters across the world.

Fabric makers sell the fabric to cut-sew and decorating plants, where the towels are produced and decorated.

Cartoonist Drew Litton shares his take on the Denver Broncos season opener

By Alexander Kirk
9 News
September 8, 2018

Iconic Colorado cartoonist Drew Litton joined the 9NEWS morning show on Friday to give us his take on the Denver Broncos 2018 season opener.

Drew created two brand new cartoons in just 45 minutes!

Like all of Broncos Country, Drew is optimistic about the revamped Broncos offense this year.

Have you ever wondered how Drew creates his more than 4,000 cartoons?

This year, Drew will be creating cartoons for 9NEWS on Sunday nights, The Colorado Sun online newspaper and CUBuffs.com, as well as on his social media pages!

Drew will be at Light Rail Art Gallery in Old Town Arvada on Friday, September 7. He'll have his prints for sale, free Broncos schedules and he'll have a preview of the 2019 Colorado Sports Calendar.

The 2019 Colorado Sports Calendar will have classic cartoons from Drew Litton covering the Broncos, Avalanche, Nuggets, Rockies and Buffs as well as all the season schedules for the Broncos, Nuggets and Avalanche.

The new calendar will be available at Barnes and Noble stores throughout the Denver metro area, Colorado Springs, Pueblo and Cheyenne by October 1st.

Check out DrewLitton.com for all the details!

Broncos emphasize early lead vs. Seattle, Mike Sullivan talks QBs, Carlos Henderson awaits return

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
September 8, 2018

The good news is news that won't last long. Never does in the NFL. The Broncos have a clean bill of health going into Week 1, which is more than some teams can say. All 53 players on the active roster practiced in full Thursday and Friday, including outside linebacker Shane Ray (wrist) and Sam Jones (back), who were limited earlier in the week.

"We're very lucky. It's very early in the season and most teams are healthy," coach Vance Joseph said. "But after Week 1, no one is going to be healthy. To be totally healthy for Week 1 is a good deal."

The Broncos put the final touches on their game plan for the Seahawks with confidence in their health but also their progress and improvement throughout preseason. But the mistakes of last year — and 2016 — continue to seep into their hopes for the new season.

After a 3-1 start to open 2017, the Broncos crumbled, often losing the same way with turnovers and early deficits. Eliminating the turnovers has been emphasized since March, when they signed Case Keenum. Gaining leads early was again mentioned this week.

"That's huge for our defense," Joseph said. "How we're built on defense is to rush the passer. Without having a lead, we can't rush the passer. Obviously being at home and with our fans being loud on Sunday helping us defend Russell Wilson is going to be huge for us. Playing with a lead Sunday is going to be critical for our success."

The Athletic spoke with Broncos quarterbacks coach Mike Sullivan during OTAs in June and circled back with him this week to get an update on starter Case Keenum, backup Chad Kelly and newly acquired third-stringer, Kevin Hogan.

Nicki Jhabvala: How has Keenum progressed from the first day you started working with him in the offseason to now?

Mike Sullivan: "Well, it was brand new for him. A lot of concepts were maybe familiar to him, but the terminology, the called formations and motions, and the play concepts themselves — the protections and schemes as far as what we wanted to do in the passing game and the run game — were all brand new. The thing about him is he dove right in. He's extremely diligent and a very hard worker. He's very involved, very engaged in meetings. He'll ask me questions, he'll ask (offensive coordinator) Bill (Musgrave) questions, he encourages the other quarterbacks in the room to have dialogue. So he's definitely a guy that is very active, very thorough in his preparation."

Jhabvala: How long does it take you to learn a new system before you can teach it?

Sullivan: "No question, anytime you get into a new system you have to hit the delete button in terms of, 'Maybe it's a familiar concept, but you know what? That's not what we're doing as the 2018 Denver

Broncos.' One thing Bill was tremendous about when we were putting this system together is he has extensive experience, but he wanted feedback from all of his assistant coaches and the places they had been. There might be a concept here, or a philosophy there that's all kind of combined to make who we are.

"My wife and daughters are still out in New Jersey. While I miss them terribly, it, on the other hand, has been beneficial because I had to spend later time in the evening to get myself ready. Because I certainly wouldn't want to ever give the wrong information to the guys as I'm learning. It's been a gradual process, but it's been a lot of fun."

Jhabvala: Vance Joseph said he believed Keenum is better than what he saw from him on film last year. Do you agree?

Sullivan: "Hard to quantify what last year was. I certainly saw a lot of the great things on film and went through the free-agent evaluation process. But I wasn't with him day to day. The one thing I would say about where he is at right now, we're very pleased. He has continued to improve, continued to get more and more comfortable, more and more confident in the system and with what we're trying to do. So I think all of his preparation, all of his hard work is paying off. Of course last time he played was a real solid night for us, a few weeks ago in Washington. Just really excited for Sunday."

Jhabvala: What kind of growth did you see in Chad Kelly from the start of OTAs through the end of preseason?

Sullivan: "I'll tell you, the first thing I have to say about Chad Kelly: What a tremendous worker he is. That guy lived in the building. He put so much time in from Day 1, to the spring and then I had some communication with him over the summertime and sending him quizzes and some other things. He was very diligent. That kid, he works at it. Some things might not come naturally, like they might not come naturally for other players, but he just attacks it full-speed head on. I couldn't be more impressed with how much time he's put in and how well he takes to the coaching. He's not someone where we're having to make the same correction over and over again. It's been very gratifying to see him take a fundamental or take a read or something schematic and having him take it from the meeting room to the practice field and of course make some great plays in the preseason games."

Jhabvala: How have you been working with Hogan to get him up to speed?

Sullivan: "I don't want to say it's a gradual process, because it can't be gradual in season. The clock is ticking. But we've spent extra time with him, prior to getting into the game plan, with one-on-one meetings. Just learning the terminology, this is how we call things, the techniques, the footwork, the schemes, you name it. We've been kind of bombarding him ... but he has been excellent in meetings. He's very, very smart. He's into it, he's processing everything. He uses a red pen and his notebook looks like it's been bled all over. He's just been taking great notes. Very bright, coming from Stanford. It'll be an ongoing process, just to get him caught up. You can't cheat OTAs, minicamp, training camp, four preseason games. But he's working hard and he's very bright and we're looking forward to him getting better and more comfortable with what we're doing."

Carlos Henderson's window had seemingly closed. A third-round pick in 2017, Henderson was drafted to be a key piece of the Broncos' offense, and perhaps their answer in the slot and in the return game.

But a thumb injury landed him on injured reserve for his rookie year, a hamstring injury kept him out of most of minicamp this year and a reported family matter landed him on the reserve/did not report list for training camp.

That wasn't the end of it though. Henderson was suspended by the NFL for the first week of the season stemming from his arrest on a marijuana possession charge in January.

The Broncos' class of 2017 failed to live up to expectations, and Henderson was front and center. And with two new receiving additions through the 2018 draft, his opportunity was expiring quickly.

But as camp neared its end, Henderson returned to Dove Valley to meet with John Elway about his options. He wanted to return, but faced the suspension and possible fines for missing camp and the reality that the Broncos had a stacked receiving class with no room for him. For now.

When the Broncos finalized its 53-man roster, they agreed to sign Henderson to the practice squad.

"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. If he does that, he'll be fine."

Henderson is unable to practice until Monday, after the Seahawks game, because of the suspension. But he has participated in meetings and has been a regular presence in the locker room.

"It feels good. I'm glad to be back and ready to take full advantage of this opportunity," Henderson told The Athletic. "I just want to show that I can be a pro off the field. Show the team that they drafted me in the third round for a reason. Just be a pro off the field, and once I do that, everything will take care of itself."

Henderson said being away from the team during camp "was hard" but he made sure to maintain his conditioning, with two-a-days and catching 300 footballs a day.

The future for Henderson is uncertain, especially considering the Broncos' depth at his position. But his return to the field Monday is the first step.

"It'll feel like heaven," he said. "It's not even a feeling I can describe. I'm just so eager to get back out there."

Five things to watch: Seahawks vs. Broncos

By STAFF

The Athletic

September 8, 2018

Four years ago, the Seattle Seahawks and Denver Broncos met in a regular-season matchup of titans. More than seven months removed from the anticlimax that was Super Bowl XLVIII, the former AFC West rivals played the kind of strength-on-strength, back-and-forth affair that makes NFL fans and network executives swoon. As they had in the 43-8 thumping the previous February, the Seahawks came away with the win, but only after beating back a furious Broncos comeback that forced overtime.

That was the last time Seattle and Denver met in the regular season, and after the intervening 4 ½ years – an eternity by NFL standards – the squads barely resemble their predecessors as they prepare for the start of the 2018 season. A couple of faces remain (Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson and Broncos defensive end Von Miller perhaps most notably), but gone are Richard Sherman, Peyton Manning, Kam Chancellor, Wes Welker, Marshawn Lynch and more. And while both teams stood on the precipice of glory in September 2014, each now faces an uncertain future after massive changes.

Neither team is expected to contend for a Super Bowl in 2018, but there is a case to be made that each could – in a best-case scenario – make some noise in its division. Of course, best-case scenarios rarely pan out, and there are significant questions facing both sides. The Athletic's Nicki Jhabvala (Broncos) and Michael-Shawn Dugar (Seahawks) break down five particular items of interest heading into an intriguing Week 1 matchup (4:25 p.m. ET, FOX).

1. Which rebuilt unit gels quicker: The Case Keenum-led Broncos offense, or the Legion of Boom-less Seahawks defense?

Nicki Jhabvala: I wouldn't have said this three months ago, but I'm going with the the Broncos' offense. After two offseasons with quarterback competitions, the offense this year was able to practice from Day One with its starting quarterback. Keenum, his receivers, tight ends and backs had throwing sessions in Colorado and Los Angeles during the offseason, and when they returned for training camp in late July they had an established rapport. It was obvious in team drills during camp, and it was obvious as preseason progressed; with each week, the starting offense was more efficient and consistent.

On paper, this offense is much better than it was last year and in 2016. Keenum is the most significant upgrade, but the class of 2018 has provided depth (and talent) across the board, most notably at receiver and running back. If there's a remaining concern, it's still the offensive line. Reducing the penalties and improving the protection of last year is a priority. Should anything happen to right tackle Jared Veldheer, though, the Broncos could be in trouble.

Michael-Shawn Dugar: Earl Thomas ending his holdout Wednesday makes this question way more interesting. Assuming he plays Sunday, Thomas makes Seattle's secondary much more talented, but the lack of chemistry could be an issue. So much of what made the Legion of Boom so dope, aside from All-Pro talent, was the group's non-verbal communication that developed over time. That said, Thomas, strong safety Bradley McDougald, left cornerback Shaquill Griffin and slot corner Justin Coleman are fairly familiar with each other and developing a feel for those nonverbal signals that make pre-snap communication so effective.

I think it's easier to plug in new members of a secondary than it is to sub in a new quarterback in the offseason. I'm also not sure how good Keenum actually is. Hard to tell when the dude throwing the ball is iffy.

2. Best vs. Best: Hobbled Doug Baldwin/Brandon Marshall/Tyler Lockett vs. Denver CB group

NJ: This will be the first real test of life without Aqib Talib for the Broncos. Chris Harris Jr., arguably the top slot corner in the game, is now the true No. 1 in Denver, while Bradley Roby moves up to No. 2. That's where it gets dicey for Denver.

For the past four years, the Broncos' secondary had a near seamless transition with the Talib-Harris-Roby trio. Talib and Harris played with each other in college, and their connection was so strong that they rarely had to say anything on the field to know how the other would react or where he would be. Roby joined them and quickly developed into an unofficial starter as the third corner.

Now, there could be a drop-off from Nos. 2 to 3. Tramaine Brock was signed to a one-year deal to be the third corner, but he was injured for much of camp. The Broncos are banking on his veteran experience — as well as that of Adam Jones, now the fourth corner. But he's been a Bronco for less than two weeks.

Last year Denver's self-titled No Fly Zone endured a rough transition in Joe Woods' first year as defensive coordinator. Communication issues were rampant, and against Seattle's experienced receiving corps, they better hope the issues are ironed out.

MSD: I'm going to quickly say Doug Baldwin versus virtually anyone in the slot is unfair, even on a bad knee (which isn't as bad as we've been making it sound, I think). Until we see what not-fully-healthy Baldwin and just-healthy-again Marshall look like, I'll give the nod to the Broncos here. That secondary, despite the loss of Talib, is legit.

Now, a quick Brock story. I didn't know the Broncos had him now. That's cool. The story, though, is from when Brock signed with the Seahawks in 2017. He had been released by the 49ers after domestic violations in the offseason, then signed by Seattle during training camp. The day he signed with Seattle, his agent came on the practice field and gathered all the local reporters. He had this unofficial press conference with us, expressing his full confidence that the women who alleged to have been assaulted by Brock would soon recant, and Brock wouldn't face any penalty from the league. I'll spare the details, but there was something so strange about that agent's confidence. It was weird. And gross. After his impromptu presser, he then instructed us to whip out our recorders to have an official media briefing. That was one of my first interactions with an NFL agent. The big leagues are no joke.

Wait, the Broncos have Pacman Jones, too? Sheesh. These guys shouldn't be the No Fly Zone, they should be the Twilight Zone.

3. Each team has six rookies on the 2-deep, per Ourlads. Which one needs to play over his head?

NJ: Royce Freeman for the Broncos. Denver has the youngest running back corps in the league, and it chose the youngest guy in the room to be the starter. Freeman is the first rookie to start for the Broncos since Terrell Davis, in 1995. No pressure.

For the Broncos' offense to go anywhere this year, it has to have a reliable run game. For years the Broncos got away with not having consistent production on the ground because the offense centered on Peyton Manning. Balance is a necessity now.

Freeman's numbers at Oregon (947 carries, 5,621 rushing yards) offered the Broncos hope he has the durability and production to be their feature back. He'll have help though, with Devontae Booker as the two and fellow rookie Phillip Lindsay, who might turn into their third-down back.

MSD: This is easy: Shaquem Griffin. Seahawks fans can barely name the guys in the starting defensive rotation as is, now K.J. Wright, one of the few holdovers from the Super Bowl teams, is out with a knee injury. Griffin was the feel-good story of the draft class, and he was very promising in the preseason, but no one really knows exactly how good he is. The Seahawks aren't going to let him use being a rookie as an excuse for hiccups in run-stopping or pass defense.

Great players like Wright increase the team's margin for error. They make plays others wouldn't normally make. Can Griffin stick his nose in there on first and second down, then break up a pass to the tight end on third down to get the defense off the field? I honestly don't know. We'll see.

A note on Freeman: Seattle coach Pete Carroll said they thoroughly evaluated Freeman during the draft process. Carroll praised the rookie runner, then called him the best pass-protector at his position last year. That was a weird comment, considering the Achilles' heel of Seattle's top draft pick, running back Rashaad Penny, just happens to be pass-protection. People are already skeptical of the Penny pick because he's currently the No. 2 tailback behind a guy Seattle landed in the seventh-round of the 2017 draft, and Carroll's remarks Wednesday afternoon didn't do anything to make fans feel better about grabbing Penny at No. 27 overall.

4. Von Miller is going to kill Germain Ifedi, right?

NJ: Vance Joseph had to tell Miller to ease up a bit during camp because when he goes full, he can "wreck practice." He has wrecked a lot of tackles, with his bend and oft-underrated power. Lane Johnson is probably the one tackle that I've seen be able to handle Miller. And Johnson, remember, ran a 4.72-second 40 weighing 300-something pounds at the combine in 2013. It takes that kind of freak athlete to hold up against Miller.

The thing with Miller is he might have had one of his finest seasons last year, but the numbers require context; he was one of the most chipped and double-teamed defenders in the league, and still came up with 83 pressures and 10 sacks.

Denver's hope is that with No. 5 overall pick Bradley Chubb on the other side, Miller will be freed more to rush the passer. This formula worked for them in 2015, when DeMarcus Ware and Miller starred on a defense that led them to a Super Bowl 50 win. Granted, Chubb is a rookie and will experience ups and downs in Year 1. But his presence alone could be a boon for Miller.

MSD: On paper, this feels like the kind of mismatch you don't see in football very often. Miller is considered to be the best pass rusher in the history of best pass-rushers, while Ifedi is considered the weakest link on one of the weakest offensive lines in the league.

For what it's worth, Ifedi, in his third year as a pro and second year at right tackle, is looking forward to the challenge. He likes the opportunity to go against the best. Like many competitors, he feels like a worthy adversary whenever he's on the field. If you ask Ifedi about a talented edge rusher, he'll offer kind words, then remind you that the rusher in question – and the rest of his defensive line – has to deal with him and his boys, too. Regardless the outcome, you have to respect a guy with that mindset. Also, what

do people expect the inferior player to say in this scenario, “Von is great and he’s gonna kill me?” Nah, these guys don’t get down like that.

5. What’s the one thing you want to learn about your team in Week 1?

NJ: Just how much has this Broncos offense improved with Case Keenum at quarterback and Bill Musgrave as coordinator? And can it be consistent?

Joseph didn’t mince words when he said he wanted Keenum to not do “anything special” and instead “just manage the game for us.” The Broncos beat themselves repeatedly last year with turnovers and penalties and communication errors on both sides of the ball. Their goal in making Musgrave coordinator late last year, and then keeping him on for this year, was to simplify an unwieldy playbook and tweak a few things so it played to the strengths of the quarterback. It was clear in preseason that the offense cleaned up many things, but it was far from perfect; Keenum didn’t throw an interception, but he also didn’t throw a single touchdown pass.

Can he both protect the ball and get production out of this group? Can the offensive line keep him upright? Can they establish the run early and keep it going throughout the year? Can they find some success in the red zone with their bigger receiving corps and young group of tight ends?

Basically, all the same questions that have been asked since 2016 ...

MSD: Oh, wow, I wish I would have read that “don’t do anything special” line about Keenum before I answered the first question. Telling the quarterback to just manage the game feels a lot like “Hey, kid, don’t mess this up.” Maybe that’s not what Vance Joseph means when he says that, but boy, that’s how I read it.

Anyway, I need to see if the Seahawks can run the ball. Thomas coming back erases any immediate concerns I had about the secondary, so now the offense becomes the biggest issue. Seattle’s defensive backfield was just fine last year and I expect it to be fine this year, even with newcomer Dontae Johnson in the mix (remember, he’s the only new starting DB if Thomas plays Sunday).

The Seahawks haven’t had a consistent run game since 2015, and even then, neither Marshawn Lynch nor Thomas Rawls could stay healthy. Chris Carson is the real deal, I think, but we need to see him consistently produce in the regular season. If the Seahawks can’t run the ball this year, they’re toast. Being one-dimensional only gets you so far – Seattle learned last year that it doesn’t get you to the playoffs – even if that one dimension is Russell Wilson.

Broncos' Phillip Lindsay prepared to make impact in NFL debut

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 8, 2018

Phillip Lindsay follows a daily routine.

Wake up. Pinch self.

He is the first player from the Broncos Futures Football Program to reach the NFL. From middle school stalwart to high school standout to University of Colorado star, no one boasts deeper local roots than the running back.

But if you think the Broncos' undrafted free agent remains satisfied, then you don't know Lindsay.

"I want to go out there and do my part, whether it's one play or 10 plays. I want to be explosive," Lindsay told Denver7. "I am looking to make an impact on special teams in kickoff return and in coverage as a gunner. I want to go out there and make a tackle."

The idea of Lindsay landing a roster spot became realistic after the first training camp practice. Linebacker Brandon Marshall let it slip that Lindsay would be the team's "third-down back." The derby remained open, but crystallized with each preseason game. Lindsay caught a touchdown pass at home, and finished the summer with 70 yards on 13 carries.

"This is not a fluff story because he's a local kid," coach Vance Joseph said. "He's earned the right to be here."

For Lindsay, the experience is a bit surreal. He grew up rooting for the Broncos, watching Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. His favorite memory was when quarterback Peyton Manning signed, an addition that led to a pair of Super Bowl appearances and a title in 2015.

"Getting Peyton is the best moment anybody can have. He's the sheriff," Lindsay said. "It's so cool how he demanded excellence from everyone."

Lindsay held a similar role in college. All but one of the Broncos' 10 draft picks served as college captains. And Lindsay filled that role as well, helping CU's program rebound during his time in Boulder.

Playing at home brings advantages. But it can also create issues, like a fishbowl existence full of pressure and distractions. Lindsay insisted that's not the case for him.

"It's easy for me because I am who I am. I don't try to flaunt myself. I am respectful. If people want to talk to me, I talk to them," said Lindsay, who is wearing No. 30 with the blessing of Hall of Famer Terrell Davis. "I just go on. It's normal. Everyone has a job, making a living, and this is mine."

Lindsay rooted hard for the Broncos. He dreamed of playing for the team. Now, his family and friends will be cheering him from the stands.

"I didn't go to Broncos games growing up because we didn't have the money. And two, I was mentally focused on my seasons, starting when I was in Little League to high school to college. I just went down the road," Lindsay said. "It doesn't mean I didn't watch the games -- I did. It's cool to be here with players like Demaryius and Emmanuel. Now, I am ready to do my part to help us win."

Colorado sports fans prepare for action packed weekend

By Russell Haythorn

KMGH

September 8, 2018

The Broncos are back, the Rockies are on fire, and away game or not - sports bars are going to be packed tomorrow when CU takes on Nebraska in a renewed rivalry game for the first time since 2010.

All this to say - this is shaping up to be a Hall of Fame worthy sports weekend in Colorado. In the calendars of professional and college sports seasons, this is one of those weekends where the stars collide.

And businesses are loving it.

"We've got Broncos, we've got the Rockies and the L.A. Dodgers and we've got college football. We're ready. We've been looking forward to this," said Tina Cochrane at Jackson's Sports Bar near Coors Field.

It's all hands deck at Jackson's.

The Rockies are first place in the NL West, playing host to the Dodgers who are only a 1.5 games out of first. It's three game home-stand.

All this while the Broncos host the Seahawks over at Mile High for their season opener on Sunday.

Chris Black is the owner of Falling Rock Tap House and says it doesn't get any better than this.

"The atmosphere, the energy down here is just so much fun," Black said.

It's also big for business.

"It's a huge boost to us downtown when we have a decent team playing over in the ball field there," Black said. "It really makes it worthwhile because you know, this is not the cheap rent district."

Lorenzo Di Pepe brought his family all the way out from California. Di Pepe is a huge Broncos fan.

"We're doing the Rockies/Dodgers game tonight and then going to the Broncos game Sunday," Di Pepe said.

"It's basically purple and orange for this weekend," said Jim LaRoche, manager of the Sports Fan, a sports merchandise shop near Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

Sports hounds were already flooding into Sports Fan Friday afternoon to gear up.

"We are going to be busy from open to close - all weekend long," LaRoche said.

Also on Saturday, the CU Buffaloes and Nebraska Cornhuskers renew their rivalry for the first time since 2010, when both universities left the Big 12 for other conferences. Colorado joined the PAC 12 and

Nebraska went to the Big Ten. Kickoff for the Buffs game is at 1:30 p.m. right here on Denver7. The game is in Lincoln, NE.

The CSU Rams will also host a home game Saturday in Ft. Collins against the Arkansas Razorbacks.

At both Coors Field and Broncos Stadium, gates will open a couple of hours ahead of time.

Expect a lot of traffic and a lot of people downtown.

"This is what happens when you have a good team," Black said. "(The Rockies) have been playing really good ball. They've got a young team. Our pitching is doing great."

Woods calls Nike Kaepernick ad a 'beautiful spot'

By Dan Gelston
Associated Press
September 8, 2018

Tiger Woods endorsed Nike's latest "Just Do It" ad narrated by Colin Kaepernick with a message nearly as succinct.

"It's a beautiful spot," Woods said.

The two-minute ad, which debuted during the NFL opener, highlights superstar athletes LeBron James, Serena Williams and others, and touches on the controversy of NFL player protests during the national anthem.

Woods, a Nike athlete since turning pro in 1996 who rarely delves into divisive issues, said Friday he was a fan of the apparel giant featuring the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback known for his social protests.

"I think Nike is trying to get out ahead of it and trying to do something special and I think they've done that," Woods said at the BMW Championship. "It's a beautiful spot and pretty powerful people (are) in the spot."

The ad aired during the first commercial break in the third quarter of the Eagles-Falcons game on Thursday night. Kaepernick watched the first television airing on NBC at an event held at Nike's headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon.

Woods has been a big part of Nike Golf through his 14 major championships, no moment more indelible than when his chip shot on the 16th green at the Masters hung on edge of the cup for two seconds — with the swoosh facing the camera — before dropping. His "TW" logo has made him an embodiment of the brand.

He said Nike didn't consult his opinion on the ad that featured Kaepernick.

"They did not tell me it was coming," Woods said. "When corporate does things that are outside of golf and outside of my realm, that's what they do."

Nike's swoosh logo was omnipresent on hats, polos and spikes for golfers at Aronimink Golf Club.

Tony Finau, the leading candidate to be the final Ryder Cup pick for the U.S. team, said the Nike campaign with Kaepernick "definitely stands out"

"As far as Kaepernick and all that's concerned, we all have the freedom of speech and he's using it in a way that's non-violent which is something you just have to respect as an American," he said. "They came out with a campaign that they feel is who they are. As an athlete of theirs, it's not my job to agree or disagree with whatever they do."

Kaepernick's deal with Nike for the 30th anniversary of the "Just Do It" campaign was the most polarizing issue in sports this week, prompting heated debate on several topics including athletes protesting social injustice and Nike wading into political waters. Some fans responded to Kaepernick's sponsorship deal by cutting or burning gear with Nike's signature swoosh logo. Others argued the backlash to the campaign and calls for a Nike boycott showed how the debate has morphed well beyond how athletes try to highlight issues like racial inequality and police shootings of unarmed minorities.

President Donald Trump, a critic of protests during the anthem, tweeted Friday, "What was Nike thinking?"

Serena Williams, who will play her ninth U.S. Open final, said last week at the tournament that she was proud of Kaepernick. He was in Flushing Meadows to watch Williams play.

"I think every athlete, every human, and definitely every African-American should be completely grateful and honored (for Kaepernick)," she said.

Kaepernick began a wave of protests by NFL players two seasons ago, kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and racial inequality.

PGA Championship winner and two-time U.S. Open champ Brooks Koepka said the biggest winner might be the publicity sparked for Nike.

"I mean, let's put it this way, their name is in the paper and people are talking about it," he said. "So Nike is doing what they want to do."

When Colorado's own Phillip Lindsay scores for the Broncos? Give 'em the Mile High Salute

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

September 8, 2018

When Colorado's own Phillip Lindsay scores a touchdown for the Broncos in the No. 30 jersey that Terrell Davis carried to the Hall of Fame, Lindsay should give the Mile High Salute.

The South High Rebels will salute back.

As we scouted the Rebels varsity practicing on the rain-soaked, grungy field turf on the south side of the almost-century-old campus, sophomore Bryce Jones, who plays Lindsay's position of running back, agreed: "Give 'em the Salute! Do it just like TD. That's my guy, TD. Terrell Davis was my favorite player. Phil having that number, I'll have to get one of those. I mean, he went here."

He went here, and these guys go here.

"It gives me a sense of hope, you know?" said Isaiah Acosta, a senior lineman. "If he can do it, that makes me think I can do it."

What Phil Lindsay means to the Broncos is no match for what he means to the kids of South. The undrafted NFL rookie is Colorado at its relentless, stubborn, fearless best. Sunday against the Seattle Seahawks, Lindsay will become the 17th football player to play a game at the high school, college and NFL level in Colorado. For the millions watching the season opener that's merely another in a sea of stats.

For the 15-, 16- and 17-year-old football players I met this week as they blocked, tackled and hustled under the caring eye of coach Ryan Marini and a steady downpour on the South practice field, it's their own dreams being realized in real time.

"He's one of us, and here he is playing at all three levels in our home state. Come on, man, that's just crazy," said Nejon McCray, a senior defensive end, plucking black bits of the field turf from his purple-and-white Rebels jersey. "It gives us kids something to believe in, to know we can do that. To go to the same school as a guy like that, it's crazy."

"Football is what I love, so I want to play in the NFL," said Martin Jiple, a sophomore wide receiver. "So it's like you can do that because he did it."

The first classes at South took place in 1893 in a spot that's now Grant Middle School, on the corner of Mexico and Washington, in the Platte Park neighborhood where I grew up. The school upgraded to its current location in the 1920s. The "new" building long ago was designated as a national landmark — like the Brooklyn Bridge, Library of Congress and Chilkoot Trail. To these kids, the addition of Lindsay to the Broncos' 53-man roster was a national holiday.

"It was all over Facebook, all over Twitter. Soon as he made it, I swear, everybody started going harder that day in practice. The energy changed that day," Jones said. "Just knowing that he came out of an inner-

city school, it just makes us know that we can actually go somewhere. Sometimes you think we can't do that because we don't go to one of those rich, toddy schools like Valor or (Cherry) Creek. It makes feel, like, let's get this going! I can make it like he did."

The Lindsay contingent that built South into the city's premier high school football program is no longer here. Coach Tony Lindsay Sr., Tony Lindsay Jr., Gabe Lindsay and ex-Bronco Tatum Bell have moved on to recreate the success at Far Northeast High — formerly known as Montbello — where a system based on old-fashioned discipline and blue-collar hard work is certain to thrive.

"Half that stadium is going to be Phillip fans on Sunday! That's what's up," Tony Sr. said on Friday with a booming laugh. "I'm going to have to get me a Phillip Lindsay shirt."

Just as the Lindsay clan shadowed their brothers' lead, kids here are following Phillip's.

"We all lived football. And that's the truth: you have to live it. If I would've been a gangster, my brother would've been a gangster. But we're football players, and so we were all football players," Tony Sr. said. "It's about what you see and know. It takes a village, you know?"

His village is watching its favorite son. Can't you just hear it now, inside Mile High on Sunday?

Touchdown, Broncos! No. 30, Phillip Lindsay!

Salute.

Klee's Spread Offense: Week 1

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

September 8, 2018

Klee's Spread Offense

Legalized sports gambling is coming. Sundays during the NFL season, The Gazette's Paul Klee offers three wagers against the spread that he would make (with Woody Paige's money):

1. Dolphins (plus-1) vs. Titans: Miami coach Adam Gase is flipping the culture on South Beach. He couldn't ask for a better opener than facing Marcus Mariota (9-12 on the road) at home.
2. Broncos vs. Seahawks (Over 42): Case Keenum joked he didn't know the "No Fly Zone's" nickname, and Seattle's "Legion of Boom" is now the Legion of Whom? Don't be shocked at a shootout.
3. Bears (plus-7.5) vs. Packers: Rivalry games usually are a wagering no-go. Exceptions are made when the spread hits a touchdown or more ... and Khalil Mack joins the 'dogs at the last minute.

Klee's 2018 ATS record: 0-0.

Broncos Injury Report: Broncos healthy for game vs. Seattle

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 8, 2018

The Broncos will enter Sunday's game against the Seahawks with a healthy team, Head Coach Vance Joseph said Friday.

No Broncos players were listed as questionable, doubtful or out on Friday's practice participation report.

Only Sam Jones and Shane Ray were limited at some point this week, and both players were full participants in practice on Thursday and Friday.

Though the Broncos have several players on injured reserve, their lack of players in doubt for Sunday's game is a luxury.

Some teams, like the Seahawks, have several players who may not play in the season opener.

Seattle players D.J. Fluker, K.J. Wright, Dion Jordan, Dontae Johnson, Germain Ifedi and Jarran Reed were either limited in or missed at least one of this week's practices.

"We're very lucky," Joseph said. "It's early in the season, and most teams are healthy. But after Week 1, no one's going to be healthy, so to be totally healthy for Week 1 is definitely a good deal."

UPDATE: This story has been updated to reflect Denver's Friday practice participation report.

Seattle Seahawks at Denver Broncos in Week 1: Picks, how to watch, stream on NFL Sunday

By Cody Benjamin

CBS Sports

September 8, 2018

There might not be a tougher game to predict than Sunday's cross-conference collision between the Denver Broncos and Seattle Seahawks.

Both teams have suffered some rather dramatic falls from glory in recent years, with Seattle uprooting its "Legion of Boom" core and Denver landing on Case Keenum after years of quarterback incompetence. But neither side is long removed from Super Bowl contention, either, so it's anyone's guess as to which versions of the Broncos and Seahawks we'll see on opening day.

Denver is banking on Keenum after smartly moving on from the likes of Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch, a trio of failed Peyton Manning successors, but its real strength probably lies on the defense. Von Miller and Co. certainly weren't invincible in a rough 2017 campaign, but they aren't lacking for proven names. If enough things swing right (a Royce Freeman burst at running back, a Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders rebirth at receiver), it's not crazy to suggest Denver could be in the hunt late in the year. But that also depends on if Keenum can prove his 2017 emergence wasn't just an anomaly in Minnesota.

As wild as it sounds, Seattle might be favored even less than Denver entering this season depending on who you talk to. Pete Carroll spent the offseason shedding the last of the Super Bowl-era stars, after all, and even Earl Thomas could be a little rusty thanks to his delayed preseason arrival. One thing's for sure, however: As long as Russell Wilson is at quarterback, the Seahawks simply cannot be counted out. Maybe he'll be running for his life as he's done far too often in recent seasons, but there's no way to fully discount Seattle's chances as long as his dual-threat self is under center.

On Sunday, both sides will meet. Here's how to tune in:

How to watch, stream

Kickoff: Sunday, Sept. 9, 4:25 p.m. ET

TV: FOX (Check local listings)

Streaming: fuboTV (Try for free)

Who will win?

Russell Wilson or not, Seattle could be in for a rough year. Or at least that's what the CBS NFL experts polled on Week 1 games seem to believe, as six of eight analysts like the in-transition Broncos to claim an opening-Sunday win.

Pete Prisco thinks the "tough venue" will be a challenge for Denver on the road, and he sees a rebuilding Seattle defense as a nice platform for Keenum to start the season.

You can catch all of CBS's expert NFL picks right here.

So who should you back in Week 1 of the NFL season? Visit [SportsLine](#) now to see which teams are winning more than 50 percent of simulations, all from the model that has outperformed 98 percent of experts tracked by [NFLPickWatch.com](#) the past two seasons.

Is It Still OK to Love the NFL?

By Charlotte Wilder

MMQB

September 8, 2018

Professional football: It's back! Look, I know: Every day more evidence mounts that this sport is bad—very bad—for people's brains. Some former NFL athletes say they wouldn't play the game knowing now what they didn't know then. That they'd prefer if their kids picked a safer sport. If I ever have sons, I'll certainly suggest they take part in almost anything else after school besides football. Listening to men who've retired describe the effects the sport has had on their bodies and minds, and watching guys get hit hard on the field—sometimes with dire consequences—makes me question whether it's OK to love this sport.

Because I do. Despite everything I just wrote, football is easily my favorite league to watch. I'm floored by the beauty of the formations, the stunning catches and insane athleticism of the players, the chess-like maneuvers of the coaches. Games are finite and packed with action. One Hail Mary pass, superhuman block, or battering-ram of a run can give us endings that would seem too unbelievable for a movie.

And when it comes to the athletes, part of me feels like watching the NFL honors what they've chosen to do. They've sacrificed so much to play, to make money, to give back to the families and the communities that got them this far. Following the sport somehow seems like respecting the players. Until the system is overhauled from the pros to Peewee—somehow making changes to the game so there are fewer risks—not watching feels like punishing the wrong people. For every athlete who says he wouldn't have played if he'd known the risks, there's at least one who says he would've. Deciding not to watch or read up on the league when I still want to would feel a bit performative to me, especially knowing that my absence wouldn't make a dent in the NFL's bottom line. On the other hand, maybe that's the only way to make a difference—by being that miniscule dent until others join in to deepen it.

The truth could be that I'm just clinging to a ritual I'm not ready to give up: With only 16 games a season, each becomes a marquee event. Sundays turn into an eight-hour excuse to sit on your couch, stare at your phone calculating fantasy points, and drink beers/inhale chicken wings with your friends and family. After the first NFL weekend, I find myself wondering what I do with my time during the offseason. I cherish the rhythm football brings to my life.

The bottom line is that I have no answers. I only have all the terrible information about the sport and the contradictory good feelings I get from watching. These two conflicting truths that rattle around in my brain as I read up on the Patriots and eagerly await the first Sunday of games. If you're trying to live your life as a just person who does the right thing but also really wants to win her fantasy league, football is an exercise in having your head and heart constantly at war with each other.

Maybe that's OK, maybe it isn't. One thing is for sure: loving football these days is messy and hard to reconcile. A mirror of America in 2018.

Emmanuel Sanders: Courtland Sutton could haul in 10-plus TDs

By STAFF

NFL.com

September 8, 2018

Emmanuel Sanders

Wide receiver, Denver Broncos

Born: March 17, 1987

Experience: Ninth NFL season

Interview by Nick Shook | Sept. 2, 2018

I got hurt last year so this is one of those situations where I sat back and said, "I've got to make a certain sacrifice to lock myself in and be healthy a full year."

It sucks, man. It sucks. What really sucks about injuries is like, the past four years have been so good. Two Pro Bowl appearances and a Super Bowl, and then I get hurt on an ankle injury that wasn't my fault. It wasn't like a hamstring strain. It was a situation where a guy came and literally dove in front of my ankle and rolled my ankle.

When I was out there, I still was playing with an ankle that was at 60, 70 percent.

It was so much pain. I missed like six games and still had like 600 yards and everybody's saying, "Oh yeah, he's hurt because he's 31," kind of like, I wouldn't say give up on you but they think that you're done because of an injury and because of a number. They don't even know how to equate the number to the injury, though. They just say, "Oh, Emmanuel Sanders. What did he do last year?" ... But regardless, though, it's one of those situations: minor setback for a major comeback.

I'm ready to come back this year and ball out. So far, so good. I've had the best offseason I've had. I didn't go out much, I didn't drink too much alcohol. I stayed locked and loaded and trying different procedures and taking care of my body and understanding and trying to get ready for the long haul.

[The ankle injury] did [make me pay attention to taking care of my body]. It did. I had a daughter, too. Having two kids, they kind of slow you down a little bit. I think all in all, it all kind of slowed me down. I feel like life in general, it beats you up and makes you grow up.

What goes up must come down. I understand that. So, two Pro Bowls. Super Bowl. Down year. Now I'm getting ready to ride this wave back up, and I'm going to ride it back up totally different than the way I did last time.

I've taken it personally, what happened in Pittsburgh. But they didn't have the money, so to speak. I didn't take offense to it, but I do remember them saying, "I want to dog these guys out," and I did. I had 180-

some yards and a touchdown and even though we lost, I remember going back after the game crying because I guess I was just pissed off and wanted to beat them that bad for how I felt. I took it as disrespect.

I was like, "All right, man. You gonna let me walk? OK then, I'm gonna go and show you." In '14, I went to the Pro Bowl. In '15, I went to the Super Bowl and in '16, I went to the Pro Bowl again on them. So, it all worked out in my favor.

Looking back at Pittsburgh, it was Antonio [Brown's] destiny to be over there by himself and with no help. Because you want to talk about a guy, man, they feed him the ball. Being the No. 2 receiver over there is not fun at times.

Last year was tough. Three different quarterbacks, ankle injury, it was definitely tough.

Totally different locker room now. I understand that what I say speaks volumes. I'm very conscientious of words that I speak, trying to keep the locker room positive, trying to keep the locker room upbeat. [We have a] new quarterback, so I'm just optimistic about this year and hopefully, we can bounce back and turn it around.

So much easier [with Case Keenum], man, so much easier. I mean, he's a veteran quarterback, too, [so] he's been through the ranks. He understands what it takes to play the position. He's hungry, he's out to prove how I felt when I left Pittsburgh.

The Vikings could've signed him back, but they let him go and brought in another guy and gave him the money after [Keenum] helped them get to the NFC championship. So that's kind of like a slap in the face. I feel like he's got something to prove. I've got something to prove and the whole organization has something to prove. So everybody's hungry.

[Courtland Sutton] is a dog. He's a dog. He's an animal. Chris Harris Jr. calls him "Mini Megatron." He's big, man. He's big. He can go up and get the ball, he has good routes, he's smart. I feel like if we do what we're supposed to, there's no reason why he shouldn't have 10-plus touchdowns.

It's like one of those situations where I'm uncomfortable even talking about it up here because I know how good [our offense] can be, and I don't want to overhype it. I just want to fly under the radar and keep balling. I don't want that headline.

I thought Pittsburgh was going to be with the team that I played the longest with because I was there for four years as well. But to be with the Broncos for five years speaks volumes, too.

It wasn't that long ago, but some days I forget I even played for the Steelers.

[Paxton Lynch getting cut is] a tough situation to speak about. Obviously, he just didn't do the job. 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.

It's one of those situations where [Lynch] just might need a fresh start. The beautiful thing about moving to a new city, a new town or going to a new school is that you can be whoever you want. It'll be good for him to go to a new team and try to start fresh and try to start and go to Pro Bowls and stuff like that. I wish him the best.

From a maturity level standpoint, when I got with Peyton [Manning], I kind of grew up a lot faster. In terms of studying, Peyton wasn't having it. Peyton's expectations of me were so high, I had to go and study. I had to do the right thing. Just his approach to how he [got on] me and trying to get me in the right mindset wasn't dissing me or bashing me. It was more like, "Hey, this is your job and I need you to do your job." It kind of helped me grow up and become the player I am today.

I think I was an arrogant, cocky guy [when I arrived in Denver]. I knew I was good, just figured I could just show up on Sundays and keep doing it that way, but I was hungry as hell, too. I wanted to be great. I wanted to prove myself. I knew going and playing with Peyton, I was going to be on the grand stage every Sunday and I had to go out and produce. I think that right there, going through those games, 100-yard games and three-touchdown games, it brought me back to where I was at SMU and having so much success and it gave me a sense of confidence as well.

Shoot, [I realized I'd become an older player] when they started calling me old man and when guys started walking around saying they're 21, 22, and I'm 31.

Also, when I watched the TV copy and they'd say, "The veteran. The veteran Emmanuel Sanders, he's been doing it a long time." I'm like, "Oh, s---. I'm one of those guys now?" They don't even say that about Antonio Brown. Like, they don't say Antonio Brown is the veteran or he's older, but for some reason they tag me in that, even though me and AB came in the same year.

They just call me "the vet." I guess I'm savvy.

I'm trying to get into broadcasting. I don't know which way I want to go, though. I don't know if I want to go towards the movie role or a sports analyst, I don't know yet. I still got hopefully another four, five years left to play ball. It's just something I'm pursuing to see [if it will] work out.

Once I get done playing football, I don't want to just sit around the house. I still want to be active. I don't want to go into coaching. I don't want to be a coach; that's way too much work for me. I don't have the patience for it.

I had my first television show out in Pittsburgh. It was called "Catch 88: The Emmanuel Sanders Show." That was my last year in Pittsburgh and it was because I was No. 88. Then I came [to Denver] and I got a show called "Broncos Huddle," but I'm not doing it anymore because I'm kind of focused on football now.

Kenny Stills Carries Colin Kaepernick's Torch by Continuing to Kneel

By Ken Belson
New York Times
September 8, 2018

As the N.F.L. season gets underway, Colin Kaepernick, a quarterback who has not taken a snap in nearly two years, is back at center stage, his presence looming over the league because of Nike's dramatic ad campaign featuring his willingness to sacrifice his career for his political beliefs.

All but a few players have returned to standing or raising fists during the playing of the national anthem, but Kenny Stills, a wide receiver on the Miami Dolphins, continues to kneel and has quietly become the on-field face of the movement Kaepernick started in 2016.

Stills, entering his sixth season, is an unlikely torch bearer for the protests. Other than a few episodes at Oklahoma, he said he had not endured outright acts of racism.

He grew up in San Diego, a city with a significant military presence, and does not fit cleanly into the often misguided assumptions about the controversy surrounding the protests — that they are somehow antimilitary, or that all military people and the players who know them are against the protesters. Stills's grandfather was in the Marines. Several influential figures from his childhood have military backgrounds.

However, like Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback who was the first N.F.L. player to refuse to stand for the national anthem, Stills wants to use his visibility to shine a light on police brutality, economic inequality and other forms of social injustice. A hero to some, Stills, like Kaepernick before him, has been branded unpatriotic, ungrateful and ignorant, though he insists he has nothing against the military or law enforcement. He says he only wants the police to be held accountable if they wrongly shoot someone.

"It shouldn't be this complicated," Stills, 26, said of the criticism after a recent practice. "There are people in this country who are saying there are issues we want to bring to light, can you help us make change. Instead of people saying, yeah, let's do this, let's make change, let's make our country a better place, it's like, no, don't do this then, this isn't the right place, you don't like the police."

Stills's profile has grown as he and a handful of other players who kneel, raise their fists or refuse to take the field for the national anthem, continue to make headlines in the drama that has by turns inspired and infuriated fans, the television networks and sponsors of the country's most popular sport. As the protests enter their third season, positions on all sides of the debate have calcified, leaving the N.F.L. in the position of alienating significant numbers of its constituents no matter what it does to address the controversy.

"There is no obvious 'one-size-fits-all' solution," said Phil de Picciotto, the president of Octagon, an agency that represents players and coaches. "The league is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't. That does not mean, however, that it shouldn't keep trying."

Entering the opening slate of games this weekend, the controversy shows no sign of abating. President Trump continues to attack the league for not penalizing players who protest. His criticism, which several owners have echoed, has prompted players who stopped protesting to resume doing so.

Stills, who has never stopped protesting, said he began kneeling two years ago because he felt helpless watching videos of African-Americans dying at the hands of the police. He wondered how he would feel if one of those people had been his nephew, father or uncle. One day, he broke down crying on the way to work and vowed to do something.

Inspired by Kaepernick, he wanted to kneel. He called his old Pop Warner coach in California and asked for advice. That coach, Joe Mascarenaz, told him not to protest.

“I have a lot of respect for him,” Stills said, “but I slept on it, prayed on it and decided if I didn’t get involved in some way, somehow, I wasn’t going to be able to live with myself for the rest of my life,” Stills said.

Last season, his teammates Michael Thomas and Julius Thomas (not related) joined Stills in kneeling at various times. After Coach Adam Gase told his players to stand for the anthem or remain in the locker room, Stills stood in the tunnel to the field. During this preseason, he resumed kneeling on the field. Just as Eric Reid knelt with Kaepernick, Stills’s teammate Albert Wilson has joined him.

“I thought I was going to be by myself out there,” Stills told reporters after a preseason game. “Today, I had an angel with me with Albert being out there. I’m grateful he sees what’s happening, and he wants to do something about it as well.”

Stills’s actions have had consequences. In August, the Broward County Police Benevolent Association said it would no longer buy discounted tickets to Dolphins games because of the protests, and it encouraged other police groups to follow suit.

Reactions like those throughout the country, as well as complaints from angry fans, declining television ratings and pressure from the White House, led the owners at their quarterly meeting in May to enact rules aimed at ending on-field protests. The new protocol required players to remain in the locker room or stand on the field for the anthem. The league said it would penalize teams whose players violated the rules and leave the question of how to penalize players up to each team.

As soon as the league changed its policy in May, the owners broke ranks. The Jets’ chairman, Chris Johnson, said he would not penalize his players if they protested. The San Francisco 49ers’ chief executive, Jed York, said he had abstained from voting.

Stills’s boss, the Dolphins owner, Stephen Ross, has made conflicting statements about the protests. In July, the team included a sentence in its rule book that said players could be fined or suspended if they did not stand for the anthem. Ross, who has spoken with Stills about his protests, later said that the sentence was merely a placeholder, not a policy.

Angered that the league changed its anthem policy unilaterally, the N.F.L. Players Association filed a grievance. The union also made it clear it would not begin negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement if there were different rules for different teams. In July, the league announced it would hold off on enforcing the new rules while the owners talk with the union about possible revisions.

Five days after that announcement, the Dallas Cowboys' owner, Jerry Jones, said his players must stand on the field for the playing of the "The Star-Spangled Banner," and not stay in the team's locker room. His son, Stephen, suggested that players would be cut if they disobeyed.

"Our policy is you stand during the anthem, toe the line," Jones told reporters.

Jones was among the owners deposed in legal cases brought by Kaepernick and his former teammate, Reid, who have accused the league of blackballing them because of their political views. An arbitrator overseeing the cases last week dismissed the N.F.L.'s bid to throw out Kaepernick's case, which sets the stage for a trial-like hearing in the coming months.

Stills, who is in the second year of a four-year contract, said he planned to continue protesting.

In March, he traveled to sites in the South that played a role in the civil rights movement. In Memphis, he visited the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. In Selma, Ala., he walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where police beat nonviolent protesters. He traveled to Tallahassee, Fla., where he joined a rally against police brutality, and to New Orleans, where he attended a camp where Kaepernick taught young people their rights when stopped by the police.

His appreciation for people he met who are working for change steeled him to continue speaking out. "The work they are doing was uplifting to my spirit because the first two years of this protest have been really difficult with the negative backlash we've been receiving," he said.

In Miami, Stills has won the team's community service award the past two seasons. He helps pay for tailgates at Dolphins home games that bring students, coaches, parents, community leaders and the police together. He organized a police ride-along program and took part in a town-hall meeting with law enforcement officials to talk about racial inequality.

Stills is not part of the Players Coalition, which worked with the league to develop a program that would funnel up to \$90 million to groups trying to address social injustice. Stills called this initiative a "Band-Aid" aimed at getting the players to stop protesting. If the owners were serious about addressing the issue, Kaepernick and Reid would still be playing in the N.F.L., he said. Only if they return to the field will he consider standing during the national anthem.

"No one wants this added stress or added negativity or hatred coming toward them," he said. "We truly just want to use our platform to say, hey, we've got issues going on, how can we all get involved to work together."

NFL Safety Tech, Part Four: The Future of Impact and Concussion Monitoring

By Joe Lemire
Sports Techie
September 8, 2018

This four-part series examines the NFL's \$60 million investment in the Engineering Roadmap to develop research and technology to make football safer. Part one discusses the data behind the controversial helmet rule. Part two outlines the engineering work supporting the roadmap. Part three discusses the crowdsourcing of innovative solutions. This part looks at the future of the program and a new data collection device.

The University of Virginia football team's season-opening 42-13 victory over Richmond seemed like just an unremarkable rout of a much smaller program. Hidden from public view, however, was something quite noteworthy: at least two-dozen Virginia players were wearing a new sensor technology embedded in their mouthguards that had been developed by NFL-commissioned engineers.

When the NFL allocated \$60 million to its Engineering Roadmap of health and safety initiatives in 2016, the league selected the leaders of Virginia's Center for Applied Biomechanics to head the effort. The center's director, Jeff Crandall, and his deputy, Richard Kent, have overseen that research from their Biocore consulting lab in Charlottesville.

Previous efforts to monitor head impacts focused primarily on sensors built into helmets, but tests of those systems showed that the head often moves differently than an exterior shell. Mouthguards are preferable because the upper jaw is part of the skull. The league has tested a number of commercial and research sensor-laden mouthguards, but Biocore has also developed its own version under the stewardship of senior research scientist Nate Dau. If the pilot test with Virginia goes well, the goal will be to provide the mouthguards to NFL players on a handful of teams on a limited basis in 2019.

"We've been focusing heavily on the technology," Crandall said. "What we've done is invested into a new technology that has very high accuracy, very small, fits into a package into a mouthguard. It's much smaller than what was available on the market. It's a completely new line of sensor technology."

Few specifics are available about the device or the trial. Crandall said the Biocore product uses minimal power, is of minimal size, and was built in coordination with a sensor partner and a boutique electronics partner. He added that the device was custom-built to measure head kinematics during typical NFL impacts and that there has been significant feedback from the NFLPA about the size and fit.

The league will spend this college football season monitoring the performance of the technology before deciding on its future. NFLPA consultant Kristy Arbogast, who is also the director of engineering for the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, has consulted closely with Biocore on the project and said there have been three points of emphasis: data accuracy, minimal intrusion into an NFL team's routines and workflow; and comfort and usability for the players. ("I can design the most accurate sensor in the world," she said, "but if I can't get a player to wear it, I won't have advanced anything.")

Accurate and more granular data is needed to quantify the impact forces on the field, and is critical for the NFL to improve player safety and reverse the trend of concussions—which reached a record high in 2017. Crandall has said there is a goal of introducing position-specific helmets to protect against the particular types of collisions each player typically endures.

“That will really tell us on each and every play the types and severities of impacts that players at a given position are experiencing,” Crandall said, “and really help us convert that information into a helmet that’s really tuned at a position-specific level.”

All NFL players wear Zebra athlete tracking chips in their shoulder pads, recording location and velocity, but there are no impact sensors on the field of play. The league and the NFLPA are collaborating closely on mouthguard development because it would provide the best data source yet to understand hits. In conjunction with the Engineering Roadmap’s forensic video reviews and other tests using crash-test dummies, the NFL will release that information to spur innovation.

“The outcome of that is going to be a level of detail and specificity that’s going to help an entrepreneur come up with an idea that’s going to address a specific problem,” said NFL EVP of health and safety Jeff Miller.

The NFL has not disclosed the results of its evaluation of the previously developed mouthguard sensors. Crandall said those products’ maturity and experience are beneficial for evaluation as his team pursues a parallel path. One of those mouthguards is produced by Prevent Biometrics. Its device will be available to thousands of high school and college football players this fall, according to chief science officer Adam Bartsch. He said Prevent continues to prove out its product as the company builds a robust system to support data collection and instant analysis. Prevent has begun syncing video footage with real-time hit data for evaluations.

“What everyone’s working on fundamentally is just trying to monitor the impacts that are worth monitoring and getting trustworthy information as fast as possible,” Bartsch said, adding later: “After one creates a gadget that you do some lab testing on, the challenge is then to build a system that can actually handle all that data and do it fast enough for all the clinicians.”

To further support the advancement of new ideas, the Engineering Roadmap had four finite element models of different helmet designs built. These complex digital models are a helpful tool for early-stage computer simulation testing of innovations. That in itself was a major undertaking, with each of four universities tasked with one helmet apiece.

“A lot of the design evolution of helmets has been, I guess I would call it, ad hoc,” Kent said. “Try something and see how it works, and it’s not very systematic. What you end up getting is very complex geometries and complex materials, like foams that are interacting with plastics.”

The process of shepherding an idea from initial concept through prototype, testing, and development to commercial viability can take three to six years. The NFL hopes the supply of data from all sources can expedite that process.

“Importantly though, too, as we provide that community the tools and data, their designs and their products are going to become more sophisticated,” Miller said. “They’re going to become more

representative of things that can protect against specific events, which is the goal. You may see some level of acceleration there because you're going to have a more specific target for them to shoot at."

Other avenues of head impact screenings are in development as well. In February, the FDA approved its first concussion-related blood test. Banyan Biomarkers can test for two protein biomarkers that can eliminate the need for a costly and time-consuming CT Scan. Baynan and Quanterix, both former GE Health Challenge grant recipients, have begun partnering on some tests, and Quanterix CEO Kevin Hrusovsky believes his company's technology will offer enough detail to one day make a more definitive concussion test—perhaps even on a sideline.

Earlier this year, Quanterix released a benchtop instrument that is more compact and portable than its signature wardrobe-sized Simoa machine. Hrusovsky said the process of taking blood and analyzing the specimen for the biomarkers that are indicative of a concussion currently takes about 10 minutes. But he sees a clear path to expediency by producing dedicated machines that hone in on particular biomarkers. "We probably can get this down to a few minutes," he said.

The ultimate goal of all of this research and data collection is protecting player health. Whether monitoring for dangerous impacts through a mouthguard sensor or screening for a possible concussion via a blood test, the aim is to find ways to decrease the risk and seriousness of head injuries.

"The real question ultimately becomes," Hrusovsky said, "'How can a test of our objectivity get further involved and integrated into various sports to try to help protect the safety of others? What does the test do to the culture of the game when it provides a more objective measure of whether or not someone's brain needs rest?'"

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell pledged that the league will "let science lead the way." At some point, science will produce results. Then, the onus will be on the sport to heed them.

Broncos Lineman Jared Veldheer Teams With Great Divide For GABF Beer

By Jonathan Shikes

Westworld

September 8, 2018

The Denver Broncos season opener is only two days away, and offensive lineman Jared Veldheer has a lot on his mind. How will his ankle hold up in his twelfth season in the NFL? How will the Seattle Seahawks defenders try to come at him this Sunday? Will he be able to protect new quarterback Case Keenum? Oh, and what Denver craft brewery should he hit next week when practice is over?

Veldheer, who joined the Broncos last spring after nine years with the Arizona Cardinals and the Oakland Raiders, is a bit of a beer nerd — well, maybe more than a bit — and an award-winning homebrewer. A few weeks ago, Great Divide Brewing cooked up one of his recipes, for a pale ale called Demon Horse #66, and entered it into the pro-am category at the Great American Beer Festival.

The brewery will tap the first keg of that beer today (Friday, September 7) at 5 p.m., at its Barrel Bar location in the River North Art District, and Veldheer, noticeable at six-foot-eight-inches tall, will on hand from 5 to 7 p.m.

"I like a lot of hops," Veldheer says. "This one is an extra pale ale with a pretty simple malt bill, but it was 100 percent double dry-hopped with Galaxy. It's probably the beer I brew the most."

Most of the lineman's homebrewing happens in the off-season — Veldheer didn't bring his equipment with him to Denver — but that doesn't mean he's not thinking about it. In the months he's been here, Veldheer and his wife have visited Fiction Beer Company, Prost brewing (which he says was "a fun change-up," since he normally drinks more hoppy ales than German-style lagers), TRVE Brewing, Ratio Beerwoks, Our Mutual Friend and Great Divide. Next on his list is Cerebral Brewing, where he hears they make good hoppy stuff.

Since Cerebral primarily makes hazy New England-style IPAs, however, that choice might get him into trouble with his wife. "She loves West Coast IPAs," Veldheer explains. "She just picks up so much on the low bitterness and high hop content" in the New England-style ones. "I like them both a lot, but if I had to pick between one or the other, I'd pick the West Coast. They are nice and bright, while East coast beers can be cloying with the dry hops."

Veldheer, who was a biology major at Hillsdale College in Michigan, first got into homebrewing about eight years ago when he took home a homebrewing kit after a Raiders gift exchange party. He fell in love pretty quickly, joining the American Homebrewers Association and trying out various recipes.

Fast forward to 2016 and Veldheer cooked up a collaboration with both Arizona Wilderness and Huss Brewing, in the Phoenix area, and also submitted a recipe for his all-Galaxy pale ale in the AHA's National Homebrew Competition, taking home first place in the first round in San Diego.

So when he was traded to the Broncos, Veldheer asked his marketing agent to help him find a brewery that might want to collaborate this year. "That's how we got together," he explains. "And the people at Great Divide have been extremely kind. I think they are as excited as I am about this beer."

Veldheer is also excited to hit his first Great American Beer Festival in person; it will be in town September 20-22, and Veldheer plans to be there on Thursday so that he can fly to Baltimore on Saturday, where the Broncos play the Ravens. He has also been talking to his new teammates about craft beer. "A lot of them like it," he says, "But they like all kinds of beer. I try to spread the good word."

The Minneapolis Miracle Won't Define Marcus Williams

By Master Tesfatsion
Bleacher Report
September 8, 2018

His sentences get shorter with each question. He maintains a mundane expression, as if he were testifying before Congress. At Saints practice in Los Angeles, a few weeks before the start of the 2018 season, Marcus Williams doesn't want to talk about the past. Not about his stellar rookie season—"subpar," he says—and especially not about the play.

"It's life," the Saints safety says. He repeats: "It's life. That's it. Life happens. That's all."

For the last eight months, Williams has had to come to terms with his role in what is now known as the "Minneapolis Miracle"—the play that knocked the Saints out of the playoffs last year. With 10 seconds left, then-Vikings quarterback Case Keenum surveyed the field before targeting wide receiver Stefon Diggs moving toward the sideline. Williams, the last line of defense, got a good break on the ball and appeared ready to make a stop to seal the Saints' 24-23 victory. A perfect read. But when the ball arrived, Williams whiffed on the tackle. Diggs came down with the ball at the 34-yard line and scored the game-winning touchdown as time expired.

"Oh my heavens, Marcus Williams is going to see that play the rest of his career," Pete Bercich, the former Vikings linebacker and current radio commentator, said on the now-infamous radio call.

Williams was later brought to tears in the U.S. Bank Stadium visitors locker room.

He won't talk about what happened now, but that doesn't mean he hasn't thought about it. Sure, those 10 seconds changed his life—and the lives of Diggs and Keenum. The three, in the view of many, will forever be linked to that where-were-you-when moment when our eyes widened, our jaws dropped. Keenum and Diggs have moved on since then—Keenum is now with Denver, while Diggs says his life has "changed for the better. I'm trying to keep it that way."

But Williams, in particular, is trying to liberate himself—and his career—from that singular event. He's been trying to figure out how to be a part of the Minneapolis Miracle without being defined by that moment. The key? Treat a once-in-a-lifetime happening as just that—a onetime thing.

"You've gotta be strong-minded and strong-willed," Williams says. "As DBs, you've gotta have a short memory and go on to the next play."

A few months after the Saints were bounced from the playoffs, in March, Williams posted a video to his Instagram that seems unlikely for a player trying to forget. The footage begins with a reel of his season-ending flub and then cuts off before Diggs reaches the end zone. Williams wakes up out of bed, restless, as if troubled by a recurring bad dream. The raspy voice of Al Pacino from *Any Given Sunday* plays in the background as Williams gets dressed, heads to his car and eventually pulls up to Winner Circle Athletics, a prep academy in his hometown of Corona, California, where Williams has trained since high school. "Turning my NIGHTMARE into my MOTIVATION!!!! #motivation #mentality #grindshineeat" the caption reads. Then, a montage of his offseason workouts plays.

There might not be a stronger representation of what Williams' daily life has been like since. He's been focused, in grind mode. But mainly out of public view. This offseason, he returned home, about an hour east of downtown Los Angeles. He called up his longtime trainer, Eliseo Cabildo. And the two went to work.

They tailored their training sessions to the future, not the past. The two focused on Williams' growth entering his second season—not the play he became famous for. They trained five days a week, with a rehab station conveniently located in the gym to help with Williams' recovery after workouts.

"For him, when people bring up that play, it already happened," Cabildo says. "He can't turn back time. But he knows what his mindset is, and it's always getting better. If that play would've never happened, he would've attacked this year the same way he has year after year."

Williams' mind is what has separated him from the pack throughout his career. It's what helped earn him six starts at safety as a true freshman at Utah with just one year of experience at the position coming out of high school. It's what gave him an edge so he could remain a starter for the following two years before he declared for the draft. It's what made him a second-round pick last year—and what helped him prove in training camp that he was capable of starting in the NFL despite his age and inexperience. And it's what helped him finish second on the Saints with four interceptions during the regular season.

"You've gotta have a ... mentality that's strong-minded and strong-willed," Williams says. "That's just who I am. That's who I've always been."

The cerebral aspect of football is an area every young player should emphasize following their rookie season, and Williams has paid particular attention to the mental side of things this offseason. He knows that mistakes are expected, especially if you're a 21-year-old—barely old enough to legally enter a nightclub—starting at a position you've only played for four years. He knows that people have been talking about what he was "thinking" during that play. Some in NFL circles believe he got there too early. Others believe he was trying to avoid a pass interference penalty, which is why he let up on the tackle—that he was too smart for his own good.

"I don't hear negative," Williams says. "Everything is positive."

When asked whether he has ever thought about what it's like to be Williams after that play, Keenum said he does a little bit. Fresh off his second training camp practice with the Broncos, he doesn't often think about that play. A lot has changed since then: Keenum has published a book, received the Play of the Year award at the NFL Honors and moved 900 miles to Denver, where he earned a two-year, \$36 million deal to become John Elway's starting quarterback.

With Keenum's move to the AFC, Williams, for the most part, is out of sight and out of mind. Still, Keenum looks fondly back at that day and the play that, he says, was a perfect call in a situation the Vikings practiced every week. "It was a play where we had 11 guys doing their jobs perfectly in the right spot, with the right call, and the right time," Keenum says.

Including Williams, who was in the right place at the right time.

"I don't see it as them screwing it up," he explains. "I see it as Stef catching the ball, turning and scoring to make that play."

But, he adds: "From what I've heard, [Williams is] using it as fuel."

While Williams' season ended after the Minneapolis Miracle, the Vikings could only prolong their year for another week. They were blown out by the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFC Championship Game, failing to become the first NFL team to make it to the Super Bowl as the host city.

Vikings fans didn't seem to care during Super Bowl week when they crossed paths with Diggs. Minnesotans were euphoric at the sight of their folk hero as he made the rounds at Radio Row inside Mall of America. Diggs was showered with a standing ovation when he walked up to his courtside seat to watch a Timberwolves-Pelicans game, followed by a thunderous "Skol" clap—a recent traditional cheer at Vikings games that draws on a similar cheer by Iceland's soccer fans.

"It brought some smiles on faces and made people happy," Diggs says. "For me, I'm glad I can share that with them. I'm glad I can be the staple for that for them. It's just me being appreciative of the moment and making it come full circle. So when somebody gives me a lot of respect and love, I want to give it all back."

Diggs has received a number of endorsement opportunities and a couple of free meals in the Twin Cities during the offseason, but nothing was more gratifying than inking a five-year extension on the fourth day of Vikings training camp. The \$72 million deal will keep Diggs under contract until 2024. More important, it fulfilled a promise to his father, who asked Diggs, then in high school, to look out for his family months before he died of congestive heart failure.

As his family stood in the back of an emotional press conference announcing the extension, Diggs fought back tears as the realization that he could financially provide for his family hit. The fourth-year wide receiver has yet to record 100 receptions, 1,000 receiving yards or 10 touchdowns in a single season. His playmaking potential is apparent, even at the most expected time.

After the Saints stormed back from a 17-0 deficit, Diggs' mother, Stephanie, thought the game was over. She shot her son a text from her house: "Better luck next time. Maybe we'll go next year."

Once Diggs walked off the field, still in disbelief, and had a chance to see his phone flooded with texts, he responded, "You gave up on me already?"

"You see how Mom do you?" Diggs cracked as he laughed about the moment with his mother in retrospect. "It be your own people."

"That's just so Stefon to put it on his back at the end and do something magical," Stephanie says. "I walked away."

Both Diggs and Keenum have reaped the benefits from the moment, while Williams' name was exposed to a mainstream audience that likely had no idea how well he had played up until that play.

"I'm pretty sure it motivated him, though," Diggs says. "If he's a competitor and he loves the game, it motivated him in a way where it'll drive him for a very long time. If I was him, I wouldn't want that play to define me because he actually had a good game other than that and a good season. Don't let that put you

in a tank or a bad place because, at the end of the day, if you're a baller, it's big, but you've gotta let that roll off your back."

What's often forgotten about that game between the Saints and Vikings is that Williams picked off Keenum in the third quarter. The play led to a Saints touchdown, which cut their deficit down to three points with about 13 minutes left in the game.

It was a sign of life against a team that tied for the best regular-season record in football and lost just one game at home. Had it not been for Williams, there would not have been a Minneapolis Miracle in the first place.

"It's just a freak deal," Keenum says. "It's a crazy little thing. It's like anything else in your life. You use those moments as learning tools."

Williams has attempted to stay the course this summer. As he returned to Southern California for two joint practices with the Los Angeles Chargers before their preseason game, Williams recorded an interception off Philip Rivers during each practice.

Unofficially, he had seven interceptions during training camp. It was a needed reminder of his talent, backing up high praise Williams received from Saints quarterback Drew Brees at the start of training camp.

"I compare him just as you look at guys in history, you know, if you ever played against Ed Reed," Brees told Saints reporters. "You had to do a great job of looking off and try to get him leaning one way, and still you'd throw a ball and be like, 'How did he get there?' Marcus makes some of those plays, where you're like, 'How did he get there? Where did he come from?'"

This Sunday, Williams will be alongside Brees again as the Saints open the season against the Bucs. And for his part, Williams isn't interested in any discussion of a sophomore slump.

"I don't know what a slump is," Williams says. "I play every day the same. I get better each day. I take that climb and don't think about a slump. I don't think about what everyone else is saying. I just do me and play."

Week One injury report roundup

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 8, 2018

The NFL season kicked off on Thursday with a win by the Eagles and it continues with 13 more games on Sunday, which means that the 26 teams in those games submitted their final injury reports of the week on Friday.

Questionable players are uncertain to play, doubtful players are unlikely to play and out should be self-explanatory. Players who are on active rosters and don't appear below should be considered healthy enough to play barring any announcements on Saturday. The teams playing on Monday night won't release their injury reports until Saturday and are not listed here.

With that housekeeping out of the way, here are all the injury reports for Sunday.

49ers at Vikings

The 49ers won't have T Erik Magnuson (hamstring) or LB Dekoda Watson (hamstring) in the lineup on Sunday. LB Malcolm Smith (hamstring) is expected to be out as well after drawing a doubtful tag.

The Vikings ruled out T Aviante Collins (elbow), C Pat Elflein (ankle, shoulder) and RB Roc Thomas (ankle). CB Mackensie Alexander (ankle) is likely out after being listed as doubtful, but hopes are higher for CB Xavier Rhodes (hamstring) thanks to his questionable status.

Bengals at Colts

Bengals WR Cody Core (back) is not expected to play after being listed as doubtful.

The Colts will wait to see if LT Anthony Castonzo (hamstring) and RB Marlon Mack (hamstring) can play after being listed as questionable. T Denzelle Good (knee, wrist) has been ruled out.

Bills at Ravens

The Bills ruled out WR Ray-Ray McCloud (knee) and listed LB Julian Stanford (nose) as questionable to play in the opener.

DT Willie Henry (abdomen) and TE Hayden Hurst (foot) won't play for the Ravens. CB Maurice Canady (thigh) and LB Kenny Young (knee) drew questionable tags.

Buccaneers at Saints

Buccaneers first-round DT Vita Vea (calf) will not play this week. CB Brent Grimes (groin) and CB De'Vante Harris (hamstring) are both considered doubtful to play while T Donovan Smith (knee) is questionable.

Two Saints offensive linemen — G Jermon Bushrod (not injury related) and T Andrus Peat (quadricep) — are listed as questionable for Sunday.

Jaguars at Giants

The Jaguars did not issue any injury designations.

LB Tae Davis (hamstring) and DE Olivier Vernon (ankle) will not play for the Giants.

Steelers at Browns

Steelers TE Vance McDonald (foot) will have to wait at least a week to make his 2018 debut.

The Browns ruled out CB E.J. Gaines (knee) and listed LB James Burgess (concussion) as doubtful.

Texans at Patriots

The Texans ruled out CB Kayvon Webster (achilles) and listed four players — WR Sammie Coates (hamstring), WR Keke Coutee (hamstring), LB Duke Ejirofor (hamstring), and WR Will Fuller (hamstring) — as questionable to face New England.

Patriots RT Marcus Cannon (calf), S Nate Ebner (knee), TE Jacob Hollister (hamstring) and RB Sony Michel (knee) are listed as questionable.

Titans at Dolphins

The Titans will not have RT Jack Conklin (knee), LB Rashaan Evans (hamstring), LB Harold Landry (ankle) and S Kendrick Lewis (foot) in this week's lineup.

WR DeVante Parker (finger) is the only Dolphins player with an injury designation and he is listed as doubtful to play.

Chiefs at Chargers

Chiefs S Eric Berry (heel) didn't practice all week and was tagged as doubtful to play on Sunday.

The Chargers will also be down a key defender as DE Joey Bosa (foot) was ruled out for Week One.

Cowboys at Panthers

C Travis Frederick (illness), DE Datone Jones (knee) and S Xavier Woods (hamstring) are out for the Cowboys. CB Chidobe Awuzie (back) and S Kavon Frazier (shoulder) are listed as questionable.

Panthers WR Curtis Samuel (medical illness) has been ruled out. TE Chris Manhertz (foot), G Amini Silatolu (knee) and T Daryl Williams (knee) are all listed as questionable for Sunday's opener.

Washington at Cardinals

WR Maurice Harris (concussion) is out for Washington.

DE Markus Golden (knee) isn't ready to go for the Cardinals. TE Jermaine Gresham (achilles), RB T.J. Logan (ankle), DT Robert Nkemdiche (foot) and DT Olsen Pierre (toe) are listed as questionable to play.

Seahawks at Broncos

The Seahawks will open the season without G D.J. Fluker (hamstring) and LB K.J. Wright (knee). CB Dontae Johnson (hip) has been listed as questionable.

The Broncos are injury free for the season opener.

Bears at Packers

Bears S DeAndre Houston-Carson (forearm, back) has been ruled out and TE Daniel Brown (shoulder) is listed as doubtful.

The Packers ruled out S Josh Jones (ankle). Linebackers Oren Burks (shoulder) and James Crawford (hamstring) are both listed as questionable for the home team.

Paxton Lynch works out for Lions

By Michael David Smith
Pro Football Talk
September 8, 2018

As Paxton Lynch tries to re-start his NFL career, he's had a second visit.

Lynch tried out for the Lions, according to Field Yates of ESPN.

Once viewed as the Broncos' franchise quarterback of the future, Lynch flamed out after the Broncos drafted him in the first round in 2016. In two seasons he started just four games and had a 76.7 passer rating. The Broncos cut him last week.

Now Lynch has had tryouts with the Bills and the Lions. It's unclear whether Detroit (where Matt Cassel backs up Matthew Stafford) or Buffalo (where Nathan Peterman is the starter and Josh Allen is the heir apparent) are interested enough to sign Lynch. But he's at least getting some interest after the Broncos sent him packing.

Nike sales spike in wake of Colin Kaepernick relationship

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

September 8, 2018

What was Nike thinking? Nike was thinking, “Money, money, money, money. . . . MONEY!”

At its core, Nike’s decision to embrace Colin Kaepernick as one of the primary faces of the 30th anniversary “Just Do it” campaign is about one thing and one thing only: Making money.

Don’t get confused or distracted by notions of principle or a desire to be on the right side of history. A publicly-traded corporation with a fiduciary obligation to its shareholders, Nike exists not to be a beacon of freedom but a bastion of capitalism.

The goal today? Make money. Tomorrow? Make more money. The next day? Make even more money.

And that’s what has happened in the immediate aftermath of the decision to partner with Kaepernick. Despite the stock price fluctuation obsessions from right-leaning I-told-you-so pundits who hope to blame all the problems of modern American sports on anyone who: (1) thinks differently than they do; and (2) dares to say so, the numbers never lie. Via Fortune.com, Nike’s online sales grew 31 percent since Sunday. That’s nearly twice the growth (17 percent) from the same post-summer period of a year ago.

So, shockingly, a company that knows a thing or two about its target audience makes a move aimed at getting them to buy more stuff and, even more shockingly, they are.

Yes, Kaepernick started a movement two years ago. And now Nike has co-opted it, all in the name of making more money.

While some may debate whether Kaepernick’s conduct is uniquely American (it is), there’s nothing more American than Nike’s deliberate, strategic pursuit of the almighty dollar.

Nick Saban: NFL players have a “right” to protest during anthem

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

September 8, 2018

A caller to Nick Saban’s radio show this week identified himself as a retired veteran before asking the Alabama coach what he thinks of NFL players who use the national anthem to protest social injustice and police brutality. Saban again talked about a divided nation, a topic he addressed earlier in the week in his media session.

“First of all, I’m just a football coach,” Saban said, via a transcript from USA Today. “I don’t have all the answers to all the problems that we have in society. The one thing that’s a little disappointing to me is something that has always been really unifying, something that created spirit in our country and was very unifying is no longer that way. That’s a little bothersome to me.

“I don’t think that what these people are doing is in any way, shape or form meant to disrespect a veteran or somebody like yourself who has worked so hard, fought so hard and sacrificed so much for all of us to have the quality of life that we want to have. But one of the things that you also fought for and made sacrifice for was that we could all have the freedom to have a choice in terms of what we believe, what we do and what we said. This is not something . . . and, look, I respect people’s individual rights.

“I have my opinions in terms of what I would do and how I would do it. I’m not one ever to disrespect the symbols that represent the values of our country. I also respect individual differences that other people have and they have the right to express those — whether it’s our players or somebody else, whether I agree or disagree, I do think they have the right to do that.”

Saban said teams were an example of players rallying together for a common cause despite their differences.

“I don’t keep up with that stuff as much as everybody else does, especially during the season, especially when we’re playing games,” Saban told beat reporters. “But to me, some of the things that we do in our country, when I grew up, they were unifying events. It’s a little painful to see that those things are not so right now.”

UPDATE: An original version of the article said the quotes were from this week. The story from 2017 is making the rounds on social media today, but the quotes actually were from 2017.