

Kiszla: Raiders stink like a skunk. But will Oakland coach Jon Gruden have last laugh on Broncos?

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
Sept. 16, 2018

Back in the day, when his NFL franchise was scary instead of satire, Al Davis sat so close behind me at old Mile High Stadium I could feel the spittle on the back of my neck when he cursed.

During games in Denver, Davis refused the kindness of an owner's box, so he sat alongside the ink-stained wretches in the press box, always a row in back of me. I called him Darth Raider. It was a term of endearment.

When the Broncos scored, the mood of Davis turned as black his team's uniforms, and he offered an unrelenting stream of colorful commentary. He was particularly fond of words that began with the letter "F."

So I can only imagine what the late, great Davis would say now, as the Raiders arrive in our dusty old cowtown as the laughingstock of the league, having traded away Pro Bowl linebacker Khalil Mack, the scariest player on their roster.

In lieu of paying big talent that could actually help them win big on the field, the Raiders signed Jon Gruden for \$10 million per year, not to be a coach, but to be Chucky, a lounge act to attract paying customers as the Raiders prepare to bolt Oakland for Las Vegas.

While lamenting a season-opening loss to the Los Angeles Rams on Monday night, Gruden created some national buzz for his bad team with this punchy line: "A skunk got loose in our locker room. That's no kidding. It's been a really tough, short week. We had a short week, no sleep and a wild skunk running around our building ... It's a smell I still can't get out of my face. It's a challenge man, overcoming all these issues."

So was Gruden playing possum, in an attempt to lull the Broncos into a sleepy state of overconfidence with his woe-is-me act? But, at the risk of killing the metaphor, Gruden's funny quip got me thinking. A franchise that boasts of its pride, poise and championships has stunk for a long time. They aren't the Raiders any more. Call them the Stinkers. Change the logo from the football pirate to Pepé Le Pew.

Now here's an alternative take, and one that won't play well in Denver while we're all rolling on the floor laughing at Gruden: What if he's correct? In a league governed by a salary cap, what if it's next to impossible to build a championship team while paying both a quarterback and a defensive player a premium salary?

"We're building our team. We have to do that," Gruden said. "We've had 10 head coaches since I was traded (from Oakland to Tampa Bay in 2002). That's unbelievable. We've had no continuity. None. We're building our team and trying to win at the same time. But we're going to try and build the Oakland Raiders into a great championship football team. It might not happen this week, it might not happen this month.

But we have a great attitude, we have some really good veteran leadership, we like our draft picks and we're making progress."

Having already committed \$25 million per year to quarterback Derek Carr, the Raiders decided it was salary-cap suicide to also make Mack one of the league's 10 highest-paid players. It was a cold-hearted calculation. And it was a painful move. But it was far from a brain-dead decision.

Consider this: Maybe the Broncos signed Case Keenum instead of Kirk Cousins as a free agent, because they couldn't afford both linebacker Von Miller and Cousins, whose contract in Minnesota now pays him a whopping average annual salary of \$28 million. Miller restructured his deal to provide Denver some budgetary relief in 2018, but combine his compensation with Keenum, and the Broncos are dealing with approximately a \$40 million commitment for just two of the 53 players on the roster.

Denver won the Super Bowl 50 with elite but aging quarterback Peyton Manning and Miller, the championship game's most valuable player, before he cashed in on a lucrative new contract. That's the current template for NFL success. Pay one superstar the big bucks, and draft an emerging, young superstar that doesn't put a huge dent in the salary cap.

Are the Broncos fooling themselves by thinking they can get back to the Super Bowl with a combination of Keenum and Miller? Is that the same Band Aid that Gruden ripped off?

If the math of Gruden is correct, the joke's on Denver.

Let's hope he's wrong.

Broncos Journal: Zach Kerr, Shelby Harris see limited, but important, playing time

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

Sept. 16, 2018

Conventional wisdom — and my final 53-man roster projection — last month suggested the Broncos would keep veteran defensive tackle Clinton McDonald.

McDonald had returned from offseason shoulder surgery and a short absence early in camp. Coach Vance Joseph praised his ability to provide — and the team's need for — an interior pass rush.

All the while, Shelby Harris and Zach Kerr went about their work to keep their spots on the roster. It paid off.

McDonald was cut (he signed with Oakland this week). DeMarcus Walker, a 2017 second-round pick, made the team as the sixth linemen.

McDonald's release confirmed to Kerr and Harris that the Broncos' brass saw what they were feeling since the offseason program: Their play warranted a return to the roles they played last year.

"(McDonald) being a veteran guy and the film he had and what he had accomplished, (his release) was like them saying, 'We believe in you,'" Harris said. "That's really the first time that's happened in my career so it felt really good."

A seventh-round pick by Oakland in 2014, Harris was waived four times by the Raiders and once apiece by the Jets and Dallas before signing with the Broncos in January 2017. He had 5 1/2 sacks last year.

Kerr was undrafted but spent three years with Indianapolis before signing with the Broncos in March 2017. He had 19 tackles in 11 games.

"Me and Shelby produced pretty well in the offseason and preseason and that spoke for itself," Kerr said. "I was, 'OK, we had this group last year and it was a pretty good group last year so why not have the same group this year?'"

Harris and Kerr made the Broncos' decision look smart last week.

Kerr played 11 snaps and Harris had one tackle for lost yardage and two quarterback hits in 15 snaps of work.

"It's definitely a luxury," defensive coordinator Joe Woods said of the Broncos' depth. "Both of those guys have done tremendous for us."

Twenty-six combined snaps may not seem like much, but on a hot day, it is valuable work. Domata Peko (25 snaps) wasn't overworked.

“It was definitely encouraging,” Kerr said. “Me and Shelby are really enjoying playing out there together and we’ve been practicing together for two years. We have a real chemistry going on and we play well off each other. It can create some good results.”

Said Harris: “It was really good because if we can get a push up the middle, it makes it easier for the outside guys (to pressure the passer). Everyone said last year we didn’t get enough of an interior push. But the D-linemen we have can rush the passer. I feel like it’s going to be a big part of what makes our defense go this year.”

Kerr said he and Harris’ playing time is “pretty random.”

“We do a buddy system so we’ll watch guys,” Kerr said. “If a guy ran 20-30 yards down the field chasing the ball, we know one of us is going in for him because nobody wants to play a double team after that.”

Said Woods: “(Line coach Bill Kollar) grinds them to a nub and he gets everything out of them. You saw the results on Sunday.”

Final thoughts.

1. The Broncos used 25 snaps of two-tight end personnel against Seattle, including two snaps by reserve offensive tackle Billy Turner. The success of the run game combined with offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave’s desire to play a “rugged” style suggests a smash-mouth game plan against Oakland.
2. Team-wide health means the Broncos will again have seven healthy scratches. The only change will be receiver Isaiah McKenzie, who was cut on Monday. The roster now has five safeties, so Dymonte Thomas and Shamarko Thomas could be the odd player out.
3. Only one of Oakland tight end Jared Cook’s nine catches last week was when he started in a three-point stance. That suggests the Broncos’ best option is a defensive back against him in coverage.

Broncos Game Plan: How Denver matches against Oakland, injury report and predictions

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

Sept. 16, 2018

GAME PLAN

WHEN THE RAIDERS RUN

The Raiders will use three running backs: Marshawn Lynch, Doug Martin and Jalen Richard. Lynch will become a problem if the Broncos don't tackle. "He's a different beast, a different creature," inside linebacker Todd Davis said of Lynch. "You definitely have to bring all of your weight behind the tackle and the whole gang has to help." Lynch has only 291 yards in five regular-season games against the Broncos (3.2 per carry). Talk about strength vs. strength. The Raiders' interior offensive line moves people around, but so does the Broncos' defensive line.

Edge: Even.

WHEN THE RAIDERS PASS

It was a quiet Week 1 for Raiders receivers Amari Cooper and Jordy Nelson (combined four catches). But Martavis Bryant re-entered the fold this week after his preseason release and he brings a big-play element with 17 touchdowns in 36 games. The two big factors for the Broncos, though, are Richard and tight end Jared Cook, who had nine catches apiece last week. The great equalizer is the Broncos' pass rush (six sacks vs. Seattle), but quarterback Derek Carr gets rid of the football quickly (sub-2.5 seconds), which negates the rush.

Edge: Raiders.

WHEN THE BRONCOS RUN

How do rookie running backs Royce Freeman and Phillip Lindsay follow up their debuts (15 carries for 71 yards apiece)? Freeman going over 100 yards and Lindsay stressing the edges of the Oakland defense would be fine. The Broncos rushed 32 times for 146 yards against Seattle and the Raiders allowed the Rams to rush 26 times for 140 yards. A key for the Broncos is getting more out of their first-down rushes. They averaged 5.2 yards on 17 first-and-10 rushes (89 yards total), but seven gained less than four yards.

Edge: Broncos.

WHEN THE BRONCOS PASS

Quarterback Case Keenum had eight completions of at least 15 yards last week and six different players were involved, a sign of how solid the pass protection was for Keenum and the array of options he has in the passing game. More of the same for Emmanuel Sanders (10 catches-135 yards) and Demaryius Thomas (six for 63) and a little more involvement for Courtland Sutton (catches of 20 and 25 yards) would equal a

2-0 start. The Raiders' rebuilt secondary has plenty of veterans, but they can't cover when the pass rush isn't a threat.

Edge: Broncos.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The good news for the Broncos: They won't have to face Seattle rookie punter Michael Dickson again this year. He averaged a whopping 57.5 yards net. The Raiders have a rookie punter in Johnny Townsend and a veteran return man in Dwayne Harris. Phillip Lindsay didn't get any kick return chances last week and Adam Jones' longest return was called back because of a penalty. The edge goes to the Broncos because of kicker Brandon McManus, who connected on field goals of 51 and 53 yards last week.

Edge: Broncos.

THREE THINGS TO WATCH

1. Defending the long pass. Last week, Seattle gained 137 of its 298 passing yards (45.9 percent) on three completions. Included were gains of 66 and 51 yards. Broncos safeties Darian Stewart and Justin Simmons need to be more alert downfield. "If a ball goes 51 yards, your safeties have something to do with it," defensive backs coach Marcus Robertson said. "I think they can play a lot better. I'm glad we walked out with the win, but I have higher expectations for both of those guys."

2. Third down uptick. The Broncos were 4 of 12 on third down against Seattle (33 percent). But they need to put themselves in better position. They needed six or more yards on eight of those opportunities.

3. Second act for Miller. Broncos linebacker Von Miller debuted with three sacks, two forced fumbles and one fumble recovery. The Raiders' offensive line is better than what Seattle trotted out last week, but Miller should still like matching up against talented-but-still-a-rookie left tackle Kolton Miller. "Von, we all know, is just a different type of player," defensive coordinator Joe Woods said.

INJURY REPORT

Raiders: None

Broncos: None

STAFF PREDICTIONS

Mark Kizla

Broncos 30, Raiders 27

Sets up as an easy win for Broncos, right? Well, Oakland might have the better coach and the better quarterback. So beating the Raiders might be harder than it looks.

Record: 1-0

Ryan O'Halloran

Broncos 28, Raiders 17

The Raiders are still trying to figure things out, which will make them more formidable later in the year. Case Keenum throws two touchdowns and Chris Harris returns an interception for a touchdown.

Record: 1-0

Kyle Fredrickson

Broncos 17, Raiders 14

Denver relies on the leg of kicker Brandon McManus for a late-game winner.

Record: 1-0

Broncos Insider: DT Shelby Harris all in on Denver-Oakland rivalry — “You always want to beat the Raiders”

By Kyle Fredrickson

Denver Post

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Walk around the Broncos' locker room during Raiders week and don't expect many players to be trash talking Oakland, as might be happening around the office water cooler.

Quarterback Case Keenum, when asked if he's heard any buzz surrounding the heated rivalry at the supermarket lately, said: “No, I haven't been to a supermarket in a while.” But fear not, Broncos Country, not every player will be so coy in assessing the Oakland-Denver rivalry.

Let defensive tackle Shelby Harris light your fire.

“Yeah, this is big,” Harris said. “Every division game is a big game — pretty much every one is a rivalry. This one just happens to go back 20-30 years. This is huge. You always want to beat the Raiders. Especially out in the locker room, everyone wants a win, especially against the Raiders, because (of Raiders coach) Jon Gruden and all. That's what they're talking about. No one talks about us. Until last week, most people probably didn't think we were going to beat the Seahawks.

“We believe in ourselves and we know what we're going to do.”

NFL Week 2 picks: Chiefs look to make two straight road upsets

By Ryan O'Halloran
Denver Post
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GAME OF THE WEEK

Patriots at Jaguars, 2:25 p.m.

A rematch of last year's AFC title game in which the Jaguars squandered a 20-10 road lead in the fourth quarter and were denied a first-ever trip to the Super Bowl. This time, the game is in steamy Jacksonville. But the combination of Jaguars running back Leonard Fournette's hamstring injury and Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski's availability will give New England a solid road win.

Patriots 34, Jaguars 24.

Ryan's record: 1-0.

LOCK OF THE WEEK

Lions at 49ers, 2:05 p.m.

Detroit figures to bounce back in some shape or form after last week's 48-17 home loss to the New York Jets. But the Lions appear in disarray and their best won't be enough as 5 1/2-point underdogs. A big game for San Francisco, which doesn't want to fall to 0-2 with trips to Kansas City and the Los Angeles Chargers in Weeks 3-4.

49ers 42, Lions 20.

Ryan's record: 0-1.

UPSET OF THE WEEK

Chiefs at Steelers, 11 a.m.

The Chiefs rolled last week as a three-point road underdog at the Chargers (won 38-28). Kansas City is getting five points against a Steelers team that committed six turnovers at Cleveland and tied the Browns. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger has an elbow issue that kept him out of practice. The Chiefs make it two impressive road wins in a row.

Chiefs 29, Steelers 24.

Ryan's record: 1-0.

Klis List: How heavy favorite Broncos can avoid Raider upset

By Mike Klis

9 News

Sept. 16, 2018

What's scary is how easy it looks for a team that finished 5-11 last season.

The Broncos looked good – not perfect, but good -- in winning their opener last week against the Seattle Seahawks. The Oakland Raiders crumbled at home in the second half against the Los Angeles Rams. And this was after Raiders' management sent the message it was surrendering hope for the 2018 season by trading away its best player, pass rusher Khalil Mack.

Consequently, the Broncos are listed as a 6 ½-point favorite by Westgate Superbook for their game Sunday afternoon against the Raiders at Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

We all agree the Broncos are improved this year. Are they ready for such lofty expectations so early in the season?

Last week's Klis List told you the No. 1 mismatch was the Broncos' Von Miller against Seattle's Germain Ifedi.

Here is this week's Klis List of factors that will be key for the Broncos to defeat the Raiders. You can thank me later.

1. No more than one turnover

Last week, Broncos quarterback Case Keenum threw three interceptions. That's enough for a while as he threw just seven interceptions in 481 pass attempts last season for Minnesota.

It would be difficult to expect the Broncos to suffer multiple turnovers and win back-to-back.

2. Run it

The Raiders are so beat up along the defensive front, they signed defensive tackle Johnathon Hankins off the street this week with plans on playing him.

The Broncos' improved offensive line should have their way in the run game -- if not early, then eventually. The Broncos' 1-2 rookie punch of Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman combined for 30 carries and 142 yards in the opener against Seattle.

3. Chip Jared Cook

The Raiders' tight end led NFL receivers last week with 180 yards. The Denver D allowed 105 yards receiving to Seattle rookie tight end Will Dissly. In the first half. This is a concern.

A Bronco defender like Bradley Chubb will have to give Cook a nudge before he releases off the line.

4. Stay back

The Broncos gave up a 51-yard touchdown pass in the opener to receiver Tyler Lockett, who was wide open on the play. The Denver secondary was vulnerable to the wide-open deep ball last year, too.

After Raiders quarterback Derek Carr mostly ignored his receivers last week – Jordy Nelson had three catches for 23 yards and Amari Cooper had one catch for 9 yards – while going up against Rams’ cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Marcus Peters, don’t be surprised if he throws outside and deep to test the Broncos’ secondary in this one.

5. Stay calm, Marquette

King will try to deliver a punting performance against his former team worthy of showmanship.

Don’t be surprised if Raiders coach Jon Gruden calls for a sellout, 10-man block attempt at least once. King is athletic enough to handle it.

6. Stay hot, Emmanuel, Demaryius

Interceptions aside, Broncos quarterback Case Keenum threw for 329 yards and three touchdowns last week. Emmanuel Sanders had 10 catches for 135 yards with a touchdown and Demaryius Thomas had six catches for 63 yards and a touchdown.

The Raiders pass defense is susceptible without Mack applying the heat so Keenum should have time to throw downfield.

7. Stay hot, Von

Yes, Carr gets rid of the ball quick. Which is why Cook and running back Jalen Richard combined for 18 receptions last week.

But if the Broncos get ahead, Carr will have to try to throw the ball downfield. And that’s when it will be Miller Time. Von Miller had three sacks and two forced fumbles in the opener. With that kind of start, Miller is in position for a career-best season.

8. Gang tackle, Marshawn

Raiders running back Marshawn Lynch isn’t nearly the running back he was from 2011-14 with Seattle. But he can still carry a load to the goal line.

9. Match Raiders intensity

A Gruden-coached team will come in hungry after losing its opener. The Broncos can’t be sluggish and expect to be 2-0 come Sunday night.

Jared Veldheer appears to have fixed Broncos right tackle problem

By Mike Klis

9 News

Sept. 16, 2018

Jared Veldheer wasn't around the Broncos the past few years but he quickly sensed a lingering mood from his new offensive line mates.

There was a collective edginess. The problem was primarily at right tackle in recent years but the Broncos' offensive line as a whole had been constantly denigrated.

Thanks in no small part to the acquisition of the right tackle Veldheer, the Broncos' offensive line has replaced criticism with lauds. The front was effective throughout the preseason and in the regular-season opener last week against Seattle, Broncos quarterback Case Keenum enjoyed secret service-like protection, Phillip Lindsay slithered through gaping holes and the Broncos' offense accumulated 470 yards and 27 points.

"We've got five guys, and it's not just the starters, really everybody in the O-line room is focused and determined," Veldheer said. "We work extremely hard every day. I can feel coming into the room there's a lot of guys with a chip on the shoulder from what happened last year. That's kind of contagious. You pick up that chip yourself just coming into the room and, 'Hey, let's go prove this thing, let's protect our quarterback, keep him clean. Open up holes in the run game. Set the tone.'"

There are late bloomers and there is Jared Veldheer. He left high school in Grand Rapids, Michigan as a tall, skinny, brainiac with his sights on medical school.

He wound up at Division II Hillsdale (Mich.) College primarily because the Michigans and Michigan States didn't think the 6-foot-7, 255-pound blocker was much of a prospect.

Then came a minor growth spurt with a major frame fill. By spring football of his freshman redshirt season, Veldheer was 6-foot-8 and pushing 300.

"When I went there originally, I had no idea the NFL would ever be a thing," Veldheer said. "I was going to major in biology and hopefully go on to med school and graduate school. Further my education there and wind up doing something in medicine.

"I ended up getting even bigger and stronger after high school after about year one. We did testing there, we'd run 40s, and bench and all that stuff so you can take your numbers and look at guys numbers at the combine. And my numbers were pretty good and I was a pretty big guy and I was thinking this has a chance."

He was selected by the Raiders in the third round of the 2010 draft and became a rookie starter at left tackle by late-October.

He became a free agent after four years and signed a big contract with Arizona, where he played another four years. The Broncos play the Raiders today in Denver but Veldheer isn't feeling much emotion, good or bad, for his former team.

"Not really. It's been half a decade since I was playing there," he said. "I'm a Bronco now. I don't really care about their feelings. It's all about winning."

Until they acquired Veldheer from Arizona in exchange for a sixth-round draft pick in March, the Broncos' right tackle position was like a downtown high-rise building's revolving door at closing time.

It began when Orlando Franklin was moved from right tackle to left guard after the 2013 season. Since then the Broncos' starting right tackles have been Chris Clark, Paul Cornick, Louis Vasquez, Ryan Harris, Michael Schofield, Donald Stephenson, Ty Sambrailo, Menelik Watson, Allen Barbre and Cyrus Kouandjio.

Stephenson was a \$6 million-a-year, free-agent signing in 2016. He didn't work out. Watson was a \$6 million-a-year, free-agent signing in 2017. He didn't work out. Veldheer was a \$6.9 million-a-year acquisition in 2018. So far, so good.

"They told me they just wanted help at that position," Veldheer said.

Veldheer was as risky as the others because he had strong roots at left tackle and struggled to re-program his technique when Arizona shifted him to right tackle last season. He had played five years, counting his redshirt year, at Hillsdale at left tackle, then his first seven NFL seasons – 12 consecutive years without taking a snap at right tackle.

"And everything you work is kind of on an angled plane," he said. "It's not straight forward, straight back. Really, your body, your hips, your hands, everything just has this muscle memory of working one direction. And when you flip that there's just a whole new training you have to do to the body. It just takes a while for different muscles to adapt."

With the Cardinals last year, Veldheer also had to fight the perception that he wasn't all in with football. Reports about head injuries had brought enough concern for Veldheer to take one day off from the Cardinals' training camp to contemplate.

"I have two young kids," he said. "I was making the transition from playing on the left side, where I had played my whole career, to the right side. And just needed to go over some things. I'm glad I did. Because it really created some clarity and I'm extremely grateful to be here and continue to be able to play."

He's clearly all-in now. Although Veldheer will qualify for unrestricted free agency after this season, he will be a contract extension candidate if he keeps playing like he has. He didn't waste his biology major, either. His familiarity around science labs came in handy when he developed his award-winning beer crafting hobby.

"But this is a little more fun than just a grade," he said. "You get to actually drink something."

Here's to Jared Veldheer for finally solving the Broncos' right tackle position.

Broncos vs. Raiders: What we're watching, key matchups and game predictions

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

Sept. 16, 2018

Two months ago, the Broncos-Raiders rivalry appeared to be not only renewed, but more intriguing than it had been in years. Jon Gruden returned to the sidelines, Oakland's defense featured Khalil Mack and its offense was stacked with weapons for Derek Carr, including Marshawn Lynch, Amari Cooper, Jordy Nelson and Jared Cook.

Much has changed over the last few weeks.

The trade of Mack, Oakland's best player and a long-time nemesis for the Broncos, changed the dynamic between the teams and may have altered the AFC West race.

"I mean, honestly, I was shocked," Broncos linebacker Von Miller told Oakland media. "I always felt like Khalil and Aaron Donald were untradeable guys. J.J. Watt, I thought guys like that were untradeable. Then they traded him. A guy like Khalil, he only comes around once every lifetime. You want to keep guys like that."

The loss of Mack for the Raiders (0-1) and the arrival of Case Keenum and an impressive rookie class to Denver (1-0) seemingly gives the Broncos the edge — on paper. But ask around the Broncos' locker room and it's clear this game carries as much significance as years past.

"This is a big one," linebacker Shaquil Barrett said. "Winning our division is what we want to do. That's how we guarantee a spot in the playoffs, and it all starts right now this week. Being at home, it's so much of an advantage to be home and do that."

Matchups to watch

Broncos' secondary vs. Raiders WRs Amari Cooper, Jordy Nelson and Martavis Bryant

The Broncos secondary isn't the one the Raiders became accustomed to facing the past few years. Aqib Talib is gone, leaving Chris Harris Jr. as the true No. 1 corner, Bradley Roby the No. 2, and Adam Jones and Tramaine Brock in a rotation for No. 3.

In the Broncos' opener against Seattle, Jones played 38 snaps at corner, compared to Brock's two. Jones was the nickel corner and Brock the dime, and the Broncos played more nickel than dime. But the split was telling, and with Vance Joseph's prior experience with Jones in Cincinnati, it's likely Jones could see more and more time with the defense.

The Broncos' defense held Seattle to 242 net passing yards and had two interceptions — one each from Jones and safety Justin Simmons. But they face a deeper receiving corps from the Raiders.

Cooper had only one catch for 9 yards in the Raiders' opening loss to the Rams, Nelson added 23 yards. But Bryant re-signed Wednesday and could see extensive time.

“He’s a guy that’s proven,” Gruden said. “He can go up and get the deep ball in contested situations. He can run away from you. He can make you miss. He can make big plays down the field, that’s an obvious. We’re hoping that we can bottle up where he is now. He’s in a great place. He’s healthy. He’s ready to go. He has a great state of mind. We’ll see what happens.”

Broncos OLB Von Miller vs. Raiders RT Donald Penn

If the Broncos do what they did in Week 1, Penn could see a lot of Miller on Sunday. Against the Seahawks, the Broncos kept Miller mostly on the right side for the favorable matchup with Germain Ifedi. Miller came away with a monster night: three sacks, two forced fumbles, one fumble recovery.

In his 12 career games against the Raiders, Miller has totaled seven tackles, 17 quarterback hits, five forced fumbles and one fumble recovery. The Broncos’ defense is built to rush the passer and, in Week 1, they used multiple pressure packages that led to six sacks of Russell Wilson.

This year, the Raiders added first-round pick Kolton Miller to the left side and moved Penn to the right. Although there was some skepticism about Kolton Miller’s projected efficiency as a starter, he allowed only two hurries in 47 pass-blocking snaps against the Rams, per Pro Football Focus.

“It’s a huge challenge. (Penn’s) a strong guy, a big guy and one of the better tackles in the league for I don’t know how long,” Von Miller said. “The Oakland Raiders have the best offensive line in football, in my opinion. I’m sure you all would say Dallas Cowboys, this team or that team, but to me the Oakland Raiders have the best offensive line in football. And they made it a whole lot better with the Kolton Miller pick and moving Donald Penn to the right side. Really all five guys are really Pro Bowl solid, offensive lineman.”

Broncos’ linebackers and safeties vs. Raiders TE Jared Cook

The Broncos’ struggles to contain opposing tight ends are well-documented and have yet to be resolved. Last week, Will Dissly pasted 105 yards and a receiving touchdown on Denver. Dissly has played the position all of two years.

Last year, 30 percent of the Broncos’ receiving yards allowed were to tight ends (the 1,023 yards were the third-most in the league) and 426 of those yards were after the catch (the most in the NFL).

Next up is Jared Cook, the Raiders’ 6-foot-5 tight end who recorded a franchise record 180 yards on Monday.

Defensive coordinator Joe Woods said the Broncos will “do a little bit of everything” against Cook to try to slow him down. He also hopes the Broncos’ tackling improves; they had seven missed tackles, including at least four on a 66-yard catch-and-run by Dissly last weekend.

“The tight end is going to be a challenge this week,” Joseph said. “He is a physical mismatch for most safeties, and definitely for backers. We have to have a plan to bracket him and to play a safety over top of him like he’s a receiver. Hopefully we can rush the passer, speed the quarterback up and kind of help us cover these guys.”

Broncos WR Emmanuel Sanders vs. Raiders CB Gareon Conley

Emmanuel Sanders caught 10-of-11 targets for 135 yards and a touchdown last week, earning his 16th career game with at least 100 yards. Since the start of OTAs and continuing into training camp and preseason, Sanders has developed the strongest connection among the Broncos' deep receiving corps with Keenum.

The bulk of his receiving yards last week, including the 43-yard touchdown, came with him lined up on the left, but he also caught all four targets in the slot, for 23 yards.

The Raiders managed to hold the Rams to only 60 passing yards, four completions and 0-for-3 on third downs in the first half. But it fell apart in the second, as the Rams finished with 233 passing yards. Should the Raiders' diminished pressure up front hinder the secondary, the Broncos could be looking at more big-play opportunities in the passing game.

Prediction

Broncos 31, Raiders 21. The Raiders traded away Mack, had a rogue skunk at their stadium and collapsed in the second half against the Rams to take a loss in their season opener. All in all, it's been a heck of a week for Oakland, and playing again on less than a week's rest in Denver's altitude won't make it any better.

While the Raiders boast the league's oldest roster and are, in the words of their head coach, in rebuilding mode, the Broncos bolstered their pass rush with the addition of Bradley Chubb, improved their run game by relying on youth and improved their quarterback spot by signing a free agent who Gruden believes will be the best acquisition of the year. The Broncos have the offensive tools to exploit Oakland's defense. If the Broncos can eliminate the turnovers — and win the turnover battle — the game should be theirs.

Denver Broncos Denver7 Keys to Victory vs. Oakland Raiders

By Troy Renck
KMGH
Sept. 16, 2018

The Broncos signed Case Keenum for games like this.

You don't write a \$25 million check to a quarterback without believing he can win in the division. Home or away. the Broncos have not won an AFC West road game since Peyton Manning retired, which is why receiver Demaryius Thomas told Denver7 this week, "this is a must-win game."

It seems foolish to categorize anything with such gravity in September. However, winning the division, if not reaching the playoffs, demands home victories. And as matchups go, this is a good place to start:

My Denver7 keys to a Broncos victory over rival Oakland:

1) Making his Case

Is Case Keenum ready to assume complete control? He has shown flashes, but without mastery of the offense mistakes surface. Keenum learned a lesson last Sunday -- "That shots called doesn't mean shots taken." As offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave said, "It was (Hall of Famer) Joe Gibbs who told me that when I was a young coach -- a good quarterback knows what to do when it's there, but the great ones know what to do when it's not there. And that's what we've just got to get in our system. We're just scratching the surface. Has Case gotten enough turns at these concepts to know what to do when it's not there? Probably not. It's learning on the fly." As Keenum digests the playbook, he must limit hiccups. He threw seven interceptions last season. He threw three last Sunday, marking the first time Denver has won with that many picks since Manning did it at Cleveland.

2) Take care of the ball

This relates to Keenum, but applies to the offense in general. The Broncos are 32-0 since 2012 when winning the turnover battle. They were even against Seattle. They must improve. Oakland only pulls off the upset with help.

3) No Cooking with Grease

It's no secret that thongs have covered tight ends better than the Broncos. Since last season tight ends have more yards after the catch against the Broncos than any other team. Jared Cook set career highs in catches and yards vs. the Rams last week. At 6-foot-5, 254 pounds, he's a walking mismatch. The Broncos insist they have a plan. They will approach Cook like a receiver, bracketing him in zone, while keeping a safety over the top in man.

4) Stop the beast

Tales of Marshawn Lynch turning into Least Mode have been greatly exaggerated. He can still move the pile. The Broncos will look to use a gang tackle, swarming approach. That's how they contained him last year in Denver. Making the Raiders one dimensional is a recipe for success.

5) Parked Carr

David Carr is a good quarterback. Elite? Nope. And he's hearing footsteps. Whether he didn't want to get hit or became antsy, Carr threw two unspeakably bad picks vs. the Rams. The Broncos will look to hit him with pressure up the middle since the ball comes out quickly. Carr will attempt to exploit matchups with runningbacks vs. linebackers.

6) Stay creative

The best part of the opening win? The Broncos' willingness to open up the game plan and trust rookies like Royce Freeman, Phillip Lindsay and Courtland Sutton. Musgrave has earned high marks. The offense posted 470 yards last week, the most since Manning exited. This week presents a new challenge. The Raiders know Musgrave's tendencies. Throwing in a few fresh looks, if not gadgets, is expected. Keenum should have time with the Raiders struggling to mount a pass rush.

7) Don't Overcompensate

To borrow from John Wooden, the Broncos need to play fast, but not hurry. They can win this game by staying disciplined. That applies to the secondary -- don't take unnecessary chances -- and the special teams. Punter Marquette King told me he has "no feelings" about this game. I don't believe him. Keep pinning the Raiders back, and King will help the Broncos win home games in consecutive weeks for the first time since last September.

Mason's Mailbag: The best undrafted Broncos

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 16, 2018

@RichirichEh

Aside from Emmanuel Sanders there does not seem to be as much chemistry as one would hope between Case Keenum and the WR corps.

1. How fast can Case get on the same page as his WRs?
2. What are the realistic expectations for our team if he cannot?

Keenum and his wide receivers just got through their first full game together. I recall in 2012 how it took a month and a half for Peyton Manning and his wide receivers to develop the exquisite timing that came to define the Broncos' offense over the years that followed.

So in regards to your questions, I would suggest stepping back, having a glass of water and a piece of fruit and letting the first few games play out before jumping to conclusions in this area. Frankly, I think the timing that already exists is ahead of schedule.

#AskMase Who are the top five undrafted Broncos of all time?

1. Rod Smith

The Broncos' all-time leader in receptions, receiving yardage and passing touchdowns, Smith never lost the razor-sharp emotional and mental edge that lingered from going undrafted out of Missouri Southern in 1994. His streak of 124 consecutive games with at least one reception -- which lasted from 1999 through 2006 -- also remains a franchise standard.

2. Chris Harris Jr.

This could change if Harris ends up on a Hall of Fame trajectory. With three Pro Bowl nods and a first-team All-Pro selection, he could earn Canton consideration if he stacks up similar honors and continues maintaining his stellar form well into his 30s. At this moment, Harris appears to be a likely Ring of Famer, who fits well into the Broncos' storied lineage of cornerbacks, headed by Louis Wright and Champ Bailey.

3. Steve Watson

He made the Broncos' roster as a rookie in 1979. Two years later, he averaged 20.7 yards per reception, a figure that remains a club single-season record for anyone with 25 or more receptions. Watson's 13 touchdown catches in 1981 set a club record that stood for 14 years. He remains in the Broncos' top 10 in receptions, receiving yards and touchdown catches and later served as a wide receivers coach under Mike Shanahan.

4. Greg Kragen

It took Kragen two training-camp attempts to make Denver's roster, but once he developed, he became one of the linchpins of the team's late-1980s defensive revival under then-coordinator Wade Phillips. Kragen earned Pro Bowl honors for his 1989 performance and held down the starting position at nose tackle until 1993. He posted 22.5 sacks over his nine Broncos seasons, an outstanding total for a nose tackle.

5. Gene Mingo

No player in team history had a more diverse skill set than this original Bronco. He played running back. He returned kickoffs and punts -- including a 76-yard punt return for a touchdown in the franchise's first game in 1960. He was the team's first placekicker. His 2014 Ring of Fame induction was a richly deserved honor.

@MaseDenver Hello from Finland! Do the Broncos need reinforcements in the corner position? Are there any free cornerbacks out there that the @Broncos would be interested in? #AskMase

Adam Jones has filled that bill nicely. What he does is ensure the Broncos have a No. 4 cornerback behind the top three with enough experience to step in (Tramaine Brock), while also ensuring that opposing quarterbacks cannot simply lock into the one-on-one matchup involving the third cornerback.

Jones is still good enough to handle the job effectively when he enters the game in sub packages, and is far better than anyone who remains on the open market.

What's your favorite "Seinfeld" quote? And did the saying, "having a cow" come from "The Simpsons" or did they just make it really popular? #AskMase

As someone who would wear sweatpants to work every day if it was acceptable, it has to be this, from Jerry to George:

"You know the message you're sending out to the world with these sweatpants? You're telling the world, 'I give up. I can't compete in normal society. I'm miserable, so I might as well be comfortable.'"

A close second would be the Jake Jarmel-Elaine Benes debate over the use of exclamation points from "The Sniffing Accountant," which you can find at SeinfeldScripts.com.

As for "Don't have a cow," Bart Simpson popularized it, but multiple sources date the origin of the phrase back to England in the 1950s.

Three Keys to Broncos-Raiders

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 16, 2018

Demaryius Thomas knows what a great offense looks like.

From 2012-14, when the Broncos racked up more yards and more points than anyone in the NFL, he didn't just live the ride with an elite offense, he helped make it possible.

For players like Thomas and fellow wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders, smiles often accompany their thoughts when asked about the potential of the Broncos' offense this season. After three seasons in which the Broncos often struggled to move the football, last Sunday's win over Seattle offered a glimpse of the past -- and the future.

The Broncos finished Week 1 fifth in the league in total offense. Denver and Pittsburgh were the only two teams to rank in the top quarter of the league in passing yardage and rushing yardage. If not for three interceptions, they might have ranked even higher -- and could have potentially routed the Seahawks.

Five days after that game, an inquisitor asked Thomas about what the offense could be if it cut the giveaways. A knowing chuckle passed from his lips -- the kind that can only come from someone with vast experience in elite offenses, and someone blessed with the knowledge he might be a part of one once again.

"Man, I don't even know what the word is for it," Thomas said, "but I know we did some great things and we continue to build to do more great things.

"If we didn't turn the ball over this past week, you never know what the score could have been, what the game could have been. I felt as a group, as a team, the Broncos as a whole, from watching film, I think we went out and played great ball. We were physical. We went out and took over the game -- besides those turnovers. If we continue to go out and do that each and every week -- especially on the offensive side of the ball -- we can be a dangerous team."

The Broncos have that potential. What are the keys to staying on track against Oakland on Sunday?

1. Use balance to keep Oakland off-balance

If Week 1's work provides any indication, the Broncos have the diverse array of trustworthy skill-position players to mimic the tactics and balance that worked for the Rams in Oakland. Denver and Los Angeles were two of four teams last week that passed for at least 220 yards and ran for at least 140.

Should Denver's offense remain equally effective on the ground and in the air, the Broncos could have the opportunity to grind down the Raiders and dominate in the second half, just as the Rams did last week.

2. Contain Jared Cook

"He's definitely a problem," Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods said in the wake of Cook's career-high 180 yards on nine receptions in the Raiders' loss to the Rams last Monday.

It was Cook's third 100-yard game in his last 11 starts. In that span, he has racked up 659 yards on 42 catches, which prorates to 959 yards and 62 receptions per 16 games. He is in the most productive stretch of his 10-year career.

Last week, Seattle tight end Will Dissly amassed 105 yards on three catches against the Broncos. Seventy of his yards came after the catch, mostly as a result of missed tackles -- including three on a 66-yard catch-and-run alone. Schematic adjustments will help, but if the Broncos improve their tackling form, such plays will be less likely.

"We feel like we do a good job tackling. I just really felt like the guys were pressing," Woods said. "It was the first game, there was a lot of energy, the fans were great, and it just felt like a lot of guys did some things that were uncharacteristic in terms of how they play.

"We really just tried to settle the guys down and tell them, 'Just do your job; that's all that's required.'"

3. Keep up the good work against Marshawn Lynch

No team did a better job of containing Oakland's power runner last year than the Broncos, who in two games held him to his two worst single-game per-carry averages of the season.

The Raiders are 4-23 since 2014 when they rush for 80 or fewer yards and they are 9-1 when they accumulate 140 or more rushing yards. Meanwhile, the Broncos lead the AFC the last two seasons in games in which they hold an opponent to 80 or fewer rushing yards (10).

Bowlen family, Broncos help raise funds for a cure at 2018 Walk to End Alzheimer's

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
Sept. 16, 2018

As flower-shaped pinwheels dotted the crowd at City Park, members of the Bowlen family led a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

And with that, the 29th annual Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's began.

More than 100 Denver Broncos employees joined Team Super Bowlen — led by the Bowlen family — and more than 10,000 people on Saturday morning for the flagship event of the Alzheimer's Association's efforts to raise money for Alzheimer's research, support and care.

"It's really special. It's moving to see 10,000 people come together from the Denver community," said Brittany Bowlen, who was just one of Owner Pat Bowlen's children in attendance on Saturday. "It's a huge effort from the community, from the fans, from our players and even other NFL organizations that have supported us. This year we'll raise more money than we have any other year. Over the four years, we've raised about \$400,000, which is great. It's going to help research, it's going to help awareness, and that's the most important thing: making a difference."

Saturday's Walk helped cap a fundraising campaign that raised more than \$1.35 million for the Alzheimer's Association of Colorado. The Broncos and Team Super Bowlen each played a large role in raising funds to help combat the disease that affects more than 71,000 Coloradans.

"It says a lot about my dad's organization," Pat Bowlen III said. "I believe that we can do so much for the Alzheimer's foundation just by getting together — not only as a family but as a group of people, as the NFL as a whole — and just kill this disease once and for all."

Team Super Bowlen and the Broncos combined to help raise a record \$115,000 for the cause, which is a dear one to the Broncos' organization.

Owner Pat Bowlen and his wife Annabel Bowlen are both fighting the disease, which is projected to impact more than 90,000 Coloradans by 2025.

"I found that it's brought me closer to supporting [the cause] any way possible," said their daughter, Annabel Bowlen. "My mom being recently diagnosed has been a huge struggle for my family, but we've all come together and become a lot stronger from it. It just makes me want to get more involved and help find a cure. This is an awful disease, and it's not easy on people. It's probably the toughest thing you'll ever have to go through."

That's why research — and supporting the more than 247,000 Colorado caregivers — is so important.

"It's amazing, because we really need the support," Christianna Bowlen said. "I'm 20 years old, and not having my parents is tough sometimes. This support makes me feel a lot better."

The fight against Alzheimer's will continue over the coming months and years.

"We're so proud of what the team has come together to do this year, led by the Bowlen family," Executive Director of Community Development Allie Pisching said. "We've been able to really make a difference and raise funds that will make a difference in research in our community. ... This is a team effort across the board, and we've really rallied our fans together and they've rallied with us to make sure this is not just a Broncos initiative, it's a city-wide initiative."

As they showed Saturday, the Broncos and the Bowlen family will remain standing with those battling the disease.

Together, they will take more steps toward a cure.

Bennie Fowler's time with Patriots ends, after only four days

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
Sept. 16, 2018

The Patriots may want to add a revolving door to their receiver room.

Out is Bennie Fowler, a veteran who joined the team on Tuesday. The team announced Fowler's exit on Saturday.

Fowler's release cleared a spot for offensive lineman Cole Croston, who was elevated from the New England practice squad. Last year, the undrafted free agent was a healthy scratch for 13 games on the Patriots' roster. Croston's spot on the practice squad was filled by (wait for it) a receiver. Riley McCarron becomes the latest potential short-term Patriots player.

The extra offensive lineman may have something to do with the fact that veteran Marcus Cannon is questionable with a calf injury.

The Patriots face the Jaguars on Sunday in Jacksonville, in a rematch of the 2017 AFC title game.