

# Kiszla vs. O'Halloran: What is Broncos' 2-0 record: Championship material or fool's gold?

By Ryan O'Halloran & Mark Kiszla

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Question: What is Broncos' 2-0 record: championship material or fool's gold?

Kiz: A football team cannot be better than undefeated. And there's no reason to ever apologize for being 2-0. But, after two games, what have we learned about these Broncos? Have they established themselves as a serious contender in the AFC? Or should we slow our roll after two victories by a total of four points? It might be better to be lucky than good, but good fortune is tough to sustain over the course of a 16-game schedule. Will the real Broncos please stand up?

O'Halloran: All the Broncos have done so far is what they were supposed to do — win twice at home as the betting favorite. That is still reason for optimism, though. Teams who end up being good hold serve at home (6-2 or 7-1) and then steal a few road games to make the playoffs. A serious contender in the AFC? Not yet. A serious contender in the AFC West? Absolutely.

Kiz: Let's start with stuff that makes me smile. Almost every season, nearly half the 32 NFL teams can finish 10-6 if everything goes right, or 6-10 if everything goes wrong. By winning twice on late comebacks, the Broncos have quickly put two toss-up games in the W column. They've bought in on the never-surrender attitude of Case Keenum and established a little swagger. Phillip Lindsay? It's no longer a question if he's the best back on team but when he will get elected mayor.

O'Halloran: Lindsay woke up Monday morning with 178 rushing yards, third-most in the NFL. He is developing into one of the league's best stories, not just Denver's top story. Building on some of the positives, this appears to be a team that will win games on special teams (a novel concept, I know) and their front seven should continue to produce third down situations because they can stop the run.

Kiz: The secondary formerly known as the No Fly Zone is a hot mess. Denver has made Russell Wilson and Derek Carr look like Tom Brady. Adam Jones looks like a 35-year-old cornerback that needs to find a seat on the porch. Bradley Roby is getting picked on. Unless linebacker Von Miller dominates, this defense is extremely vulnerable. Keenum has been gutsy, but inconsistent. I predicted an 8-8 record for Broncos and will stick with that, though early trends suggest something worse, despite the 2-0 start.

O'Halloran: Is it too early to call it the Frequent Fly Zone? The Broncos aren't getting much from No. 2 cornerback Bradley Roby and Jones and Tramaine Brock allowed multiple completions Sunday. Coming out of the win over Oakland, this is developing into a major concern. Teams will throw quick to keep Miller at bay and knowing the receivers can get open. I had the Broncos starting 2-0 on their way to 9-7. Not changing that now.

# Lunch Special: What is Broncos rookie Phillip Lindsay's ceiling?

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
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Denver Post columnist Mark Kiszla answered questions about all things Denver sports in a live Lunch Special chat on Monday. Here are the highlights:

Kiz, I've been watching Phillip Lindsay since the beginning of preseason and every week he looks like he's improving. What's the ceiling on his potential?

Kiszla: Broncos Country has got Phillip Lindsay fever. As I stated in a debate with my Post colleague Ryan O'Halloran earlier today, it's no longer a question of if Lindsay is the Broncos' No. 1 running back, but when he will be elected mayor of Denver. Whatever ceiling has been given Lindsay, he keeps punching through it. Shortly after he was signed by the Broncos, I said Lindsay looked every bit as good in college as Royce Freeman, the team's third-round pick out of Oregon. Folks laughed at me. That's OK. I'm used to be laughed at. I have kids. But, let me also add, I didn't see Lindsay blowing up like this. I originally figured a role where he rushed for 300 yards and caught passes for 300 yards would be a fantastic rookie season for an undrafted player. Now? If Lindsay stays healthy, are there any limits? Let's dream big. Offensive rookie of the year. How does that sound?

How did the Raiders lose that game? Derek Carr goes 29 out of 30 for 2 TDS and no picks and we didn't have a first down in the first quarter! It's a funny old game.

Kiszla: How did the Raiders lose? They did Raiders things. And Jon Gruden started playing the clock instead of trying to score more points in the fourth quarter. Denver deserved to win the game. Denver, and quarterback Case Keenum in particular, should get kudos for refusing to surrender after a lousy first half. But the Broncos got a lucky, as well. Recall the fourth-and-one play for Oakland? Gruden and his staff made a great call. With the line stacked, a running back came wide open in the flat, Derek Carr hit him in stride and he dropped the football. Make that catch ... and there's no talk today of a wonderful Broncos' victory.

Hey Kiz, How's it hanging? DT is beginning to look like more of a liability than an asset, way too many drops for his pay grade. Your thoughts?

Kiszla: The Broncos have too many high-priced players. This is not criticism, merely a financial analysis of the roster in a league with a salary cap. There's Von Miller, Case Keenum, Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders, Ron Leary ... you get the idea. Somebody is going to have to go at the end of the season. Right, now, the leading candidate to be that somebody is Demaryius Thomas. He's a very good player, despite the drops. But he has never been a truly elite NFL receiver.

I can't believe I'm talking about this...but where do you think Keenum will end up in terms of all-time skillset as a Broncos QB? After Elway/Manning/Plummer/Morton there's a huge drop-off. Obviously, Cutler had more raw physical talent ... but Keenum is a much better leader/winner.

Kizla: I can't believe you're talking about this, either. (I only kid the ones I love). Where does Case Keenum rank on the list of all-time Broncos' QBs? C'mon now. Stick to coffee during business hours, stay away from the Orange Kool Aid. The comeback Keenum led was a fine example of his leadership, which I praised extensively in my column from the victory over the Raiders. But if you want me to keep it real ... Keenum has yet to record a victory as big as Brock Osweiler beating New England in overtime. Keenum is a better QB than Osweiler. But the jury is very much out on if he can lead the Broncos to the playoffs.

Kiz, I gotta say, I was pretty impressed with Josey Jewell on Sunday. When are the Broncos going to let him play a bigger role?

Kizla: Josey Jewell will be a starter on this Denver defense before the end of the season. He might be a starter before the end of October. I'd make him a starter before the end of September. But that's just me.

Have you been surprised by Keenum's four interceptions over two weeks? He only had seven last season.

Kizla: No. Keenum got paid the big bucks for the first time in his career. And, as is human nature, he has tried to play like a big-buck quarterback. He is not. He is a fine leader. He is tough. He is smart. He is a game manager. I've been saying this since the day Denver signed Keenum. The Broncos have told you this. After two games, perhaps Broncos Country has finally begun to see what I told you about Keenum is closer to the gospel than a hater's rant. (And I certainly don't hate Keenum. He's a fine man.)

Will the Rockies trade DJ LeMahieu?

Kizla: I hope DJ LeMahieu goes out and signs a big fat contract. I hope that because I hope good things for good people. I don't root for the Rockies. I do hope that top performers, whether their field of work is baseball, engineering or journalism, get paid in a way that shows an employer can't take them for granted.

What happened to CSU football this year? Is it coaching, player talent, other?

Kizla: I feel for Mike Bobo, who has shown great fortitude while coaching as he deals with some serious physical issues. Get well soon. And let's all pray for his 100 percent recovery. OK, that's the important stuff. By comparison, football is a trifle. But, if you're asking me my football analysis about Bobo the coach, I think he's very close to average in almost every way, from recruiting to in-game decisions. Giving him a contract extension was a mistake. That being said, I hope Bobo proves me wrong. For his benefit. And for the benefit of everyone who cheers for the Rams.

If the NFL draft were held today, I'm thinking the Broncos would be eyeing cornerbacks. What do you think?

Kizla: During the preseason, I appeared on a local radio station that does spin for the Broncos. I went on after writing a column on Courtland Sutton, a column that tabbed him as the breakout rookie star, when maybe I should've gone with Phillip Lindsay. I figured the segment would be happy talk about Sutton. Not long after the interview began, however, I made the comment that Bradley Roby couldn't handle Sutton in practice. One of the hosts took umbrage with my analysis, suggesting I didn't know what I was talking about. Cool by me. But I've said this for months and years: Roby looks more like a safety than a

cornerback to me. And he's getting picked on with the departure of my buddy Aqib Talib. The secondary is a mess. Adam Jones looked old versus the Raiders. Can the problems in the secondary be fixed? It's certainly possible, because Chris Harris Jr and Justin Simmons are good players. But if the problems in the secondary don't get fixed, the Broncos aren't going to make the playoffs. (I'm not certain that's honesty you will hear on a radio station whose mission is to make the Broncos look good.)

Oh man, it's September and the Rockies are playing games that matter! What do they need to do to win the NL West? I've been a fan since the beginning and this would be amazing.

Kiszla: Playoff race baseball in September. Is that sweet agony, or what? The Rockies have 3 1/2 legit starting pitchers. Kyle Freeland, German Marquez, Jon Gray and Antonio Senzatela. Depending on the day, it's 50/50 whether Gray or Senzatela are legit starters you want on the bump in the heat of a playoff race. Now, that's more pitching than the Rockies have typically had in the past. And it might be enough starting pitching to make a deep run in the playoffs. But is it enough starting pitching to get Colorado through the grind of the final two weeks. I'll be honest. I'm not certain. But it's that starting pitching that will most likely tell the story of whether the Rockies qualify for the postseason or not.

Could Isaac Yiadom provide a spark to the secondary? Or just not ready yet?

Kiszla: If he was ready, the Broncos would have never signed Adam Jones to play cornerback. When Denver signed Jones, it screamed the secondary was a problem area. And it remains a problem area. Yiadom has room to grow. But can we be certain he's going to be a player in this league next week, next month or next year? I'd say it's far from certain.

Is DT now the fourth best wide receiver for the Broncos?

Kiszla: Lots of DT dissatisfaction from the peeps. I don't blame y'all. He has not been good. Here's the beauty, though. There's enough receiving talent on the roster than Thomas' snap counts will go down if he doesn't perform.

Wondering if the broncos lost yesterday would we be hearing shouts of firing VJ and bringing in Chad Kelly in for Case? Basically, my question is how short is the leash before the lynch mob starts their annual screaming? One game? Two to three games?

Kiszla: The Broncos finished 5-11 last season after starting 3-1. They've won 2 games by a total of 4 points. Case Keenum's overall passing statistics are as sad as the numbers that got Trevor Siemian fired from the job. Those are facts, not Chicken Little worries. Vance Joseph and Case Keenum still must prove they can lead Denver to the playoffs? Isn't that fair? Seems fair to me.

Is Kyle Freeland having the best-ever season for a Rockies' starting pitcher? I mean, Ubaldo Jimenez had that magical first half of 2010 before he trailed off after the all-star break. Where do you think he'll end up in the Cy Young vote?

Kiszla: Kyle Freeland's stuff is not as electric as the baseball Ubaldo Jimenez threw during his best days with the Rockies. But Freeland is as tough a competitor as Colorado has ever sent to the mound. But my media brethren in the Cy Young voting already made up their minds on the top candidates weeks ago. It's as aspect of instant analysis in 2018 that drives me a little nutty. If Freeland finishes 17-7, with an ERA under 3.00, that should make him top 3 in the Cy Young voting. But I think he can finish no better

than fourth, with Jacob deGrom, Max Scherzer and Aaron Nola already designated as the 1-2-3 finishers (in no particular order). My baseball brethren here in Colorado do not see it fit to give me a vote on any award, much less something so prestigious as the Cy Young. I've got no problem with that. But don't come crying to me if Freeland doesn't get his due in the voting.

I like watching the Rockies. I'm sick of listening to Drew Goodman drone on in a monotone about how great they are. Any chance he's gone next year?!

Kiszla: Yes, the Rockies telecasts do have a large portion of homerism. But we all know that going in. I actually enjoy the television crew. Spillygoat, in particular, brings a sense of fun that makes it entertaining.

Do you believe Chad Kelly has a legitimate shot of being the Broncos future franchise QB? Or is it the usual misguided fan hope of the back-up turning into the franchise savior?

Kiszla: I have not been a big believer in Chad Kelly, as faithful followers of this chat or my Twitter timeline (@markkiszla) know all too well. Kelly, however, has made the most of his opportunity. So he has proved me wrong. Kudos to him. A future as a bona fide NFL starting quarterback? Well, Kelly could prove me wrong again.

Being at the game, the best I can describe how the Broncos won is the following: The Raiders had several chances to put the Broncos away but couldn't and the Broncos hung around and in long enough to get the comeback. Played well enough in the 2nd half to get back in the game...

Kiszla: True dat. Good teams can win without their A game. So maybe, just maybe, hanging around and beating the Raiders was a sign the Broncos can be better than the 8-8 record I projected for them.

# After “cautious” first half, Vance Joseph liked response of Broncos’ secondary

By Ryan O’Halloran

Denver Post

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The Broncos like to describe their defense as one which plays press-man coverage, challenging every completion.

“And in the first half, we didn’t do that,” coach Vance Joseph said Monday, referring to Sunday’s win over the Oakland Raiders. “We played way too cautious. We were really non-aggressive and they took advantage of us. That’s on me.”

The Raiders built a 12-0 halftime lead at which point quarterback Derek Carr was 18-of-19 passing for 158 yards.

The Broncos in general and their defense in particular rebounded after halftime for a 20-19 win, though they had only one sack and no takeaways.

“In the second half, we got more aggressive, it showed and we played better,” Joseph said.

But finding coverage options after top cornerback Chris Harris is an ongoing issue.

Bradley Roby is a starter, but needs to improve. Veterans Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones traded turns as the nickel back against Oakland. The Broncos rely on Brock and Jones because rookie Isaac Yiadom has been inactive for two weeks and Brendan Langley is on the practice squad.

Joseph said Jones was limited Sunday because of a “tight” hamstring. Jones called his injury “a little strain but I’ll be all right. I was not as aggressive this week because of my hamstring.” The Broncos trimmed Jones’ playing time from 38 snaps in Week 1 to 21 plays against Oakland.

Jones said Joseph’s halftime message was clear.

“Just play a little more aggressive as a group,” Jones said. “That was the main thing. Press a little more than we did early. We could have played more aggressive (in the first half).”

In the first half, the Broncos’ cornerbacks gave too much cushion. Carr recognized the free yards and threw quickly.

“We were seven or eight yards off and it’s going to be a completed ball and he’s going to fall (forward) for five or six yards,” Joseph said.

Wary of the Broncos’ pass rush and recognizing soft coverage, Carr (29 of 32) made history with his throw-quick, throw-short, throw-accurate performance:

His 90.6 completion percentage was the fourth-highest in NFL history among quarterbacks with at least 20 attempts in the game. And he became the first quarterback to attempt at least 30 passes and finish with a completion percentage of 90 or better.

And, among those with at least 20 passing attempts in a game, Carr's 288 yards were the most in league history for a player who completed at least 90 percent of his passes.

The Raiders provided a how-to guide to neutralizing a Broncos pass rush that had six sacks in Week 1. Carr got rid of the football quickly. A lot. It mirrored the Raiders' Week 1 plan against Los Angeles Rams interior pass rushers Aaron Donald and Ndamukong Suh.

The Broncos threatened from the edges with Von Miller and Bradley Chubb, but the Raiders' plan was similar.

Of Carr's 32 attempts, he threw in less than two seconds 19 times. The breakdown: Less than two seconds (19), 2.00-2.50 seconds (six), 2.51-3.00 seconds (six) and more than three seconds (seven).

The Broncos' only sack (by Miller) came in 3.01 seconds.

"You just have to stay the course and keep rushing," defensive lineman Shelby Harris said. "All it takes is one or two plays where he actually holds on to the football and it isn't a quick pass. You knew they were going to get the ball out quickly. You have to make sure you don't get frustrated because if you do, it can carry onto another play and you can't let that happen."

The Broncos face Baltimore quarterback Joe Flacco on Sunday. Flacco is not a statue, but won't create plays with his feet, either. The key will be tight coverage helping the pass rush and vice versa.

"We have to press the receivers because if (Carr) held the ball, we know that we can get pressure," Joseph said. "With our pass rush, as a corner, you should have confidence that if they're throwing a (deep pass), our pressure will get there."

# Broncos day after: 10 takeaways from Denver's 20-19 win over the Oakland Raiders

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

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## Denver pressure

The Broncos rushed five or more players on 12 of Raiders quarterback Derek Carr's 35 drop-backs (34.3 percent), up from 21.4 percent against Seattle's Russell Wilson. A few of the pressure situations against the Raiders, though, came in goal-line and short-yardage so the Broncos didn't dial up a lot of blitz looks.

## Oakland pressure

2. Oakland rushed five or more at Broncos quarterback Case Keenum on 13 of 39 drop-backs (33.3 percent). On the winning drive, Keenum faced four-, five-, six- and eight-man rushes. The Raiders rushed eight (against seven blockers) on Keenum's second-to-last attempt, a pass that was dropped by receiver Demaryius Thomas.

## Airing it out

3. The pass chart spelled out what coach Vance Joseph said post-game: The Broncos needed to become more aggressive in the second half. In the first half, Keenum was 0 of 3 with an interception on passes that traveled at least 16 yards in the air. In the second half, Keenum was 5 of 8 for 108 yards with completions of 21, 20, 24, 22 and 21 yards.

## Offensive snap count

4. Broncos offensive skill player snap counts (66 snaps): Thomas 59, Courtland Sutton 54, Emmanuel Sanders 54, Jeff Heurman 41, Phillip Lindsay 28, Jake Butt 26, Devotae Booker 22, Royce Freeman 16, DaeSean Hamilton 12, Andy Janovich 11, Tim Patrick 4 and Matt LaCosse 2.

## Defensive snap count

5. Broncos defensive snaps (64 plays): Justin Simmons 65, Chris Harris/Darian Stewart 63, Bradley Roby 58, Todd Davis 57, Brandon Marshall 53, Von Miller 49, Derek Wolfe 48, Bradley Chubb 47, Domata Peko 34, Adam Gotsis 28, Tramaine Brock 23, Shelby Harris 22, Zach Kerr/Adam Jones 21, Shane Ray 19, Shaq Barrett 18, Will Parks 14 and Josey Jewell 13.

## Roby's rough start

6. The secondary's tough game started on the second play when Roby bit on the play action, leaving receiver Jordy Nelson momentarily uncovered for a 23-yard gain. We booked Roby in man coverage for catches of 14, seven and 13 yards by Amari Cooper.

## Staying tight on Cook

7. A week after catching nine passes, Raiders tight end Jared Cook was held to four receptions for 48 yards. He had gains of four (Davis), 20 (Jewell bit on the play-action), 20 and five yards (Simmons missed the tackle).

## Butt busts loose

8. A well-designed play started the Broncos' fourth-quarter touchdown drive. Butt lined up at fullback and hit the line of scrimmage as if he was going to block. Instead, he kept running straight down the field and Keenum found him for 22 yards when linebacker Tahir Whitehead's eyes were still in the backfield.

#### Broncos protection

9. Oakland's only sack came in the second quarter (2.34 seconds). The play's timing was disrupted by center Matt Paradis' high shotgun snap. Cornerback Leon Hall blitzed from the slot. Left tackle Garrett Bolles blocked Maurice Hurst and left guard Ron Leary tried to flash out to block Hall but got tangled up with Bolles. That sent Leary down and Bolles off balance, allowing Hurst to get the sack.

#### Wildcat emerges

10. We knew something was up in the third quarter when Lindsay and Freeman were on the field together. Keenum went wide right, leaving Lindsay in the shotgun. After faking a handoff to Freeman, who was moving right, Lindsay headed toward the left edge. The play lost one yard, though, when tight end Matt LaCrosse had to choose between two Raiders to block. That left safety Erik Harris to make the tackle.

# Broncos briefs: Rookie linebacker Josey Jewell earns crunch-time minutes in Raiders victory

By Kyle Fredrickson  
Denver Post  
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Broncos rookie linebacker Josey Jewell played 13 snaps in Denver's victory against Oakland to represent 20 percent of team's workload at inside linebacker.

What's more significant, though, was the timing of those plays — several late in the game as the Broncos' defense made just enough second-half adjustments to slow down Oakland's quick-twitch offense. Jewell, a fourth-round draft pick from Iowa, recorded two run-stop tackles against the Raiders. His role is beginning to expand from fresh legs when Brandon Marshall or Todd Davis need a break to carving his own niche in the Broncos' defense.

"You definitely want the opportunity to get in the game anytime, but late in the game like that where there is a lot of pressure, that's awesome," Jewell said. "I strive to get there every week, and you want to be that guy they have confidence in. But I have a lot of things to work on still."

Jewell's uptick in usage also stems from a schematic shift.

"We're playing more nickel now, so those guys are playing more snaps," coach Vance Joseph said. "Last year, we played more dime defense, so our 'backers didn't play as much. Now, we would like to have a three-man rotation between Todd, B-Marsh and Josey. That way they're playing probably 40-45 snaps and not 60 snaps."

Turner next man up. Joseph confirmed that starting left offensive tackle Jared Veldheer has entered the concussion protocol, and should be he unavailable for the Broncos' game Sunday at Baltimore, Billy Turner will fill Veldheer's role.

Turner played the final 34 snaps at right tackle in the Broncos' victory against Oakland in which Denver finished with 168 yards rushing while allowing only one sack.

"I felt great about Billy," Joseph said. "Nobody talked about him, so that's a good sign. We have great depth at the O-line position. I wasn't surprised he played well. We've got Billy, we've got (offensive guard) Max (Garcia) dressing out. Those two guys play as starters, so I wasn't concerned at all."

Peko knows Baltimore. Denver's most veteran player, defensive tackle Domata Peko (13 seasons), has extensive experience against the Ravens after 11 seasons with AFC North foe Cincinnati.

"Baltimore is a tough place to play," Peko said. "They're a really strong crowd there, but you've got to get after them early and show them that you mean business. Get that run stopped and definitely get pressure on (quarterback Joe) Flacco, because he can sit back there and throw the deep ball like the best of them."

# Broncos Mailbag: Should there be concern about Denver's secondary despite a 2-0 start?

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

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Holy heck, who would've thought that Phillip Lindsay would be the Broncos' most dynamic weapon on offense? Do you see his role expanding even more in the weeks to come? Maybe even becoming the team's No. 1 back?

— Kyle, Kalamazoo, Mich.

I did not envision Lindsay having this kind of impact through two games. He leads the team in rushes (29) and rushing yards (178). The main development is the Broncos' trust level in him to gain yards within the basic framework of the run game. They don't have to create ways to get him involved. Thirty-two offensive touches in two games — that may be the sweet spot for Lindsay and it may be a little high. As for the No. 1 running back, it's still Freeman even though Lindsay has more carries.

Denver's secondary looked like trash vs. the Raiders. They let go of several huge plays and still can't stop tight ends. Is there anyone out there we can pick up to improve it?

— Mike, Denver

Raiders quarterback Derek Carr set a franchise record with a 90.6 completion percentage (minimum 20 attempts). He was 29 of 32 on Sunday. The Broncos have issues in coverage when Chris Harris is not covering the intended receiver. Teams will continue to challenge Bradley Roby, Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones. The available list of players isn't too intriguing. Sean Smith. Jeremy Lane. David Amerson.

What do you think of this year's Broncos? I can't decide. At times, they look like they're world beaters, destined to be making a strong playoff run. Other times, they look like that terrible team in the middle of 2017, unable to move the ball on offense and constantly trotting out a tired defense that, while good, can't maintain a high level for too long. I want to get excited. Being 2-0 is huge, but should I temper my expectations? Give me reasons to believe!

— Robin, Parker

I can't decide, either. They've held serve as the home favorite twice so far. Don't temper your expectations because what fun is that? In the AFC, only Miami, Cincinnati, Jacksonville, Kansas City and the Broncos are 2-0. We'll learn a lot over the next three weeks: At Baltimore, home to the Chiefs and at the New York Jets. Win two out of those three and then you can be even more excited.

What do you think about the Broncos going after Josh Gordon? We can never have too many big-time receivers.

— Matthew, Aurora

Not worth the trouble, honestly. Plus, do the Broncos have room for him? Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders, Courtland Sutton, Tim Patrick and DaeSean Hamilton represent a good group.

How in the world did the Raiders lose? Derek Carr looked like he couldn't miss a pass if he tried. And Denver's offense was super sluggish pretty much the whole game. What happened?

— James, Golden

Oakland did grab defeat from the jaws of victory. The Raiders threw the football around but didn't produce many big plays. Only one of Carr's 29 completions gained more than 23 yards. He threw quickly which meant he threw short. The Broncos tackled well and forced 10 third downs (the Raiders converted only three). The Broncos hung around until they could combine one stop with two scores.

About that Courtland Sutton non-touchdown: Did it look like he scored? Because it looked like he scored.

— Kelly S., Denver

I think they got the call right with an incomplection. When I watched the replay, what I saw was: Sutton's right foot landing in-bounds (that's good), but his right heel going out of bounds before his left knee hit the turf. Thus, the incomplection.

I know this is one of those "it's only Week 2" questions, but is Phillip Lindsay a viable rookie of the year candidate? Just following him from the beginning of training camp to now, he looks like he's improving every single week.

— Jules M., Denver

If Lindsay keeps it up, he can develop into a viable candidate because his production will be splash plays and help the Broncos win games. He won't get as many touches as the Giants' Saquon Barkley or as many opportunities as the rookie quarterbacks, though.

# Von Miller credits “young guys” for Broncos’ success in opening two weeks of the season

By Matt Schubert

Denver Post

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Count Broncos defensive end Von Miller as another fan of Denver’s rookies.

Appearing on the Monday Night Football halftime show, the Broncos veteran was asked by ESPN’s Scott Van Pelt why the team has been able to win “coin-flip” games the first two weeks of the season.

After citing the “great locker room culture” in Denver, Miller gave some love to the team’s new young talent.

“I think it starts with the young guys that we brought in,” Miller told Van Pelt. “I mean, Phillip Lindsay, Courtland Sutton — all of these young guys have really given everybody a boost.”

Van Pelt then asked for Miller’s thoughts on the NFL’s emphasis on protecting quarterbacks, including a new rule that prohibits tacklers from landing on top of a quarterback. He specifically cited a flag against Green Bay’s Clay Matthews for roughing the passer at the end of the Packers-Vikings game that kept a Minnesota drive alive that ended with a game-tying touchdown.

“I saw the play... that’s a tough one,” Miller said. “I understand what they are trying to do. The game is about the quarterback, we get that. You don’t want to get guys hurt.”

“I totally get it, it’s about the quarterback. You want to keep the quarterbacks safe, but I’m not sure how we’re supposed to take them to the ground either.”

# Broncos notes: Keenum is 2-0 but must make his move

By Mike Klis

9 News

Sept. 18, 2018

For obvious reasons, the 2018 Broncos are becoming irked about comparisons to last year.

Last year, though, brings constructive caution to the otherwise optimism of 2-0.

None more so than this:

Through two games last season, Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian was 2-0 with 6 touchdown passes against 2 interceptions for 450 yards and a 106.9 passer rating that ranked No. 6 among all NFL quarterbacks.

Through two games this season, Broncos quarterback Case Keenum is 2-0 with 3 touchdown passes against 4 interceptions for 551 yards and a 73.7 rating that ranks 28th among QBs.

Keenum can make up serious ground over the next five games. In fact, he must: Siemian went 1-4 in that stretch, with 3 TDs against 8 picks. And the Broncos finished 5-11 overall.

There is nothing about Keenum's play that suggests he will experience that type of slump – especially his clutch fourth quarter performances in each of the Broncos' first two wins.

He must do it, though. The point here is a team, and its quarterback, cannot be fully evaluated on two games alone.

## Turkey Bowl Attack

I played in a Turkey Bowl game once where the rule stipulated at least one pass had to be completed to a kid, and another to a mom or wife before a QB could throw a touchdown pass to an adult male.

The Broncos have been using their own form of the Turkey Bowl pass offense in that multiple players seemingly must have at least one catch before the team wins.

Keenum completed passes to seven different receivers in game 1, including tight end Jeff Heuerman, who had one catch for 15 yards.

Going one better in game 2, Keenum completed passes to eight different receivers, including one completion each to Tim Patrick, Andy Janovich, Courtland Sutton and Phillip Lindsay.

Still looking for their first catch going into game 3: DaeSean Hamilton, Royce Freeman and Matt LaCosse.

## Bronco Bits

After No. 3 cornerback Adam Jones was flagged for defensive holding late in the second quarter, he was replaced by Tramaine Brock. By game's end, Brock had 23 defensive snaps to 21 for Jones. ...

Safety Justin Simmons is the Broncos' only player who has played every defensive snap through two games. ...

There are snaps and there are carries. The Broncos' running back rotation Sunday against the Raiders: Lindsay, 28 snaps (14 carries), Devontae Booker, 22 snaps (3 carries) and Freeman, 16 snaps (8 carries). ...

There are snaps and there are receiving yards. The Broncos' top three receivers Sunday: Demaryius Thomas, 59 snaps (5 catches, 18 yards), Emmanuel Sanders, 54 snaps (4 catches, 96 yards) and Sutton, 54 snaps (1 catch, 9 yards).

# Broncos' cornerback depth a concern after Carr completes 29 of 32

By Mike Klis

9 News

Sept. 18, 2018

If the Broncos are to convert their 2-0 record into a serious run at a playoff spot – and with “Fourth Quarter” Keenum as their quarterback, why wouldn't they? – they're going to have to address some issues.

Problem No. 1: The Broncos must do something about 29 of 32.

Victory alone cannot dismiss the concern Oakland Raiders' quarterback Derek Carr completed 29 of 32 passes Sunday against Denver's Fly At Will Zone. And it would have been 30 of 32 completions had Raiders' fullback Keith Smith not dropped a fourth-and-1 pass from the Broncos' 33 in the fourth quarter, a flub that gave Denver a chance to rally from a 19-10 deficit.

Carr was 18 of 19 in the first half. It had the look of a training camp, 7-on-7 passing drill.

“That falls back on the corners” Broncos coach Vance Joseph said Monday in his day-after-game press conference at the team's UHealth Training Center headquarters. “We have to press the receivers because if he holds the ball, we know that we can get pressure. If it comes up quick and we were seven or eight yards off, it's going to be a completed ball and he's going to fall for five or six. Our corners have to play with great confidence all the time and obviously play press coverage.

“With our pass rush, as a corner, you should have confidence that if he's throwing a nine-ball, a seven-ball or a deep in-cut, that our pressure will get there. We were really too soft, I guess I should say, at corner with our coverage.”

The trade deadline is October 30, or six weeks away. Broncos general manager John Elway may not make a deal, but he figures to at least look at the available cornerbacks.

Elway has tried to address the need. In each of the past two drafts, he selected a cornerback in the third round. But Brendan Langley and Isaac Yiadom have watched the Broncos' first two games from the press box, neither deemed quite ready to help on the field on Sundays.

The cornerback position was enough of a concern in the days leading into the regular-season opener the Broncos signed Adam Jones, who turns 35 in two weeks, off the street to become their No. 3 cornerback. Jones replaced 30-year-old Tramaine Brock as the No. 3.

When Jones' hamstring tightened up in the 92-degree heat Sunday against the Raiders, Brock got his No. 3 job back.

The Broncos are fine with their top two corners. Chris Harris Jr. remains one of the league's top defensive backs and Bradley Roby had been one of the league's best No. 3 corners who is making the gradual adjustment to No. 2.

But can 30-somethings Jones and Brock hold up as interchanging No. 3 corners through a 16-game season?

Sure, the Broncos came back to beat the Oakland Raiders, 20-19, on Sunday thanks to two, long, fourth quarter touchdown drives engineered by Keenum. In his fourth quarters this year, Keenum has compiled a combined 113.7 passer rating – easily his most efficient quarter as he has not topped an 80.0 rating in any of the other three quarters.

To help afford Keenum, a free agent who the Broncos' signed to a two-year deal worth \$18 million per, Elway made the business decision to trade away star cornerback Aqib Talib, who is 32 and making \$11 million this year.

When it comes to building a competitive NFL roster, if it's not one thing, it's another. If 2-0 is going to lead to 10-6 and a playoff spot, either the young corners must get ready to contribute, or the veteran corners must stay healthy and play at a high level, or Elway will have to look at making a move for another corner.

Jewell in linebacker mix

As the Raiders were trying to protect their fourth quarter lead by chewing up the clock with their running game, Broncos' rookie Josey Jewell replaced starter Brandon Marshall as the inside linebacker partner of Todd Davis.

Davis is considered a superior run-stopper who is a work in progress in pass coverage. Marshall is considered a fast, all-around linebacker who is best in pass coverage. Jewell can eventually become a three-down linebacker but for now more closely resembles Davis as a run-stopper.

"Josey played good football and it wasn't about 'B-Marsh', it was more about Josey and he played good football," Joseph said. "Now, we would like to have a three-man rotation between Todd, B-Marsh and Josey. That way they're playing probably 40-45 snaps and not 60 snaps."

# Denver Broncos honor first responders, Basalt firefighter who lost home battling Lake Christine Fire

By Cealey Godwin

9 News

Sept. 18, 2018

The Fourth of July is usually celebrated with American Flags, fireworks, and fun-filled times with family. But on July 3rd, Basalt Fire Deputy Chief Cleve Williams was in a fire meeting at Station 42 when his crew got a call of a fire growing on a ridge above the Willits subdivision.

“It started with someone shooting illegal rounds at a shooting range,” the 28-year-veteran recalled. “We were on scene pretty quick and it was already out of control by the time we got there.”

In nearly three decades spent fighting fires, Williams had never seen a wildland fire like the Lake Christine fire.

Basalt Fire Chief and long-time friend Scott Thompson was keeping track of the weather as the day continued.

“We had no idea that the wind event on July 4 was going to happen, so it was very reactive how we had to deal with it,” Thompson explained. “We had been up for over 36 hours fighting fire, so we were getting ready to put people to bed for the night.”

According to Thompson, wildfires normally climb to higher grounds and die down at night, but this one grew more powerful and made “an incredible run downhill”. It then crossed the valley, heading straight towards the small mountain town of El Jebel.

As the fire made the unpredictable run, the firefighters would have twenty minutes to evacuate a trailer park and the nearby neighborhood of Missouri Heights-- the subdivision where Williams and his family lives.

With no time to spare, Williams ran to his home to warn his wife, leaving her only minutes to grab some family photos before evacuating.

Firefighters then began to prepare for the incoming flames. They set engines behind the house and ran hoses to the front, but they didn’t burn out around the home.

“I think neither one of us believed what happened was going to happen,” said Thompson.

Ultimately, the flames were too much, and Williams had to make the difficult call to move his crew back.

“Right then, it wasn’t very difficult because the fire was moving up to the neighbor’s house and I thought we could save it,” said Williams.

Williams and his crew did save his neighbor's house. While they were protecting that home, Williams glanced back at his own home and snapped a couple of photos as it was engulfed in flames. Other than what his wife was able to grab, the home was a complete loss.

Since losing his home, Williams, his wife and teenage son have been staying in a motor home and at his mother's home, who is a retired firefighter herself. Their daughter is away at college in California. Williams said he also bought a mobile home that will be put on their lot while they work on plans to rebuild.

Williams, soft-spoken and humble, choked back tears when talking about losing the home he built with his own hands. They often hosted parties and get-togethers for the Basalt Fire Station and other friends outside of the department.

When Thompson was nominated as one of 75 First Responders to be honored at the Broncos season-opener against the Seattle Seahawks, he asked for Williams to take his place.

"Cleve deserves a break right now," Thompson added. "Cleve deserves to have something to take his mind off of everything he's been going through for the last couple of months and it's just special."

Williams is a life-long Broncos fan but had never been to a game.

The first responders, made up of EMT's, police officers, and firefighters around the state, were honored in the pre-game ceremonies with a special announcement and the privilege of unfurling the American flag for the playing of our nation's anthem.

Williams took in all the sights and sounds of Broncos Stadium at Mile High, a smile stretching from ear-to-ear the entire time. Thompson had the same smile on his face as he watched his friend and coworker experience some much-deserved fun.

"This is awesome," Williams said over-and-over.

Once the anthem was done, the first responders shook hands with several members of the Seahawks, including quarterback Russell Wilson.

A rather hot day for September, Thompson came prepared with a change of shorts and a shirt while Williams looked forward to buying a Broncos jersey, although he didn't know whose jersey to buy.

The duo then headed up for the section to watch the Broncos capture their first win of the season.

# Case Keenum certainly has proved he can rebound from a tough start

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

Sept. 18, 2018

The Denver Broncos always believed quarterback Case Keenum could bounce back from mistakes and show some mental toughness when it was needed in a game.

But maybe they didn't really want to see him do it every weekend.

Keenum, whom the Broncos signed to a two-year, \$36 million deal this past offseason, has led game-winning, fourth-quarter drives in each of the Broncos' two wins to open the season. Sunday, in a 20-19 win over the Oakland Raiders, Keenum cut it as close as possible as the Broncos went 62 yards in 10 plays in the game's final two minutes.

Brandon McManus kicked a 36-yard field goal to win the game with six seconds remaining. That was an encore from the opening weekend of the season when the Broncos put together a fourth-quarter drive to defeat the Seattle Seahawks 27-24.

"I mean, anytime you have a game-winning drive in the fourth quarter, it feels pretty awesome," Keenum said. "Last week was fun. This week was a lot of fun. They are all special. This is incredible. To start in my first two games here with, you know, wins like that, when you have adversity going, not playing well in the first half, to come out and play like we did in the second half ... we just kept fighting. We've got fighters in that locker room, you know. We want it bad."

Keenum finished Sunday's game a rather pedestrian 19-of-35 for 222 yards and an interception -- he was just 5-of-11 for 38 yards and the interception in the first half. But on the 10-play, 62-yard drive to win the game, Keenum completed three passes for 34 yards and had a 7-yard run.

It capped a 10-point quarter for the Broncos and enabled them to overcome a difficult start by the offense, a balky stumble out of the gate Sunday that included Keenum's interception.

"That's our guy," said Broncos linebacker Von Miller.

Keenum threw three interceptions in the team's opener against the Seahawks, but it was part of a 329-yard, three-touchdown day for Keenum. Sunday's game, however, had a far different feel for much of the day as the Broncos' offense struggled mightily in the first half with just one first down by halftime and four three-and-outs in their six first-half possessions, with a five-play drive ending on a Keenum interception and the sixth possession ending at the half.

Keenum's interception came early in the second quarter on a play that began on the Raiders' 18-yard line.

"I don't know if I connected with many people in the first half," Keenum said. "... But it's hard to get the ball to anyone when you don't have that many plays."

Keenum also called his interception an "idiotic mistake," as he has thrown seven interceptions in his past four games -- two playoff games with the Minnesota Vikings last January included.

But while the Broncos don't want turnovers, they did sign Keenum because they believed he could rebound from the rough spots in games, something all three of their quarterbacks (Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch) struggled with last season when they threw 22 interceptions.

Keenum completed a 4-yard pass to tight end Jeff Heurman on a third-and-3 on the final drive and later found wide receiver Tim Patrick for a 26-yard catch-and-run play that put the ball on the Raiders' 18-yard line for McManus' kick.

"We meet every Friday about two-minute offense, being smart with the ball, and our guys came through," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph. "It was fun to watch."

"We talk about it all during the offseason, we're talking about two-minute [offense]," Keenum said. "All during the week we are talking about two-minute. You just need time and downs. They brought the kitchen sink at us. There was pressure after pressure. The O-line just played their guts out and the guys made some plays down the field. It was fun to watch."

# Phillip Lindsay leads a youth movement key to Broncos' 2-0 start

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

Sept. 18, 2018

Domata Peko has played in 187 games in an NFL career that is now in its 13th season.

And he has often said, with a laugh, that he doesn't learn a rookie's name "until they make the team. I appreciate them and how hard they work, but until they make the team I just call them by their number or something."

Two weeks into the Denver Broncos' season, Peko knows a lot of rookie names -- and nicknames -- and some "thank yous" are in order.

"I mean, we have Rolls Royce [Royce Freeman] and the pit bull, number 30, Phillip Lindsay," Peko said. "Just keep handing the ball to those two young guys -- they are doing great."

The Broncos' youth movement was on full display during Sunday's 20-19 win over the Oakland Raiders, as it was in the season opener against the Seattle Seahawks. Ten rookies made the Broncos' 53-man roster, and coach Vance Joseph promised it was because the team had plans for them.

That total included eight of the team's 10 draft picks from this past April to go with undrafted rookies Lindsay and linebacker Alexander Johnson. Also in the youthful mix is wide receiver Tim Patrick, who spent two stints on the Broncos' practice squad in 2017 -- his rookie season.

It's a group that has quickly won over teammates with a no-nonsense approach and an attention to details. It's a noticeable departure from the previous two draft classes that had a selection of players who were often criticized by teammates for lacking in those areas. Some of the team's veteran players had gone as far as to use the word "entitled." Broncos linebacker Von Miller, a team captain, indicated how much differently this group of younger players is viewed in the locker room after Sunday's win when he was asked about the team's leadership.

"It's not really about the six or five captains that we have," Miller said. "Honestly, the rookies and the new guys that we have, they are playing lights out. They gave us a hell of a boost on offense and defense. If we look at some of the things that Phillip Lindsay did for us today, and Tim Patrick and Courtland Sutton, all those guys, they weren't here last year. So we did a great job of going and getting playmakers and big-time guys that help lift everybody around them. That makes a captain and a leader's job a whole lot easier having guys like that."

Lindsay, a graduate of Denver South High School, rushed for 107 yards Sunday, including a 53-yard run in the second quarter. With his 102 yards from scrimmage in the team's opening-week win over the Seahawks, Lindsay is now the first undrafted player in the league's history to top 100 yards from scrimmage in his first two games.

Lindsay was the Broncos' back of choice during a 10-point fourth quarter. Patrick also had a 26-yard catch-and-run to put the Broncos in field-goal position to win Sunday's game.

"I am here to be our spark player," Lindsay said. "I am here to make sure that I get my teammates going, whether it is on a punt, if it is on a kickoff or kickoff return, anything. I am going to do what I have to to get our team moving. ... I can't thank Mr. [John] Elway enough for letting me be a part of this."

Freeman also had his first rushing touchdown of the season Sunday, which closed out the Broncos' first scoring drive of the game.

Sutton came within two replay reviews of two of the biggest plays of the game. He had a 42-yard completion overturned early in the third quarter when replay showed he didn't maintain possession and he had a 21-yard touchdown erased when officials said his foot had touched out of bounds before he landed in the end zone. The plays were indicative of just how much quarterback Case Keenum is looking for the rookie because as he said, "I trust him."

In all, seven of the Broncos' rookies were in uniform and played in Sunday's win, in addition to Patrick. And that's not going to change in the weeks ahead as coach Vance Joseph said those players have earned every minute of that time.

"Those guys are qualified, we've got a lot of young guys playing, but they've shown us in the last two weeks that it's not too big for them," Joseph said. "They're just doing their jobs. They're good players, they're good athletes and they're tough guys. ... They're all qualified."

# 'We just had to find a way to win': Broncos win ugly in thriller against Oakland Raiders

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

Sept. 18, 2018

Brandon McManus didn't want to ponder the what ifs as Case Keenum lined up in shotgun for the start of the Broncos' final drive.

The Raiders, ahead by two, left the Broncos a minute and 58 seconds to make something happen and to try to erase a dismal first half.

All they needed was a field goal. All they needed was to get into range, and McManus had a wide one. Sixty yards? He can do that.

But he didn't want to.

"You don't want to be thinking about having to kill a 60-yarder when you know you're gonna make a shorter one possible," McManus said.

"They made it easier for me on that last play."

McManus already experienced the disappointment of a missed game-winner last year in overtime against Kansas City.

He wouldn't experience it Sunday, thanks to just enough big plays and smart decisions by the Broncos' offense on its final series.

The first big one: A 21-yard catch by Emmanuel Sanders on a second-and-20 after a Broncos penalty. Two plays later, Keenum launched a rocket to tight end Jake Butt for 14 yards, then he found fellow tight end Jeff Heuerman, who converted a third down before falling out of bounds and stopping the clock with 22 seconds left.

And then the magic: Keenum hit receiver Tim Patrick, an undrafted player who earlier had a touchdown reversed after review, on a curl route for a short completion that turned into a 26-yard gain. Patrick shed two tackles before sprinting out of bounds.

"I knew I had plenty of time to go up the field," Patrick said. "The whole purpose was once I went up the field, I just wanted to get as much yardage as I can while getting out of bounds at the same time."

Enter McManus.

With 10 seconds remaining on the clock, he nailed a 36-yard field goal to cap a thrilling come-from-behind 20-19 win over Oakland.

“He’s got ice in his veins!” his teammates screamed from across the room as cameras swarmed McManus’ locker.

The game was the 10th in Broncos history in which they overcame a halftime deficit of at least 12 points to win.

The Broncos, if anything, have a knack for theatrics and certainly a bounce-back that was missing for much of the last two seasons. Two weeks in, the Broncos have won on a pair of game-winning drives in the fourth quarters, both testaments, the players say, to their renewed will and improved roster.

“Anytime you have a game where you drive in the fourth quarter, it feels pretty awesome,” Keenum said. “Last week was fun. This week was a lot of fun. They are all special. This is incredible — starting my first two games at Mile High. Wins like that, when you catch them in person, when you are not playing well in the first half, to come out and play as we did in the second half, with our defense making huge stops. ... We just kept fighting.”

But with those nail-biting wins is the simple fact that the Broncos have been making up for mistakes and missed opportunities earlier in games. The Broncos are 2-0 in spite of generally inefficient and inconsistent play.

The Broncos’ first half against Oakland was one to forget, as they recorded only three first downs compared to Oakland’s 12, netted only 112 offensive yards (the Raiders had 202) and were shut out 12-0. Keenum closed the first half with a 16.5 rating after four three-and-outs and an interception, bringing back memories of 2017 and generating a chorus of boos from the crowd at Broncos Stadium.

Worse: With temperatures spiking at 93 degrees, the Broncos’ defense was on the field for nearly 21 of the first 30 minutes in the game.

The Raiders jumped to a 6-0 lead on two field goals, which could have been more, given Derek Carr’s 18-of-19 passing. As its offense sputtered, Denver allowed seven plays of at least 13 yards to Oakland.

“We just knew that he was going to throw dink and dunks all game,” cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. “He threw a lot of now routes, a lot of screens, things like that. We just worry about the points. We tried to kind of change our mentality a little bit. We’ve always been about yardage here but last year our points-per-game number was too high. As long as we can hold anyone to 19 points, we should win every game.”

Added Von Miller: “We just wanted to get off the field, and honestly, it took us all half to be able to do that. It took us all second half to be able to do that. We just wanted to get off the field. We just wanted to get a three-and-out. We wanted to make the Raiders punt and give our offense a short field. We weren’t able to do that until when it mattered the most.”

After the Broncos finally ended their streak of three-and-outs, disaster struck. Phillip Lindsay, the Broncos’ local star who set a record as the first undrafted player in history to eclipse 100 yards from scrimmage in each of his first two NFL games, gave his team a boost with a 53-yard run on their first possession of the second quarter.

But the spark quickly fizzed, as Keenum was picked off on a throw intended for Butt.

“At halftime, it wasn’t good,” coach Vance Joseph said. “Offensively, I think our first three or four drives we were three-and-out. (The Raiders) played good football in the first half and we didn’t.”

Keenum, who was signed in large part because of his knack for limiting turnovers, has thrown seven interceptions in 14 quarters of play, dating back to the playoffs last year with Minnesota.

The Broncos last year had the league’s second-most turnovers (34), and with each interception thrown by Keenum this season, fears of a repeat year have surfaced in Denver.

That was when the Broncos endured an eight-game losing streak and general manager John Elway labeled his team “soft” because of its inability to respond to in-game adversity and for failing to keep games competitive for four quarters. That was when some players bristled at the accusation but the team collectively couldn’t stop the bleeding.

But something is different about these Broncos — so far at least. Early mistakes haven’t sent them into the tank before the fourth quarter arrives.

“Everybody is doing their homework now,” Miller said with a laugh. “We’ve always been on time to work and respectful in the locker room. But I guess we’re winning now, so I guess the culture is different.”

The second half was different, though the switch might have been flipped just before the break.

Linebacker Shaquil Barrett blocked a Raiders extra-point attempt late in the second quarter that, in the end, made all the difference. Keenum carried the momentum into the third with a 21-yard strike to Sanders that would help set up a touchdown catch by Patrick. The catch was overturned upon review, but the Broncos’ made good on their second attempt: a 1-yard touchdown run by rookie Royce Freeman.

Another catch in the end zone later that quarter, this one by rookie Courtland Sutton, was ruled incomplete and upheld upon review. And sandwiched in between the Broncos’ pair of near-touchdowns was a touchdown by Oakland that sent Harris and Justin Simmons into a collision in coverage. Both returned to the field for the following series, but the scare cast a hush over the crowd.

It wasn’t until the fourth quarter that the Broncos performance (and luck with the referees) changed. Keenum punched the ball into the end zone on a keeper on a fourth-and-1, cornerback Bradley Roby tackled Martavis Bryant 5 yards shy of a first down on Oakland’s ensuing possession, and then the fireworks of the final drive began.

The Broncos ended with a balanced showing — 217 passing yards and 168 rushing yards — with many repeat stars. Lindsay led the game with 107 rushing yards, Sanders fell 4 yards shy of his second consecutive 100-yard receiving game and Marquette King averaged 51 yards on four punts.

But pretty, it wasn’t.

“It’s hard to win in this league,” Butt said. “It’s not always going to be pretty. As you could see in the first half, we just weren’t clicking. But we stuck to it. We came in here at halftime and everybody looked each other in the eyes and nobody was worried. We just had to find a way to win.”

# So ... how did every NFL team overlook Phillip Lindsay in the draft?

By Nicki Jhabvala  
The Athletic  
Sept. 18, 2018

The Broncos were desperate. After three three-and-outs to open Sunday's game against Oakland, Denver needed a spark and it needed one fast before it fell into a hole too deep to climb out.

The Broncos have seen this end badly too many times, so before the game could run away from them, they let Phillip Lindsay run away with the ball.

It was early in the second quarter when the spark plug fired. After taking the handoff from quarterback Case Keenum, Lindsay hesitated for a split second as his lane between the center and left guard opened. Then, on the heels of blocks from fullback Andy Janovich and guard Connor McGovern, Lindsay cut right, bounced off one defender, leapt over another and sped past a third before running out of bounds.

For 53 yards, at a top speed of 20.76 mph, according NFL's Next Gen Stats, the Broncos' unheralded rookie did what he's done for most of his football career and became a disruptor.

"He is a total package as a football player," coach Vance Joseph said. "He's been impressive. He's been really impressive."

Not bad for a kid that couldn't even get an invite to the NFL combine.

From April to September, Lindsay did what many national scouts apparently believed he couldn't: He landed on an NFL depth chart, then rose from the bottom rungs to become a lock for the 53-man roster (since 1997, at least, the Broncos haven't held an undrafted rookie out the final preseason game because he was too good to risk injuring).

Lindsay went from the local feel-good story to one of the stories in the NFL.

For the first two games of the season — and really since the start of OTAs when linebacker Brandon Marshall declared him the Broncos' new third-down back — Lindsay has surprised some who believed they knew him well.

"I think we're all surprised because you just never know about young guys as far as coming into this league and playing — playing confident, playing with a toughness, playing with an IQ to play in this league," Joseph said. "He's done all three: He's tough, he's smart, he's a playmaker and it doesn't seem too big for him. I've been really impressed with him from Day One. From Day One, rookie camp, he's come in with swagger and confidence, and it hasn't changed."

In the Broncos' season-opening win against Seattle, Lindsay had 102 scrimmage yards (71 rushing, 31 receiving) to go with the team's first touchdown of 2018. Against Oakland, he added a game-high 107 rushing yards and 4 receiving yards to become the first undrafted rookie in NFL history to record at least 100 scrimmage yards in each of his first two games.

In only two weeks, Lindsay has rendered most of his pre-draft scouting reports useless.

“Phil came in and he just put his head down and went to work from rookie camp, OTAs, to minicamp and training camp and just worked his ass off,” fellow rookie Courtland Sutton said. “I think not only our class saw it but everybody on the team saw it. Everybody saw how hard he worked and how much he demanded out of himself to be great. He wasn’t going to let himself fall below that standard, and I think it pushed a lot of guys around him to make sure they were going really hard.”

A third-down back? Lindsay has essentially been the starting back, despite his official status as the third-string halfback. He’s also the Broncos’ starting kickoff returner and L5 gunner on kickoff coverage.

He can run, he can catch, he can block and he has, so far, been the Broncos’ most complete and consistent performer.

Ask him and this was all part of the plan. When he was snubbed from the combine, he said it “wasn’t meant to be.” When he signed with the Broncos after going undrafted, he admitted he was joining a talented running backs room but warned, “I’m talented too.”

And when he rejuvenated the Broncos on Sunday, he reminded of his role.

“I am here to be our spark player,” he said. “I am here to make sure that I get my teammates going, whether it is on a punt, if it is on a kickoff or kickoff return, anything. I am going to do what I have to do get our team moving.”

Through Sunday, Lindsay ranked third in the league with 178 rushing yards, sixth with 6.14 yards per carry and second with nine rushing first downs.

“He is a good football player,” Joseph said. “Not only as a running back, but as a guy who covers kicks for us and a guy who catches the ball for us. He is a total package as a football player. He’s been impressive. He’s been really impressive.”

But the surprise, even awe, with Lindsay’s performance so far can’t be because of his football past.

He left CU as its career leader in all-purpose yards (5,760) and yards from scrimmage (4,683). He finished as the Buffs’ second all-time leading rusher (3,707 yards) and was the first player in program history to record consecutive 1,000-yard seasons. He also had 917 career touches with only eight fumbles (five lost) and capped his college career with zero fumbles over his last 392 touches.

He left Denver South High as the school’s all-time leader in rushing yards (4,587) and all-purpose yards (5,747), to go with 57 career touchdowns, 23 100-yard rushing games, and 285 tackles, 10 sacks and three interceptions as a linebacker.

And in middle school, as a member of the inaugural Denver Broncos Futures Football Program, Lindsay guided his team to the Super Bowl and an undefeated record.

“Our team was so dominant and so mean that — this is nothing to brag about — but they used to bring ambulances to the game because every game we were putting somebody in the ambulance,” Lindsay said ahead of the draft. “We had a pretty nice team.”

And the surprise with Lindsay can't be because of pre-draft showcase either. At the East-West Shrine Game in January he led all rushers with 51 yards on 12 carries. At his pro day in Boulder two months later — in front of representatives from almost every NFL team and a Broncos contingent of John Elway, Joseph, Gary Kubiak and Matt Russell — Lindsay ran a blazing 4.39-second 40-yard dash. He would've ranked second at his position at the combine.

No, the surprise of Lindsay is nothing of his own doing. At 5-foot-7, 184 pounds, Lindsay simply didn't fit the mold of a successful NFL back.

Too small. Too weak. Not this. Not that.

“As people always do, they set a standard and make a prototype of what they think everyone should be right now,” his father and former Colorado State back Troy Lindsay said. “That's where football has gone. Before it was whoever had heart, whoever could play. Now it's all about how you look and how big you are and if you meet our specifications. That's what it comes down to.”

Now the surprise of Phillip Lindsay stems simply from the perplexing question of how. How was he passed up by 32 NFL teams — especially the Broncos, who are coached by a former CU Buff, whose director of player personnel (Russell) is a former CU Buff, who are headquartered some 45 miles from Folsom Field and who even expanded their selections from eight to 10 players on the final day of the draft?

“That happens every year,” Broncos running backs coach Curtis Modkins said. “You get guys that get looked over. I'm not surprised because that's a part of our business, but he's done everything we've asked him to do so far.

“What I've seen is a kid that's come in and has worked his tail off and does everything we ask him to do the way we ask him to do it. He does it with a smile, he does it full speed. Very receptive to coaching. Wants to be good. Wants to be pushed. So because he came in like that, I haven't been surprised.”

# Vance Joseph says the Broncos were ‘too soft’ with their coverage at cornerback

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

Sept. 18, 2018

The Broncos knew Derek Carr could cause trouble with his quick release and they knew he had myriad weapons to choose from on offense and they knew that, even without Khalil Mack, their longtime AFC West rival could give them fits.

The Broncos were right. And the Raiders did for much of Sunday.

Carr completed 18-of-19 throws to nine different receivers in the first two quarters, a result of his timing, of Oakland’s varied receiving options and of the Broncos’ generous coverage plan.

“I thought yesterday, defensively, that we didn’t play aggressive enough in the first half,” coach Vance Joseph said. “That’s on me. This offense obviously poses problems because they come in with a lot of different weapons. They have a lot of different matchup issues. I thought defensively that we were too cautious about No. 30 (RB Jalen Richard), No. 12 (WR Martavis Bryant), No. 87 (TE Jared Cook), No. 89 (WR Amari Cooper), the running back (RB Marshawn Lynch). We played way too cautious.

“Our defense is based on rushing five and playing press-man coverage, and in the first half, we didn’t do that. It showed, we were really nonaggressive and they took advantage of us. In the second half, we got more aggressive and it showed, and we played better. But, that’s on me.”

In the first half, Carr completed six throws for 13 yards or more. Five of those completions were short passes that turned into more after the catch. A short pass to receiver Seth Roberts turned into a 13-yard gain in the first. A short pass to Cooper later that quarter became 14 yards. A short pass to Bryant in the second became 16 yards. Another two short passes to Cook became 20-yard gains apiece.

According to NFL.com’s Next Gen Stats, Carr averaged only 2.34 seconds per throw against the Broncos which, through Sunday, clocked as the third fastest in Week 2.

The couple of times Carr held onto the ball longer in the pocket, the Broncos’ pass rush was able to get to him. Von Miller had a strip sack in the first quarter — but it was nullified because of a holding penalty on Todd Davis. Then Miller had another sack in the second that stuck. On a third-and-3, Carr hung out in the pocket just long enough for Miller to run over tackle Donald Penn and get the quarterback takedown for a loss of 7 yards.

But the small throws in between were the problems.

“We just knew that he was going to throw dink and dunks all game,” cornerback Chris Harris said. “He threw a lot of now routes, a lot of screens, things like that. We just worry about the points. We tried to kind of change our mentality a little bit. We’ve always been about yardage here but last year our points per game number was too high. As long as we can hold anyone to 19 points, we should win every game.”

Oakland picked up 202 net offensive yards in the field half and held Denver's defense on the field for nearly 21 of the first 30 minutes. The Raiders also jumped to a 12-0 first-half lead as the Broncos' offense sputtered and the defense tried to find its footing.

The issue? Too much cushion.

"At halftime, (Carr) was 18 of 19 and it was really quick passes," said Joseph, a defensive backs coach for years before making the leap to coordinator and then head coach. "That falls back on the corners. We have to press the receivers because if he holds the ball, we know that we can get pressure. If it comes up quick and we were 7 or 8 yards off, it's going to be a completed ball and he's going to fall for 5 or 6. Our corners have to play with great confidence all the time and obviously play press coverage. With our pass rush, as a corner, you should have confidence that if he's throwing a nine-ball, a seven-ball or a deep in-cut, that our pressure will get there.

"We were really too soft, I guess I should say, at corner with our coverage."

Adjustments made at the break resolved many issues across the board, especially on offense. Quarterback Case Keenum guided the Broncos on four scoring drives in the second half, including one in the final seconds that produced the game-winning field goal. Along the way, Denver's defense came up with a pair of game-saving stops in the fourth, none bigger than Bradley Roby's tackle on a third-and-8 late that thwarted Oakland's final drive.

For the past three seasons, the Broncos' defense has either led the league in passing yards allowed or ranked among the top four. But the start to 2018 has exposed some holes, as new faces join the defensive backfield.

Chris Harris Jr. is now the lone No. 1 cornerback, and tasked with keeping the corners on the same page. Roby has been elevated to No. 2, and Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones have shared in the third-cornerback rotation to give the secondary a new look. But the issues early against Oakland, Joseph indicated, were not about personnel or communication.

"Yesterday, our problems weren't in zone," he said. "It was more in man-free coverage, and that's man-on-man. They have to have the confidence to go up there and challenge whoever — 12 (Bryant), 89 (Cooper) — and play technique and trust the pass rush."

The defense John Elway created in 2014 and tweaked over the years has always been built to create pressure. The Broncos' Super Bowl-winning group of 2015 paired an elite pass rush with a stout secondary to allow a league-low 5.11 yards per pass play. Although Denver still features a stacked pass rush, starring Miller and rookie Bradley Chubb, the Broncos have allowed 7.26 yards per pass play, to rank 24th so far this season.

"I'm always involved with the play calling on defense," Joseph said. "Obviously, again, it starts with me as far as how we call the defense and being aggressive. But again, this offense posed a lot of problems as far as matchups. Sometimes as a coach you can over game plan and make your guys really non-aggressive. But, it starts with me. Our defense, again, is based on rushing and covering and being aggressive with our coverage. In the first half, we didn't do that."

# Phillip Lindsay leads Denver7 Takeaways after Broncos victory

By Troy Renck  
KMGH  
Sept. 18, 2018

As the Broncos enter the third week of the NFL season, they are inching dangerously close to relevance. They are one of seven undefeated teams. They own a pair of fourth quarter comebacks, and possess an infusion of youth that brings promise.

My Denver7 Takeaways from the Broncos' dramatic 20-19 win over the Raiders.

## 1) Lindsay is legit

For a team to rebound from the depths of 5-11 -- and the spiral was real -- it needs surprises. None ranks bigger than Phillip Lindsay. He is the only undrafted free agent to eclipse 100 yards from scrimmage in his first two weeks. He sits third in rushing with 178 yards, while playing a prominent role on special teams. Joseph said Monday no plans to make Lindsay the starter, saying it was unnecessary because he will contribute regardless of depth chart.

## 2) Case is clutch

Case Keenum hasn't played well in the first halves. He owns a 65.4 rating, completing 20 of 35 passes for 272 yards, two touchdowns, three interceptions and one sack. However, he has played his best when it matters most. That's a special quality for a team seeking a leader. Keenum has completed 14 of 20 passes for 176 yards, one touchdown and no picks for a 113.8 rating in the fourth quarter.

"The plays he made on third down, the plays he made. He gives the team hope. He gives the fans hope," Joseph said. "He's a winner. And that's the number one trait you want from your quarterback."

The Broncos have a closer. Now, they need him to work well as starter.

## 3) The defense is different

The Broncos prided themselves on limiting yards, ranking tops in multiple categories for years. It's not 2015 anymore. The Broncos have shifted their focus to elasticity. They bent but didn't break Sunday. As cornerback Chris Harris Jr. explained, "It's about points allowed. And if we keep opponents to 19 points we are going to win a lot of games."

## 4) Sutton is on the verge

With veteran Demaryius Thomas struggling with drops -- he has four by my count through two weeks -- it would not be a shock to see Courtland Sutton's role grow as the season advances. He had two big plays called back on Sunday. He is on the verge of a breakout game.

## 5) The depth is real

Last year, the Broncos 2017 ghost draft class left them with no quality depth. This season, the Broncos are younger and healthier. And kids bring energy, caffeinating the team. Besides Bradley Chubb, Phillip Lindsay, Royce Freeman, DaeSean Hamilton and Sutton, linebacker Josey Jewell is starting to get some run. He played 13 snaps vs. the Raiders, slowly taking away time from Brandon Marshall as the Broncos use more of a three linebacker rotation in nickel coverage.

#### 6) Denver needs to corner market

The Broncos are thin in the secondary. Derek Carr feasted on third corners Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones, leaning on Amari Cooper for easy completions. Jones should improve as his conditioning catches up. I am not sure on Brock. He looked vulnerable in training camp, and still does. Teams will look to exploit this matchup, especially when Denver is forced to shift its focus to the tight end.

#### 7) Remain aggressive

Nothing good comes from passive behavior in sports. The Broncos will blossom with an aggressive mindset. They went for it on fourth down on Sunday and scored on Keenum's Keeper. Playing it safe will get this team nowhere. Keep taking chances, keep taking shots, and leave yourself in position to win it in the fourth.

# Phillip Lindsay has gone from undrafted to unforgettable

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
Sept. 18, 2018

Phillip Lindsay is taking the NFL by storm. He's also taking it all in stride.

"I am just playing football, that's it," the Denver Broncos running back said after becoming the first undrafted player in NFL history to eclipse 100 yards from scrimmage in each of his first two NFL games.

"I am just playing football for our team. I don't think of things like that."

Keeping his head down has always been Lindsay's style.

The 5-foot-8, 190-pound sparkplug was undeterred when he wasn't invited to the NFL combine and was bypassed by 32 teams in the draft despite piling up nearly 5,000 yards from scrimmage and scoring 39 touchdowns at the University of Colorado.

"I mean, since when have I not been the underdog?" Lindsay said after signing a \$15,000 bonus this spring to try out for his hometown Broncos.

He quickly made his mark on special teams and worked his way into the first-stringer drills as a third-down back and slot receiver, and he hastily won over his teammates, too.

"Guys like that in the league, you just can't cover them," Von Miller said after getting his first glimpse of the man who earned the nickname "Tasmanian Devil" for his frenetic style. "They're just assets to the offense. You have to have a back like that and we definitely have one."

Lindsay gained 102 yards in his debut against Seattle, scoring on a 29-yard pass play. On Sunday, he topped that with a 111-yard performance in Denver's 20-19 comeback win over Oakland that included 107 yards on 14 carries.

Lindsay, who won over Hall of Famer Terrell Davis by asking his permission to don jersey No. 30, is still awed by the opportunity to play for the team he grew up watching.

"For me, it's just a great opportunity to go out there," Lindsay said. "I am just happy we got the W. It's on to the next. We have a big game next weekend and we are going to go away."

The Broncos (2-0) visit Baltimore (1-1) next weekend, and you can bet the Ravens will spend plenty of time preparing for the rookie running back who already has 178 yards on 29 carries for a whopping 6.1-yard average — even if he won't be starting.

Coach Vance Joseph said Monday that Lindsay remains the third stringer behind starter and fellow rookie Royce Freeman and third-year pro Devontae Booker, who has five carries for 21 yards and two catches for 11 yards so far.

"Our deal with that room is more of game planning, it's what they do best, it's who has the hot hand that day," Joseph said. "So, we don't have to make a depth chart change to give him more carries or to give Royce more carries or to give Book more opportunities. It's really what we do and to have three guys who are all different, it's really tough on defenses.

"So, he can be the 3 and still get 10 touches or 12 or 14 or Book can be the 2 and still get seven or eight. So, it doesn't matter who's the starter."

Look at Sunday's game as evidence: Freeman started but only got 16 snaps, less than Booker (22) and Lindsay (28).

General manager John Elway has received plenty of kudos for his 2018 draft class but the gem so far has been the one player nobody drafted.

A Colorado alum himself, Joseph was no stranger to Lindsay's talents.

"It's hard to believe he didn't go to the combine," Joseph said recently. "Obviously he's a Buff, so I've watched Phillip for three years as a starter in a major conference. He was a great player. We were all surprised he didn't go to the combine, and obviously signing him as a free agent was tough because we drafted two backs. We pursued him heavy and he stayed home."

The Broncos selected Freeman in the third round and Arkansas' David Williams in the seventh.

While Williams toils on Denver's practice squad, Freeman has rushed for 99 yards and a touchdown on 23 carries for a solid 4.3-yard average through two games.

The Broncos started out Sunday with three three-and-outs as Freeman, who would score on a 1-yard run in the second half, ran twice for minus-1 yard and 1 yard before Lindsay broke free for a 53-yard gain.

"I am here to be our spark player," Lindsay said. "I am here to make sure I get my teammates going, whether it is on a punt, if it is on a kickoff or kickoff return, anything. I am going to do what I have to do to get our team moving."

# Broncos are winning again and the Raiders are still losing

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
Sept. 18, 2018

Ugly wins are a thing of beauty in Denver, where the Broncos learned all their hard lessons last year in the dreariness of defeat.

"We're sitting here 2-0 but we're struggling," Emmanuel Sanders after the Broncos eked out a 20-19 win over Oakland on Sunday on Brandon McManus' 36-yard field goal with 6 seconds left.

It was their only lead on a sweltering afternoon in which the temperature at kickoff was a record 92 degrees.

The Broncos, who overcame a 12-point second-half deficit, hadn't opened a season with back-to-back fourth-quarter comebacks since 2007. Last week, they rallied past Seattle 27-24 in Case Keenum's Denver debut.

"It does feel good to win the hard-fought games," Sanders said. "But I can't wait until we can win one of those smooth games. But we're going to keep pushing. I'm going to wake up in the morning and stretch my arms and go, 'Ahh. It feels good to be 2-0.'"

Especially after going 5-11 last year.

It was for times like these that Broncos general manager John Elway ditched his stopwatch drafts in April in favor of players who had been captains in college and left school with degrees in hand.

"One thing we learned last year when you're 5-11 and you're in a losing streak, you need that maturity and that leadership to get things turned around," Elway said last spring.

Royce Freeman scored on a 1-yard run and fellow rookies Bradley Chubb and Josey Jewell had key stops, but the biggest contributions came from Tim Patrick, a receiver who spent his rookie season on Denver's practice squad in 2017, and undrafted rookie Phillip Lindsay, a hometown hero who starred at the University of Colorado.

Patrick's first NFL catch was a doozy: an 18-yarder that set up the winning field goal. And all Lindsay did was make history Sunday.

He became the first undrafted player in league history to top 100 yards from scrimmage in his first two games. He followed a 103-yard debut with a 111-yard performance that included 14 rushes for 107 yards.

Other takeaways from the game, which marked the 350th win in Broncos owner Pat Bowlen's tenure:

**CARR REVVS UP:** Derek Carr was on target all afternoon, completing 29 of 32 passes for 288 yards and a touchdown. His 90.6 completion percentage is the best mark in franchise history — with a minimum of 20 attempts — topping the record of 89.5 set by Rich Gannon on Nov. 11, 2002, in Denver.

"He was great. Very accurate in getting us the ball. Made a lot of plays," said receiver Amari Cooper, who caught 10 passes for 116 yards four days after coach Jon Gruden gave Carr grief for not finding Cooper more in Week 1.

#### MILLER MAGIC

The Raiders protected rookie left tackle Kolton Miller by having Carr get rid of the ball quick, keeping Von Miller to one sack a week after he destroyed Seattle's game plan with four quarterback hits, three sacks, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery.

Miller's day could have been very similar to the Seahawks game had teammate Todd Davis not been whistled for a holding call that negated Miller's strip sack and Domata Peko's fumble recovery at the Oakland 20-yard line in the first half.

"I had Derek Carr, it was one of the few plays that he held the ball," said Miller, who later had a sack that counted. "I was able to get in and get the sack. And the forced fumble. And we recovered it. But we had to go back out because Todd was doing the Viennese waltz with whoever it was out there."

#### SEEING RED

Rookie Courtland Sutton had a 42-yard catch overturned after Gruden threw his red challenge flag. He also thought he had come down with a 21-yard TD catch, but Broncos coach Vance Joseph lost his challenge when the officials confirmed Sutton's left foot slipped out of bounds just before his right knee hit inbounds.

So, Sutton finished with a single catch for 9 yards.

"I don't know. I thought Courtland's touchdown was a touchdown," Joseph said. "Obviously, I challenged it. The second catch, I guess he didn't finish the catch. We'll figure it out. It's a tough game to officiate. There are so many rules right now and hopefully it's fair on both sides."

#### BLOCKED KICK

One of the few things that went right for Denver in a dismal first half was Shaq Barrett's block of Mike Nugent's extra point, leaving the Raiders ahead 12-0 at the half.

"Who knew that would be huge?" Keenum asked.

Barrett did, that's who.

"Coaches always say you never know what play can end up being a game-winning play," Barrett said. "That's why you've just got to play every play like that. When I'm out there, that's what I'm trying to do."

# Broncos coach says he messed up the defensive game plan

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
Sept. 18, 2018

Broncos coach Vance Joseph is criticizing his team's conservative defensive play against the Oakland Raiders but takes responsibility rather than blaming defensive coordinator Joe Woods.

The Broncos kept giving the Raiders eight-yard cushions and quarterback Derek Carr repeatedly threw quick strikes to those wide-open targets as he set a franchise record by completing 90.6 percent of his passes — 29 of 32 for 288 yards in Oakland's 20-19 loss in Denver on Sunday.

"I thought yesterday defensively that we didn't play aggressively enough in the first half, and that's on me," Joseph said Monday. "This offense obviously poses problems because they come in with a lot of different weapons, a lot of different matchup issues."

Joseph said the Broncos (2-0) were too engrossed in what running backs Marshawn Lynch and Jalen Richard, tight end Jared Cook and receivers Amari Cooper and Martavis Bryant might do to spark the Raiders (0-2).

"So, we played way too cautious," Joseph said. "Our defense is based on rushing five, playing press-man coverage. And in the first half we didn't do that. And it showed, we were really non-aggressive and they took advantage of us. In the second half, we got more aggressive and it showed and we played better. But that's on me."

Carr completed 18 of 19 throws for 153 yards before halftime.

"Sometimes as a coach you can over-game plan and make your guys really non-aggressive," said Joseph, who stressed he's always involved with the defensive game plan.

Carr was almost as sharp in the second half when he completed 11 of 13 passes for 133 yards and a touchdown but they frittered away a 19-7 lead late in the third quarter.

Joseph said Denver's pass rush couldn't have done better because Carr only "held the ball twice and we got two sacks." Both were by Von Miller, but the first one, which resulted in a turnover, was negated by penalty.

"So, at halftime he was 18 for 19 and they were really quick passes, so that falls back on the corners," Joseph said. "We have to press the receivers because we know if he holds the ball we can get pressure. If it comes out quick and we're seven, eight yards off, it's going to be a completed ball and he's going to fall for five or six. Our corners have to play with great confidence all the time and obviously play with press coverage."

Even though he took responsibility, Joseph indicated that Bradley Roby and Adam Jones have to "have the confidence to go up there and challenge whoever, 12 (Bryant), 89 (Cooper) and play technique and trust the pass rush. Yesterday, we didn't do that."

Nose tackle Domata Peko welcomed the notion of a more aggressive mind-set from the get-go because Carr was "getting rid of the ball in two seconds, quick, little smoke outside. Then we made some adjustments and those quick, little throws weren't there no more. I'm really happy we went to halftime, made those adjustments and came out the second half and did our thing."

Joseph also said Jones, who signed late last month, needs to get in better shape because his hamstrings tightened up on him, forcing Tramaine Brock into the game in his place.

"He's only been here three weeks now, so he has to get in football shape," Joseph said. "That's half of Adam's problem right now."

Star cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said he wasn't worried about Carr's efficiency or passing statistics, only about shutting down Oakland's offense at the end.

"As long as we can hold anyone to 19 points," Harris said, "we should win every game."

# Next-Day Notebook: Being aggressive from the outset

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
Sept. 18, 2018

The trouble started early.

Not much of the first half of Sunday's game vs. Oakland went according to plan, beginning with the very first drive.

Oakland received the opening kick and marched 62 yards in nine plays to take a 3-0 lead. The Broncos' defense held strong inside the 10-yard line to force the field goal, but for most of the Raiders' drive, the visitors moved the ball at will.

That was especially true in the passing game.

Raiders quarterback Derek Carr found wide receiver Jordy Nelson for 23 yards on the game's second play, and then found fullback Keith Smith for 7 yards on the ensuing first-down play.

Running back Marshawn Lynch added a 10-yard run and then Carr found wide receiver Seth Roberts for a 13-yard gain.

As the Raiders marched, their early-down success proved very helpful. They consistently stayed ahead of the chains — they needed 4 yards or fewer on their first two second-down plays — which allowed Carr to continue to rely on the quick-passing game.

"You want to start faster," Head Coach Vance Joseph said Monday. "I thought yesterday defensively that we didn't play aggressive enough in the first half. That's on me. This offense, obviously, poses problems, because they come in with a lot of different weapons, a lot of different matchup issues. And I thought defensively that we were too cautious about No. 30 [Jalen Richard], No. 12 [Martavis Bryant], No. 87 [Jared Cook], No. 89 [Amari Cooper], the running back [Lynch]. We played way too cautious.

"Our defense is based on rushing five, playing press-man coverage, and in the first half, we didn't do that. And it showed. We were really non-aggressive, and they took advantage of us. In the second half, we got more aggressive and it showed and we played better. That's on me."

Those weapons can create matchup problems, Joseph said, and they may have led the Broncos to over-prepare for the Raiders' offensive attack. In the second half, though, they returned to their aggressive style of play.

"It starts with me as far as how we call the defense and being aggressive," Joseph said. "This offense posed a lot of problems as far as matchups, and sometimes as a coach, you can over game plan and make your guys really non-aggressive. It starts with me. Our defense, again, is based on rushing and covering and being aggressive with our coverage. In the first half, we didn't do that."

The defense improved drastically in the second half, allowing just seven points, but Denver's cornerbacks still allowed a slew of Carr completions. The Oakland quarterback ultimately finished 29-of-32 for 288 yards and a touchdown.

Cooper was on the receiving end of nearly a third of those attempts. The Alabama product caught all 10 of his targets for 116 yards. And, perhaps more concerning, he was just one of four Oakland receivers to record a catch of at least 20 yards.

While Joseph said those receptions largely came as the result of mental errors — rather than physical or strategic ones — he said he needs to see more aggressive play from his corners.

That, in part, comes down to trusting the pass rush in front of them. In return, Von Miller and Co. should also benefit.

“[Carr] held the ball twice, and we got two sacks,” Joseph said. “At halftime, he was 18-for-19, and it was really quick passes. That falls back on the corners. We have to press the receivers, because if he holds the ball, we know we can get pressure. If it comes out quick and we're 7, 8 yards off, it's going to be a completed ball and he's going to fall for five or six [yards].”

“Our corners have to — have to — play with great confidence all the time. And obviously play press coverage. With our pass rush, as a corner, you should have confidence that if he's throwing a 9-ball or a 7-ball or a deep in-cut, that our pressure will get there. We were really too soft at corner with our coverage.”

The Broncos will certainly have an easier time making those adjustments after a win, but Joseph said he knows it would be “naïve” to ignore the mistakes.

“We're going to play teams that are always going to give us their best shot,” Joseph said. “So we have to fix the mistakes moving forward so we continue to win. If not, you're fooling yourself if you [think you can] keep making the same errors on tape.”

## REMAINING HEALTHY

Tackle Jared Veldheer was the only Broncos player to leave Sunday's game with an injury.

“He's in the protocol from the concussion,” Joseph said Monday. “Other than that, we're pretty clean, so we're very, very fortunate. We'll see about him as the week proceeds.”

If Veldheer can't play Sunday against the Ravens, Joseph said he feels confident in replacement tackle Billy Turner.

“He would be the guy,” Joseph said. “I felt great about Billy. Nobody talked about him, so that's a good sign. We have great depth at the O-line position. I wasn't surprised he played well. We've got Billy, we've got Max [Garcia] dressing. Those two guys play as starters, so I wasn't concerned at all.”

The Broncos did make one precautionary switch on Sunday, as they swapped Tramaine Brock in for Adam Jones at cornerback.

“Adam was a little tight [in his hamstrings] in the second half, so Brock came in and played for him,” Joseph said. “He’s only been here three weeks, so he’s got to get in football shape. That’s half of Adam’s problem right now.”

#### ALIGNING AT LINEBACKER

Todd Davis and Brandon Marshall received the bulk of the snaps at linebacker with 57 and 53, respectively, but rookie Josey Jewell saw about twice as much playing time as he did in Week 1.

Particularly in the fourth quarter, Jewell saw the field in the Broncos’ nickel package.

“Josey played good football,” Joseph said. “It wasn’t about B-Marsh, it was more about Josey. He played good football. We’re playing more nickel now, so those guys are playing more snaps. Last year we played more dime defense, so our ‘backers didn’t play as much. Now, we would like to have a three-man rotation between Todd and B-Marsh and Josey. That way they’re playing probably 40, 45 snaps and not 60 snaps.”

#### BACK TO PLAYING BALTIMORE

After spending the first 11 years of his career in the AFC North, Domata Peko Sr. knows the Baltimore Ravens well.

So perhaps there’s no better player to speak about what the Broncos should expect this Sunday when they play their first AFC North opponent of the season.

“Baltimore’s a tough place to play, man,” Peko said. “I played there 11 years in a row in the AFC North. It’s a tough division. ... The crowd’s going to be loud as heck — they’re a real strong crowd there. You’ve got to get after them early, show them that you mean business. Get that run stopped and you’ve definitely got to get pressure on [Joe] Flacco, because he can sit back there [and] throw the deep ball [with] the best of them.”

# The NFL's Un-American New Fad: Tie Games

By Joshua Robinson & Andrew Beaton

Wall Street Journal

Sept. 18, 2018

The NFL is developing a disturbing new habit—one that is strange, uncomfortable, and very...European.

Football is now being forced to reckon with the tie.

As Green Bay and Minnesota played out a 29-29 draw at Lambeau Field, the NFL was aghast at its second tie in as many weeks. In fact, with one tie this weekend, the NFL had more standoffs than the English Premier League, which had none.

The NFL does not like this.

“It’s not losing,” Vikings receiver Stefon Diggs said, “but it’s damn sure not winning.”

Two ties in two weeks may be a random aberration, but NFL teams—and fans—may need to get used to it. Ahead of last season, the league slashed overtime from 15 minutes to 10. Previously, in 2012, the league had changed the rules so that both teams would get the ball unless the receiving team scores a touchdown on the opening possession.

But ties in football aren’t nearly as common as they are in soccer. Despite the rule changes, there weren’t any in the NFL last season, and they happen so infrequently that it’s awkward to even to look at a team’s record that features a grotesque third column. It confuses fans who prefer a result, even one they don’t like, and leaves players emotionally disoriented.

“I don’t know what to feel after a tie,” said Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins.

Americans love to look down on soccer for its willingness to recognize that sometimes two teams can’t settle the score. They are so repulsed by the concept of saying that neither side won that the most common analogy is “kissing your sister.” So most American sports are prepared to go to absurd lengths to avoid ties.

The NHL abolished ties following the 2003-04 season and now uses overtime and shootouts to determine a winner. The NBA has so much scoring that a winner emerges with enough overtime periods—the record of six has stood for more than 60 years. And baseball will play extra inning after extra inning in front of near empty stands theoretically forever.

In 2009, a Connecticut-Syracuse college basketball game went to six overtimes. It took so long that it felt like college football, which, by the way, eliminated ties a couple of decades ago because this most distinctly American breed of fans abhorred the very concept.

Even soccer, during its early forays on the American pro sports scene, recognized that ties might be an issue. The North American Soccer League banished ties to oblivion in the 1970s and replaced them with penalty shootouts and eventually hockey-style shootouts, even for regular-season games.

Europe, however, long ago made its peace with the idea of a hard-fought battle that yields equal dissatisfaction, firm handshakes, and no winners. In the Premier League last season, more than a quarter of all matches ended in draws, with 99 occurring over the 10-month campaign.

No one sees anything wrong with that. With three points awarded for a victory and one for a tie, a stalemate can still give a team something positive to cling to. For an underdog, it might even make the whole journey worthwhile.

“An away point in the Premier League is always good,” David Wagner, manager of struggling Huddersfield Town, said after a recent draw on the road at Everton. “It’s a deserved point due to our defensive organization and the effort from the players in this game was great. They worked their socks off.”

NFL teams aren’t giddy after their games end with the score knotted up. And in some sense, they should embrace deadlocks even more than soccer teams. Ties, in football, are functionally half a win—which makes them more valuable than the one point most soccer leagues award.

If there’s any team that should pop champagne after a draw it’s the Browns. That’s because the Browns lost every single game last season and all but one the year before that. Then they tied the Pittsburgh Steelers, annually one of the best teams in the league, during Week 1 for Cleveland’s best start to a season in more than a decade.

Browns coach Hue Jackson refused to see it as anything but a frustration. There was no solace in taking something, anything, from this result. “Obviously,” he said, “disappointed at the outcome: a tie game.”

Steelers coach Mike Tomlin was equally miffed. “It’s an awkward feeling after a game like that. You don’t know what to feel or to say or think.”

Some players showed signs of acceptance. Aaron Rodgers, a self-styled fan of England’s Manchester City, noted it’s “better to be standing here with a T instead of an L.” And Vikings coach Mike Zimmer at least had the clarity to identify the difference between losing and other results: “It’s better than a loss, obviously.”

But it’s mostly as foreign as meat pies. The Browns’ Jackson was asked if there’s any consolation that Cleveland left the field with a tie and not a loss. He had a curt reply.

“No.”

# NFL Week 2 Overnights: Sunday's Four-Window Avg. Up From '17

By STAFF

Sports Business Journal

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The four NFL windows in Week 2 yesterday saw overnight ratings jump 4% compared to Week 2 last year. Yesterday's windows were without the Raleigh-Durham market due to the effects from Hurricane Florence, whereas last year, all of the Florida metered markets were not reporting due to Hurricane Irma. Week 2 last year also saw Fox' Cowboys-Broncos game in the national window get extended well into primetime due to a lightning delay. Compared to Week 2 in '16, yesterday's four-window average was down 5%. CBS led the way with a 14.0 overnight for its national window featuring Patriots-Jaguars. Two years ago in Week 2, CBS featured Colts-Broncos and drew a 13.6 overnight. CBS also saw a gain for "The NFL Today" pregame show for the second week in a row. The show drew a 2.5 overnight yesterday, up 14% from Week 2 last year. Meanwhile, Giants-Cowboys last night drew a 13.8 overnight on NBC, marking the best Week 2 "SNF" game since Seahawks-Packers in '15 (16.3 for NFC Championship rematch). Last year, the 12.6 for Packers-Falcons was the lowest Week 2 "SNF" overnight since Steelers-Browns drew an 11.9 in '08. Giants-Cowboys also led NBC to a primetime win among all networks last night. Dallas-Ft. Worth led all markets with a 33.6 local rating, while N.Y. was 12th with a 16.0 (Austin Karp, Assistant Managing Editor).

CAMERA WORK: Fox Sports Producer Fran Morrison said that the net with its NFL production wants to "form an attachment with the viewer," and THE ATHLETIC's Richard Deitsch noted that is why there were "plenty of shots" of Browns K Zane Gonzalez yesterday after he missed two kicks in the final minutes of the team's loss to the Saints. Morrison said, "You want to make the viewer feel as if they are sitting next to him. The shot of Gonzalez sitting on the bench dejected, you can feel how he feels and that's what our director, Bryan Lilley, brought out [yesterday]. It had to be the most dejected feeling on earth. You never want to pile on anyone but you can't hide a shot that is so good." Fox' Chris Myers "had an excellent, sparse call of Gonzalez's missed field goal with eight seconds left." Myers on the call said, "He missed to the left. He missed to the right. And the Saints are going to win this game (Long pause). The frustration for the Browns continues." Had the Browns won for the first time since '16, Fox had "permission from the Browns to have their cameras in the locker room for coach Hue Jackson's game ball presentation, as well as exclusive interviews with team members from sideline reporter Laura Okmin" (THEATHLETIC.com, 9/17).

LOVE HIM OR HATE HIM: In Boston, Alex Reimer wrote CBS' Tony Romo during Patriots-Jaguars was "sharp and boisterous." Viewers are "either going to find Romo's hysterical routine endearing or nauseating." Reimer: "Two weeks into the season, I fall with the former." Romo also "contributes much more than sheer enthusiasm." He is "consistently ahead of the action." Given the "paucity of coherent, never mind insightful color analysts on this planet, chiding Romo for his exuberance and occasional malapropism" seems like "nitpicking" (WEEI.com, 9/16).

NOT SLOWING DOWN: AWFUL ANNOUNCING's Andrew Bucholtz noted the NFL on Fox is in its 25th season, and play-by-play man Dick Stockton has been "calling games ever since" joining the net in '94. Stockton has "done a lot of other things over the years." But he said that his work on the NFL on Fox has "been his favorite." Stockton said, "To be one of the original on-air people is something that I think is really

tremendous. I take really great pride in it, not pride for me personally, but just pride that I've been with this fabulous NFL team for as long as I have." Bucholtz noted at 75, Stockton is "regularly asked how long he plans to keep announcing." He said that he "doesn't have any plans to leave yet." Stockton: "As long as it feels good. Fox has been great to me, they want me back, they tell me they want me back every year, and I feel good" (AWFULANNOUNCING.com, 9/14).

# Phillip Lindsay making most of “great opportunity” with Broncos

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
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The Broncos drafted Royce Freeman in the third round this year and installed him as their starter, but he hasn't been the most impressive rookie running back in Denver through the first two weeks of the year.

That would be the undrafted Phillip Lindsay, who followed up 102 yards from scrimmage in the opener with 111 yards in Sunday's 20-19 win over the Raiders. That makes Lindsay the first undrafted player to top 100 yards from scrimmage in each of his first two NFL games.

“Just playing football,” Lindsay said, via the Denver Post. “Just playing football for my team. It's just a great opportunity to be here. I can't thank [General Manager John] Elway enough for letting me be a part of this organization.”

Head coach Vance Joseph called Lindsay a “total package” while citing his contributions on special teams as well and it seems he's quickly found a niche on the team he rooted for while growing up in Colorado.