

Broncos WR Courtland Sutton, a CU Buffs star? It almost happened. Here's why it didn't.

By Kyle Fredrickson
Denver Post
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Courtland Sutton once dreamed of donning the black and gold as a Colorado Buffalo at Folsom Field.

Yes, that Courtland Sutton. The Broncos' rookie wide receiver already regarded as an elite NFL jump-ball target by teammates and coaches. So imagine this: A CU offense featuring Phillip Lindsay in the backfield and on the edge, Sutton, a 6-foot-3, 218-pound freak athlete with 3,220 receiving yards and 31 touchdowns through college. Just enough to make any Buffs' fan swoon.

"CU was my very first scholarship offer back when I had no idea what a scholarship offer meant," Sutton said. "I already loved Colorado. The state itself was amazing."

Of course, it never happened.

Sutton starred at SMU — about 200 driving miles north of his hometown of Brenham, Texas — after a hard lesson in college football recruiting.

Sutton, also sought by several college programs to play safety and outside linebacker, missed what he called "the big visit" at CU in December 2013 because Brenham High School was in the midst of a Texas state playoff run. He finally made it to Boulder with his mother for an official in January, that by all accounts, went well. At least, until the final day.

"CU was trying to get me to commit, but I told them I wasn't committing yet," Sutton said. "On that Sunday, I met with coach (Mike) MacIntyre and he starts asking about the weekend and if I enjoyed it. Then he goes, 'Here's the situation right now. We don't have a scholarship for you anymore.'"

The Buffs received a commitment from another receiver, MacIntyre told Sutton, and his slot evaporated. It's an all-too-common phenomenon in modern college football recruiting. As of Tuesday afternoon, the combined scholarship offer totals for the 2019 recruiting class between CU, Colorado State and Air Force checked in at 790, per 24/7 Sports. With more offers extended earlier in the scouting process, as noted in The Denver Post's July examination, the pressure for recruits to make quick decisions can stem from losing their scholarship opportunity.

Sutton didn't hide it. Back then, MacIntyre's decision stung.

"Honestly, I really liked Colorado and wanted to commit if they would have had my scholarship," Sutton said. "There wouldn't have been a Courtland Sutton SMU story. I would have been a Buffalo. Who knows, I'd probably still be playing safety or outside linebacker or something."

SMU endured great adversity through Sutton's first two seasons with three overall wins. But the Mustangs eclipsed .500 in Year 3, and next fall in Sutton's senior season as a team captain, he led SMU back to a bowl berth. NFL scouts marveled at Sutton's elite size and athleticism, and through two games with the Broncos, he's shown flashes of big-play potential.

Sutton appeared on a combined 98 snaps against the Seahawks and Raiders. He's recorded three catches for 53 yards. However, recent struggles for veteran Denver wide receiver Demaryius Thomas might signal a shifting of the guard outside for the Broncos. Expect Sutton's role, especially in the red zone, to increase as the year goes along.

Sutton, reflecting on what might have been with the Buffaloes while seated in his Broncos' locker last week, shared no ill will to the program some five years later. He wouldn't change a thing.

"I'm blessed with my decision, what happened and grateful that not I'm director of my own path," Sutton said. "There's always a bigger picture for everybody's life. I'm a firm believer in that."

Broncos' first road trip might be a wake-up call

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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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."

Why the Broncos place a lot of value in one unquantifiable trait: resiliency

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

September 19, 2018

The second week of the season has been kind to the Broncos in recent years. Remember 2013, when Peyton Manning outdueled younger brother Eli in an 18-point win over the Giants? Remember 2014, when 330-pound nose tackle Terrance Knighton deflected a pass on a Chiefs fourth down in the final seconds to preserve a Broncos win?

Week 2 the following season starred Bradley Roby, who recovered a fumble in the waning seconds and ran it back for the game-winning touchdown at Kansas City.

The second week of 2016 was pretty good too, as Von Miller played the role of closer and strip-sacked Colts quarterback Andrew Luck in the final two minutes. Shane Ray scooped up the loose ball and returned it for a game-sealing touchdown.

Last year, Trevor Siemian threw four touchdown passes and the Broncos destroyed the Cowboys in Denver 42-17.

Then last Sunday, the Broncos turned a dismal start against Oakland into a thriller with a game-winning drive in the fourth quarter.

For the sixth consecutive season the Broncos are 2-0 to start, but as was the case in many years past, they face a slew of questions about sustainability and lingering mistakes, about turnovers and, of course, if it will all come unglued eventually.

These Broncos, however, insist that their 2-0 record has a different feel because of a “culture change” and unquantifiable trait that has kept them alive until the final whistle.

“The thing that’s really encouraging is the grit that this team has,” general manager John Elway said Tuesday on the Broncos’ partnering radio station, Orange and Blue 760. “They’re competitive and they keep battling back even when things go against them. They don’t duck their head. They keep battling and keep competing and I think that’s what we’ve seen the first two weeks. It’s the most encouraging thing that can be said really about the first two weeks is the fact that we didn’t give up and didn’t let the mistakes overcome us and were able to figure out how to win football games. ... That’s the exciting thing, because if you got that, you know you’re always going to have a chance to win some football games.”

Consider Week 1 against Seattle. Case Keenum, a quarterback lauded for his accuracy and limited turnovers last season, tossed three interceptions in the first three quarters. The mistakes cost the Broncos a potential 17 points, but mixed around those picks were five Broncos scoring drives.

When the Seahawks reclaimed the lead early in the fourth quarter, the Broncos snatched it back. Keenum found Demaryius Thomas for a 4-yard touchdown pass with just more than 11 minutes to go, and the Broncos’ defense held Russell Wilson at bay until the end.

Consider Week 2, when the Broncos punted four times and tossed an interception in the first half. The momentum flipped in the second, though, as Keenum led the Broncos to scores in each of their final four possessions, including the game winner. Brandon McManus booted a 36-yard field goal in the final seconds to give Denver its second fourth-quarter comeback in as many games.

“I love the guy. He fights his tail off. I know there was a big third down and a couple yards and he ran there. He didn’t slide. He went in there and took the hit,” Domata Peko said, referring to Keenum’s keeper early in the fourth quarter last Sunday. “That’s the quarterback we like to play for. He’s doing a great job for us and really battling and winning the game for us in the fourth quarter. That just shows what type of competitor he is.”

In the fourth quarters this year, Keenum has completed 70 percent of his passes for 176 yards, one touchdown, zero interceptions and a 113.8 rating that ranks seventh-best in the league. He’s also taken zero sacks in those quarters.

His first-half numbers tell a different picture: 57.1 percent passing, two touchdowns, three interceptions and a 65.4 rating.

So what is the value of resiliency? After a 5-11 campaign marred by repeated mistakes and a label — from Elway, no less — of a team that’s “soft,” resiliency may be the Broncos’ greatest marker of potential success.

“That’s huge for a football team because it gives you hope,” coach Vance Joseph said. “Even (Sunday) after the first penalty (on the final drive), we’re first-and-20, and everyone thought that we had a chance to win because of Case. Again, to watch him battle the first half and to throw a bad pick in the high red zone, and to come back in the second half and have four straight scoring drives and make the plays he made on third downs — he made three or four big-time throws on third downs — it gives you hope. It gives your defense hope, the coaches hope and it gives the fans hope, and he’s proven to be a winner. That’s the first trait that you want for a quarterback.”

The early returns haven’t been bad either; the Broncos rank among the NFL’s top seven in multiple major offensive categories including net yards (427.5 per game to rank fourth), net rushing yards (157, second) and third-down percentage (42.9 percent, tied for seventh). The Broncos also lead the NFL with 15 plays of 20 yards or more.

But the four interceptions rank 30th.

The Broncos have yet to serve a complete game offensively, free of turnovers and drops, and balanced in the running and passing games. It’s been ugly more than it’s been pretty and with each turnover is an unspoken, “Please not again,” from those who witnessed 2017. The Broncos’ fall last year started in Week 3, when they turned the ball over on each of its last four possessions in a loss to the Bills, and it only got worse as the weeks progressed.

It’s still early, but the Broncos’ early responses to adversity offer hope of a different result this year. The first test comes Sunday, when the Broncos face the Ravens in Baltimore for their first road game of the year.

“Any time you have a year like we had last year it’s always tough to shake it,” Elway said. “So there’s always going to be comparisons – ‘Well this is what happened this year and that’s what happened last year.’

“This is a different football team than we had last year. But I think you also have to guard against it because we know what can happen and if anything I think it’ll keep our eyes wide open, especially when you win football games because the last thing you can do is exhale. Especially during the season, because everybody can beat you. ... If we play like we’re capable of, then we can compete and beat everybody in this league too.”

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

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

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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.”

Butt Army hopes to grow fan base for Broncos tight end Jake Butt

By Alison Mastrangelo

KMGH

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They call it Broncos Country because it's a big fan group, and a large fan group could use an Army to help keep them in line. Well that's where the Butt family comes in; they want to bring the first ever Butt Army to Denver to support their son Jake Butt, who is a tight end for the Broncos.

The Butt family has become known for the fun names they put on the back on their football jerseys, all revolving around their last name Butt. It started when Jake Butt played football at the University of Michigan. Some of the original members in the Butt Army include Meg Lally and Rob Butt, also known as Mama Butt and Head Butt.

Some other friends and family jersey names include the following: I like Big Butt, Black Butt, Tiny Butt, New Butt Lil Butt, Mama Booty, There's a Butt, Kick Butt, Nice Butt etc.

So now they are hoping Broncos fans catch on and start to make it their own.

Denver7 Sports Anchor Alison Mastrangelo had a chance to catch up with Mama Butt and Head Butt at the Raiders game on Sunday and you can watch the story [here](#).

Broncos coach says he messed up the defensive game plan

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
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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."

Hall of Fame members threaten boycott of inductions

By Barry Wilner

Associated Press

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A group of Pro Football Hall of Famers led by Eric Dickerson is demanding health insurance coverage and a share of NFL revenues or else those former players will boycott the induction ceremonies.

In a letter sent to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith and Hall of Fame President David Baker — and obtained by The Associated Press — 21 Hall of Fame members cited themselves as "integral to the creation of the modern NFL, which in 2017 generated \$14 billion in revenue."

Among the signees were Dickerson, who is listed as chairman of the newly created Hall of Fame Board the group has formed; Jim Brown; Joe Namath; Lawrence Taylor; and Sarah White, the widow of Reggie White.

There were questions, though, about how well-organized the group was. Two players whose names are on the letter said they were not part of the boycott effort. Another name on the list of 22 signees including Sarah White was Carl Ellard, but no one by that name has played professional football. Former Vikings defensive end Carl Eller, however, is a Hall of Famer.

"The time has come for us to be treated as part of a game we've given so much to," the letter states. "Until our demands are met, the Hall of Famers will not attend the annual induction ceremony in Canton. It's well known that the NFL is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2020, and while we are proud of our role in building this league, we don't believe 100 years of player exploitation is something to celebrate."

The strongly worded letter called out the league for paying Goodell \$40 million, saying "there are better uses for that money." It also criticized Smith for his salary and the lack of a former player on the players' association executive board. But there have been two former players on that executive board since 2009.

Jerry Rice, whose name is on the letter, said he wasn't on the Hall of Fame Board. And in a statement on Twitter, the former wide receiver said he plans to support the Hall of Fame and "looks forward to attending the 100th anniversary in 2020."

Kurt Warner also released a statement on Twitter that said he wasn't made aware of the letter and said his name was mistakenly put on it. He said he supports the efforts for better benefits for all retired players and doesn't believe in boycotting the Hall of Fame.

Baker said the Hall seeks to help all players, not just those enshrined in Canton, Ohio.

"Many Hall of Famers have reached out to express their support of the Hall," he said in a statement.

"While we enshrine Hall of Famers, our mission is to serve every player who helped build this great game. We guard the legacies and seek to serve all players and not just Hall of Famers who we serve every day."

NFL players have received a pension since the Bert Bell Plan, named after a former league commissioner, was created in 1959. In the 1993 collective bargaining agreement, a 401K plan to which players also could contribute was established, and in 1998 an annuity program was created.

"There have been significant increases in the pension with every collective bargaining agreement in the history of this sport," said Miki Yaras-Davis, the NFLPA's senior director of benefits.

"The normal retirement age is 55 for former players, and those players can leave in their pension (funds) and at 65 they have almost a 300 percent increase. This is one of the few defined benefit plans left in the country. It's a program which isn't seen much anymore that defines the benefits at a certain age."

During the 2011 labor dispute and lockout, one of the main issues was establishing a fund for pre-1993 players. In that CBA, a "Legacy Fund" was established, with a \$620 million increase in benefits, with team owners contributing out of their share of revenues for the first time. The union and the league have increased pensions three times for former players since 2011.

But the letter calls the Legacy Fund "little more than cynical public relations ploys that fail to help those who desperately need it."

"The total cost for every Hall of Famer to have health insurance is less than \$4 million — less than that of a 30-second Super Bowl ad, or about 3 cents for every \$100 the league generates in revenue," Dickerson's letter states.

"Paying Hall of Famers an annual salary works out to about 40 cents for every \$100 in annual revenue, a figure that will increase dramatically in the near future with legalized gambling."

The disgruntled former players also took aim at the expansion of the Hall of Fame into a village that Baker has estimated will eventually cost \$1 billion. The NFL provides significant funding for the hall, but equally significant costs for the project are funded elsewhere.

Also, the Hall of Fame village plans a player care center called Legend's Landing that provides independent and assisted living for retired Hall of Famers as well as "members of the NFL's legends community, along with coaches, officials and administrators," according to the Hall of Fame's website. A health care center also is part of the expansion.

The letter's demands cover the 318 members of the Hall of Fame, but it says it hopes to create "a template for active players in the next round of (labor) negotiations." Those talks would come in 2021 when the current CBA expires.

Other Hall of Famers listed on the letter are:

Marcus Allen, Mel Blount, Derrick Brooks, Earl Campbell, Richard Dent, Marshall Faulk, Mike Haynes, Rickey Jackson, Ronnie Lott, Curtis Martin, John Randle, Deion Sanders, Bruce Smith and Jackie Smith.

5 things to see and do outside Broncos Stadium

By Terry Terrones

Colorado Springs Gazette

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Going to a Denver Broncos game is an amazing experience. All the sights and sounds of being part of an NFL game are thrilling. But the game day fun isn't confined to the action taking place inside the stadium.

There's plenty to see and do outside the stadium before the game even starts, and none of it even requires a ticket or an entry fee.

Here are five reasons you'll want to arrive early to Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

1. **Miniature Mile High** – The Mile High Monument, a miniaturized version of Mile High Stadium, sits in parking lot J on the northwest side of Broncos Stadium. Inside, fans can sit in one of the 165 original seats from Mile High and take a peek at the mini Bucky the Bronco on top of the scoreboard. Outside of it is a statue of legendary Broncos fan, The Barrel Man. At 1/8 of the original stadium's size, it makes for a great photo op and is a unique journey back in time to the glory days of the Orange Crush. The monument is free to visit and opens 30 minutes after main parking lots open to the public.

2. **An artist's vision of football** – After visiting the Mile High Monument, slide over to the north side of the stadium and check out the three Pigskin Variations sculptures. Created by Massachusetts artist and hopefully not Patriots fans Ralph Helmick and Stuart Schechter, these three statues made of bronze and Colorado sandstone offer alternative takes on pro football. The blend of art and sports is a powerful one.

3. **The musical stylings of the Stampede** – The Denver Broncos Stampede, a drum line and brass ensemble, is sure to bowl you over with its high-energy performance. The group, which performs on the field before home games, can be seen pre-game outside at the south part of the stadium. It also bounces around different tailgating areas, so you'll have to keep an eye (or ear) out for them. The Stampede's passionate play and enthusiasm is contagious.

4. **Go to the Mall** – If you're looking to get hyped for the game in a family-friendly atmosphere, the Sports Legends Mall is the place to be. Located on the south side of the stadium, this football-shaped grass field is jam-packed with themed events. You can try tossing a football through a tire, play corn hole, or listen to local bands while grabbing something to eat and drink. I'd highly recommend going to the UHealth booth, where you can get tested for Broncos Fever. A simple cheer for the home team leads to some free swag, which will give you a Vitamin B boost.

5. **Take in some Broncos history** – Longtime Broncos fans are certain to feel the nostalgia at Ring of Fame Plaza. Located at the south part of the stadium, this is where the team honors the 32 members of the illustrious Broncos Ring of Fame. Greats like Rick Upchurch, Karl Mecklenberg and Terrell Davis are immortalized in eight-foot tall steel monuments. It's a nice look at the history of the franchise.

How Phillip Lindsay's roots guide his devotion to the Denver community

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

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All Phillip Lindsay wants to be for the kids who were at West High School's Tuesday-afternoon football practice is Willis McGahee.

As Lindsay approached the practice field at Sunken Gardens Park, ready to speak to the team, he recalled the impact that McGahee had on him in 2012, when he had an opportunity to touch a high-school student's life, and Lindsay knew he could have that same effect six years later.

The situation was much different in 2012, but the end result could be the same.

Lindsay, fresh off surgery reconstructing his ACL after a devastating tear that ended his senior season at South High School, was at the lowest point of his life. His future in football was impossible to predict, and to him, the outlook didn't seem bright.

And then he got a call from then-Broncos running back Willis McGahee.

At the time, McGahee was a busy man. The previous season, he had revitalized his career with a 1,199-yard Pro Bowl season and was in the midst of a troubling start to the Peyton Manning era (which, of course, ended up being just fine).

Yet during a break in the week leading up to the Broncos' Week 3 game against Houston, he took the time to call Lindsay, who was known in the organization because of his participation in the Futures Football program that the Broncos run with Denver Public Schools.

Lindsay knew McGahee well, at least through his family's television set. The standout University of Miami running back was a star on the Hurricanes' early '00s teams, but his collegiate career ended abruptly when he tore his ACL, PCL and MCL in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl National Championship Game.

"I knew his story with his knee and how hard it was to get back," Lindsay says. "To be able to see what he did after that brutal knee injury, it felt good to get a call the day after surgery. He was just like, 'Hey.' He didn't have to do that. He didn't have to take the time, but he did. He felt the need to take the time to tell me I was going to be OK. And now I'm sitting here in the same shoes he was in as a Denver Bronco."

For Lindsay, who now knows all the responsibilities that come with being an NFL player, the call amazes him even more.

"Being in this job here in the NFL, it's hard to find time to do the little things sometimes," Lindsay says. "It's not even that you forget; it's so much going on. And for him ... in my senior year of high school, at my lowest point, he called out of the blue. I was watching a Colorado Buffaloes game, and he called me. That gave me a lot of hope. It felt good that somebody cared enough to be able to contact me and reach out to me at the lowest time of my life."

Though visiting West's practice Tuesday isn't the same scenario, Lindsay knows the standard that's been set for him as far as making an impact on young lives, and he wants to hold himself to that — even just days after becoming the first undrafted rookie to record at least 100 yards from scrimmage in each of his first two games.

"I'm never going to be too big for this," Lindsay says. "This is how I grew up and where I came from. Everybody here knows who I am, and it just feels comfortable. I don't have to sit there and put on an act for anybody. I can just be myself, which I am anyway. But [it's great] to just be able to be here and feel comfortable and see these young men and try to impact them so they can go on to college."

So when he spoke to the students, who will participate in this week's Broncos High School Game of the Week against North High School, he spoke of that importance, hoping they might follow in his footsteps as a scholar with two degrees, regardless of whether they're able to chase NFL dreams as he did.

"That's the biggest thing," Lindsay says. "The NFL is going to be there, and it's going to come and go faster than you would go to college. For college and getting a degree, it's probably one of the most satisfying things you can have. Yeah, I'm in the NFL and I'm grateful for it, but at the end of the day, I do have my degree. I have two. I'm excited about that, and I want to make sure that they understand that."

Following the speech, Lindsay walked off the field, meeting a few players one on one, including one who told Lindsay that he's his hero.

As big as expectations may get for Lindsay as a Bronco, they may be even bigger as a local idol, and even if he can't be Willis McGahee, being Phillip Lindsay will be enough.

RB Phillip Lindsay nominated for two weekly NFL honors

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 19, 2018

Phillip Lindsay turned another strong performance into another set of award nominations.

The rookie running back was named a finalist for Rookie of the Week and FedEx Air & Ground Player of the Week awards on Tuesday after his Week 2 performance.

Lindsay totaled 107 rushing yards on 14 carries and added another 4-yard reception against the Oakland Raiders in a 20-19 comeback win. The former Colorado Buffalo is the first undrafted player in NFL history to total more than 100 yards from scrimmage in each of his first two games.

Lindsay's performance on Sunday was punctuated by a 53-yard first-half run in which he evaded several Raiders defenders and brought Denver's offense all the way to the edge of the red zone.

For Rookie of the Week honors, Lindsay will compete against Jets quarterback Sam Darnold, Giants running back Saquon Barkley, Colts linebacker Darius Leonard and Chargers safety Derwin James.

His competition in FedEx's "Ground" category is limited to San Francisco's Matt Breida and Atlanta's Tevin Coleman.

Get your vote in for Lindsay right now by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

Power Rankings Roundup: Broncos make a steady climb

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

September 19, 2018

ESPN

Current ranking: 15

Last week: 16

The Broncos snapped a streak of 15 straight losses in games during which they trailed entering the fourth quarter, overcoming a nine-point fourth-quarter deficit to beat the Raiders. Case Keenum has led a fourth-quarter game-winning drive in each of the Broncos' first two games this season.

NFL.com

Current ranking: 18

Last week: 18

Think Broncos fans had zero confidence their team would win until Brandon McManus' kick hit the back net with six ticks to go. The defense, which bailed out an erratic Case Keenum in the season opener, was put in a similar position in Week 2, thanks to a total offensive failure in the first half that led to a 12-0 Raiders lead. Keenum and Co. came to play in the final 30 game minutes, though, grinding out points on all four second-half drives: touchdown (11 plays, 75 yards), field goal (10 plays, 54 yards), touchdown (14 plays, 67 yards), field goal (10 plays, 62 yards). That penultimate scoring drive closed with Keenum executing a Cam Newton special: a designed QB draw from shotgun on fourth-and-goal. Gutsy play call, Bill Musgrave. Yes, that's the same Bill Musgrave the Raiders didn't bring back after they enjoyed that fertile offensive campaign in 2016.

Pro Football Talk

Current ranking: 18

Last week: 19

Things may change once the team has to play on the road.

USA Today

Current ranking: 14

Last week: 17

Phillip Lindsay sparking ground game, leading rookies with 178 yards. His 53-yard gallop Sunday was 13 more than any Denver run in 2017.

Bleacher Report

Current ranking: 14

Last week: 17

Keenum didn't have the best of games against Oakland. He completed only 19 of 35 pass attempts for 222 yards. His passer rating was a moribund 61.8. And Keenum threw his fourth interception of the young season.

However, late in the game Keenum engineered two drives that culminated in Brandon McManus field goals and another that ended in a Keenum run for six — and that was enough to squeak the Broncos past Oakland and into the ranks of the league's 2-0 teams.

The Broncos aren't the best 2-0 team in the league. In fact, they might be the worst. But with the defense playing well and rookie Phillip Lindsay pacing the ground game, Denver is hanging around and finding a way to pull games out.

Mark Maske, Washington Post
Current ranking: 9

Last week: 17

Case Keenum isn't playing particularly well yet but the Broncos are 2-0. That's fine for now. But eventually, they'll need better play and fewer mistakes by their new QB.

Sporting News
Current ranking: 15

Last week: 14

The best word to describe Case Keenum so far as the Broncos' starting QB: competent. There are no style points, but they've been able to win a couple games with their running game and defense. Let's hope they remember they went 3-11 after this kind of start last season.

NFL Week 3 power rankings: Jags, Rams at top as Eagles, Patriots lose

By STAFF

USA Today

September 19, 2018

USA TODAY Sports' NFL power rankings following Week 2 of the season, highlighted by Patrick Mahomes' high-flying Chiefs and an ugly start for Seattle. USA TODAY Sports

NFL power rankings, post-Week 2 edition:

1. Jaguars (5): Took NFL royalty to the woodshed — their 11-point defeat of New England wasn't really that close — without injured Leonard Fournette's help.
2. Rams (3): No one else remotely approaches their 54-point scoring differential after two weeks. But first real test looms Sunday vs. cross-town Chargers.
3. Chiefs (10): Patrick Mahomes is your MVP at two-week mark after stunning pair of wins against quality opponents. But beware league's last-ranked defense.
4. Packers (7): After seeing Clay Matthews rooked by refs and Aaron Rodgers limited against swarming D, tie feels OK — especially in tiebreaker department.
5. Vikings (4): After seeing Clay Matthews rooked by refs and Aaron Rodgers limited against swarming D, tie feels bad — especially in tiebreaker department.
6. Buccaneers (20): Ryan Fitzpatrick triggering league's No. 1 offense despite getting next to nothing from ground game. Enjoy your place on pine, Jameis.
7. Eagles (1): They face Vikes, Panthers, Jags in October, so good idea to let Carson Wentz get feet wet now before diving into deep end of defensive pool.
8. Patriots (2): Be interesting to see how much patience, effort they're willing to invest in Josh Gordon. Sunday's loss illustrated New England needs help.
9. Falcons (6): The last time Matt Ryan rushed for two TDs before Sunday's win ... was never. Hey, whatever it takes to put a spark into Sark's offense.
10. Chargers (11): Definitely a less-than-ideal time to be without Joey Bosa given Bolts will see Jared Goff, Jimmy Garoppolo, Derek Carr next three weeks.
11. Bengals (16): Might be best team you won't see rest of this year. Barring flex changes, Cincinnati will play 1 p.m. local starts for season's duration.
12. Saints (9): They were fortunate to avert another 0-2 start by splitting homestand, but must endure playing five of next seven away from Superdome.

13. Panthers (13): With eight players on IR and Thomas Davis suspended — to say nothing of Greg Olsen's injury — few teams have as many personnel issues.
14. Broncos (17): Phillip Lindsay sparking ground game, leading rookies with 178 yards. His 53-yard gallop Sunday was 13 more than any Denver run in 2017.
15. Bears (18): Offense hasn't coalesced under Matt Nagy yet, but Khalil Mack-led defense will apparently provide plenty of margin for error.
16. Steelers (12): Le'Veon Bell still MIA, Antonio Brown inviting controversy by taking bait on social media, defense cratering. You could see this coming.
17. Ravens (15): It's early, but maybe Alex Collins should get more touches? He's averaging 5.5 per, which is 1.7 better than time-share mate Buck Allen.
18. Dolphins (23): No team averaging fewer passes, but resurgent Ryan Tannehill is highly efficient (72.5% completion, 104.9 rating) when he does throw.
19. Titans (27): When pair of DBs (Kevin Byard, Dane Cruikshank) provide your biggest offensive play, there's a problem. But kudos on creativity front.
20. Colts (30): Rookie Darius Leonard is league's leading tackler after two weeks and emerging as play maker Indianapolis defense desperately needed.
21. Texans (14): They're out of mulligans and need Deshaun Watson, J.J. Watt to shed any remnants of rust if this team is going to challenge Jacksonville.
22. Browns (24): No team has more takeaways (8) or is more committed to running (65 attempts). Winning formula in place ... with exception of kicking game.
23. Jets (22): Sam Darnold's home debut didn't go as planned, but he did make some history by becoming the youngest (21) player ever to pass for 300 yards.
24. Redskins (8): Blew chance to take control of NFC East. But few Washingtonians witnessed it as 50-year sellout streak ended with 30% of seats empty.
25. 49ers (21): If we gave you one guess to identify NFL's leading rusher, and you said Matt Breida ... then we'd know you surely Googled correct answer.
26. Cowboys (25): Defense out of chute with nine sacks, one off Chicago's pace. That must continue given lackluster start by Dak Prescott and pass game.
27. Giants (19): Sure didn't take long for offensive line issues to resurface ... though Jacksonville and Dallas will be among sternest tests of season.
28. Raiders (29): They're averaging just one sack per game sans Khalil Mack. But, hey, they're only allowing one sack per game, too, so glass half full.

29. Seahawks (26): Russell Wilson's a great player. But as we've been saying for months, the supporting cast isn't close to what it once was.

30. Lions (31): Signs of progress included running ball better, turning it over less and cranking up the pass rush. But Detroit couldn't avert 0-2 start.

31. Bills (32): If you're keeping score, Buffalo scored six points in six quarters prior to Vontae Davis' "retirement" and 14 in half following his exit.

32. Cardinals (28): Shocking level of underachievement given talent spread throughout this roster. What buttons does rookie coach Steve Wilks push now?

Blandino, Pereira strongly oppose NFL emphasis on roughing the passer

By Shalise Manza Young

Yahoo! Sports

September 19, 2018

The last two men who served as the NFL's head of officiating have come out strongly against the league's emphasis on roughing the quarterback, in particular the two called in the Minnesota Vikings-Green Bay Packers game on Sunday.

Much of the emphasis has been placed on the call against Packers' linebacker Clay Matthews, which took a Kirk Cousins interception off the board and allowed the Vikings to come back and score the game-tying touchdown and two-point conversion.

'Those are not fouls'

Mike Pereira and Dean Blandino, both of whom served as the NFL vice president of officiating (Alberto Riveron holds the job now) and are currently rules analysts for Fox Sports, do an online show together called "Last Call" where they go over plays and penalties from the week's slate of games.

The two were adamant that the roughing the passer calls in the Vikings-Packers game – Minnesota's Eric Kendricks was called for it at the end of the first half – should not have been fouls.

Here's the relevant transcript:

"Those are not fouls. We don't like those as fouls," Blandino said.

"If you go back to when we were there, they're clearly not fouls," Pereira added. "The problem that I have with it, and I know it's a point of emphasis and I know referee Tony Corrente is taking some heat for this, but this is a point of emphasis coming off of Aaron Rodgers last year with the Anthony Barr hit ended up to be the injury [Barr drove Rodgers into the ground, breaking his clavicle]. But that clearly – I don't even think that was a foul, but the contact was much more flagrant – but what I'm having a problem with now, even though it's a point of emphasis, is they're creating penalties for contact and tackles to me that don't put the quarterback at risk of injury."

"Correct," Blandino said. "You look at the rule and it says you can't commit intimidating or punishing acts, you can't violently or unnecessarily drive him to the ground or land on him with all or most of your body weight. That's not what you're seeing in at least those two calls in that game."

"What do you want the defender to do? To me it looks like he's wrapping and he's trying to bring the quarterback to the ground. There is going to be some force. There is going to be some impetus that takes both players to the ground. Again, what do you want the defender to do in that situation?"

Summarized Pereira, "I think we're setting a dangerous precedent ... You can't have that as a foul. There's got to be a line drawn closer to a more violent hit."

Matthews did what he was coached to do

On Monday, Packers coach Mike McCarthy defended his player, saying Matthews brought Cousins down just as he'd been instructed.

"He did what he was coached to do. He tries to brace the weight distribution," McCarthy said. "[The referees] saw it differently."

McCarthy added that he understands the goals of player safety and protecting quarterbacks, but he also wondered how far things can do.

"I'm all for the goal being achieved, but you have to make sure it's not a competitive disadvantage to the pass rusher. Those are quality conversations you can have with the officials," he said.

Matthews' sack will be used in instructional video

While knowledgeable observers like Pereira and Blandino and even players believe that the Matthews call in particular was wrong, the league is doubling down, and will use the play in a teaching tape that will be sent to teams to continue to illustrate what constitutes a foul.

The league says Matthews used a "scoop and pull" technique, but when officials met with media during training camps, there was no mention of the scoop and pull technique being a foul, at least according to Packers reporter Aaron Nagler.

NFL Power Rankings Poll: Jaguars Take Over No. 1, Bengals Make Biggest Jump

By STAFF

Sports Illustrated

September 19, 2018

Did Week 2 confirm what we saw in Week 1, or do we now realize we had a few overreactions? Maybe it's a little of both. We have a new No. 1 this week after the Jaguars beat the Patriots in rematch of last season's AFC Championship Game. This week's MMQB Power Rankings Poll also has the Bengals making the biggest jump and the Steelers taking another drop.

This week's voters:

Andrew Brandt, Business of Football Columnist

Mitch Goldich, Producer/Writer

Jonathan Jones, Staff Writer

Kalyn Kahler, Editorial Assistant

Bette Marston, Senior Producer

Mark Mravic, Executive Editor

Conor Orr, Staff Writer

Jenny Vrentas, Senior Writer

1. Jacksonville Jaguars (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 6

Points in poll: 250

Highest-place vote: 1 (3)

Lowest-place vote: 3 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. New England 31-20

Next game: vs. Tennessee

2. Los Angeles Rams (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 5

Points in poll: 242

Highest-place vote: 1 (3)

Lowest-place vote: 7 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Arizona 34-0

Next game: vs. Los Angeles Chargers

3. Kansas City Chiefs (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 7

Points in poll: 238

Highest-place vote: 1 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 5 (1)

Last week's result: Win at Pittsburgh 42-37

Next game: vs. San Francisco

4. Minnesota Vikings (1-0-1)

Last Week's rank: 4

Points in poll: 225

Highest-place vote: 1 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 7 (1)

Last week's result: Tie at Green Bay 29-29

Next game: vs. Buffalo

5. New England Patriots (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 1

Points in poll: 223

Highest-place vote: 3 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 7 (1)

Last week's result: Los at Jacksonville 31-20

Next game: at Detroit

6. Green Bay Packers (1-0-1)

Last Week's rank: 3

Points in poll: 222

Highest-place vote: 2 (2)

Lowest-place vote: 7 (4)

Last week's result: Tie vs. Minnesota 29-29

Next game: at Washington

7. Philadelphia Eagles (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 2

Points in poll: 219

Highest-place vote: 4 (2)

Lowest-place vote: 9 (1)

Last week's result: Loss at Tampa Bay 27-21

Next game: vs. Indianapolis

8. Atlanta Falcons (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 8

Points in poll: 198

Highest-place vote: 4 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 12 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Carolina 31-24

Next game: vs. New Orleans

9. Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 15

Points in poll: 190

Highest-place vote: 8 (2)

Lowest-place vote: 11 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Philadelphia 27-21

Next game: vs. Pittsburgh

10. Cincinnati Bengals (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 23

Points in poll: 177

Highest-place vote: 8 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 15 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Baltimore 34-23

Next game: at Carolina

11. Los Angeles Chargers (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 12

Points in poll: 175

Highest-place vote: 9 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 15 (1)

Last week's result: Win at Buffalo 31-20

Next game: at Los Angeles Rams

12. New Orleans Saints (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 13

Points in poll: 165

Highest-place vote: 8 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 19 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Cleveland 21-18

Next game: at Atlanta

T-13. Carolina Panthers (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 10

Points in poll: 151

Highest-place vote: 10 (2)

Lowest-place vote: 23 (1)

Last week's result: Loss at Atlanta 31-24

Next game: vs. Cincinnati

T-13. Denver Broncos (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 20

Points in poll: 151

Highest-place vote: 11 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 16 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Oakland 20-19

Next game: at Baltimore

15. Miami Dolphins (2-0)

Last Week's rank: 19

Points in poll: 140

Highest-place vote: 13 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 18 (1)

Last week's result: Win at New York Jets 20-12

Next game: vs. Oakland

16. Pittsburgh Steelers (0-1-1)

Last Week's rank: 9

Points in poll: 137

Highest-place vote: 12 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 22 (1)

Last week's result: Loss vs. Kansas City 42-37

Next game: at Tampa Bay

17. Dallas Cowboys (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 25

Points in poll: 124

Highest-place vote: 13 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 24 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. New York Giants 20-13

Next game: at Seattle

18. San Francisco 49ers (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 11

Points in poll: 121

Highest-place vote: 14 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 21 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Detroit 30-27

Next game: at Kansas City

19. Chicago Bears (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 21

Points in poll: 117

Highest-place vote: 17 (2)

Lowest-place vote: 21 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Seattle 24-17

Next game: at Arizona

20. Baltimore Ravens (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 16

Points in poll: 108

Highest-place vote: 16 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 24 (1)

Last week's result: Loss at Cincinnati 34-23

Next game: vs. Denver

21. Seattle Seahawks (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 24

Points in poll: 90

Highest-place vote: 20 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 24 (1)

Last week's result: Loss at Chicago 24-17

Next game: vs. Dallas

22. Tennessee Titans (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 28

Points in poll: 86

Highest-place vote: 15 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 25 (2)

Last week's result: Win vs. Houston 20-17

Next game: at Jacksonville

23. Washington Redskins (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 18

Points in poll: 84

Highest-place vote: 16 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 27 (2)

Last week's result: Loss vs. Indianapolis 21-9

Next game: vs. Green Bay

24. New York Jets (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 17

Points in poll: 80

Highest-place vote: 20 (2)

Lowest-place vote: 26 (2)

Last week's result: Loss vs. Miami 20-12

Next game: at Cleveland

25. Indianapolis Colts (1-1)

Last Week's rank: 27

Points in poll: 66

Highest-place vote: 21 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 26 (4)

Last week's result: Win at Washington 21-9

Next game: at Philadelphia

26. Houston Texans (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 14

Points in poll: 64

Highest-place vote: 20 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 28 (1)

Last week's result: Loss at Tennessee 20-17

Next game: vs. New York Giants

27. Detroit Lions (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 26

Points in poll: 45

Highest-place vote: 22 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 30 (2)

Last week's result: Loss at San Francisco 30-27

Next game: vs. New England

28. New York Giants (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 22

Points in poll: 41

Highest-place vote: 24 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 30 (2)

Last week's result: Loss at Dallas 20-13

Next game: at Houston

29. Oakland Raiders (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 29

Points in poll: 37

Highest-place vote: 27 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 31 (2)

Last week's result: Loss at Denver 20-19

Next game: at Miami

30. Cleveland Browns (0-1-1)

Last Week's rank: 30

Points in poll: 32

Highest-place vote: 27 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 31 (2)

Last week's result: Loss at New Orleans 21-18

Next game: vs. New York Jets

31. Arizona Cardinals (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 31

Points in poll: 16

Highest-place vote: 30 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 32 (1)

Last week's result: Loss at Los Angeles Rams 34-0

Next game: vs. Chicago

32. Buffalo Bills (0-2)

Last Week's rank: 32

Points in poll: 10

Highest-place vote: 30 (1)

Lowest-place vote: 32 (7)

Last week's result: Loss vs. Los Angeles Chargers 31-20

Next game: at Minnesota

Vance Joseph says Broncos were too cautious defensively against Raiders

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
September 19, 2018

Raiders quarterback Derek Carr threw just three incomplete passes in Sunday's 20-19 loss to the Denver Broncos. And while Denver did enough to get the victory, head coach Vance Joseph wasn't happy with the game plan they implemented against Oakland.

According to Arnie Stapleton of the Associated Press, Joseph wishes they hadn't been so conservative defensively.

"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.

"So, 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. But that's on me."

Carr completed 29 of 32 passes for 288 yards and a touchdown against the Broncos. He was 18 of 19 for 153 yards in the first half with Denver playing soft coverages against Oakland.

Joseph said it was his fault and that a coach "can over-game plan."

The Broncos are 2-0 anyway with wins over the Raiders and Seattle Seahawks.

Through two weeks, only two lowering-the-helmet penalties

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 19, 2018

Those changes the NFL didn't make to a controversial new rule really have done the trick.

After averaging 1.5 penalties per game for lowering the helmet and initiating contact with an opponent through two weeks of the preseason the NFL has seen two penalties in the regular season. Through two full weeks of football.

According to a league spokesman, there has been only two total penalties under the new prohibition regarding helmet use in 32 total games. That's an average of 0.0625 per game.

So why the stunning drop? One explanation would be that the players immediately have adjusted their playing styles to the new rule. Another explanation would be that the conference call conducted on the Wednesday after Week Two, the one that officially resulted in no changes to the rule, resulted in just enough changes to the rule, with inadvertent or incidental helmet contact not a foul, with "bracing" used more aggressively to excuse helmet contact, and with (as former NFL referee Terry McAulay explained it on Tuesday's #PFTPM podcast) a focus on defensive players having the time and space necessary to choose to use the helmet as a weapon.

Here's where we focus on giving you the pitch to check out #PFTPM, which includes conversations with McAulay and Super Bowl 50 MVP Von Miller.

Eric Dickerson cites “miscommunication” with Kurt Warner, Jerry Rice over HOF letter

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 19, 2018

Pro Football Hall of Famer Eric Dickerson is spearheading an effort to get more for the players who made the game what it is. And he now admits that he took a liberty or two with reality in order to make the effort seem stronger than it is.

Dickerson has posted a statement on Twitter accepting responsibility for a miscommunication with fellow Hall of Famers Jerry Rice and Kurt Warner, whose names were added to the letter threatening a boycott of future Hall of Fame enshrinement ceremonies unless the league does more for former players. Both Rice and Warner have said they do not support a boycott.

Dickerson’s acceptance of responsibility was hardly unconditional and unequivocal.

“[T]his is typical NFL pitting players against each other,” Dickerson said, “whether it’s retired players versus Hall of Famers or whether it’s players who are on the Hall of Fame board versus players supporting the cause. At the end of the day, the NFL’s strategy is simply to take attention away from the major issue at hand, which is that the NFL is past due on doing right by the players.”

Dickerson also has made it clear that he’s not seeking benefits for only Hall of Famers, but for all former players.

Where this goes remains to be seen. But former players don’t really have much leverage other than to try to win the P.R. battle or, for the Hall of Famers, to not show up at the Hall of Fame enshrinement weekend. While Dickerson may be on board with that, it’s not clear whether other Hall of Famers are.

Lowest Week Two rating since MNF moved to ESPN

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 19, 2018

Plenty of factors are pointing to a resurgence of national interest in pro football. Some factors aren't.

Case in point: According to SportsBusiness Daily, the Week Two Monday Night Football game on ESPN generated the lowest rating since the package moved to the four-letter network in 2006.

The 8.2 rating reflects a six-percent drop from last year's 8.7 for Lions-Giants, the previous low.

The game wasn't spectacular, which surely was a huge factor. That's why people tune in; not to hear the announcers or to see Booger McFarland in a floating chair or to hear Khalil Mack say absolutely nothing of any value or significance into a microphone attached like a pledge pin on his uniform or to see at halftime a cheesy lip-synced black-and-white video that harkens back to the days when MTV actually played cheesy lip-synced black-and-white videos.

Then there's the fact that a cable audience always will be smaller than a broadcast audience. That's why Monday Night Football used to get better games when it was on ABC, and why NBC's Sunday Night Football gets better games now.

Some Hall of Famers named in boycott letter reportedly didn't know about it

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 19, 2018

That letter from Eric Dickerson and other Pro Football Hall of Famers threatening a boycott of future Hall of Fame enshrinement ceremonies carries one potentially important flaw: Not all of the Hall of Famers listed on the letter knew about it before it was sent.

Jim Trotter of NFL Network reports that some of the players listed in the letter “did not see the letter beforehand, nor did they know of the threat to boycott” the Hall of Fame enshrinement ceremonies. If this is true, the Hall of Famers who didn't authorize the letter should say so; indeed, they should want to say so. Otherwise, their names have been misappropriated by someone hoping to create the impression that there will be a mass boycott of Gold Jackets on the weekend when men wearing Gold Jackets are important aspects of the overall pomp and circumstance.

The letter has Eric Dickerson's name under “sincerely,” identifying Dickerson as the “Chairman” of the “Hall of Fame Board.” Listed below Dickerson's name are various “Board Members.”

MDS raised the possibility that the letter wasn't expressly endorsed by each name on it due to the fact that Carl Eller's name was misspelled. Also, the fact that Deion Sanders and Kurt Warner still collect sizable checks from the NFL for broadcasting services would tend to make them far less likely to undermine one of NFL Network's most important broadcasting weekends. If anything, any employee of NFL Network has a clear bias in favor of propping up Hall of Fame weekend and, in turn, neutralizing any threats to it.

Dickerson, who clearly supports the effort, would seem to be the key to understanding the context and the procedures used to develop the letter. Maybe some of the “Board Members” simply didn't attend the meeting at which the decision to send the letter was discussed.

Regardless, it appears that at least one Hall of Famer has realized the value of as many Hall of Famers showing up for Hall of Fame weekend as possible. It's a point that may have been crystallized by the Hall of Fame's unreasonable reaction to the decision of new Hall of Famer Terrell Owens to not attend this year's ceremonies.