

# Kiszla: How much longer can little Phillip Lindsay cover for Broncos' big offensive problems?

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
Sept. 20, 2018

It's no longer a question of if Phillip Lindsay is the Broncos' best offensive player, but when he will be elected mayor of Denver.

The Broncos could not be 2-0 without Lindsay, the mightiest mite in the NFL.

But, at 5-foot-8, is Lindsay big enough to carry Denver to the playoffs?

Nope.

At a salary of \$485,000, no NFL player is providing more bang for the buck than Lindsay, whose 178 yards rushing ranks third in the league.

But with quarterback Case Keenum and receiver Demaryius Thomas playing football that's meh at best, can Lindsay be counted on to cover for \$27 million of under-performing assets in the Denver huddle?

Nope.

Lindsay has stolen the hearts of his home town and dominated the narrative of the Broncos' undefeated start. Everybody loves Lindsay, including Baltimore Ravens coach John Harbaugh.

"You probably have to be surprised when any rookie (produces like Lindsay); it doesn't matter if they're a free agent or drafted highly," Harbaugh said Wednesday. "To put up the kind of production he's put up, it's pretty unusual. And very impressive."

Lindsay has been discovered. Don't be surprised if Harbaugh goes all Bill Belichick on the Broncos, doing everything in his power to take away Lindsay, while daring Denver to beat him with a quarterback struggling to find a rhythm in the passing attack.

It's far too early for the Broncos to panic. But it's not too early for us to ask: What's going on with Keenum and Thomas? They carry the two highest salary-cap hits on the Denver roster in 2018. And they haven't carried their weight.

At a cap hit of \$15 million, Keenum's quarterback rating is 28th in the league, no thanks to Thomas. D.T. stands for dropped throw. He drops anything you throw at him. At a salary cap hit of \$12 million, Thomas looks old at age 30.

The positive outlook: The Broncos are tied for first place in the AFC West, despite disappointing contributions from Keenum and Thomas, who account for more than 14 percent of their salary-cap allocation.

The reason for concern: The Broncos have yet to establish a reliable identity on offense. Can Keenum evolve into more than the game manager that his skill set suggests? Or do the Broncos need to acknowledge their limitations, settle for a conservative ground-and-pound attack that minimizes the chance of interceptions, while leaning on linebacker Von Miller and the defense to win games?

What offensive identity did coach Vance Joseph want Denver to establish?

"I wanted an offense that can obviously run the football and find completion plays for our quarterback on early downs," Joseph said. Translation: Physical football, with conservative throws and the ability to rule time of possession.

When Denver signed Keenum as a free agent, he was hailed as a major upgrade at quarterback. The early results have not been favorable. That's not an opinion. It's a fact.

A year ago, Trevor Siemian opened with victories over the Los Angeles Chargers and Dallas, completing 65 percent of his passes, with six touchdowns and two interceptions for a passer rating of 106.9, as the Broncos averaged 33 points per game.

Through two games, Keenum has completed 59.5 percent of his passes, with three touchdowns and four interceptions for a passing rating of 73.7, as the Broncos averaged 23.5 points per game.

Trying to rebound from his least productive season since becoming a full-time starter in 2012, Thomas is off to an even slower start this year. It's a small sample size, to be certain. But his catch percentage (52.4) and his yards per reception (7.4) indicate a troubling lack of chemistry with Keenum. Is it just me, or does Keenum seem to have more trust in Emmanuel Sanders and Jake Butt as passing targets?

Keenum and Thomas must play better for the Broncos' undefeated record to survive a trip to Baltimore's house of pain.

"They're big, tough and strong. Big, tough, strong," Keenum said, repeating attributes of the Ravens so nasty it can make a quarterback's knee ache. "It's an AFC North defense. I've played them a few times and I know very well how they operate. We've got our work cut out for us, especially on the road."

Lindsay is the best story in Denver sports.

But, for the Broncos to make the playoffs, there has to be more to this story.

# Broncos QB Case Keenum expected to return to practice Thursday as Denver's injuries start to mount

By Ryan O'Halloran  
Denver Post  
Sept. 20, 2018

The Broncos' good injury fortune lasted two weeks.

Reality checked in Wednesday when quarterback Case Keenum (knee), right tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion protocol), inside linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) and nickel cornerback Adam Jones (thigh) sat out the non-padded practice.

All four players were injured in the 20-19 win over Oakland and coach Vance Joseph is "very hopeful," they will be available for Sunday's game at Baltimore.

Spanning six practices in Weeks 1-2, the Broncos had no player miss an entire workout because of injury. At the top of the list is Keenum, who missed his first practice of training camp and the regular season. Joseph said Keenum, who woke up Monday feeling "a little sore" will practice Thursday.

"I could have practiced (Wednesday)," said Keenum said, who is expected to start at Baltimore on Sunday. "I wanted to practice, but they wouldn't let me. It was a good mental day and (then) come back and be ready to go (Thursday)."

Chad Kelly took the first-team practice snaps in Keenum's place.

"He looked fine," Joseph said of Kelly's practice. "He should be. He's our '2' and if he had to play, I have no worries."

Keenum carried three times in the second half against the Raiders and appeared to twist his knee during a seven-yard scramble on the game-winning drive. He was also sacked once and knocked down on three other drop-backs.

"I guess I need to slide a few more times than running around and bouncing around defenders," Keenum said. "But I want the first down. I want to score. I'm competitive that way."

He didn't say if a single play caused the injury.

"I couldn't tell you," he said. "I ran it a few times and (took) a few hits in the pocket. They came after us. A lot of guys were sore but it was a good sore after that game."

Asked if he had experience dealing with knee soreness, Keenum said: "Similar as far as dealing with being sore after games. I want to make sure I play 16, 20 weeks, not just a few weeks."

While in college at Houston in September 2010, Keenum tore his ACL.

Though there's good news for Keenum, the injury statuses of his teammates are more uncertain, including Veldheer's. Players must pass several steps in their recovery before they are cleared from the concussion protocol and even allowed to practice with a helmet.

"He's progressing," Joseph said of Veldheer. "It's only Wednesday. We'll see on Friday."

Billy Turner would start if Veldheer can't play. Turner was booked for one "bad" run play in two quarters of work.

"You look up and see Billy Turner is in the game and I don't think anybody even noticed; that's a good thing," Keenum said.

Jones' injury is most problematic. He listed now as having a thigh injury and was limited against Oakland with a hamstring issue. If Jones is inactive, rookie Isaac Yiadom would make his NFL debut as the fourth cornerback.

"I think he'll be ready," cornerback Chris Harris said of Yiadom. "He might have a chance to get out there and play with (Jones) being hurt so he has to be ready to go."

If Marshall can't play, rookie Josey Jewell would pick up his snaps.

# Baltimore won't dish on QB Lamar Jackson's role Sunday. The Broncos still have a plan.

By Kyle Fredrickson  
Denver Post  
Sept. 20, 2018

The Broncos are likely to see Lamar Jackson on the field Sunday in Baltimore.

It's anyone's guess at what position.

Quarterback, co-quarterback, running back or wide receiver are all possible in Ravens coach John Harbaugh's playbook. Jackson appeared on six snaps in a 11-point loss at Cincinnati last week, out wide and behind center, and also 30 snaps in mop-up duty late in the Ravens' 47-3 opening win against Buffalo. In total, Jackson completed one pass for 24 yards and rushed the ball nine times for 45 yards. He has yet to tally a reception.

But all signs point to the Ravens' continued willingness to experiment with the 2016 Heisman Trophy winner from Louisville.

"We've tried to be creative. It's hard to get two quarterbacks on the field," Harbaugh said. "It's not really the norm. We're working on that and trying to pioneer that a little bit and see what we can do to get our best players on the field. He's one of our best players."

Harbaugh also told local Baltimore media that Jackson's usage will be "week-to-week, game-plan to game-plan."

The Broncos (2-0) had no problem frustrating another mobile quarterback, Seattle's Russell Wilson, in a Week 1 victory when Denver pressure forced six sacks. The mechanics of stopping Jackson will be similar with priorities on blitz spacing and containment. But Jackson, the final pick of the NFL draft's first round last spring, provides an even more non-traditional test.

"(Jackson) is a good athlete, so you can't treat him like a wildcat player because he can throw the football," Joseph said. "Obviously, we're going to have a plan for him. I won't share that, but we have a plan for him. ... He's played about four to five snaps with (Ravens starting quarterback Joe Flacco) on the field. It's going to happen, and again, we have a plan for it. We can't be surprised by that and give up a cheap play. That's why they're going to do it, obviously, to catch you slipping and to make a big play on you. We can't allow it."

Joseph is smart to play his cards close on how to defend Jackson, although common sense points to one practice squad member possibly holding some role in preparing for the shifty runner — wide receiver Isaiah McKenzie — who clocked a 4.42-second 40-yard dash at the 2017 NFL Scouting combine. The Broncos' former punt return man told The Denver Post on Wednesday that he has yet to simulate Jackson in practice, but McKenzie said he will likely "run some of the plays (Jackson) runs and things like that" as the week progresses.

“We’re trying to cheat him as a receiver when he comes up,” cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. “They’re not really doing too much with him right now, but you can expect something has got to come up sooner or later. When you lose a divisional game like that at home, you’ve got to expect the best. I’m pretty sure he’s going to have some type of package in there. We’ve got to be ready for it.”

Jackson has yet to achieve a game-breaking movement through his first two NFL games. In fact, the Ravens’ offense has averaged 3.4 yards per play with him on the field as opposed to 5.1 when Jackson is on the sideline, according to pennlive.com. However, Baltimore remains steadfast in its commitment to showcasing Jackson’s true talents.

“I think he’s done a great job,” Harbaugh said. “I think he’s adapted to it well. Obviously, like anybody else, he wants to earn more and more playing time. And, that’s how it works — play well and you get more playing time.”

# Broncos Four Downs: Avoiding negative-yardage plays helping offense

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

Sept. 20, 2018

**FIRST DOWN:** Avoiding negative plays

A big reason why the Broncos are averaging 427.5 yards per game (fourth in the NFL) is their ability to avoid minus-yardage plays and produce explosive plays.

The Broncos have allowed only two sacks (tied for second fewest), which keeps them out of long-yardage situations, and their six negative plays are tied for the league's fewest with Arizona, Detroit and Tennessee.

On the flip side, the Broncos' 15 plays of at least 20 yards lead the NFL, as do their 14 completions of at least 20 yards.

Evidence of staying on schedule is the Broncos' third down work. Against Oakland, the Broncos were 8 of 16, but seven of those plays required only three or fewer yards (they converted six).

Baltimore's defense has forced 15 negative plays during its 1-1 start.

**SECOND DOWN:** Mosley potentially big loss

During the preseason, the Ravens had rookie Kenny Young compete with third-year veteran Patrick Onwuasor for the starting inside linebacker spot alongside C.J. Mosley.

Onwuasor won the job, but he and Young could start against Denver because Mosley (bone bruise on knee) may not play after being limited to three snaps against Cincinnati.

Young, a fourth-round pick from UCLA, is second on the team with 11 tackles and also has three quarterback hits.

"He's a guy that's a really good processor after the ball is snapped and that's not easy," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said on Wednesday. "You kind of worry about that with young defensive players. Are they going to be able to process the defense first and understand what their assignment is? And then once the ball is snapped, make the right reaction? He does a good job of that and, when he doesn't, he plays fast and makes tackles."

The Broncos targeted rookie outside linebacker Shaquem Griffin in the win over Seattle and tight end Jake Butt had success down the middle of the field against Oakland. Expect them to challenge Young.

**THIRD DOWN:** Run games in opposite states

Fueled by rookies Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman, the Broncos are second in the NFL in rushing (157 yards per game) and fourth in yards per attempt (5.2).

The Ravens' run game has yet to fire, which is a good sign for the Broncos, who have allowed only 3.6 yards per carry.

The Ravens' 3.3-yard rushing average is 30th in the league. Kenneth Dixon (quad) is on injured reserve, leaving the duties to Buck Allen and Alex Collins.

"We need to pop some (long) runs," Harbaugh said. "That's the biggest issue. When you hit some long runs, that average goes to where you want it to be. ... We're not in any way pleased with the numbers. We're very determined to run the ball well because we think it fits our offense and it's something that opens everything else up."

FOURTH DOWN: Right call at right time

The Broncos unveiled the "Wildcat" formation for one play against Oakland. Lindsay took the shotgun snap, faked a hand-off to Freeman and ran left.

Tight end Matt LaCosse, who lined up on the right side, moved laterally along the line of scrimmage to serve as Lindsay's lead blocker.

Problem was, two Raiders — linebacker Tahir Whitehead and safety Erik Harris — had the play read well.

"They had the best look for that play," LaCosse said.

Since Whitehead was identified as the "first threat," (closest to the football), LaCosse tried to block him. That allowed Harris to stop Lindsay for a one-yard loss.

"If (Whitehead) isn't scraping and it's just 25 (Harris) out there, I'm blocking him and Phillip's in the end zone," LaCosse said.

# **NFL Network's Shaun O'Hara predicts Von Miller will break Michael Strahan's single-season sack record this year**

By STAFF

Denver Post

Sept. 20, 2018

NFL Network analyst Shaun O'Hara made a bold prediction on "Hot Take Tuesday" that Broncos all-pro linebacker Von Miller will break Michael Strahan's single-season sack record.

Miller currently has four sacks this season and is on pace to record 32. Strahan set the current record with 22.5 sacks during the 2001 season.

Miller has a favorable schedule to accomplish this feat as he could face three rookie quarterbacks before it is all said and done. The New York Jets and quarterback Sam Darnold, Arizona Cardinals with Josh Rosen and then the Cleveland Browns in Week 15 with Baker Mayfield.

# Keenum on sore knee: "I guess I need to slide a few more times"

By Mike Klis

9 News

Sept. 20, 2018

This is perfect for the Broncos.

Their quarterback Case Keenum has another challenge to overcome. This time it's knee soreness from the game Sunday against the Oakland Raiders that held him out of practice Wednesday. Keenum scrambled three times in the fourth quarter Sunday and he got up slowly after his 7-yard scramble with about a minute to play.

"Yeah, I guess I need to slide a few more times instead trying to go run and bounce around off of defenders," Keenum said. "But I want to get a first down, I want to score. I'm competitive in that way."

The knee soreness is considered mild -- he is expected to practice Thursday and play Sunday at Baltimore against the Ravens.

"Woke up on Monday a little sore," he said. "I could've practiced today, I wanted to practice, but they wouldn't let me. So, a good mental day."

The Broncos will need Keenum for their first road game Sunday against the Baltimore Ravens, especially in the fourth quarter.

There is a correlation between all the knocks he took early in his career and his ability to come through in the fourth quarter when all seemed lost in the Broncos' first two wins.

"I always see the tough times, the obstacles, I would say, I see them as an opportunity to overcome," Keenum said. "I've had to look at that because I have had obstacles and have had adversity. But to have the ball in the fourth quarter, in your hands, with a chance to win a game — that happened a lot early in my career and it didn't happen. It's fun when it does and I cherish it when it happens. Those are exciting games to win."

# Floyd Little on Dickerson letter: Former players need help but Hall of Fame boycott not the answer

By Mike Klis

9 News

Sept. 20, 2018

Floyd Little has mixed feelings about the Eric Dickerson letter.

Anything that raises awareness toward the financial and medical plight of former NFL players – not just Hall of Famers, as Dickerson initially campaigned for, but all former players, especially those who played before 1993 – is good.

“But I don’t agree with boycotting the Hall of Fame,” said Little, the former Broncos’ running back great who was elected into the Pro Football Hall of Fame Class of 2010. “The Hall of Fame is its own entity. Boycotting the Hall of Fame doesn’t solve anything. It’s the NFL that should help out the former players. It’s not the Hall of Fame’s fault. The Hall has been very, very good to me.”

How good has the Hall of Fame been to the player who was nicknamed “The Franchise” during his playing days?

“I’ve made more money in the eight years I’ve been in the Hall of Fame than I did as a Bronco,” said Little, who has drawn an income through appearances and signings that now include, “HOF” after his signature.

Little, 76 and now living in Las Vegas, played for the Broncos for nine years from 1967-75. He made a \$26,000 salary his first season, \$28,000 in year two and \$29,000 in year three. His top salary was \$76,000 in his final season of 1975.

More significantly, Little’s NFL pension pays him \$2,600 a month. He offers this not for his own cause, but to illustrate what so many players from his era are trying to get by on.

“I’m fine,” Little said. “I’ve taken care of myself. Don’t drink, don’t smoke. Work out. Cut out sugar, salt and red meat. But I know a lot of guys who are having a tough time because of their health.”

Dickerson recently published a letter with signatures of several Hall of Famers (none from the Broncos) stating an intention to boycott the annual Hall of Fame ceremony if Hall of Fame players didn’t receive medical benefits and pay for life. In a TMZ interview, Dickerson said \$300,000 a year was a fair salary for Hall of Famers.

Gary Zimmerman, another Broncos Hall of Famer, didn’t want to be quoted because, well, that’s how Zim rolls. He did indicate, however, that pre-1993 players should be in the front of the line of benefits help.

The NFL and NFL Players Association made significant advances in pension and medical benefits for players starting with the 1993 season that also brought in unrestricted free agency and the salary cap.

“(The Dickerson letter) has some merit,” Little said. “The dollars that are being made today are incredible. It’s about the guys that really fought and made the game what it is and there are no benefits for a lot of guys. A lot of Hall of Famers are having financial difficulties.

“I just believe some way, somehow with the dollars being made in the league today that they should look out – maybe even if it’s just health for these guys.

“It’s good that they’re raising awareness. Stating they won’t attend the Hall of Fame – that’s raising awareness that something needs to be done.”

It’s just the proposed solution, Little said, that needs adjusting.

“Raising awareness is fine,” he said. “But I would never not go to the Hall of Fame. I waited 35 years to get in the Hall of Fame and now I’m not supposed to go? I’ll never miss one.”

# How Broncos learned the 'how-tos' of game-winning drives

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

Sept. 20, 2018

The Denver Broncos officially won their second game of the season on Sunday, when Brandon McManus' 36-yard field goal went inside the right upright for a 20-19 victory over the Oakland Raiders.

It also was the proof of lessons learned the Friday before and the Friday before that. And a little in the spring, a tad in the summer.

Now every team has some version of reviewing end-game scenarios, but these Broncos are seeing it up close after two last-minute wins, won by a combined four points.

"Every Friday we have 'Football 101' and basically put our team in one big room and we talk through situational football," Joseph said this week. "Like two-minute, and four-minute and different penalties and those things -- those guys were very aware that we didn't have any timeouts and they played it smart."

Down two points to the Raiders, with no timeouts, the Broncos were at their own 20-yard line. Here's how the last 1:58 went down:

First-and-10 at Denver 20, 1:58 to play.

Quarterback Case Keenum, rolling left and looking downfield, was nearly sacked by Raiders defensive end Arden Key as he tossed the ball away. Broncos left tackle Garrett Bolles was flagged for holding.

"We were all on the same page right there," Keenum said. "... We're in great shape because all we need is a field goal. We had a lot of time. ... Just being ready for the situation at hand."

First-and-20 at Denver 10, 1:51 to play.

Raiders cornerback Rashaan Melvin knocked the ball away from Demaryius Thomas on what would have been a short completion.

Second-and-20 at Denver 10, 1:47 to play.

Keenum found Emmanuel Sanders for a 21-yard gain on the right sideline, in front of Leon Hall. Sanders immediately popped up and ran ball back to the official standing on the right hashmark so that he could place the ball immediately.

"That is all coaching. I think Coach has done a great job of giving us a lot of two-minute examples, so when I caught the ball, I got up and gave it right back," Sanders said. "... That is the stuff that we preach all the time in our room."

Joseph offered his take.

"We have no timeouts," the coach said. "So, if [Sanders] throws it [to the official] outside, that guy throws to the hash and that's five seconds."

First-and-10 at Denver 31, 1:25 to play.

Keenum overthrew Thomas on right sideline.

Second-and-10 at Denver 31, 1:21 to play.

Keenum found tight end Jake Butt, who cut inside Raiders linebacker Tahir Whitehead for a 14-yard gain before he was tackled in bounds.

"Calm, no worries, everybody, just business as usual," Butt said. " ... [Joseph] has done a hell of a job at putting us in bunches of different situations: down six, down three, down two. We've been in this situation like this before, so everybody was calm."

First-and-10 at Denver 45, 0:58 to play.

Keenum threw too high for Courtland Sutton to the right, but Sutton tipped the ball up in the air and Gareon Conley was close to a diving catch on the deflection. The Raiders bobbled an assignment on a zone blitz and, if Keenum had more time, Sanders was free behind Conley with no other defenders in the area.

Second-and-10 at Denver 45, 0:54 to play.

Keenum didn't have a throw that he liked, so he pulled the ball down for a 7-yard scramble; he gambled a bit, as he didn't get out of bounds and got down just before being hit by Whitehead.

"I did not think I could get out of bounds at that point," Keenum said. "I know we were close to it. I knew with our kicker, any yards that we could get near midfield, especially here at elevation, makes a big difference."

Third-and-3 at Oakland 48, 0:26 to play.

Keenum found tight end Jeff Heurman on the right sideline, and Heurman got out of bounds as he passed the down marker. The Broncos' receivers on the left side of the formation appeared to have some confusion about the play before the snap, but Keenum looked to Heurman the whole way.

First-and-10 at Oakland 44, 0:22 to play.

Thomas dropped what would have been an easy completion to put the Broncos in field goal range. It was his third dropped pass of the game.

Second-and-10 at Oakland 44, 0:18 to play.

With Sanders and Tim Patrick on the left side of the formation, Keenum hit Patrick, who cut back toward the middle of the field as he evaded Conley and then turned back to the sideline. As Sanders waved for him to get to the sideline, Patrick stepped out of an attempted tackle by Leon Hall to get out of bounds for a 26-yard gain.

"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."

First-and-10 at Oakland 18, 0:08 to play.

McManus kicked a 36-yard field goal.

"Our offense didn't flinch," Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "They had time. Even with no timeouts, we knew if we got the ball back for them with two minutes that was enough for Case. They knew that situation, and we got the win."

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

By Nicki Jhabvala  
The Athletic  
Sept. 20, 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."

# Tyler Polumbus: Film review shows how Broncos eked out win against Raiders

By Tyler Polumbus  
The Athletic  
Sept. 20, 2018

The Denver Broncos eked out a 20-19 victory over Oakland to move to 2-0 on the season and prove they're capable of handling adversity in back-to-back matchups.

In Week 1 against the Seattle Seahawks, quarterback Case Keenum tossed three interceptions, yet Denver overcame the turnovers for the win.

In Week 2, the Broncos overcame their largest second-half deficit (12 points) since Oct. 15, 2012, against the Chargers.

Offensively it was a tale of two halves against the Raiders. In the first, the Broncos were held to only three first downs. But in the second, the offense found life with undrafted rookie Phillip Lindsay leading the charge. He finished with 111 yards from scrimmage, becoming the first undrafted rookie in league history to have 100 yards or more from scrimmage in each of his first two games.

Defensively the Broncos did not fare much better in the first two quarters. Raiders quarterback Derek Carr completed 18 of his 19 passes and the Broncos rarely challenged Oakland's wide receivers at the line of scrimmage. The defensive backs played off the ball and allowed the Raiders to connect for the entire first half on short, uncontested routes.

So how did the Broncos close the 12-0 halftime deficit? Let's dive into the film:

The O-line gave Keenum time

Through two weeks of play the Broncos' offensive line is easily the most improved group on the team. They have plowed the way for 314 yards on the ground in two games and they have done a great job of giving Keenum time to find his open receivers.

Take the first play of the second half as an example. The Broncos came out in heavy personnel with two tight ends to make Oakland think they are trying to run the ball. Offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave called a six-man play-action protection and the offensive line was able to come off the ball with a run sell. They got double-teams on two of the four pass rushers.

The run sell forced all three Raider linebackers to step up toward the line of scrimmage and vacate an empty area behind them. The offensive line, along with tight end Jake Butt, did a great job of staying on the rushers to give Keenum more than five seconds to survey the field and find a wide open Emmanuel Sanders, who sat in the soft spot that the Raiders' linebackers vacated.

Phillip. Lindsay.

This isn't your average 5-foot-8,190-pound running back. Some backs go down if you graze their shoe string. Others like Lindsay don't go down until the second or third attempted tackle.

This 11-yard run by Lindsay in the third quarter is a weak side one-back run, meaning the offensive line is out-leveraged by their linebackers and does not get to take advantage of angles like it can when a fullback is in the game. The linemen have to chase their out-leveraged linebackers almost 5 yards before making contact.

Watch the way Lindsay stretches the field, understanding that he has to pull the linebackers with him and then cut back behind his O-line because they will be blocking the linebackers' backside shoulder.

Lindsay goes untouched for the first 4 yards of the run, shakes off the first tackler and then explodes into a mob of Raider defenders to gain an extra yard or 2 for a total of 11. This is a beautiful run by everyone on the field.

Denver's defense tightened up in the fourth quarter

For much of the game, the Broncos allowed Raiders running back Marshawn Lynch to run free. On the back end the Broncos' secondary played very soft against Oakland's wideouts and effectively handed Carr a completion percentage of 90.6 percent, the fourth-best single-game percentage in league history.

Things changed in the fourth quarter.

Denver's run defense became stout and the defensive backs began to press wide receivers at the line of scrimmage. This is how you defend a run by Lynch:

This play, from the third quarter, is made by two players: nose tackle Domata Peko and defensive end Zach Kerr. Peko is responsible for forcing the ball to go inside of him and he does a great job of moving nearly two gaps over the outside shoulder of right guard Gabe Jackson without losing ground. Kerr is the real hero of this play though. He begins on the left shoulder of left guard Kelechi Osemele, reads the play moving to his left and beats Osemele over the top.

To defend a hard running back like Lynch, you must maintain gap integrity so that the running back is forced to run through a small window and then gang tackle him. That is exactly what the Broncos' defense did on this well-executed play.

Altitude and a high tempo

I have long argued the Broncos should play with a higher tempo at home to force opposing teams to feel the altitude. Musgrave's offense can't take credit for the pressure change, but the Broncos are playing with speed and they are wearing teams out.

I am a Denver native so I've never been affected by the altitude. But having played games at the Broncos' stadium both as a member of the team and as an opponent I can tell you that when I was wearing an away uniform my teammates would panic about the thin air. It was a constant battle to see who could get to the oxygen tank first and it was a mental struggle for my teammates who were not accustomed to playing at altitude.

Watch what happens during the Broncos' 2-minute drive to win the game. Raiders defensive end and team captain Bruce Irvin (number 51) couldn't muster up enough energy to put out something that even resembles a pass rush after dealing with the Broncos' fast pace.

It may be a lack of effort on Irvin's part, but it was clear the Broncos were better prepared in their conditioning as the Raiders' pass rush nearly fell off the map at the end of the game.

Why the Broncos won ...

It was not easy, nor was it pretty, but the Broncos outlasted their inferior opponent. Broncos fans might not feel great about barely sneaking out this win, but the team gained plenty of confidence by handling the slow start. It got hit in the face with adversity and it stepped up when it mattered most. The performances from talented young players Lindsay, Royce Freeman, Courtland Sutton and Tim Patrick were key to the win, but so was the play of veterans Peko, Sanders and Von Miller.

# Q&A: Terrell Davis on rookie Phillip Lindsay, the Broncos' RBs room and owner Pat Bowlen

By Nick Jhabvala  
The Athletic  
Sept. 20, 2018

Phillip Lindsay was only a year old when Terrell Davis was a sixth-round rookie trying to make it onto the Broncos' roster. He was only 4 when Davis helped the Broncos' to their first Super Bowl victory and earned the game's MVP honors, and he was likely about to enter kindergarten when Davis recorded 2,008 rushing yards in a season and picked up his second Super Bowl ring.

The kid certainly wasn't old enough to understand the magnitude of Davis' torn ACL months later.

But Lindsay, an Aurora native born into a football family, is among a small group of players to compete at every level in Colorado. He knows his Broncos history and knows Davis, the franchise's all-time rushing leader and Hall of Famer.

"I read his book and everything," Lindsay said. "I know about Terrell Davis when he was young and went to college. My story is like his as well, how he got on the team. The book is an interesting book. That's probably one of the first times I've read a book and finished the whole book."

When Lindsay made the Broncos' active roster as an undrafted free agent, one of the first questions he asked was to the Broncos' executive vice president of public and community relations, Patrick Smyth. After wearing No. 2 throughout training camp and preseason, Lindsay had to pick a new number, so he asked Smyth if he could relay a message to Davis, to see if he would be OK with Lindsay wearing his No. 30.

Smyth did, and Davis immediately responded asking for the kid's number. A conversation ensued and since their talk on Sept. 3, Davis has been one of Lindsay's biggest supporters.

Davis, now an analyst for NFL Network, spoke to The Athletic this week about Lindsay, about what he looks for in running backs today, about his impression of the Broncos' running backs room as a whole, and about Pat Bowlen, the Broncos' long-time owner who was selected as a contributor finalist for the Hall of Fame.

Were you surprised Lindsay reached out to you for permission to wear No. 30?

I was a little bit surprised. I was surprised in a good way though because nowadays you got some of these young men and maybe they don't know the history, maybe they don't know what the proper etiquette is or whatever. For him to reach out to me to ask to wear the number was refreshing. And it told me a lot about him as a person in doing that.

So when he reached out I called him and we talked. He went on to explain how he grew up a Broncos fan and read my book and kind of what it meant to him to play for Denver and then to wear that jersey.

I thought it was appropriate for a number of reasons. Obviously No. 1, it's easy to give to somebody who's an underdog, for me. That just makes sense. And I had already heard about him and watched him through the OTAs and all the way through the offseason and then in preseason.

It's kind of cool actually. I'm like, "Hey, man, rock it." To me, a number doesn't make me as a person or anything like that.

I know safety David Bruton wore No. 30 for his seven years in Denver. Is it different for you seeing another running back wear it though?

No. No, it's not. To your point, I had already seen it out there so it wasn't like the first time I saw it out there. And even though he's a running back, he's a different-looking running back. He's a smaller back. I don't know, it doesn't feel like it's my 30 out there. I mean, it's my 30 but it's his 30. He's a different kind of back. He's a smaller back, a little scatback. I think it's cool to see the 30 getting some more love.

You mentioned you followed him throughout OTAs and camp. Before talking to him earlier this month, did you know much about his college career at the University of Colorado?

I didn't initially. But then when I would call down there (to the Broncos) just to kind of see what was going on, they talked about him so of course I checked him out and looked at his background. I think he had back-to-back 1,000-yard season at CU and it was a pretty impressive résumé. You start to ask the question, "So, why wasn't he drafted? Why wasn't this kid that was pretty productive not drafted?"

I'm sure he was asking the same question.

He wasn't even invited to the combine.

Right. I feel his pain. I understand what he went through. But that's cool because we have some things in common. A young man not drafted, not going to the combine, having to come in and work his tail off to be noticed and not only be noticed but become really good. Week 1 he didn't start but got a lot of touches and was effective. So his ascension was pretty remarkable. I can relate to that.

But as a person talking to him, he just seems to be humble but confident at the same time. For you to make the call to say, "I want to wear 30," that's some big shoes. You realize what you're asking for. To me, that spoke a lot about his confidence and where he believes he can take this thing. I'm all for it, brother. You want to rock it? Go for it. I'm with it.

What did you see from Lindsay in the Broncos' first two wins?

The first two weeks have been as advertised. He's been really good. What's cool about it is you know he's going to get better. And he's already showing you that he's not afraid of the spotlight, he's not afraid of being in that position and that's half the battle. You have to believe that you belong. He certainly believes that he can make plays, he has very nice hands, he can catch the ball, he can line up as a wide receiver, he can play on special teams, he's an offensive weapon, and I'm excited about the growth. I'm excited about watching his journey and seeing how this thing all plays out. I already envision in my mind there will be a day where it's probably six, seven, eight years from now that I'm meeting him on the field because the torch is being passed because he's breaking my rushing yards record.

When you watch running backs today, what do you look for?

The first thing you see from a back is what's special about him. What makes him different from other backs? That's what I'm always looking for. How do you separate what you do from what everybody else can do? Are you just a guy? Or do you have qualities where you're hard to tackle, you can make people miss in space, you're elusive, you got great instincts? What is it that you bring to the table? Once you see it, you're like, "OK, that guy's special." Like, Le'Veon Bell. He's got unique qualities. Most backs don't have what he has.

And the one thing that cannot be taught as a running back is you can't teach them instincts. You can't teach a person to be able to run the ball. You can tell them landmarks — "This is where you're supposed to run, this is where you're not supposed to run." But you pretty much let them go. You say, "Hey, the play is designed to go here, but if it's not there you have to make something happen." So far, what I've seen, and it's been consistent, is (Lindsay) has the ability. He's very instinctual, which you love that. He's a football player. He plays bigger than his size, which is always a great trait for a back, when you run hard and you run like you're 6 feet, 220 pounds and you're only 5-7.

And then obviously it's the moment. The practices are cool, but if I put you in a game am I getting the same person that I saw in practice? Does it translate to the game? The other thing I look for too, and it's rare with these backs now, is stamina. They come out every play. I'm watching backs and I'm like, "OK, you had a nice run. Stay in the game." When we were playing, I never came out of the game. I don't care if it was a pass, long run, whatever it was, I think I was playing 90 percent of the snaps, if not 100 percent of the snaps of some games.

But I'm a fan of backs. I like watching them. I really do enjoy it because it's an art.

What do you think of the Broncos' other backs, Royce Freeman and Devontae Booker?

For Devontae, either he's blooming late or there's something that's just not clicking with him right now. Just watching him over the last two years and I know he's got it because I saw it when he was at college. He's got something. But unfortunately he hasn't been able to put it together yet. He had some fumble issues, he had some health issues. So I'm just still waiting to see if we're going to ever see what I thought we would.

Royce has shown that he can be an explosive back. I think they got a really good corps of running backs, albeit young. They're exciting and I think as the season goes along and they start to use them and get a little bit more rhythm and comfort in the offense and get everything clicking, that that's going to be a really good unit for them.

What is realistic expectation for Lindsay in Year 1?

Could he be a 700-yard receiver and 800-, 900-yard running back? I don't know that because I don't know how Denver is going to use him. He's displayed he can be a 100-scrimmage-yard back. He's done it twice already. He's a back you can use in so many different ways. I expect him to get some volume in terms of touches. I expect him to really be part of the game plan. Maybe there are some weeks where he's not; Vance Joseph talked about how they have three backs they can kind of rotate in and will probably use the three backs based off the matchups they see. But I certainly expect him to be a back that is going to contribute on a weekly basis. What does that mean? I don't know.

Pat Bowlen — What was your reaction when he was selected as a contributor finalist for the Hall of Fame?

Oh man, I was happy. Happy because really before I got in, I was pushing for Pat to get in. So now, he's in. I know this is one step closer. But he's in. There's no way the committee is not going to push him through. And I'm excited for the Bowlen family. I'm excited for him just knowing him for so long and knowing what he's meant not only to the Broncos, but Denver, the state of Colorado, Broncos fans everywhere, what he's done for the NFL Network, what he's done for the NFL, what he's done for me personally, as an owner.

When you know somebody like Pat and you know what he's done for you and how he's helped you be successful, helped the team be successful, has given the organization everything that he can possibly give us to be the best that we can be, and then would take no credit for it, it's fitting that now it's time for him to get the credit that he deserves. Even though he doesn't want it and never wanted it, it's only fitting. This is great for Broncos Country. This is where it should be.

The winning is stupid on so many levels. What he's done — and this is over decades with how consistent it's been there — not only winning on the field, but you talk about in the building, top to bottom first-class, never been a place where people had to worry about the players in Denver or the franchise. It's just been a class act for so many years and I'm excited. Unfortunately, not knowing his condition right now, I don't know if he'll be there to see this. But I certainly hope he, in some way, that he understands what's happening at this point.

If he's inducted next year, will you be there for the ceremony?

Oh yeah. I'll be in Canton. Absolutely.

# NFL Power Rankings: Power moves are paying off for Rams

By Lindsay Jones  
The Athletic  
Sept. 20, 2018

With blockbuster move after blockbuster move, the Los Angeles Rams won the offseason, but splashy deals don't always immediately translate into wins. But so far the plan to load up on star power is working for the Rams, who have landed atop The Athletic's NFL Power Rankings after Week 2.

The Rams, one of seven 2-0 teams, have rolled in their two wins, including the most lopsided game of last weekend, a 34-0 win against division rival Arizona. The Rams can further cement themselves as the league's top team in the first quarter of the season with a win against the Chargers — their new crosstown rival.

The Rams split first-place votes with the Jacksonville Jaguars, who won over skeptics after thoroughly beating the New England Patriots last week, thanks to a stunning performance by quarterback Blake Bortles in outdueling Tom Brady.

## 32. Buffalo Bills (0-2)

This is a team so bad that a player quit at halftime of last week's loss to the Chargers. We all saw the joyous videos last year of Bills fans relishing in the fact that the playoff drought had finally been broken. Yeah, we suggest fans keep watching those happy videos on repeat, because they're certainly not going to want to watch what's on their screens this season. Buffalo deserves this bottom spot.

Word On The Beat: Inept. (—Matt Fairburn)

## 31. Arizona Cardinals (0-2)

The Cardinals have the NFL's worst offense, with just one score (a 2-yard run by David Johnson) in two games. How soon before first-year head coach Steve Wilks switches quarterbacks from Sam Bradford to first-round pick Josh Rosen?

Word On The Beat: Impotent. (—Scott Bordow)

## 30. New York Giants (0-2)

So much for the Giants' hopes that a change in head coach (to Pat Shurmur), the addition of a stud running back (No. 2 overall pick Saquon Barkley) and a new contract for the star receiver (Odell Beckham Jr.) would jump start the offense. The Giants are still struggling to protect Eli Manning, and the offense looks as ugly as it did in 2017.

Word On The Beat: Déjà Vu. (—Dan Duggan)

## 29. Detroit Lions (0-2)

What a disaster of a start for new head coach Matt Patricia, whose Lions rank last in run defense and 30th in rushing offense after two weeks. Sure the NFL might be a passing league, but the Lions are losing in the trenches.

Word On The Beat: Exasperating. (—Chris Burke)

28. Oakland Raiders (0-2)

The Raiders blew two second-half leads in the span of six days and have yet to figure out how to even replace part of Khalil Mack's pass-rush production. The (black and) silver lining for the Raiders is that quarterback Derek Carr looked much better in Week 2.

Word On The Beat: Barf. (—Vic Tafur)

27. Cleveland Browns (0-1-1)

The Browns are a competent kicker away from 2-0, and while moral victories don't count in the NFL, maybe they do in Cleveland.

Word On The Beat: Improving. (—Zac Jackson)

26. Seattle Seahawks (0-2)

These Seahawks have so many issues, from long-standing ones like the inability to protect Russell Wilson or create a running game, to new ones, like lingering injuries to two starting linebackers (Bobby Wagner and KJ Wright) and Wilson's favorite receiver, Doug Baldwin. At least the Seahawks get to finally return home this week.

Word On The Beat: Troubled. (—Michael-Shawn Dugar)

25. Houston Texans (0-2)

What's more concerning for the 0-2 Texans — that quarterback Deshaun Watson and the passing game have struggled in his return from last year's ACL injury, or that JJ Watt, Jadeveon Clowney and Whitney Mercilus have combined for zero sacks?

Word On The Beat: Stumbling. (—Aaron Reiss)

24. New York Jets (1-1)

Welcome to the Sam Darnold rookie roller coaster. The Jets have reason to be optimistic about their young star — not to mention their defense — but there will be struggles, as indicated by Darnold's 1:1 touchdown to interception ratio.

Word On The Beat: Developing. (—Connor Hughes)

23. Indianapolis Colts (1-1)

Andrew Luck is healthy, first-round pick guard Quenton Nelson is as good as advertised and the Colts' defense has a breakout star in linebacker Darius Leonard. The Colts aren't ready to crack the top half of the power rankings yet, but they might be soon.

Word On The Beat: Fluid. (—Stephen Holder)

22. Tennessee Titans (1-1)

The Titans had no business winning a division game Sunday, down to their fourth and fifth offensive tackles and with Blaine Gabbert starting at quarterback in place of Marcus Mariota. But somehow the Titans found a way, creatively and stubbornly.

Word On The Beat: Resilient. (—Travis Haney)

#### 21. Washington Redskins (1-1)

Washington's drop-off between its Week 1 blowout road win over the Cardinals to its home loss to Indianapolis in Week 2 was inexplicable, and a bad sign for head coach Jay Gruden, whose seat might grow plenty warm if the Alex Smith-led offense can't pull it together quickly.

Word On The Beat: Vexing. (—Tarik El-Bashir)

#### 20. Dallas Cowboys (1-1)

The Cowboys quieted some critics by beating the Giants Sunday night, but let's not get too excited about Dallas' offense after that game. Quarterback Dak Prescott has just 330 total passing yards in two weeks — and 64 of that came in one throw in Week 2.

Word On The Beat: .500 (—Calvin Watkins)

#### 19. San Francisco 49ers (1-1)

It's been an uneven start for the 49ers, though they seem to have discovered some rushing game magic with Matt Breida, who was thrust into the starting lineup in August. We're going to learn a lot about the 49ers' defense this week, however, when they play at red-hot Kansas City.

Word On The Beat: Inconclusive. (—David Lombardi)

#### 18. Baltimore Ravens (1-1)

Few teams looked as different from Week 1 to Week 2 as the Ravens, who, after trouncing the hapless Bills in Week 1, crashed down to Earth in a loss to the division rival Bengals.

Word On The Beat: Enigmatic. (—Jeff Zrebiec)

#### 17. Chicago Bears (1-1)

The Bears lead the NFL in sacks, with 10 in two weeks (putting them on pace for 80 sacks this season) and legitimately look like they have one of the best defenses in the league. But the offense is still a work in progress under first-year head coach Matt Nagy and quarterback Mitchell Trubisky.

Word On The Beat: Mack Attack. (—Kevin Fishbain)

#### 16. Pittsburgh Steelers (0-1-1)

The good news for the Steelers this week is that they weren't answering questions about the absence of Le'Veon Bell. Instead they're facing questions about if star receiver Antonio Brown is unhappy, and if a defense that got torched by the Chiefs last week can hold up.

Word On The Beat: Drama. (—Mark Kaboly)

#### 15. Miami Dolphins (2-0)

The Dolphins have to be enjoying their spot alone atop the AFC East rankings, and they've earned it. Quarterback Ryan Tannehill's productive return after a lengthy recovery from a knee injury is one of the underrated stories of the season so far.

Word On The Beat: Intriguing. (—Chris Perkins)

#### 14. Carolina Panthers (1-1)

The good news for quarterback Cam Newton is his completion percentage is way up — it's at 69 percent, 10 percent above his career average — but the Panthers' offense hardly looks explosive under coordinator Norv Turner.

Word On The Beat: Checkdowns. (—Joe Person)

#### 13. New Orleans Saints (1-1)

The Saints are lucky to be 1-1, and that's a disappointing start for a team that was a Minnesota Miracle away from the NFC championship game last year. And here's a surprising stat after two weeks: The Saints are last in rushing.

Word On The Beat: Unexpected. (—Larry Holder)

#### 11. **\*\*TIE\*\*** Denver Broncos (2-0)

The Broncos are 2-0 after two fourth-quarter comebacks at home, and have a breakout star in undrafted rookie running back Phillip Lindsay. Bigger tests loom, starting with a road trip to Baltimore, and we'll learn quickly if the Broncos are for real.

Word On The Beat: Gritty. (—Nicki Jhabvala)

#### 11. **\*\*TIE\*\*** Los Angeles Chargers (1-1)

Not sure how much we can take away from the Chargers' Week 2 win at Buffalo (though they deserve bonus points for dominating so much in the first half that an opposing player, cornerback Vontae Davis, quit at halftime rather than return for more). A huge test, both on the field and in the Los Angeles market, comes Sunday against their crosstown rival Rams.

Word On The Beat: Murky. (—Sam Fortier)

#### 10. Cincinnati Bengals (2-0)

The Bengals might be one of the more surprising 2-0 teams, but they also appear to be one of the most balanced teams in the NFL. The running game will be something to watch, however, with Joe Mixon sidelined for the next couple of weeks.

Word On The Beat: Resurgent. (—Jay Morrison)

#### 9. Atlanta Falcons (1-1)

It feels like the Falcons could so easily be 2-0 or 0-2, and will continue to be a middle-of-the-pack team until offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian and quarterback Matt Ryan can get their red-zone issues solved.

Word On The Beat: ͇(ツ)͇ (—Jason Butt)

#### 8. Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2-0)

Who could have seen the Buccaneers' 2-0 start coming? Perhaps only Ryan Fitzpatrick, who has made his claim to keep the starting quarterback job even after Jameis Winston returns from suspension in Week 4.

Word on The Beat: Surprising. (—Greg Auman)

#### 7. Philadelphia Eagles (1-1)

This ranking is based off two weeks with Nick Foles at quarterback — and what an uneven two weeks it was for the Super Bowl MVP. But future rankings will be determined by the Eagles' play with Carson Wentz, and that should make Philly fans feel better after last week's loss in Tampa.

Word On The Beat: Resurrection. (—Bo Wulf)

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

The Packers are one very questionable roughing the passer penalty away from 2-0, and they're one of the most dangerous teams in the league .... as long as Aaron Rodgers' knee holds up, that is.

Word On The Beat: As-Advertised. (—Michael Cohen)

#### 5. New England Patriots (1-1)

We should all know by now not to panic about the Patriots after a September slip up. This year, that hiccup happened in Jacksonville, against one of the top teams in the league. But still, the Patriots seem concerned enough about their receiving corps that they traded for troubled receiver Josh Gordon to see if he can help give Tom Brady a downfield threat.

Word On The Beat: Fine. (—Jeff Howe)

#### 4. Minnesota Vikings (1-0-1)

The Vikings have to be thrilled with quarterback Kirk Cousins so far (669 passing yards, six touchdowns, one interception), even if they're grumpy after their Week 2 tie with Green Bay. They know they're a Super Bowl caliber team this year, and letting a win over their fiercest division rival slip away because of their kicker is a tough pill to swallow. But hey, at least they have Dan Bailey now!

Word On The Beat: Dissatisfied. (—Chad Graff)

#### 3. Kansas City Chiefs (2-0)

All aboard the Patrick Mahomes-for-MVP bandwagon! Mahomes is proving that the crazy preseason hype that surrounded him is legitimate, with 10 touchdown passes in two games. If not for a questionable defense that is giving up more than 500 yards per game, the Chiefs would sit atop these power rankings.

Word On The Beat: Explosive. (—Nate Taylor)

#### 2. Jacksonville Jaguars (2-0)

We already knew the Jaguars had one of the NFL's best defenses, but after last week's win against New England, we should probably consider that the Jags might have not only a competent offense with Blake Bortles, but a dangerous one.

Word On The Beat: Complete. (—Daniel Popper)

1. Los Angeles Rams (2-0)

The Rams rocketed to the top of the power rankings after shutting out the Cardinals last week, and they really only look like they're scratching the surface of how good they can be.

# Broncos Case Keenum misses practice with knee injury, will be ready for Ravens

By Troy Renck  
KMGH  
Sept. 20, 2018

Of all the molotov cocktails lobbed in the Broncos' direction last season -- unprepared, disorganized -- the most volatile came from general manager John Elway. He called the team "soft" leading into a loss to the Bengals that closed the curtains on playoff hopes. Elway used the adjective to describe a group, if not organization, that had become complacent.

But there was no denying the Broncos lacked an edge, specifically on offense. Case Keenum brings a razor's edge personality to Sundays. When he ran for a first down and a touchdown in the victory over Oakland, he inspired teammates.

"He had two plays where he got hit, and he kept fighting, he kept going," linebacker Shane Ray said. "He kept throwing good balls, finding his guys. It's important you have a quarterback like that, that you know is going to fight to finish and win the game."

It came with a price. Keenum sat out Wednesday's practice with a sore knee. It's not serious, and he will return Thursday. Keenum playing well -- even better than he has the first two weeks -- remains paramount to the Broncos pulling off an upset at Baltimore.

"I woke up and it was sore. I wanted to go. But I took a mental day and will come back (Thursday)," Keenum said. "I guess I need to slide a few times rather than running around and bouncing off defenders. I want to get a first down. I want to score."

Keenum has been better in the clutch than Mr. Goodwrench in the first two weeks, completing 14 of 20 fourth quarter passes for 176 yards, one touchdown, no turnovers, no sacks and a 113.8 rating. He has needed a boost because of his first half missteps -- 65.4 rating, two touchdowns, three picks and one sack.

"He is a winner," Joseph said, "and that's the No. 1 trait you want in a quarterback."

Offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave admitted Keenum continues to learn the attack. As he digests new wrinkles, in theory, he will have a better feel for throws not to make. Keenum found that sweet spot last season in Minnesota. He leaned on the running game, something the Broncos, too, possess through two weeks. They rank fourth in carries (30) and yards per attempt (5.23), and second in yards per game (157), fueled by the caffeinated rookie Phillip Lindsay.

"We are better at the offensive line spot this year. We are really well-coached," Joseph said. "Garett (Bolles) is better in his second year. Leary is healthy, and playing good. Matt Paradis has come back from those hip surgeries. Last year he had a slow start. He's healthy. McGovern is playing good football and having Jared (Veldheer) here is a Godsend."

If the Broncos stay potent on the ground, Keenum should be able to protect the ball, and rely on uptempo and play action when needed. Keenum has proven he can make good decisions with the increased pace.

Last season, Keenum starred on the road. In his past six starts in visiting parks, Keenum owns 1,520 passing yards (253.3 per game) with 13 touchdowns and five picks. He threw only six road interceptions, and opponents sacked him 16 times.

Compare that to the Broncos' cringe-worthy, road performances last season: six touchdowns, 14 interceptions and 28 sacks. Is it any wonder, they went 1-7 on the road?

Keenum enters this game armed with weapons and balance. He also faces a Baltimore team that is difficult to beat at home. The Ravens have long forged an identity around a punishing defense and effective pass rush. Even at 35, Terrell Suggs demands attention, and the challenge to thwart him could become more difficult if Veldheer is unavailable. He missed Wednesday's practice as he remains in the concussion protocol. However, he watched the end of practice, an indication that he's more likely to play Sunday. If Veldheer is out, Billy Turner starts. He played effectively in relief against the Raiders, logging 35 snaps. However, no one is going to confuse the Raiders' rush with Baltimore's.

Sunday represents the type of game the Broncos could not win a year ago. The season started to turn sour with a loss at Buffalo in Week 3, a winnable game overshadowed by the anthem protest and horrible interceptions.

For Keenum, this represents the next step.

"The thing that's really encouraging is the grit this team has. They're competitive and keep battling even when things aren't going their way," general manager John Elway said on 760 AM. "If you have that, you'll always have a chance to win football games."

And it starts with the quarterback.

Footnotes

Cornerback Adam Jones, who missed snaps Sunday with tight hamstrings, did not practice. There's no guarantee he plays Sunday. If he doesn't rookie Isaac Yiadom will be active for the first time. ... I gave Keenum a hard time about his running ability. He had a better zinger at me Monday, calling my salmon colored dress shirt and tie "Easter" gear. ... The Broncos are averaging 427.5 yards offense per game.

# Domata Peko renews his rivalry with the Ravens

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
Sept. 20, 2018

Denver Broncos 13th-year nose tackle Domata Peko always has the ears of his young teammates, especially this week with a trip to Baltimore coming up.

The Ravens (1-1) are a team Peko faced 22 times while anchoring the Cincinnati Bengals defensive line from 2006-16.

"Baltimore is a tough place to play," said Peko, who's coming off a spectacular game against the Raiders on Sunday. "I played there 11 years in a row in the AFC North and it's a tough division. The crowd is going to be loud as heck."

Which makes it imperative for the Broncos (2-0) to get off to a fast start, Peko said.

That's something they didn't do either on offense or defense in squeaking past the Raiders 20-19 .

"You have to get after them early, show them you mean business, get that run stopped and you definitely have to get pressure on (Joe) Flacco because he can sit back there and he can throw the deep ball like the best of them," Peko said.

Broncos fans need no reminder of that.

Seared in their collective memory is Flacco heaving a 70-yard touchdown throw to Jacoby Jones with 31 seconds left in a divisional playoff game in 2013 that led to Baltimore's double-overtime upset of the top-seeded Broncos in Peyton Manning's first season in Denver.

"You definitely have to start fast against those guys," Peko said.

Last week, the Broncos trailed 12-0 at halftime and 19-7 in the third quarter before rallying behind Case Keenum 's second straight fourth-quarter comeback.

Coach Vance Joseph said this week that his cornerbacks played too soft in the first half, allowing Derek Carr to get too comfortable in completing 29 of 32 passes for a franchise-record 90.6 completion percentage.

The Broncos also sputtered from the start on offense, going three-and-out on their first three drives while their most explosive player thus far — rookie running back Phillip Lindsay — cooled his cleats on the sideline.

When Lindsay got into the game, he reeled off a 53-yard run on his first carry and finished as the first undrafted player in NFL history to eclipse 100 yards from scrimmage in his first two NFL games.

At halftime, Joseph ordered defensive adjustments, taking away the huge cushions they were giving Oakland's receivers, and the offense make its own corrections. Following six fruitless first-half possessions, the Broncos scored on all four of their second-half drives.

In studying the Broncos, Harbaugh sees a familiar sight in Peko, who looks to him like every bit the thorn he was for the Ravens during his time with the Bengals.

"He's the same guy, just he's a hard-edge football player. Just lots and lots of respect for that guy," Harbaugh said. "I mean, he's physical, he's tough, plays super hard. I don't know how he's built but he's got a sixth sense for screens. He sniffs those things out like nobody's business. He always has.

"He's a screen wrecker. Just a very physical, very tough, very smart player and we've got a lot of respect for him."

Joseph, who was on Marvin Lewis' staff in Cincinnati from 2014-15, agreed with Harbaugh's assessment that Peko hasn't lost a step at age 33.

"Being around Domata in Cincinnati, he's always been a guy that played with great energy — for a big guy, to move like he does and to hold double-teams like he does, and obviously read screens like he does? He's a screen killer and he's been that way since I've known Domata," Joseph said. "He's a great locker room guy, a great team leader and he played really well last week."

# Broncos QB Case Keenum skips practice with sore knee

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
Sept. 20, 2018

Case Keenum said he'll be back directing Denver's offense Thursday after missing Wednesday's workout with a sore knee.

"I woke up Monday a little sore," Keenum said. "I could have practiced today. I wanted to practice today, but they wouldn't let me. So, a good mental day, come back and be ready to go tomorrow."

Although Keenum has thrown four interceptions already after getting picked off just seven times last year in Minnesota, he's led the Broncos to their sixth straight 2-0 start with a pair of fourth-quarter comebacks.

But he can't remember tweaking his knee in Denver's 20-19 win over Oakland on Sunday.

"I couldn't tell you. I just woke up sore. Ran it a few times there. A few hits in the pocket. But a tough defense. They came after us," Keenum said. "And a lot of guys were sore, but it was a good sore after that game."

Keenum was hit five times in the pocket, sacked once, and ran three times for 16 yards, including a 1-yard TD in the fourth quarter, the fourth of his six-year NFL career.

"Yeah, I guess I need to slide a few more times than go around bouncing off defenders," Keenum cracked. "But I want to get a first down. I want to score. I'm competitive that way."

Keenum has never been known as a running threat although he did rush 40 times for 160 yards and a score in leading the Minnesota Vikings to the NFC championship game last year.

"Yeah, I'm going to be me," Keenum said. "I'm going to realize, too, that I'm a lot better quarterback than I am a running back."

"Why'd you laugh so hard?"

Because, even he admitted running right into his center on his touchdown keeper Sunday, so his running style leaves a little to be desired.

"I know. I know. I felt bad. Yeah, I definitely could be better running the ball or just handing it off," Keenum said. "But yeah, I'm a competitor and that's me. I want to win. I hate losing and I'm going to do whatever it takes to get first downs to move the ball down the field."

Except practice through the soreness.

"Just making sure. I want to play 16, 20 weeks. Not just a few weeks," said Keenum.

Coach Vance Joseph said he wasn't worried that Keenum would be unable to play Sunday at Baltimore (1-1).

Nevertheless, Joseph expressed confidence in backup Chad Kelly , who ran the offense Wednesday for the first time since winning the backup QB job this summer.

"He looked fine," Joseph said. "He should be. He's our 2 and if he had to play, I have no worries."

Notes: RT Jared Veldheer (concussion), ILB Brandon Marshall (knee) and CB Adam Jones (thigh) also missed practice. This marked the first time the Broncos had any players sit out for injury this season. "I'm very hopeful all four guys should have a chance to play" Sunday, Joseph said.

# Broncos CEO Joe Ellis shares vision for future of Mile High stadium and football in Denver

By Marty Finley  
Louisville Business First  
Sept. 20, 2018

While in town to study Denver's economic success, regionalism efforts and population growth, more than 130 Louisville, Kentucky, leaders had dinner Monday night at Coors Field — home of the Colorado Rockies — and toured Broncos Stadium at Mile High Tuesday morning.

The tour of the Denver Broncos stadium proved to be one of the high points of the trip. U.S. Bank asked Broncos President and CEO Joe Ellis to address the group and discuss some of the NFL team's business principles, according to David Wombwell, Louisville market president for U.S. Bank. (The Broncos are a U.S. Bank client).

Ellis led Greater Louisville Inc.'s annual GLIDE trip attendees in a 15-minute huddle in the visitor's locker room. The locker room held a surprise: Each attendee's name was draped atop one of the NFL lockers as a keepsake to take home from Denver.

Broncos Stadium opened in 2001 at a cost of about \$400 million, about two-thirds of which was funded through public funding across a multi-county region, Ellis said.

In addition to Broncos games, the facility is used year-round to host concerts, one-off sporting events, weddings and corporate events. The stadium hosted more than 280 events last year, Ellis told the group.

The team and its owner, Pat Bowlen, hold the stadium's operating rights and collect the lion's share of the revenue.

As the stadium approaches two decades of use, Ellis said, the team is preparing for the future and the millions in needed upgrades to ensure another stadium won't be needed anytime soon.

To help fund those expenses, the team plans to develop a multi-use commercial district on a lot it controls south of the stadium. The district would include a hotel, office space, residential units, restaurants and retail. An amphitheater also is possible as a way to raise lease revenue as the landlord.

Ellis is convinced the district also will enhance the game-day experience for fans.

"It's going to be its own little extension of downtown," he said.

Throughout the trip to Denver, the underlying theme was collaboration through regional partnerships. The Broncos share that regional philosophy, Ellis said.

"As the game grew and pro football grew and the NFL grew, so grew the Broncos and so grew Denver," he said. "We've grown up together."

But the Broncos' following, he said, cannot be taken for granted. Instead, fans must be nurtured and cultivated.

Part of that cultivation comes through capturing the attention and support of Denver's millennials and younger population. Ellis said the team is working to expand its fanbase digitally through social media, mobile ticketing and advanced market intelligence.

"You have to connect with that next generation of people, and those are our next generation of our fans," he said.

At the same time, the team stays plugged into Denver's corporate and philanthropic worlds — urging its players to give back to local communities.

"We strive to be good players, a good organization on the field, but good citizens off the field as well," he said. "It's really important to our business model."

# Woody's OrangeBlitz Bag of Mail

By Woody Paige  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
Sept. 20, 2018

Woodman: What's up with Demaryius Thomas? Or down? He looks disinterested. Shouldn't he be replaced by Courtland Sutton, who is a younger, taller, better version of D.T.? I'll hang up the phone and listen. – John Jackson

Another Jackson – Browne – might sing that D.T. is "Running on M.T." Demaryius is ranked 80th among receivers after two weeks with 11 catches for 81 yards and one touchdown. But this is what is amazing. He has been targeted 21 times. The NFL stats claim that Thomas has dropped only two passes (tied for second in the league behind Golden Tate's three), but the eyes believe he has dropped at least three or four, or more. A fellow Gazette columnist and I were talking in the press box on Sunday about how weak D.T. has come out. He's not disinterested or disenchanting. He is in decline truthfully, and Courtland Sutton, who had a controversial touchdown catch overturned, is on fast incline. I was sort of surprised in camp how much taller than D.T. he is, and he's obviously faster and has softer hands. But the Broncos aren't going to displace Thomas and disrupt the starting lineup. They've won two games. Thomas had a surge or three in the opening weeks, but certainly hasn't been as impressive as Sutton or Emmanuel Sanders - 14 catches on 15 targets for 231 yards, a 43-yarder and one touchdown. Heck, T.P. (Tim Patrick) is stronger now than D.T. But Keenum is spreading the ball around to his five receivers, tight end Jake Butt and Phillip Lindsay. We must remember that D.T. remains among the highest paid NFL receivers at \$12 million-plus in 2018. But he is not the D.T. of the Manning era, and he was not named captain this year after one season of being an ineffective leader. Demaryius is not going anywhere, though. John Elway exercised the \$4 million option in March to bring back D.T. for at least this season and next – when he will be paid a base salary of \$14 mil (plus bonuses).

WoPa: Derek Carr still is a better quarterback than Keenum. After two games, what's your opinion of Keenum's chances to be the starter all year? – The Gym Ratt

Carr may be superior individually to Case, but one is 2-0, with two fourth-quarter comebacks, and the other is 0-2 with two second-half meltdowns. Neither one is Patrick Mahomes (10 touchdowns in two victories) or Philip Rivers (1-1), but Keenum has a heart and a will. You should ask Bill Musgrave, who has been the offensive coordinator for both, whom he prefers. He won't answer, but, based on our conversations, I know he really likes Keenum's work habits and refusal to back down. But there are issues for Case. He said before the season he had to protect the ball and score touchdowns. Four interceptions and three touchdowns. That won't work. He will be the starter all year. Guaranteed. I am somewhat surprised that Kevin Hogan has been inactive both weeks behind Chad Kelly. Hogan, at least, has played in eight NFL games, and started one. If something happens to Keenum, Kelly will be the replacement.

Woody: I see where ESPN "experts" have our Broncos 15th in the latest power rankings. Don't you think they deserve more love? They belong in the top 10 with two wins. Are your cohorts crazy or what? – Bronco Betty

The 80 ESPN NFL writers, commentators and columnists (but I wasn't asked) who contribute to the power rankings surely haven't given the Broncos much respect, but it could be worse. The Dolphins have won two games (including one on the road), and they are ranked at No. 16 in the league. I would have placed

the Broncos at 12th, ahead of the Saints, Steelers and Panthers. Pittsburgh hasn't won a game. If the Broncos win in Baltimore, they'll be right in the top 10 mix. If they lose, they'll probably stay about where they are in the middle of the league. In regard to the division, K.C. is the best team at the moment, we'd all agree, and the Chargers rebounded. I'd make them second, even at 1-1, and the Broncos third until they prove they can win more than a game or two on the road. Don't fret. Those ESPN experts are not infallible, and I am, of course, fallible.

Hey, you: Who you got as Broncos MVP after two games? Asking for an enemy. – Sam in the Springs

That's a fair debate. There are four viable candidates, and the edge, for me, is the No. 1 edge rusher in the league – Von Miller. He has four sacks, highest among NFL defenders, two forced fumbles (one recovery) and nine tackles. He is Reggie Jackson, the (non-plastic) straw that stirs the Broncos' defense. Just behind him, I feel, is Emmanuel Sanders, who almost never drops a pass, and has produced at least half a dozen large catch-and-runs, including a 43-yarder. He's so dependable, unlike the other guy. I would go with Lindsay for third. He's been the only undrafted free agent in NFL history to have back-to-back 100-yard offensive games to start his career. And he also returns kickoffs and plays on special teams. He's a Poor Man's Christian McCaffrey (because he makes millions less than the other former Denver-area high school star). Let's compare. Lindsay has rushed 29 times for 178 yards (6.1-yard average) and caught three passes for 35 yards (11.7 per). He has one touchdown (reception-run) and three tackles. McCaffrey, in his second year, has rushed 18 times for 87 yards (4.8-yard average) and caught 20 passes for 147 yards (7.4). He has not scored yet. McCaffrey has the overall edge, 234-213, but it's not decisive. And "No-Brow" Lindsay was The Steal Deal of UFAs. Fourth on the MVP list would be Keenum, 2 of 2 in fourth-quarter QB comebacks.

The last note: Lest you forget, the Rockies are in the middle of tight race.

Woody: Seems Jon Gray's resurgence was short-lived. Do you think it's too late to send him down to Albuquerque again? Seriously, his "act" is getting old and PAINFUL. I know Buddy doesn't have any other options for starters. If we lose Nolan and keep Gray I'm gonna seriously reevaluate my Rockies loyalty. Your take? – Ken Church

One problem with your desire. If the Rockies sent Gray back to Albuquerque, it would be to buy turquoise jewelry. The Isotopes' season is over, my friend. And the Rockies' season could be over if Gray doesn't come through in his last two starts. No chance he will start a wild-card game this time, or the opening game of any series.

Gray matters.

# 'Pack your defense': Broncos prep for first road game of the season

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
Sept. 20, 2018

As the Broncos take the first step Sunday toward improving on last year's 1-7 road record, Chris Harris Jr. knows the onus may very well fall on his unit.

"When you play on the road, you have to pack your defense," Harris said Wednesday. "We've got to be ready to go and be ready to out-play their defense. That's how it is on the road. Defense, you've got to ball on the road. You always plan on the offense to struggle a little bit on the road, so we have to try and give them a little help — hopefully get an early turnover and get Case going early."

Harris could be the player to record one of those turnovers. The eighth-year corner has picked off Joe Flacco twice in four career meetings, including a 98-yard pick-six in a 2012 game against the Ravens.

"I like Flacco," Harris said. "He's thrown me a couple picks, so I like going against him."

Harris said he expects Flacco to hold the ball and look for the "home-run ball" to players like Willie Snead, Michael Crabtree and John Brown. Unlike last week, when the Broncos faced quick pass after quick pass from Derek Carr, the unit should have a chance to make plays.

"He wants to take you up top," said Harris of Flacco. "He wants the deep, 70-yard bomb. It's a totally different mindset. I've had plenty of experience playing against Flacco, so I'll try to share any information I can [with] the young guys."

Denver's defense will also need to be wary of first-round pick Lamar Jackson, who has shared the field with Flacco at times. In some situations, Jackson has lined up out wide before cutting into the backfield, which gives him the option to either run or throw the football. But he's also taken snaps at quarterback with Flacco split out wide.

The Ravens haven't shown these formations often — just a handful of times per game — but it's enough to make Head Coach Vance Joseph and the Broncos pay attention.

"He's a good athlete, so you can't treat him like a wildcat player because he can throw the football," Joseph said. "Obviously, we're going to have a plan for him. I won't share that, but we have a plan for him."

"... We can't be surprised by that and give up a cheap play. That's why they're going to do it, obviously, to catch you slipping and to make a big play on you. We can't allow it."

Whether it's Flacco or Jackson or both on the field, the Broncos won't make excuses.

And Joseph wants that mentality spread to the rest of Denver's preparation. He stressed Wednesday that no matter the situation — if the weather is bad, if they're shorthanded, if the Ravens run a trick play — the Broncos simply "don't care."

“We just want to go out and play the game,” Joseph said. “Again, it’s all about mindset. We’re not going to worry about how far we’re traveling, what time the game starts — we don’t care. It’s going to probably rain on Sunday. We don’t care. I think pushing it back and just going on Saturday is all about our mindset and not worrying about going east, who we’re playing or where we’re playing. It’s worrying about the Broncos playing the best we can play.

“Our attitude this year is, ‘We don’t care about where we go or who we play or when we travel or where we travel.’ We’re just going to go play.”

If the Broncos do that, they may very well pick up a win while they’re out.

# Through My Eyes: Tim Patrick's first catch is one he — and Broncos fans — will never forget

By Tim Patrick  
DenverBroncos.com  
Sept. 20, 2018

My mindset was simple: Make a play.

Coach was telling me, "Stay ready." I was like, "Coach, I got you. I'm gonna make a play."

And then he put me in.

When the ball came my way, my first thought was, "Get out of bounds." But I knew I had enough time to go up the field. As soon as I caught the ball, I felt the cornerback was behind me, just by the way he was playing defense. I knew I could go inside and get enough yards to get us into field-goal range.

I heard everybody was saying, "He's trying to score! He's trying to score!" Nah, I was just going up the field. And once I saw it was one-on-one with the safety, I made a break for the sideline.

We have complete trust in Case. One-hundred percent. We knew all we needed was a shot. Our defense just needed to stop them. Once our defense stopped them, we were very confident we were gonna get down there and score.

With a kicker like Brandon, I knew I sealed the game. That's why you saw me — once I made the catch and got out of bounds, man — I headed straight to the sideline. I knew it was Brandon's turn to finish the game off, and that's exactly what he did.

It was a great way to get my first catch. It was either gonna be that or a touchdown. So I'll take either one of those options.

On the sideline, it was a rush. It was just everyone was screaming, saying "Big time, man, getting out of bounds."

I didn't really soak it in. I don't really remember much. I just remember sitting down on the cooler, just like, "Brandon's gonna make this... And then I have to go out on special teams, so I have to forget about it."

After the game Sunday, my phone was blowing up. It was blowing up all day Monday, too.

I'm not really surprised I made the play, but I've watched it a lot — I'm not gonna lie. It's my first catch, man. Things like that, you don't forget.

# Broncos Injury Report: Case Keenum, Adam Jones, Jared Veldheer, Brandon Marshall miss practice

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
Sept. 20, 2018

Quarterback Case Keenum (knee soreness), cornerback Adam Jones (sore thigh), linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee soreness) and right tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion protocol) did not participate in Wednesday's practice.

Head Coach Vance Joseph said after the session he is not concerned about Keenum's availability for Sunday's game against the Ravens.

"[His knee is] a little sore," Joseph said. "He's going to practice tomorrow."

Keenum said he could have practiced Wednesday after waking up sore on Monday following a 20-19 win over the Raiders.

"I wanted to practice, but they wouldn't let me," Keenum said. "Good mental day [and I'll] come back and be ready tomorrow."

Keenum wasn't sure when he suffered the injury during Sunday's game, but he said he may consider sliding the next time he takes off to run.

"Yeah, I guess I need to slide a few more times [rather] than try to go running around bouncing off defenders," Keenum said. "I want to get a first down. I want to score. I'm competitive in that way."

Joseph said he's hopeful Keenum and the other players on the injury report will be healthy enough to play Sunday.

"Obviously you don't know as the week progresses, but I'm very hopeful all four guys should have a chance to play," Joseph said.

Veldheer exited Sunday's game against the Raiders with a concussion, and Head Coach Vance Joseph said Wednesday he remains in the protocol.

"It happened on Sunday," Joseph said. "It's only Wednesday. He's progressing. We'll see on Friday how much he can do on the field."

If Jones cannot play Sunday, the Broncos will likely rely on Tramaine Brock and Isaac Yiadom.

"The biggest challenge for Isaac [is] just getting back in the game flow," Chris Harris Jr. said. "When you don't play for two weeks, that's hard. So getting back into game shape, getting back into game plan. I think he'll be ready. He might have a chance to get out there and play with [Jones] being hurt."

# Bettors claim to be cheated out of huge payouts from Broncos win

By Scott Gleason  
USA Today  
Sept. 20, 2018

The Denver Broncos' 20-19 win over the Oakland Raiders on Sunday appeared to deliver one bettor an \$82,610 payoff on a \$110 bet. Two other bettors thought they were in line to collect \$56,000.

Except it was a glitch in the system that made the miracle bet payouts possible. That led New Jersey sportsbook FanDuel to decline the payout, citing "an erroneous price over an 18-second period."

In a statement, FanDuel director of publicity Kevin Hennessy said: "We honored all (erroneous) bets on the Broncos to win the game at the accurate market price in accordance with our house rules and industry practice, which specifically address such obvious pricing errors. We have reached out to all impacted customers and apologized for the error."

Kerry Langan, spokesperson for the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, told USA TODAY Sports "the matter is under investigation."

The would-be \$82,610 winner Anthony Price, told News 12 New Jersey that he placed the wager at the Meadowlands Racetrack when the Broncos were losing to the Raiders 19-17 late in the fourth quarter.

Because FanDuel's system did not update the live betting odds to reflect Denver as a -600 favorite (with a net of \$18.35) after the Broncos were within game-winning field goal range, Price received a ticket that said he'd get up to \$82,610. The company's computer error kept the Broncos at 750-1 underdogs.

Price told News 12 New Jersey that he declined FanDuel's offer of \$500 and three New York Giants tickets, and plans to hire an attorney to challenge the declined payout.

Two other men, Mike Guerriero and Chris Calcano, told News 12 New Jersey that the next morning their \$56,000 win was swapped for \$12. They also are considering legal action.

According to ESPN, the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement is investigating FanDuel's glitch. While sports betting regulations differ in each state, New Jersey's state that a sportsbook like FanDuel cannot "unilaterally rescind any wager."

FanDuel claims its rules that if a "palpable error" is made then it is only obliged to pay "the correct price at the time at which the bet was placed."

# Ranking NFL's seven 2-0 teams from lucky to legit

By Michael Middlehurt-Schwartz

USA Today

Sept. 20, 2018

Seven NFL teams stand at 2-0, but no one should be issuing challenges to the 1972 Dolphins just yet.

Since 1990, 62.3% of teams without a loss after two weeks went on to the playoffs. That hardly means that a small-sample hot start indicates a lock for postseason, as just four of eight teams (Falcons, Panthers, Chiefs and Steelers) that were without a loss after two weeks last year made the cut.

To further temper expectations, we took a look at all seven 2-0 teams this year and not only ranked them by their long-term viability, but also separated them into two categories based on what they've shown so far.

Not there yet

7. Denver Broncos: After staving off the struggling Seahawks before sneaking past the rival Raiders, Denver is lucky not to be 0-2. Give credit to Vance Joseph's crew, however, for its resolve. Rookies Royce Freeman and Philip Lindsay have helped revive the second-ranked rushing attack, but the much-improved offensive line might be the biggest difference of all.

Yet there's only so much confidence this team can engender given Case Keenum's uninspiring play. And while the pass rush remains formidable, teams might duplicate Oakland's spread-out, quick-passing attack while attempting to neutralize Von Miller. Given that Denver started 2-0 in each of the last two seasons before crumbling down the stretch, maybe it's best to keep the postseason expectations at bay for now.

6. Miami Dolphins: Enjoy the view from atop the AFC East for now, as this positioning seems like a short-term setup. Perhaps quarterback Ryan Tannehill is most emblematic of the Dolphins' play as well as the team's staying power. While the seventh-year veteran has been admirably efficient (73.9% completion rate), the passing attack simply lacks the firepower to overcome rough patches or top-tier defenses.

With a forgiving schedule, Miami very well could cobble together enough wins to seize just its second wild-card berth in the last decade. But this is a team that is far more opportunistic than it is overwhelming.

5. Cincinnati Bengals: After watching them seemingly reach a point of stagnation with losing seasons the last two years, Marvin Lewis must be elated by his group's progress. Promising production from running back Joe Mixon (now expected to be sidelined a few weeks with a knee injury) and a young defense dotted with play makers has made the Bengals one of the league's most intriguing teams. But much like in years past, a tendency toward running hot-and-cold could be their undoing.

It's not too outlandish to think that Cincinnati could take advantage of turbulent times in Pittsburgh and Baltimore to make a serious push in the AFC North. But the upcoming slate is brutal, as the next seven games all come against 2017 playoff teams (Panthers, Falcons, Steelers, Chiefs and Saints) or fellow 2-0 squads (Dolphins and Buccaneers).

4. Tampa Bay Buccaneers: The prevailing question in Tampa seemingly no longer centers on whether Jameis Winston will resume his starting role once his three-game suspension is over after Monday's game against Pittsburgh. Instead, what's unclear is what the season-long expectations should be for a 35-year-old journeyman leading the league in passing yards (819) and quarterback rating (151.5).

A regression is almost certainly in order for Ryan Fitzpatrick, though he could still keep the big-play offense rolling if he can continue to take advantage of downfield opportunities with Mike Evans, DeSean Jackson and O.J. Howard. The real concerns are a dormant run game (averaging a league-worst 2.7 yards per carry) and 31st-ranked defense. And in the hyper-competitive NFC South, the Buccaneers likely won't have much margin for error.

#### Contenders

3. Kansas City Chiefs: They belong here with a caveat — covering for the last-ranked defense by scoring 35-plus points every game isn't tenable. Yes, Patrick Mahomes is setting opponents ablaze and taking advantage of what might be the league's best collection of skill-position players in wide receivers Tyreek Hill and Sammy Watkins, tight end Travis Kelce and running back Kareem Hunt. But Mahomes' daring style is sure to yield turnovers eventually, and the defense has yet to reach even speed-bump status in its ability to slow anyone.

Still, there's no denying Andy Reid is onto something special. The return of safety Eric Berry (Achilles) also should have a ripple effect that could elevate the pass defense to a tolerable level. Upcoming matchups with the Jaguars (Week 5) and Patriots (Week 6) should serve as good measuring sticks, but the Chiefs clearly have a spark.

2. Jacksonville Jaguars: If there were any questions about their legitimacy after last season's run to the AFC Championship Game, a commanding win Sunday over the Patriots should have eradicated them. With perhaps the most talented collection of defenders in the league, the Jags could be in position to improve upon a formula already that's already proven successful.

But while Blake Bortles delivered the best game of his career by throwing for 377 yards and four touchdowns against New England, his composure under pressure remains a significant vulnerability. That could become an even greater problem after left tackle Cam Robinson, also one of Jacksonville's best run blockers, was lost to a season-ending torn anterior cruciate ligament.

1. Los Angeles Rams: The stars are aligning more rapidly than Sean McVay could have hoped for. With defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh and cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Marcus Peters already clicking, the defense hasn't allowed a point for the last six quarters. Meanwhile, new receiver Brandin Cooks is already providing the deep threat (12 catches, 246 yards) that could help take Jared Goff to the next level.

The Rams had the look of an NFC front-runner on paper, but the early chemistry is encouraging. Yet to be seen is how this team handles adversity after two underwhelming opponents (Raiders, Cardinals). But with what looks like one of the league's easiest races in the NFC West, L.A. has a leg up prepping for a possible deep playoff run.

# Vikings coach claims official admitted clean hit drew penalty: 'They just want us to throw the flag'

By Jack Baer  
Yahoo Sports  
Sept. 20, 2018

There has been no shortage of confusion, frustration and outrage as the NFL's new tackling guidelines continue to lead to questionable penalties, but now it looks like even an NFL official believes clean hits are now receiving flags.

Minnesota Vikings coach Mike Zimmer claimed he was told as much during the Vikings' 29-29 tie against the Packers on Sunday in an interview on KFAN captured by ESPN's Courtney Cronin on Wednesday.

NFL official reportedly admits Vikings penalized for clean hit

After Vikings safety Andrew Sendejo was flagged for unnecessary roughness on a hit he believed was clean, Zimmer said that Sendejo asked an official what he could have done differently. He apparently received a less than satisfactory answer.

"You did everything right. You couldn't have done anything different," the official reportedly said. "They just want us to throw the flag."

The hit in question occurred in the third quarter and involved Sendejo leading with his right shoulder for an open-field tackle of Packers wide receiver Devante Adams, who had made initial contact with Vikings cornerback Xavier Rhodes. Zimmer reportedly called to ask the NFL's office to review the hit.

Packers also questioned NFL rules

Zimmer joins an ever-expanding chorus of football figures bewildered by the NFL's new directives on defense, a chorus that ironically includes the quarterback of the team that the Vikings were playing on Sunday.

Though it was likely due to a costly penalty on Clay Matthews in Week 1 rather than their game against the Vikings, the Packers' Aaron Rodgers publicly questioned the new rules on Wednesday, saying the rules "maybe are going the wrong direction" and that some of the hits in question "are not penalties" to him.

# Warner, Rice Distance Themselves From Potential HOF Boycott

By STAFF

Sports Business Journal

Sept. 20, 2018

Kurt Warner and Jerry Rice have "distanced themselves" from the group of Pro Football HOFers who are threatening to boycott future induction ceremonies unless they receive health insurance and an annual salary, according to Sean Wagner-McGough of CBSSPORTS.com. Warner in a statement said that he "wasn't aware" of the letter sent to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, NFLPA Exec Dir DeMaurice Smith and Pro Football HOF President David Baker outlining the group's stance and that his "signature was 'mistakenly attached'" to the letter. Meanwhile, Rice in a separate statement noted that he is "not a member" of the HOF BOD, which was responsible for the letter. Both Warner and Rice indicated that while they "support the issues that the group raised, they will not be participating in a boycott" (CBSSPORTS.com, 9/18). PRO FOOTBALL TALK's Mike Florio noted Eric Dickerson, the Chair of the HOF BOD, posted a statement on Twitter "accepting responsibility for a miscommunication" with Warner and Rice. However, Dickerson's acceptance of responsibility was "hardly unconditional and unequivocal." He said this is "typical NFL pitting players against each other." Dickerson: "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" (PROFOOTBALLTALK.com, 9/18).

SPECIFICS OF THE PROPOSAL: TMZ notes Dickerson is "demanding Hall of Famers get a respectable salary." He said, "If it was up to me, I think every Hall of Famer would get about \$300,000 a year. I think that would be a proper number." He added he eventually wants all former players -- "not just the NFL legends -- to get a 6-figure salary and health care" (TMZ.com, 9/19). Dickerson: "We want all players to have health insurance, not just Hall of Famers" ("OTL," ESPN, 9/18). PRO FOOTBALL TALK's Michael David Smith notes Dickerson "complained that NFL player pensions aren't big enough and said \$300,000 a year for each Hall of Famer would supplement their pensions" (PROFOOTBALLTALK.com, 9/19). Dickerson said that the "intent is ultimately to win benefits for all retired players, but the Hall of Famers have leverage." He said, "If I had just started with the retired players, I wouldn't have gotten their attention. But when you start with the Hall of Fame guys, you get their attention. Those names are recognizable" (L.A. TIMES, 9/19).

UPHILL CLIMB: USA TODAY's Tom Schadt noted Dickerson and the group will "likely face an uphill battle given the financial heft of their request" -- about \$60M annually -- and the fact that the NFL, NFLPA and HOF "all operate as independent entities" (USATODAY.com, 9/18). FS1's Jason Whitlock said there are some "good ideas in this and what (Dickerson's) proposing and what these players are striving for." However, they have "come out really hard and some of the language in this letter is a little over the top." Former NFLer DeAngelo Hall agreed with what the HOFers are trying to achieve, but said, "This is the time to say, 'Let's start with all players. Let's not just start with the Hall of Famers.'" FS1's Marcellus Wiley: "Sometimes you just need a spokesman, spokesmen. You need the ones that are going to have the most powerful voice in your message" ("Speak For Yourself," FS1, 9/18). ESPN's Michael Wilbon: "Somebody has to leverage something to get anything out of the NFL. I'm not saying this is the way, but somebody always has to leverage something" ("PTI," ESPN, 9/18).

NOT ABOUT THE HALL: In Canton, Todd Porter in a front-page piece reports the HOF has "increased appearances for Hall of Famers and fees for those players" since Baker took over. The HOF, while "working closely with the NFL, is not a part of the league and operates independent of the league's revenue." The NFL's contributions "amount to less" than 5% of the HOF's revenue. More than \$4.5M was "paid out to Hall of Famers for appearance fees" in '17, and a long-standing emergency fund is also "available to Hall of Famers." HOFer Joe DeLamielleure, an "outspoken critic of the NFL and the players union, said the Hall of Fame is caught in the middle and 'the beef isn't with the Hall or the people of Canton.'" DeLamielleure: "I don't blame the Hall of Fame. I blame the league and the union. We have a corrupt union." HOFer Dave Robinson said that he "did not have a chance to see the letter and declined to comment on the specifics of it." Robinson said, "I see where the frustration is coming from. What the guys went through in the early days to make the league what it is today -- a lot of people feel we have not been adequately rewarded" (Canton REPOSITORY, 9/19).

MISSED OPPORTUNITY? The AP's Barry Wilner wrote there are questions about "how well-organized the group" is. One name on the list of 22 signees was Carl Ellard, but "no one by that name has played professional football." Carl Eller was inducted into the HOF in '04 (AP, 9/18). In N.Y., Carron Phillips writes the HOFers behind the letter had "good intentions with this letter" as they "wanted to force the league's hand." However, good intentions "become null and void if they are followed by bad execution, and that seems like it could be the case here." If all living HOF members "weren't at least notified that this was coming, then it's impossible to believe that they will now all be on the same page" (N.Y. DAILY NEWS, 9/19).

# **Report: Case Keenum to miss practice with knee soreness**

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
Sept. 20, 2018

The Broncos are expected to practice without their starting quarterback on Wednesday.

Mike Klis of KUSA reports that Case Keenum will sit out their first session of the week. The cause of the absence is knee soreness, but, per the report, it is not expected to impact Keenum's availability for Sunday's game against the Ravens.

Klis also reports that Keenum received treatment on the knee after the Broncos' 20-19 win over the Raiders in Week Two. Keenum, who signed with Denver as a free agent, is 44-of-74 for 551 yards, three touchdowns and four interceptions in a pair of wins this season.

Chad Kelly is the No. 2 quarterback for the Broncos and Kevin Hogan is also on the depth chart in Denver.