

Broncos Briefs: Case Keenum returns to full practice work

By Ryan O'Halloran
The Denver Post
September 21, 2018

Broncos quarterback Case Keenum returned to full practice participation on Thursday after sitting out Wednesday due to knee soreness.

The news, though, was not as encouraging regarding linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee), right tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion) and cornerback/punt returner Adam Jones (thigh), all of whom missed a second consecutive day.

Marshall, who hopes to practice Friday, described the injury as “a little tendinitis,” and it didn’t originate in last Sunday’s win over Oakland.

“It had been going on since training camp,” he said. “It got gradually worse.”
If Marshall is unable to play or is limited, rookie Josey Jewell would take his playing time in the base and nickel packages.

“He’s a really good football player,” defensive coordinator Joe Woods said of Jewell. “Very high football IQ — you could tell that from the first time he stepped on the field.”

Coach Vance Joseph declined to say who would handle punt returns if Jones is inactive.

Broncos ninth-most valuable. Forbes released its 21st annual NFL valuation list and the Broncos were valued at \$2.65 billion (ninth in the NFL), a two percent increase from last year.

Forbes’ top five: Dallas \$5 billion, New England \$3.8 billion, the New York Giants \$3.3 billion, the Los Angeles Rams \$3.2 billion and Washington \$3.1 billion.

The Rams’ valuation grew the most (seven percent) of any team. Only four teams were valued at less than \$2 billion. Buffalo ranked last at \$1.6 billion.

Hitting the road. The trip to Baltimore will be the first of three Broncos games in the Eastern time zone this year. They play at the New York Jets in Week 5 and at Cincinnati in Week 13.

The Broncos were 0-4 on the East Coast last year. Joseph will have the team fly on Saturday instead of Friday.

“We just want to go out and play the game,” Joseph said. “It’s all about mindset. We’re not going to worry about how far we’re traveling, what time the game starts (11 a.m. Denver time) — we don’t care. I think pushing (the departure) 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 and playing the best we can play.”

Footnotes. Ravens linebacker C.J. Mosley (knee) did limited work on Thursday; he played only three snaps in Week 2 against Cincinnati. ... Per Bovada, the Broncos' odds at winning the AFC West have improved slightly, from 11/4 to 5/2. Kansas City is the favorite (6/5) and the Chargers have dropped from 2/1 to 12/5. ... Sunday's referee is Ron Torbert, whose crew has worked the Los Angeles' Rams' 33-13 win at Oakland and New Orleans' 21-18 home win over Cleveland. Torbert's crew called a combined 19 penalties in Week 1 but only eight in Week 2. ... Ravens defensive coordinator Don Martindale on Broncos linebacker Von Miller: "In just studying Von in the offseason, his motor and athleticism are what stand out. It's like playing LeBron (James). Every now and then, LeBron is going to clear the lane and go dunk. Those types of players do that. You always have to account for (Miller) because he's that special of a player."

If Jared Veldheer can't play, Broncos have confidence in Billy Turner

By Ryan O'Halloran
The Denver Post
September 21, 2018

Broncos right tackle Jared Veldheer's concussion kept him out of a second consecutive practice on Thursday, putting his status for Sunday's game at Baltimore further in doubt.

But in Billy Turner, the Broncos feel they have a more-than-serviceable option.

Turner, 26, would be making his first start in two years (one apiece at left guard and left tackle for Miami). Since then, he has been waived by the Dolphins and Ravens and joined the Broncos in October 2016.

Turner played the final 34 snaps in place of Veldheer against Oakland this past Sunday. Per the Denver Post game charting, Turner had only one "bad" run play (gain of three or fewer yards not including short-yardage).

"We were really pleased with Billy," offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave said. "He came in and pass protected and run blocked well. That was huge."

Said Turner: "I played all right. Obviously, it wasn't perfect by any means, but it gave me something to look at to know what to improve on."

The Broncos rallied from a 12-0 halftime deficit to win 20-19.

Veldheer worked in a helmet (no pads) off to the side during the media viewing period Thursday.

Turner spent the first two weeks of the regular season rotating between right and left tackle. He said playing exclusively right tackle this week "is no different."

"I always have a good feel for the game plan because I'm always in my (play) book and I know my opponent," he said.

The Broncos' offensive line has allowed only two sacks in two games.

"There is great synergy in the room," Musgrave said. "We have good parts but the sum of the parts is probably greater."

Broncos wide receiver Demaryius Thomas searching for consistency

By Kyle Frederickson
The Denver Post
September 21, 2018

The cruel truth behind the Broncos' stunning last-minute victory against the Raiders on Sunday is the heroics of one player bailed out the mistakes of another in the game's most critical juncture.

Denver trailed 19-17 with 22 seconds left and was nearing field goal range with no timeouts left. Quarterback Case Keenum fired a dart to wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, who was cutting toward the boundary just past the first-down marker. But the football bounced off Thomas' hands. One play later Broncos wide receiver Tim Patrick gained 26 yards on a catch-and-run to set up Brandon McManus game-winning field goal.

"That's big for our team," Thomas said. "We have guys (like Patrick) who work so hard and now it's paying off."

His mindset after that drop?

"Make another play and try to win the game, that's it," Thomas said Thursday. "The main thing is just doing my job the best I can to help my squad out. That's my main goal."

There is no questioning his leadership role as one of only a handful of players left from the 2015 Super Bowl title team. Thomas also remains an integral part of Denver's offense through two games. No Broncos wide receiver has been targeted more often (21). But the other Thomas statistics don't lie, either.

Of those 21 Keenum-to-Thomas targets, Thomas has managed to haul in just 11 for a catch-rate of 52.4 percent — the second-lowest among NFL players with at least 20 targets this season (Detroit's Golden Tate bottoms the list at 50 percent), according to STATS. Five of the 10 incomplete passes to Thomas, per Denver Post stat tracking, were the result of Thomas drops (two versus Seattle and three against Oakland).

Few NFL receivers performed to the same level of excellent consistency between 2012-'16 as Thomas with five consecutive 1,000-yard seasons and four Pro Bowl appearances. But Thomas, now 30, is in the midst of his ninth NFL season searching for answers to his consistency as Denver prepares for the Ravens on Sunday.

Keenum's first two targets to Thomas against Seattle fell incomplete. Against the Raiders, the two didn't connect until the third series. That's a problem, per Broncos' coach Vance Joseph, who said: "(Thomas) is OK. It's our job to get him going early and to get him his confidence early. When guys go through a whole half and have one attempt or two attempts, that's tough for receivers. If he has his first attempt and he drops it or it's a bad ball, that's a mind war. It's our job to get him going early. It's his job to play with confidence, and he will."

However, offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave prefers a much simpler approach.

“We’re just trying to get everybody the ball,” Musgrave said. “We don’t want to start worrying about one guy. We have to let the ball find everybody in the system.”

It’s Zach Azzanni’s job as receivers coach to identify and fix shortcomings within his unit’s production. For players such as Thomas, with career totals of 119 games played and 58 receiving touchdowns, the answer to an early slump is all about patience.

“Demaryius is old enough to know what his attitude and mindset need to be for him to be successful,” Azzanni told The Denver Post. “I’ll give Demaryius this: He didn’t have his best day, but man, he was great on the sidelines and he did a lot of things on Sunday that a lot of people don’t see to help us. He didn’t have his greatest day on the field. He’ll be fine and he’ll bounce back. He came in Monday with a great attitude, with a bounce in his step, ready to get better and not hanging his head.

“A true pro and I appreciate that about him.”

One example of the Thomas impact outside a stat sheet was captured by the team’s digital film crew against the Raiders. Thomas rallied teammates with a rousing pep talk on the bench as the Broncos erased a 9-point fourth quarter deficit. At one point he shouted, “Put your foot on the gas and let’s go.”

“I think it’s more spur of the moment,” Thomas said back in the locker room Thursday. “We were coming off a drive where we went down and scored and before that we weren’t able to get anything clicking. We did that in the second half.”

Broncos tracker: Denver ranked No. 9 on Forbes' list of most valuable NFL teams

By Ryan O'Halloran and Kyle Fredrickson

The Denver Post

September 21, 2018

2:53 p.m. — Keenum returns to full work

Quarterback Case Keenum (knee) was a full practice participant after sitting out Wednesday.

Right tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion) was listed as not practicing. He had a helmet (no pads) and was doing some side work during the media viewing period.

Linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) and cornerback Adam Jones (thigh) missed a second straight day of practice.

Marshall said he hopes to practice on Friday.

"That had been going on since training camp," Marshall said of his knee issue. "It got gradually worse. A little tendinitis."

12:50 p.m. — Broncos crack top-10 for NFL's top-valued franchises

Forbes released its 21st-annual NFL valuation list on Thursday and the Broncos were valued at \$2.65 billion (ninth in the NFL), a two-percent increase from last year.

Forbes' top five: Dallas \$5 billion, New England \$3.8 billion, the New York Giants \$3.3 billion, the Los Angeles Rams \$3.2 billion and Washington \$3.1 billion.

The Rams' valuation grew the most (seven percent) of any team.

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— Ryan O'Halloran

12:20 p.m. — Injury update

<https://twitter.com/ryanohalloran/status/1042840348500754432>

10:45 a.m. — Behind enemy lines

We caught up with Jonas Shaffer, Ravens beat writer for the Baltimore Sun, to get his take on the 1-1 Ravens. Follow him on Twitter: @jonas_shaffer. Here are five questions and his answers:

1. Cornerback Jimmy Smith remains out (suspension) and Maurice Canady is on IR. Should the Broncos make it a priority to go after cornerback Tavon Young like Cincinnati appeared to do?

Young had maybe the worst game of his career Thursday, but that came just a few days after he was terrific against the Bills. (It's easier to discount that performance because, well, Buffalo.) Cincinnati's A.J. Green gave him trouble with his size and speed in the first half, but I think the Broncos will stick with

Emmanuel Sanders as their slot receiver against the 5-foot-9 Young instead of moving a bigger guy like Demaryius Thomas or Courtland Sutton inside.

The Ravens trust Young, but there's still not a huge sample size of his ability after he missed all of last year with a torn ACL. If he's not up to the challenge Sunday, I think we'll find out pretty quickly.

2. The Ravens are averaging only 3.3 yards per carry. Will Buck Allen or Alex Collins emerge or is this a true by-committee set up at running back?

I think the Ravens are still looking at Collins as their No. 1 option, but he was missing from Wednesday's practice with an undisclosed injury. Buck Allen is more of a third-down back, but Collins showed some real open-field ability after the catch against Cincinnati.

John Harbaugh said their 3.3 yards per carry are somewhat deceiving because the team hasn't broken off a long gain yet, and they didn't have much of a choice but to pass a lot Thursday. Just as importantly, Collins has faced eight men or more in the box 62.5 percent of the time on running plays, the highest rate in the league. It's hard to run through that.

3. Anytime the Ravens put quarterback Lamar Jackson in the game, it looks forced. Do you see his role expanding as the season goes on?

I expect him to get see the four or five plays he's gotten per game (excluding his lengthy stint against Buffalo), with some variance depending on the opponent. Joe Flacco hasn't exactly asked for more play calls with Jackson, and I think the team wants to be respectful of his command of and rhythm in the offense.

Unsurprisingly, Jackson was more effective in the preseason, but all it takes is one misplay in the secondary for the rookie to come around on an end-around pass and connect downfield.

4. If C.J. Mosley can't play because of injury, how up to the task is rookie linebacker Kenny Young?

Mosley's got four years of NFL experience and about 15 pounds on Young. It's tough for anyone to measure up to the Ravens' defensive captain. Some good soul on YouTube put up a compilation of Young's highs and lows from Thursday's game, and you can see his athleticism in pass coverage and in rushing the passer and his still-developing instincts elsewhere.

It won't be as simple as Young replacing Mosley. The Ravens need fellow inside linebacker Patrick Onwuasor to step up, the defensive line to give them some cover and safety Eric Weddle to manage the play-relaying duties.

5. The Ravens overhauled their receiver group in the offseason. Which player — Michael Crabtree, Willie Snead or John Brown — has the best chance to emerge as Flacco's favorite target?

It's a hard question. Through two weeks, Brown leads the Ravens in yards (136) and touchdowns (two), Snead in receptions (nine), and Crabtree in targets (16). Rookie tight end Hayden Hurst would probably be up there, but he's out for at least another week or two.

This could be a premature evaluation, but I think Flacco might come to rely on each receiver depending on how far downfield he's looking to throw. Snead's a quicker option who's reliable on third down out of the slot. Crabtree's a sure-handed, physical receiver who can carve out space on fade routes in the end zone or on comebacks 10 to 20 yards downfield. And Brown's the speedster who's unafraid to go up for a deep ball, which Flacco is unafraid to throw.

— Ryan O'Halloran

Is Courtland Sutton the Broncos' version of A.J. Green?

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 21, 2018

It doesn't take a football expert to figure out how the Broncos should attack the Baltimore Ravens on Sunday.

In the Ravens' previous loss to the Cincinnati Bengals, it was 21-0 A.J. Green 2 minutes into the second quarter. That's right, the first three touchdowns of the game were scored by the Bengals' star receiver.

All the Broncos have to do is come up with their own A.J. Green.

Ordinarily, that top Broncos receiver is Demaryius Thomas. But he's had so many drops -- four through two games this season -- that if he muffs even one pass Sunday, the Broncos should go to Courtland Sutton.

Emmanuel Sanders? He is the Broncos' No. 1 receiver now, but it's the rookie Sutton who has the A.J. Green-like ability to catch those 50-50 high lob passes.

This might be the game when this terrific rookie crop leads the Broncos.

"Same guys that were making plays in OTAs are making plays now," said Von Miller, the Broncos' star pass rusher with 4.0 sacks through two games. "Courtland Sutton, he really set it off in OTAs and he's setting it off now."

The Broncos' first choice Sunday will be to get Demaryius Thomas going. By the way, he stayed after practice both Wednesday and Thursday to work extra with Sutton.

A Wink and a shake

Don "Wink" Martindale was the Broncos' defensive coordinator during the miserable final season of Josh McDaniels in 2010. Martindale was the Baltimore Ravens' linebackers coach from 2012 until he was promoted this year to defensive coordinator.

Anything special about calling the defensive signals against the Broncos on Sunday?

"No, because I go back to this game always has been, and always will be, about the players," Martindale told Baltimore reporters Thursday. "Denver is a blip on the radar screen. I think there's one guy left (Demaryius Thomas) that was on that roster when I was there. I'll be glad to say hello to him. He's a good guy. But, it's really, it's a blip on the radar screen. It really is."

Bronco Bits

Right tackle Jared Veldheer observed practice while wearing a helmet Thursday, a sign he is clearing the concussion protocol and may play Sunday. ...

Broncos coach Vance Joseph said he hopes Adam Jones will return to practice from his quad strain Friday and play Sunday. Inside linebacker Brandon Marshall, who has been held out the past two practices with knee soreness, may also practice Friday. ...

Ravens star linebacker C.J. Mosley returned to practice Thursday on a limited basis. "We're expecting to see him on Sunday," said Broncos' offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave. ...

The Ravens are 9 for 9 scoring touchdowns in the red zone through two games. That's unreal. "That's amazing," Joseph said. "They're running the football, they're passing the football, so it's going to be a challenge, but we're looking forward to the challenge.

Bronco Notes: T.D. believes Lindsay can hold up

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 21, 2018

The numbers for Broncos running back Phillip Lindsay are 17 touches for 102 yards in week 1 and 15 touches for 111 yards in week 2.

If Lindsay, the undrafted rookie from South High and the University of Colorado, is going to become the Broncos' top running back, then there is another set of numbers worth examining.

5-7 ¼, 184. Those were his measurements at the CU Pro Day. It begs the question: Can Lindsay hold up to produce 100 yards from scrimmage in week 10, 12 and 15?

Terrell Davis, who looked bigger in the Broncos' No. 30 jersey in the late-1990s than Lindsay does now, thinks he can.

"What I like about him is he runs bigger than his size," Davis said. "He can run around you and you see sometimes where he's actually trying to run through you. Yeah, he can hold up because he's not getting 25 carries. He's getting 15, 16 touches. Catching some passes.

"And that speaks to how far he's come, too. Undrafted, no combine. And his first two games he's averaging 16 touches, and nobody thought he'd be doing that. That's pretty cool. I'm pretty excited to follow his journey and see how this all turns out.

"He was maybe a surprise initially but after a while he won't be a surprise. Hopefully, he gets more and more comfortable every week and we see this young man blossom."

Coach Joseph is older, wiser

Vance Joseph turned 46 years old Thursday. For the second consecutive season, he is 2-0 on his birthday.

It can be safely assumed his wish is to beat a Super Bowl-winning head coach for a third consecutive week. His Broncos beat Seattle's Pete Carroll, the SB 48 winner, in week 1. He beat Oakland's Jon Gruden, the SB 37 winner with Tampa Bay, in week 2.

And now Joseph will match wits Sunday with Baltimore's John Harbaugh, the SB 47 winner, in week 3.

"When you play this team, it's going to be a fundamental, sound, tough football team," Joseph said. "They've always been a tough team. They're a big team. You said it about the special teams. Coach (Harbaugh) was a coordinator on teams 10-plus years in this league, so he takes a lot of pride in his teams. They've made plays to beat us in the past on special teams. I've been in games with those guys and lost 12-6, and it's a punt return and two field goals, and you lose the game.

"He has great culture there. His team shows up every week. They're sound in all aspects of the game. They're a tough team and he's been a winner. It's going to be a tough out."

Harbaugh says Broncos throw quick

We all know what the Broncos' offense looks like. The opposing coach this week verified what we've been seeing all along.

"They don't want to get sacked," Harbaugh said when asked to compare the Broncos to the Cincinnati offense that beat up the Ravens' defense last Thursday and the Vikings' offense that Broncos quarterback Case Keenum operated last year. "They get the ball out quickly. That's a carry over to what they do in Cincinnati, what they did in Minnesota last year.

"(Broncos offensive coordinator) Bill Musgrave has always been like that. You track back to Oakland, I think would be the other comparison, where coach Musgrave was at before with Derek Carr. They want to get the ball out quick, on time, on rhythm and to completable passes. That's kind of what they do."

Broncos saving on hotel bills

For East Coast road games last season at Buffalo, Philadelphia and Miami, the Broncos flew out Friday morning and stayed two nights in a hotel for early Sunday games.

The Broncos went 0-3 in those games, losing by an average of 21.3 points. (The Broncos had two other Eastern time zone games last year, but did not go out two days early for a Thursday night game at Indianapolis, or Christmas Eve in Washington D.C.).

And so this year, the Broncos are flying out the day before they're East Coast games. Even though the game Sunday at Baltimore kicks off at 11 a.m. Colorado time, the Broncos are scheduled to arrive at their hotel late-Saturday afternoon.

"We just want to go out and play the game," Joseph said. "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."

How you can return to Broncos games if you're kicked out for being drunk: A demonstration

By Noel Brennan, Mike Grady

9 News

September 21, 2018

Unruly Denver Broncos fans who get kicked out of the stadium can come back to another game so long as they complete an online "fan conduct class."

We were reminded of the NFL rule that took effect back in 2012 thanks to a news tip from a fan who was instructed to take the course.

She was mistaken for being intoxicated at a Broncos game this season and taken to the hospital. Turns out, she had fainted at the game and was suffering from dehydration. After hearing her story, the Broncos resolved the situation and will allow her to come back to the stadium without taking the course.

But, it got us thinking - how many Broncos fans get kicked out of the stadium?

Broncos spokesman Seth Medvin told 9NEWS Broncos security staff typically deal with five to 10 unruly fans each game. Medvin said more than 100 unruly fans faced detox, arrest or ejection last season, and there have been fewer than 20 incidents so far this season.

People ejected from Broncos Stadium must enroll in the online fan code of conduct class. The four-hour course covers alcohol abuse and public intoxication and disruptive fan behavior. It offers skills for improving empathy, judgment, stress and communication.

Fans must complete the \$250 educational course if they wish to return to Broncos stadium. According to the course website, \$50 of each course fee is donated to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver and the Colorado Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

You can find out more about the class [here](#), but for a visual representation of how this all works, we present to you Noel Brennan, ladies and gentlemen. Watch in the video above.

Broncos offense with Case Keenum has a familiar look to it

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 21, 2018

When Vance Joseph sat down with offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave during the offseason, they had something in mind for the 2018 offense.

“I wanted an offense that can obviously run the football and to find completion plays for our quarterback on the early downs,” Joseph said this week. “Bill’s done that ... He’s a hell of a playcaller ... He’s a calming figure for me on the sideline and obviously calming for our quarterback.”

The Denver Broncos are 2-0 after uneven wins over the Seattle Seahawks and Oakland Raiders. But, there’s plenty we haven’t seen from the Broncos offense. It hasn’t always been smooth sailing, either, especially the four three-and-outs the Broncos had in a balky first half against the Raiders when they had the ball for just 21 plays with only three first downs. Or quarterback Case Keenum’s three interceptions in the opening game against the Seahawks.

But they have indeed run the ball – they’re second in the league in rushing at 157 yards per games – and while Keenum’s 59.5 percent completion rate isn’t quite what they hope for and the four interceptions are cause for some early pause, Keenum has won over his teammates while the Broncos have made the plays when it’s counted in two comeback wins.

And much of that on the offensive side of the ball, the Broncos say, is due to how Musgrave has fit things with Keenum behind center and with the new personnel, especially the team’s rookies, including running backs Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman as well as wide receiver Courtland Sutton.

So far, the Broncos have blended a few schemes to help Keenum. Keenum played in spread attack in college then was groomed in Gary Kubiak’s zone-run scheme in his first pro stop with the Texans. The Broncos’ current offense now has some of the same looks, principles and even plays, Kubiak used as Broncos head coach, including in 2015 with Peyton Manning at quarterback, when the Broncos were a mix of what Kubiak had long done and what Manning was most comfortable doing.

That’s no surprise, really, since Musgrave was once a Broncos quarterback when Kubiak was the team’s offensive coordinator and Mike Shanahan was the coach. Shanahan has called Kubiak “one of the smartest people I’ve ever been around in football and he had so much to do with our success.”

Kubiak is not on the Broncos’ coaching staff, but his front-office role with the Broncos increased this past offseason as president of football operations/general manager John Elway expanded Kubiak’s duties.

“(Kubiak is) very involved, even to this day,” Musgrave said. “... He’s forgotten more football than all of us will ever know. It’s great to have him as a resource. I’m always hitting him up when he has a moment, amongst his personnel duties.”

So, when Musgrave shows a power run game out of a three-wide receiver set, often with a no-huddle look, it does look like the Broncos' attempts to do what Kubiak did after he returned to the Broncos as the head coach in 2015 – Manning's fourth (and final) season with the team. It also looks like the offense Musgrave called for the Raiders that year when Oakland was in a three-wide receiver set more than any other formation on first-and-10.

Kubiak didn't have the early success, especially in the run game, Musgrave has had, but Kubiak fused what Manning knew best – working out of the shotgun in a three-wide set – with what he had the most success with, a quarterback under center at times with a zone run scheme and some play-action work in the passing game. After some early struggles to run the ball in 2015 with Manning in the shotgun much of the time, Kubiak tried the "pistol" – including a season-high 43 snaps in the sixth game of that season – with Manning not as deep behind center and a running back behind him.

Then Manning got hurt – Brock Osweiler made seven starts that year – so the offense became more about survival, a low-risk affair that kept things in line for the league's best defense.

But the roots from this year's playbook stretch back to that. Keenum has been in the shotgun plenty – 53 percent of the time in the opener and 65 percent of the time in this past Sunday's win, even as they have pounded the ball on the ground at times. The Broncos have been behind in both games so they have gone to more open looks to try to come back in both.

"But you can see the similarities," Keenum said. "There are things we do that are familiar and like with coach Kubiak. I think things always evolve and there are a lot of people involved, but you see some things."

Joseph sees it as well, offering that Musgrave and Kubiak have "the same personality. Really bright guys, both played quarterback, understand quarterbacks and hell of game day playcallers. Obviously, as a coordinator, you make your money on game day. During the week, it's really secretary work. You're just gathering information and feeding it to players, but you make your living and your name on game day. Bill is a hell of a playcaller."

‘We just show up and go to work’: Why the Broncos’ class of 2018 has earned rave reviews so far

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
September 21, 2018

The Broncos had just dropped their eighth game and Chris Harris Jr., frustrated by the losses and the way the Broncos were losing, sat at his locker and thumbed through his phone to pull up proof of their dreadful season.

The Broncos’ secondary was stacked and for the previous two seasons led the league in passing yards allowed. But Harris’ targets in coverage plummeted as the team tumbled and opponents found ways to work around him.

“Before the bye, I thought we had a chance to go to the playoffs,” he said at the time. “... We just didn’t bring it all together as a team. We’ve just been killing ourselves the whole year.”

Before the bye last year, the Broncos were 3-1. After, they spiraled as a playoff-less team with a fraying locker room. With the frustration grew a resentment as scuffles broke out in practices and the once tight-knit team seemingly split into two factions — the established players and the younger players with plenty to prove.

“I still show up to work every day to try to set an example,” Harris continued. “You practice how you play. I still believe that. These young guys, they’re not as hungry as I was. I hope to see that. I mean, that’s what we need. We need some guys that are hungry like I was. I think I was just very determined, on a whole other level, just to play in this league.”

Apparently, general manager John Elway agreed, because when he set out to remake the roster and the “culture” of the Broncos, he also changed his approach to finding the next crop of young players. With the fifth pick, he was bound to find talent. But with it, he wanted maturity.

Nearly all of the rookies who were signed this year — drafted and undrafted — were team captains in college. Many set records at their college programs. All entered with the same mindset, and all served as notices to members of previous classes that jobs could and would be taken.

Of the Broncos’ eight drafted rookies last year, only one — left tackle Garrett Bolles — played and started every game. Three (Carlos Henderson, Jake Butt and Chad Kelly) spent the year on injured reserve, another (DeMarcus Walker) struggled with a position change, another (Isaiah McKenzie) struggled with fumbles, another (Brendan Langley) struggled to adapt to the pro speed and still another (De’Angelo Henderson) saw little time on the field.

The limited contributions from the rookies helped to fuel the team’s nose drive, but the trend has since been reversed. Elway’s class of 2018 has been heralded as perhaps his finest since joining the Broncos’ front office.

“I haven’t seen a class like this in Denver in a while, if ever,” Broncos Hall of Fame running back Terrell Davis said. “Especially the contributions that they’re getting at this early stage. With some luck and some help, I think this is a pretty good building block for Denver moving forward.”

The early dividends are hard to dispute.

Undrafted running back Phillip Lindsay leads all rookies in the league and sits third overall with 178 rushing yards through the first two weeks of the season. He is the first undrafted rookie in NFL history to have 100 yards or more from scrimmage in each of his first two games.

Fellow running back Royce Freeman was appointed the starter for Week 1 and has 99 rushing yards to rank fourth among rookies.

Add in the yardage from second-round receiver Courtland Sutton and the Broncos’ offensive rookies look even better. The three have combined for 366 offensive yards, the most by a rookie class through two games since the 1995 Colts (379).

And then there’s Bradley Chubb, the Broncos’ No. 5 overall pick who was made the starter over veteran holdovers Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett and leads all NFL rookies with eight quarterback pressures.

“I think it’s just the work ethic and what they instilled in us since we got here to Denver, what it takes to make the team and what they’ve seen from other rookies and other players,” Freeman said. “Just taking that really to heart. I think our class has done a good job of that and applying that and just the want to be here.”

But there’s more to this class than meets the eye on game days.

Nose tackle Domata Peko said during OTAs that he doesn’t bother to learn rookies’ names until — or if — they make the roster. Peko had to learn many new names this year.

Eight of the Broncos’ 10 drafted rookies made the active roster. Lindsay and first-year linebacker Alexander Johnson were the only undrafted to make their way onto the 53. Tight end Troy Fumagalli, a fifth-round selection, was placed on injured reserve and seventh-round pick David Williams was added to the practice squad.

Their production throughout the offseason and camp lived up to their initial billing and prompted the Broncos to initially release half of their 2017 draft class to make room. (Langley and McKenzie have since been added back to the practice squad.)

But while they impressed, they were hardly exempt from the usual rookie protocol.

There’s an initiation process for newcomers in Denver. Rookies carry veterans’ pads after practice. Rookies also get atrocious haircuts that must be worn for a weekend in preseason.

Rookies are expected to know their rank and know that, even though they may have starred in college, they have to earn their way in the NFL.

The class of 2018 seemingly had little problem with the unofficial rules.

“There’s no complaining,” defensive end Derek Wolfe said during OTAs. “That’s the one thing that you notice from an immature draft class, is that they complain a lot, whine and cry a lot. There’s none of that coming from this group.”

Added Peko: “You’ve got to earn the respect of the veterans. These rookies, like Wolfe said, are really hungry to learn and really hungry to win. I’m excited to have them a part of the team.”

But what’s especially notable about the members of this class is how they seem to operate as one.

It’s not uncommon for rookies to live near each other or even within the same complex. Six of the Broncos’ rookies do this year. And the others aren’t far away.

They spend their days at the Broncos’ practice facility together, and often their evenings together for dinners or just to hang out.

In the Broncos’ cafeteria, the class of 2018 typically sits together. In the locker room, the class of 2018 is usually cracking jokes with one another.

“I came in and I was honestly the quiet one when I first got here,” fourth-round receiver DaeSean Hamilton said. “Then I started to meet a lot of the guys and I started talking to them a little more and became friends with them.

“We all came in at the same time and then we were basically stuck around one another for hours every single day. But we all started to become friends, seeing obviously the value that everyone brings to the team and then trying to get each other better every single day.”

Vance Joseph credits the rookies’ similar approach for their tight bond. They work the same way and they fit in seamlessly, especially among veterans like Harris, who earned their way to the top from the very bottom and have an innate and insatiable hunger.

“I was a fourth-round pick. I was the 13th or 14th receiver drafted. I feel like I’m a lot better than that,” Hamilton said. “Like I said, that’s just something I’ve been doing since high school. The motivation stuff, that just comes naturally. I find a reason to be motivated for any simple reason.”

They rookies also know their role.

“We knew that we couldn’t walk in here and just become captains of this team,” Sutton said. “But we knew pushing each other as a group, we’re going to be able to help where we need — offense, defense, special teams. I think that’s one thing that sets our group apart and is making people notice.

“We just show up and go to work. We keep our mouths closed, we know our roles and we go to work every day.”

They’ve also seen the early payoff.

Sutton, one of the Broncos’ early stars in training camp, has played the most of any receiver behind Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. Lindsay and Freeman are the Broncos’ top rushers. Chubb

has played the second-most defensive snaps among the front seven. And fourth-rounder Josey Jewell has played a team-high 51 special-teams snaps.

“People become tight because they’re like-minded, not because they’re drafted in the same class,” Joseph said. “They all work together and they’re all helping us win. It’s really fun to watch the maturity and watch how they fit in and how hungry they are with our veterans. Courtland is playing, Royce is playing, Phillip is playing, but you wouldn’t know in the locker room. They’re really humble, they follow well and it’s a really mature group.”

The Broncos just won their second game, and Harris, encouraged by the victories and the way in which his team won, stood at a podium alongside the team’s practice field this week and told of Denver’s improvement.

It hasn’t been pretty or perfect, and the Broncos have plenty to clean up on both sides of the ball, Harris admitted. The secondary hasn’t played to the level it wants, but the run game has flashed and special teams is one of the Broncos’ most improved units.

Harris, like the others who experienced the fast start to 2017 and the steep drop that ensued, knows it’s still early. The “culture change” the Broncos speak of is thanks, in part, to small details like the rearranging of lockers to pair players of different positions and the general influx of talent.

But perhaps the biggest shift is with the kids. And the newest Broncos kids are all right.

“I like this rookie class,” Harris said. “They compete, they work hard and they don’t really say too much. They just come out and do their jobs.”

Von Miler, Broncos must pack defense to pull off upset

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 21, 2018

Von Miller makes everyone else invisible. He dominates tackles, wrangles quarterbacks and crushes teammates in Connect 4 games.

"He cheated," linebacker Todd Davis said after losing a locker room grudge match of Connect 4. "He had help."

Yeah, it's called genetics and, over the last four years, a relentless work ethic. Miller enters Sunday's game with an NFL-best four sacks. For fun, he projects to 32 sacks for the season. He won't reach that total. But 20 should not be out of the question given his ability to anticipate blocking schemes and move defenders with pure strength.

Last Sunday, he shoved Donald Penn to the ground with a push, leaving Oakland's right tackle a wobbly mess as Miller raced around for a tackle. Miller netted one sack against Oakland, with another erased by penalty. Teams continue to chip Miller more than Doritos, but a stout inside rush from Derek Wolfe and Bradley Chubb's presence have created more open lanes for Miller.

He has reached star status with his career on a Hall of Fame arc. In Week 1, Russell Wilson compared him to Kobe Bryant. Thursday, Ravens defensive coordinator Wink Martindale name-dropped LeBron James.

"(Miller's) motor and athleticism are what stand out. He's a very productive guy no matter what you do to try to stop him. It's like playing LeBron, and that's what I told the guys about A.J. Green. Every now and then, LeBron is going to clear the lane and go dunk. Those types of players do that," Martindale said. "I think that's the same thing with Von on the defensive side of it. You always have to account for him, because he's that special of a player."

For the first time this season, the Broncos are not expected to win. They are 4.5-point underdogs, traced to Baltimore's history of home success and Denver's awful 1-7 mark in visiting parks last season.

"We have a better offense, and our special teams are way better this year," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr. "But if we are going to win, we have to pack our defense."

For all of Miller's exploits -- and the resume is thicker than "The Iliad and The Odyssey" -- the Ravens represent an anomaly as one of three teams he has never registered a sack against, joining the Lions and Saints. It's a two-game sample size. But a bagel is not something Miller is used to.

In Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco, Miller has a standing target. Unlike Oakland's Derek Carr, whose quick release makes sacks difficult, Flacco will hold onto the ball.

"(Miller) is very disruptive, but that's going to be taken care of by the guys up front, our backs, everybody. It's all hands on deck," Flacco said.

Flacco has been sacked five times this season, and struggled with Cincinnati's pressure in a road loss.

"We always have to know where 58 is. But it's not just 58 -- 55 (Bradley Chubb) is pretty good, too," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "They have four legit pass rushers who are edge pass rushers, and they put them all out there at the same time, at times. All that being said, it comes back to '58.' We'll have a plan for him. Some of these teams are blocking him one-on-one, and they're doing it, most of the time, with success, but then, all of a sudden he wrecks the play. So, that's the problem. We're not divulging the plan. We have a plan."

Harbaugh finished his explanation by crossing his fingers to laughter. Miller is capable of throwing Ragu on any blueprint. And for the Broncos to remain undefeated, they need their best player to leave an indelible footprint on Baltimore's chest.

FOOTNOTES

Quarterback Case Keenum (sore knee) returned to practice Thursday, as expected. Right tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion) was at practice, a good sign that he is on the path to playing Sunday. Cornerback Adam Jones (quad) and inside linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) were not at practice. Tramaine Brock replaces Jones in the secondary, and rookie Isaac Yiadom will be active if Jones can't go. Marshall's replacement is Josey Jewell. He played 13 snaps last week. ... It will be interesting to see if the Broncos put Lindsay on punt return if Jones is out. Lindsay sits second on the depth chart, but his special teams duties should begin to shrink given his involvement in the offense. He is the NFL's third-leading rusher. "Lindsay is a rocket! I think he runs 4.3, the kid from Colorado. You always have to be aware. Your antennae go up when he's in the game," Martindale said.

Broncos changed travel schedule after 1-7 road record

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 21, 2018

The Denver Broncos have adjusted their travel itinerary in hopes of changing their fortunes on the road.

They're no longer flying out on Friday for trips to the East like this weekend's game at Baltimore .

"We're not going to worry about how far we're traveling, what time the game starts — we don't care," coach Vance Joseph said. "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," Joseph added. "Our motto 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."

The Broncos (2-0) went 1-7 away from home last year and have only won one of their last 10 road games.

That's a reversal of their road success during Peyton Manning's four seasons in Denver, when the Broncos were 22-10 away from home.

Von Miller, for one, doesn't mind the change in plans: "It's all good," he said. "We're able to get a great night's sleep before, so that's all that really matters."

The formula for ending their road woes, Miller suggested, was, "starting fast, getting off on third downs, being able to (force turnovers) and scoring touchdowns."

Come to think of it, he said, "that'll work for you anywhere."

It'll be imperative against the Ravens (1-1), who have scored touchdowns on all nine of their trips inside the 20-yard line so far.

"It's the first team in 20 years to be that way in the first two games, that's amazing," Joseph said. "They're running the football, they're passing the football. So, it's going to be a challenge."

The Ravens have four TD runs and five TD passes inside the 20-yard line, and Denver defensive coordinator Joe Woods credits their veteran quarterback, Joe Flacco.

"I mean, they obviously have a good scheme. But he's a smart quarterback. He understands what he's looking at. He gets rid of the ball on time," Woods said. "But I think the big thing is just him. Execution."

Miller spread the accolades a little bit more than Woods, attributing Baltimore's 9-for-9 mark to "a great corps of receivers" in addition to "a great quarterback."

Ravens coach John Harbaugh would add running back and offensive linemen to that list, although somewhat reluctantly because it's only Week 3 and he doesn't want to get carried away.

"What I'm seeing is good players," Harbaugh said. "I think we have guys making plays and we ran the ball in a few times, and that's big to our running backs and offensive line. But, man, you don't want to start patting yourself on the back. This league is too tough."

The advantage of playing their second game on a Thursday night, Harbaugh said, was that the Ravens got to kick back last weekend and watch the rest of the league, including the Broncos, who rallied past the Raiders 20-19 behind Case Keenum's second straight fourth-quarter comeback .

"It gives you good perspective. You see it's a crazy league. You see how tough it is. You see how tough it is to score in the red zone, how tough it is to stop somebody in the red zone," Harbaugh said.

Denver's defense leads the league in third-down efficiency. The Broncos have allowed only five third-down conversions in 22 tries for a 22.7 percentage.

"I just think it's great execution," Miller said, noting "the Ravens are pretty good on third down."

Baltimore is sixth in the league with a 43 percent conversion rate.

"So, third down will be pretty tough for both sides," Miller said.

Notes: Keenum returned to practice after missing one day with a sore knee RT Jared Veldheer (concussion) was cleared for activity but not any action. The Broncos were pleased with how well his backup, Billy Turner, played last week. ... CB-PR Adam Jones (thigh) missed a second straight day of practice as did ILB Brandon Marshall (knee).

Case Keenum returns to Broncos practice after missing 1 day

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 21, 2018

Denver Broncos quarterback Case Keenum returned to practice Thursday after missing a day with a sore knee.

Keenum didn't want to miss Wednesday's workout but said he understood that being cautious in September will give him a better chance of staying in the lineup all season.

Keenum has led the Broncos (2-0) to a pair of fourth-quarter comebacks, pushing his record over the last two seasons to 13-3.

He helped the Minnesota Vikings reach the NFC championship game last year before signing a two-year, \$36 million free agent contract with Denver.

Right tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion) was cleared to return to activity but not contact Thursday. Linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) and cornerback Adam Jones (thigh) were held out again.

The Broncos play at Baltimore (1-1) on Sunday.

Unbeaten Broncos face first road test against Ravens

By David Ginsburg
Associated Press
September 21, 2018

Unbeaten after two games for the sixth consecutive year, Denver showed its tenacity in a pair of fourth-quarter comebacks at home.

Now it's time to see if the Broncos can win on the road.

Quarterback Case Keenum, record-setting rookie running back Phillip Lindsay, standout receiver Emmanuel Sanders and the NFL's second-ranked offense will be tested Sunday by the Baltimore Ravens, who are 60-21 on their own turf since coach John Harbaugh arrived in 2008.

"They have great crowd noise. It's like playing at a college stadium," Denver coach Vance Joseph said. "It's going to be a tough out for our guys as far as traveling and playing our best game."

Keenum orchestrated a late drive for the game-winning field goal last week against Oakland after throwing for 329 yards and three touchdowns in his Denver debut versus Seattle. Lindsay is the first undrafted rookie in NFL history to top 100 yards from scrimmage in each of his first two games, and Sanders has 14 catches for 231 yards and a score.

"They play really well together," Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs said. "They have a quarterback at the helm that they believe in. In this game, confidence is 95 percent of it."

All that aside, the Ravens (1-1) know the outcome could depend on how well they handle Denver linebacker Von Miller, who's already got four sacks as the focal point of an aggressive defense.

"He's the straw that stirs the drink, no doubt, one of the very best in the league at what he does," Harbaugh said. "We will have to have him accounted for at all times, on every play. If we don't do that, he'll wreck the game."

The 6-foot-3, 250-pound Miller is vastly quicker than he looks.

"He's a physical freak. That's his major trait," Joseph said. "He's built like an outside linebacker, but he's got defensive back movement."

Some things to know about the Denver-Baltimore matchup:

FLACCO FACTOR

Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco struggled in the first half of a 34-23 loss to Cincinnati last week, but he finished with 376 yards passing and has a 15-5 touchdown-to-interception differential in his past nine games.

His success on Sunday could very well depend on how Baltimore handles Miller, who has three sacks in two career regular-season games against the Ravens — both of them victories. In a 2013 playoff game, Miller had a half-sack and seven tackles in a 38-35 double-overtime defeat.

"He's very disruptive, but that's going to be taken care of by the guys up front, our backs, everybody," Flacco said. "It's all hands on deck, and we'll have a plan for it."

ROOKIE SENSATION

Lindsay had his first 100-yard game rushing last week to go with a 71-yard effort on the ground against Seattle.

The 5-8 rookie out of Colorado and 2018 third-round draft pick Royce Freeman (99 yards rushing) have developed into an effective 1-2 punch.

Baltimore looked at Lindsay before the draft, and now they've got to stop him.

"The offensive line has done a good job," Harbaugh said, "but this kid is running and he's making plays with his speed and his fearlessness."

BROWN DELIVERS

Free agent receiver John Brown has scored a touchdown in each of his first two games with Baltimore.

"It feels great," Brown said. "Most people had doubts about what I could do because of injuries, but I just want to keep rolling."

Brown rang up 1,003 yards and seven TDs with Arizona in 2015 before being slowed by injuries the following two years.

"He's a humble guy, but he's very confident," Flacco said. "He's a lot of fun to be around."

COURAGEOUS KEENUM

Keenum starred with Minnesota last year, and his sizzling start with Denver lifted his record as a starter to 13-3.

Keenum missed practice Wednesday with a sore knee, the result of a few hits he took while scrambling out of the pocket against Oakland.

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

Keenum has played against Baltimore three times with three different teams.

LEWIS HONORED

Former Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis, a 2018 Hall of Fame inductee, will be honored by the team over the weekend.

There will be a parade in Baltimore on Saturday. On Sunday, Lewis will make an on-field appearance just before the kickoff and will be presented his Hall of Fame ring at halftime.

Broncos-Ravens Capsule

By STAFF

Associated Press

September 21, 2018

DENVER (2-0) at BALTIMORE (1-1)

Sunday, 1 p.m. EST, CBS

OPENING LINE — Ravens by 5 1/2

RECORD VS. SPREAD — Denver 0-1-1, Baltimore 1-1

SERIES RECORD — Ravens lead 7-6

LAST MEETING — Broncos beat Ravens 19-13, Sept. 13, 2015

LAST WEEK — Broncos beat Raiders 20-19; Ravens lost to Bengals 34-23

AP PRO32 RANKING — Broncos No. 11, Ravens No. 16

BRONCOS OFFENSE — OVERALL (4), RUSH (2), PASS (13).

BRONCOS DEFENSE — OVERALL (15), RUSH (6T), PASS (21).

RAVENS OFFENSE — OVERALL (8), RUSH (23), PASS (7).

RAVENS DEFENSE — OVERALL (2), RUSH (15), PASS (3).

STREAKS, STATS AND NOTES :

Broncos 6-5 against Ravens in regular season, but Baltimore beat Denver on way to both Super Bowl wins. ... Ravens defensive coordinator Don Martindale held same job with Denver in 2010. ... Broncos S Darian Stewart spent 2014 season with Baltimore. ... Broncos 2-0 for sixth straight year. ... Despite missing practice Wednesday, Denver QB Case Keenum (knee) expected to start. He's 13-3 as starter over past two seasons. ... Broncos 109-56-3 in opening month since merger, second best in NFL. ... Denver has won franchise-record 32 consecutive games with plus-turnover margin. ... Broncos lead NFL with 15 plays of at least 20 yards. ... Denver RB Phillip Lindsay is first undrafted rookie in NFL history to top 100 yards from scrimmage in each of first two games. ... Denver has allowed only five third-down conversions in 22 tries, best percentage (22.7) in NFL. ... Broncos LB Von Miller leads NFL with four sacks. ... Ravens likely without three-time Pro Bowl LB C.J. Mosley (knee). ... TE Hayden Hurst (foot) and DT Willie Henry (abdomen) out. ... Baltimore QB Joe Flacco has 10 TD passes and one INT in last six home games. ... Flacco has five TD passes in two games, tying career best set in 2009. ... Ravens have nine TDs in nine trips to red zone. ... Baltimore 60-21 at home with plus-53 turnover differential since coach John Harbaugh arrival in 2008. ... Ravens 23-12 in September under Harbaugh. ... Baltimore K Justin Tucker has NFL-best 205 FGs since 2012 and leads in career FG percentage at 90.3. ... Ravens P Sam Koch to play in 195th consecutive game, longest streak in franchise history. ... Baltimore CB Brandon Carr has streak of 162 starts, NFL's longest

active run by defensive player. ... Ravens rookie QB Lamar Jackson 1 for 4 for 24 yards but ranks second on team with 45 yards rushing. Fantasy Tip: Denver WR Emmanuel Sanders (14 catches, 231 yards, TD) faces defense that yielded three TDs to Bengals WR A.J. Green in one half.

Broncos Injury Report: Case Keenum returns to practice

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 21, 2018

A day after missing practice with knee soreness, quarterback Case Keenum was a full participant in Thursday's practice.

The Broncos, however, did have four players who did not practice. Tackle Jared Veldheer (concussion protocol) was on the field during the media-viewing portion of practice, but he did not participate. Cornerback Adam Jones (thigh) and linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) were also out.

Nose tackle Domata Peko Sr. received a vet day.

Safety Dymonte Thomas was added to the injury report with an abdominal injury. He was limited in Thursday's practice.

This article was updated after Joseph addressed the media on Thursday afternoon.

Broncos look to continue strong effort on the ground against Ravens

By Zach Pereles

DenverBroncos.com

September 21, 2018

On the road for the first time this season, the Broncos will depend on two rookies in their first NFL road game to carry the load against what is traditionally one of the league's best run defenses.

Early returns indicate Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman will be ready.

In two games this year, the Broncos have rushed for 314 yards — second in the league — at a rate of 5.2 yards per carry — good for fourth in the league. It's a far cry from 2017, when Denver finished 18th in yards per attempt and scored just eight touchdowns on the ground, tied for 25th in the league.

The running game has come through in a variety of situations. In the opening game, Denver ran the ball effectively late to drain the clock down and minimize any comeback hopes from Russell Wilson and the Seahawks offense. Last weekend, the Broncos' ground game awoke from a poor first half to gain 89 yards in the second half.

Finding continued success on the ground against Baltimore may be an important factor against a stout front seven.

Nine times over past 10 seasons, the Ravens' defense has ranked inside the top 10 in yards per carry.

"Baltimore has played great defense," Head Coach Vance Joseph said Thursday. "That's been their culture for the last 10 to 12 years with [Pro Football Hall of Fame LB] Ray [Lewis] and those guys, and [former S] Ed Reed and those guys. It hasn't stopped. They take great pride in playing defense. ... It's going to be a challenge. It's a big, powerful AFC North defense."

This season, the Ravens allowed just 3.8 yards per carry in a 47-3 romp over the Bills to open the season. Last week, the Bengals ran for 108 yards in a win but averaged only 3.9 yards per carry.

The Ravens, who played Cincinnati on Thursday last week, lost C.J. Mosley early in the game and trailed 28-7 at halftime. As rookie backup Kenny Young settled into the game, though, the Ravens stemmed the tide and outscored the Bengals 16-6 in the second half before ultimately coming up short.

Mosley has been a limited participant in practice this week, but even if he is unable to play, Young proved he can be a quality backup.

"C.J. is the quarterback of their defense and obviously he's a Pro Bowl guy, All-Pro linebacker," Offensive Coordinator Bill Musgrave said. "We're expecting to see him on Sunday, that he would bounce back from his injury."

Regardless of who lines up at that middle linebacker position for the hosts Sunday, Terrell Suggs will be next to him. The seven-time Pro Bowler is still effective as he nears his 36th birthday.

"He's a force," Bill Musgrave said. "We've got to account for him and really do a good job of knowing where he is. Guys like him, they're just rare. They obviously have a good thing going on defense and have for years and years, ever since even when [Cincinnati head coach and former Ravens defensive coordinator] Marvin Lewis started the whole thing, back during their original Super Bowl run."

Getting Lindsay and Freeman into a good rhythm early could pay huge dividends. The two rookies have averaged 6.1 and 4.3 yards per carry, respectively. Lindsay is the league's third leading rusher with 178 yards. It's been a rapid ascension for the undrafted rookie free agent.

"I don't know if it's even fazed him," Musgrave said. "I think he's still that same Phil. I think he's really focused. In the meetings, he's outstanding, bright-eyed, ready to take notes and retain the game plans we're installing. I think he's keeping on, keeping on."

Running the ball effectively early on the road can quiet what will certainly be a boisterous Ravens crowd at Baltimore's home opener. Last season, the Ravens allowed 4.4 yards per carry in the first half, and the team finished 16th in yards per carry allowed.

"I think the run game is important," Musgrave said. "We want to just be balanced and do our best to take the crowd out of it. That just comes from successful plays. ... So, it'll be a challenge. Of course, we were in Washington and Arizona in the preseason, but it's definitely not the same."

Establishing the run early and often doesn't just fall on the running backs, though. The Denver offensive line has done a solid job opening up lanes for Lindsay and Freeman, and the rookies have taken advantage.

"We're happy about [the success], but it's only Week 2," left tackle Garrett Bolles said. "We've got [14] more weeks to go. We've just got to continue to stay on the grind and continue to do things that we need to do to be successful. I feel like we're right on track and the train is going to continue to move as long as we're doing the things we need to do."

FanDuel reverses course, agrees to pay \$82,000 bet despite glitch

By Steve Gardener
USA Today
September 21, 2018

We want you to become a better bettor. Get it? So we enlisted Action Network's Chad Millman to tell you the bets you need to make and avoid this weekend in the NFL. For more analysis check out ActionNetwork.com USA TODAY Sports

Despite a computer glitch that resulted in wildly incorrect odds, FanDuel has reconsidered and agreed to pay a New Jersey man \$82,000 for his winning bet on Sunday's Denver Broncos-Oakland Raiders game.

The company had originally refused on the grounds that the odds that Anthony Prince of Newark received on his \$110 wager were "an erroneous price over an 18-second period."

After consulting with state gambling regulators, FanDuel reversed course on Thursday.

"Above all else, sports betting is supposed to be fun," the company said in a statement. "As a result of a pricing error this weekend, it wasn't for some of our customers."

Prince placed an in-game bet at FanDuel's sportsbook at the Meadowlands Racetrack as the Broncos trailed the Raiders 19-17 late in the fourth quarter.

Instead of getting what should have been the proper 1-6 odds, Prince's \$110 bet was placed when the odds momentarily went to 750-1.

When Broncos kicker Brandon McManus hit a 36-yard field goal with two seconds left to win the game, cashiers refused to pay.

A spokesperson for the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement said the agency is "encouraged" by FanDuel's actions.

"The division will continue to work with FanDuel and the state's other licensed sports wagering operators to ensure the implementation of industry-wide best practices," Kerry Langan said in an email to USA TODAY Sports.

FanDuel has also agreed to pay in full to the 11 other people who made similar bets at the inflated odds.

Colin Kaepernick to receive Harvard honor for African and African American studies

By Michael Singer
USA Today
September 21, 2018

Colin Kaepernick will join the likes of numerous African American icons as he will receive Harvard's highest honor in African and African American studies, the university announced on Thursday.

Kaepernick, along with seven others including comedian Dave Chapelle, will receive the W.E.B. Du Bois medal "in recognition of their contributions to African and African American culture and the life of the mind." Kehinde Wiley, the artist who painted Barack Obama's official portrait, will also be among the recipients for the October ceremony.

Past award winners include Muhammad Ali and Maya Angelou.

Kaepernick is still out of the NFL two seasons after he began kneeling to protest police and racial injustice. His actions spurred dozens of others to protest throughout last season and the early portion of this season. President Trump has fanned the hot-button issue and politicized the peaceful protest while deriding the NFL from his Twitter account.

Kaepernick was the centerpiece of Nike's 30th anniversary for their "Just Do It" campaign, and his efforts earned him Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award in April.

Terrell Davis: Lindsay can break my rushing record

By Kevin Patra

NFL.com

September 21, 2018

Phillip Lindsay knew what it meant to ask for Terrell Davis' No. 30 jersey. The undrafted rookie running back then spent the first two weeks of the season impressing the Hall of Fame running back.

Lindsay became the first undrafted free agent in NFL history with 100-plus scrimmage yards in each of his first two games, taking the lead in the Denver Broncos backfield.

In an interview with Nicki Jhabvala of The Athletic, Davis heaped high-level expectations on the rookie running back.

"The first two weeks have been as advertised. He's been really good," Davis said of Lindsay.

"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."

T.D. owns the Denver Broncos franchise rushing record with 7,607 yards in just 78 games. The workhorse of the Broncos' back-to-back Super Bowls sits 55th all time after an injury-shortened career.

Lindsay has a long way to go to replicate Davis' path to the Hall of Fame, but the former Broncos back sees certain traits that make him believe the undrafted back can become one of the league's best.

"And the one thing that cannot be taught as a running back is you can't teach them instincts," Davis said.

"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."

Through two weeks, Lindsay has been the most entertaining running back to watch in the NFL. The rookie blasts through arm tackles like they are pebbles on the road, never going down on first contact. He never seems to pick the wrong hole, and owns a third and fourth gear in space that would make a Camaro jealous.

The hardest thing for running backs ignored through the draft process is to break through and garner attention of scouts, coaches, and fans. Lindsay has not only broken through, he's accomplished acclaim quickly.

Now the Colorado native must continue to prove the high expectations correct.

Surprise Unbeatens: Breaking Down the Broncos, Bengals, Bucs and Dolphins

By Albert Breer
Sports Illustrated
September 21, 2018

Less than a week of training camp was in the books before Broncos coach Vance Joseph put into words what he'd been thinking. His audience was senior personnel advisor Gary Kubiak, who was Joseph's boss during Case Keenum's two seasons as a Texan. His point was built off shared experience with their new/old quarterback, and just how far the quarterback had come from Point A to Point B.

"I turned to Coach Kubiak, and said, 'Koob, I think he's better than what we thought.' And Koob agreed," said Joseph over the cell just after Wednesday's practice. "And Koob knows quarterbacks, and so does [GM] John [Elway] and so does [offensive coordinator] Billy Musgrave. In our building, we've got four or five guys who've played NFL quarterback. I played college quarterback.

"And we're all looking at it and saying, 'Man, I think we've got the guy. He's better than what we thought.' And in my opinion, he's going to play better for us."

So far Keenum has given the Broncos just what they needed coming out of a rough 2017 season. "It's hope, and not just to the receivers, not just to the offense, it's there for our team, for our coaches, for everyone," Joseph says. And there's so much more that Denver believes it can do as a result.

Consider, first, that Keenum was able to compartmentalize three picks and lead the team on a seven-play, 75-yard drive to beat the Seahawks in Week 1. Then, think about how the offense was shut out in the first half against Oakland, and came back to score on its first four possessions of the second half en route to a 20-19 win.

The 2017 Broncos weren't capable of this kind of stuff, largely because they couldn't make it happen from the most important position.

In this week's Game Plan we're going to take a look at the surprise 2-0 teams—we'll get to our players to watch for the weekend and your mail in a bit—and what got the Broncos, Bucs, Dolphins and Bengals through two weeks without a blemish. In each case, quarterback play comes into the equation. And in each case, there's a coach who's had his job security called into question over the last few months.

It goes without saying that, across the NFL, the former most certainly ties into the latter, and that was absolutely the case in Denver as the 2017 season wound down. The rumor mill was spinning on Joseph going into the season's final weekend, and Elway conceded at a press conference the day after the season ended that change was a consideration. Joseph, for his part, understood it.

"I knew I wasn't going to have time to ease into this job, I wasn't going to have time to get it right," he said. "This is the Denver Broncos—they're used to winning. We have demanding ownership, and we have demanding fans. I'm OK with that. I knew taking this job, it wasn't going to be easy. Those things last year, I'd say, deservedly so, we won five games, and I was the head guy in charge.

“But that’s over. That’s behind us.”

It’s behind them largely because, at least for now, there’s a locker room in Denver that believes in its quarterback, because it’s been given reason to believe in its quarterback. As Joseph’s moment with Kubiak in late July would indicate, it started with Keenum’s teammates seeing him work in spring and early summer. It was bolstered by a near-flawless preseason effort against the Redskins.

And it’s been kicked into overdrive the last couple weeks.

In the opener, Keenum followed a first-quarter interception with a seven-play, 75-yard march to his first touchdown pass as a Bronco (29 yards to rookie Philip Lindsay). Denver then started the second half with 31 yards, a pick and two punts in its first four possessions, but after Seattle took the lead, Keenum responded with another seven-play, 75-yard touchdown drive to put the Broncos ahead for good.

Last week it was more of the same. The Broncos mustered just 112 yards and three first downs and punted four times in the first half against Oakland, only to score on all four of their second half possessions to turn 12-0 and 19-7 deficits into a 20-19 win. In the process, they’ve taken on their quarterback’s personality—to keep swinging no matter how tough things get.

“How he leads our team has been breathtaking,” Joseph said. “Obviously our team believes in him, but when you have a guy who has so much confidence in his own game, but a toughness, and he’s a winner, it gives you hope. It allows his teammates to continue to play, knowing that, if we get the ball back to Case, we’re going to be fine. If we’re driving in the fourth quarter or we need a field goal to win, we’re going to be fine. He provides hope.”

There are other factors here, of course. Garrett Bolles has developed at left tackle. The rookie class—behind Bradley Chubb, Courtland Sutton, Josey Jewell, Royce Freeman and Lindsay—has shown promise. Low-profile veteran additions, like Pacman Jones, Jared Veldheer and Tramaine Brock, have paid off.

But in examining the difference between last year and this year, and what Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch were versus what Keenum is, Joseph isn’t trying to fool anyone. It’s evident everywhere.

“Obviously his receivers who played with Peyton [Manning], I’m not saying he’s Peyton, but those guys know what a real guy looks like,” Joseph said. “And to watch [Demaryius Thomas], watch Emmanuel [Sanders] show up every day with so much energy, it’s all because of Case. Receivers want the ball, they want yardage, and when a quarterback can get them the ball, it motivates those guys to practice harder, to practice faster, to put more into it.

“We all know if we just do our job, if we do our part, he will do his part. The quarterback, in this league, is obviously the guy who can make or break a season ... It’s a league that’s built for parity, and there’s one position that can make your team different and that’s quarterback. We all understand that. We all fight with a deeper passion because of our quarterback on Sundays.”

The coolest part, as Joseph explains it, is that neither Keenum nor the team has come close to playing their best yet. “We’re thankful to be 2-0,” he says. They’re there despite some uneven stretches, some turnovers from the quarterback, and some holes they’ve had to dig out of.

Which means there’s still plenty more out there for the Broncos.

Same for the other surprise 2–0 teams? Let's take a look ...

- **Bengals (won at Colts, v. Ravens):** While much of the focus has been on Andy Dalton's improvement and Joe Mixon's emergence, the stabilization of the offensive line is probably the biggest difference for this year's Bengals. Remember, the franchise went through serious attrition up front in losing cornerstones like Andrew Whitworth and Kevin Zeitler the last couple years. So bringing in Cordy Glenn via trade and Billy Price with their first-round pick has re-established what was long a team strength. New line coach Frank Pollack, imported from Dallas, has been a factor too. The challenge now: Price is down for a couple weeks with a foot injury.
- **Buccaneers (won at Saints, v. Eagles):** The easy place to look is at quarterback, and Ryan Fitzpatrick has been fantastic. But opposing coaches are also pointing to offensive coordinator Todd Monken getting play-calling authority this year, and how aggressive Tampa has been as a result. It showed up on the Bucs' fourth play, a first down, against the Saints, with a 58-yard touchdown strike to DeSean Jackson. It came even quicker against the Eagles—75 yards to Jackson. And it shows up across the board in the numbers. Fitzpatrick has thrown the ball more on first down (24 times) than he has on second (20) or third (17). And Fitzpatrick has a perfect passer rating on those 24 first-down throws, completing 20 of them for 460 yards and four touchdowns without a pick. Which is a credit to what Monken's doing.
- **Dolphins (won v. Titans, at Jets):** This offseason, Adam Gase committed to culture over talent, and Miami's already seen the fruits of rebuilding the locker room around veteran imports like Danny Amendola, Albert Wilson, Josh Sitton, Frank Gore and Robert Quinn. One problem last year was that Miami handled neither adversity (Hurricane Irma, Chris Foerster, Ryan Tannehill's injury) nor prosperity (witness the team laying an egg in Buffalo after a big win over New England) well last year. Now? The Dolphins opened the season by winning a seven-hour, three-part, storm-ridden marathon against the Titans, and then came back off that to outlast the Jets on the road in a rockfight. That's two good signs, and Tannehill's play thus far would be another.

WEEKEND WATCH LIST

Players under the spotlight in Week 3:

- **Steelers WR Antonio Brown:** Pittsburgh plays the 2-0 Bucs on Monday night, but that's almost irrelevant. What matters is that the Steelers are winless, and Brown has put himself in the crosshairs. Fair or not, how he plays, and by extension how the team plays, will be seen as a referendum on where the Steelers are amid all the tumult.
- **Falcons S Damontae Kazee/MLB Duke Riley:** Kazee's coming back off his Week 2 ejection (his hit on Cam Newton was way over the line), and Riley will be trying to help the front seven rebound after being gashed for 6.7 yards per carry in last week's win over Carolina. And the Saints offense will most certainly provide challenges for the replacements for Keanu Neal and Deion Jones.

NFL

The Super Bowl Halftime Show: How It Should Be

- **Panthers QB Cam Newton:** The Panthers offensive line has been a M*A*S*H unit over the first couple weeks of the year, and that group gets Carlos Dunlap, Geno Atkins and a fearsome Cincy front this week. That'll put the onus on Newton to get rid of the ball in a timely manner, and move to avoid punishment.

- Giants LT Nate Solder: Thus far the Giants' offensive line issues do not appear to be solved, and J.J. Watt, Jadeveon Clowney and Whitney Mercilus are up next. And at \$15.5 million per year, Solder is firmly the face of a group that took a nationally televised pantsing in Dallas last week.

- Eagles QB Carson Wentz: Obviously.

TWO FOR SATURDAY

College players to keep an NFL eye on this weekend:

Oregon QB Justin Herbert (vs. Stanford, ABC, 8 p.m.): Reviews coming out of Eugene from scouts have been mixed through summer and early fall. On-the-ground scouts, the guys who've watched Herbert practice, see all the traits there and rave about how physically impressive he is in person. The problem? He already has a pair of two-interception games against mid-majors (Bowling Green and San Jose State), and completed fewer than half his throws in those games. He can erase a lot of that this week with a big game against a very tough Stanford defense that has allowed 16 points through three weeks.

NFL

Drew Lock Is Poised to Rise Up NFL Draft Boards

Alabama LT Jonah Williams (vs. Texas A&M, CBS, 3:30 p.m.): There's some question as to what position Williams will play when he gets to the NFL—in fact, there was some question if he'd stay at left tackle this year—and this is one of those game wherer that could get sorted out. Scouts will keep a close eye on the occasions during which Williams is locked up against Aggies senior Keke Kingsley, who is a mountain of a defensive line prospect in his own right.

N.F.L. Week 3: Our Picks Against the Spread

By Benjamin Hoffman
New York Times
September 21, 2018

People tend to like touchdowns and close games, so this N.F.L. season has truly delivered. The N.F.L. has produced the most touchdowns, and the second most overall points, through two weeks of any season in its history, and according to the league, 25 of the 32 games have been within one score at some point in fourth quarter. For those who like to factor in drama, there have even been nine fourth-quarter comebacks.

This week the Rams are trying to prove they are the team to beat in the N.F.L., while Patrick Mahomes and Ryan Fitzpatrick are trying to show their hot starts are not just a fluke, and Matt Patricia is going up against his old boss, Bill Belichick. A reasonable assumption: Lots of touchdowns, lots of points and more than a few close games.

Here is a look at this week's schedule, with all picks made against the point spread.

Last week's record: 10-6

Overall record: 21-10-1

Top-Tier Games

49ers at Chiefs, 1 p.m., Fox

The football world has struggled to quantify just how incredible Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes has been over the season's first two weeks, but one statistic sums it up best: He set a record for touchdown passes through the first three starts of a career — 10.

The reason that's especially notable is that Mahomes didn't throw a single touchdown pass in his first start, which came in the final game of last season. So even after he spotted every quarterback in N.F.L. history a game, he still came out on top.

Mahomes's 10 touchdowns lead the N.F.L., and the Chiefs (2-0) look unstoppable on offense. They have been so wildly entertaining that little attention has been paid to the fact that their defense has allowed 217 more yards than their offense has gained. Provided Mahomes throws from four to six touchdown passes every week — and no interceptions — a yardage deficit like that can be manageable. But should he regress to the mean even slightly, the jig could be up.

Enter the 49ers (1-1), who have their own young quarterback to be excited about in Jimmy Garoppolo and the N.F.L.'s leading rusher in Matt Breida. San Francisco has underwhelmed so far, but if Marquise Goodwin returns on offense, and Reuben Foster makes his season debut on defense, this game might be a lot closer than Las Vegas has predicted. Pick: 49ers +6.5

Chargers at Rams, 4:05 p.m., CBS

Scoring more than 30 points in each of their first two games was hardly surprising for the Rams (2-0), who had the top-scoring offense in the N.F.L. last season and should only benefit from the addition of receiver Brandin Cooks and another year of development from receiver Cooper Kupp. The question is whether the team's defense, which added several stars this off-season, is really as good as suggested by the 13 total points it has allowed thus far.

This first battle between teams from Los Angeles since 1994 will serve as a good test of how the Rams perform against a top-tier offense. Quarterback Philip Rivers and the Chargers (1-1) are fairly certain to do more damage than Oakland or Arizona managed, but should the Rams' defense continue to match their offense, the rest of the league might want to call it a season. Pick: Rams -7

Patriots at Lions, 8:20 p.m., NBC

There are plenty of reasons this game is a top-tier matchup, but none of them have to do with the teams' quality of play so far this season. The Patriots (1-1) have followed up last year's Super Bowl loss with a narrow victory over Houston and a fairly embarrassing loss to Jacksonville. That's still better than the Lions (0-2), who have allowed an ugly 78 points.

Among the plot points to watch:

- Coach Matt Patricia going up against New England after having spent 14 years on the Patriots' coaching staff;
- Josh Gordon, the talented wide receiver, potentially playing for the Patriots despite a hamstring injury that was reportedly part of Cleveland's decision to part ways with him;
- New England's defense, which has allowed 276 passing yards a game, trying to contain Matthew Stafford, who has averaged 323.5.

If Patricia beats his old boss, it would certainly make up for a disappointing first two weeks of the season, but expecting two bad games in a row from Tom Brady and the Patriots seems greedy. Pick: Patriots -6.5

Packers at Redskins, 1 p.m., Fox

The Packers (1-0-1) want to believe that a roughing-the-passer call against Clay Matthews cost them a victory last week. While they have a point, they are ignoring the fact that Green Bay needed a blocked punt for a touchdown, and a performance so horrible by the opposing kicker that he was immediately released by the team, to come away with a tie. Close games and frustration are likely to define the Packers' season as long as Aaron Rodgers is severely limited in his movements because of a knee injury. The veteran superstar gives Green Bay a far better chance of winning than his backup, DeShone Kizer, but either way a decent team like Washington (1-1) is a tough matchup on the road. Pick: Redskins +3

Thursday Night's Matchup

Jets at Browns, 8:20 p.m., NFL Network

If the Browns (0-1-1) seemed cursed to continue their winless streak with a hard-luck tie in Week 1, that feeling only intensified in Week 2, when Zane Gonzalez missed an extra point and a field goal in the closing minutes, denying Cleveland 4 potential points in a 3-point defeat. It was the type of heartbreaker a

franchise occasionally needs in order to end up 1-32-1 over two-plus seasons. Now facing the Jets (1-1), who were terrific in Week 1 and considerably less so in Week 2, the Browns find themselves favored. A key to justifying that faith from Las Vegas would be Tyrod Taylor's rediscovering the accuracy he was known for in the past. Pick: Browns -3

Second-Tier Games

Colts at Eagles, 1 p.m., Fox

If fans of the Colts (1-1) seemed excited about the return of Andrew Luck in Week 1, just wait until Philadelphia fans see Carson Wentz take the field for the Eagles (1-1). It's hard to imagine a team's fan base being more excited about the benching of the reigning Super Bowl M.V.P., but the Philadelphia faithful seem to have struck a healthy balance between being thankful to Nick Foles for the upset over the Patriots and being realistic about how much better their team is with Wentz on the field. The question now is if Wentz can do all of the remarkable things that he did on the field before last year's devastating knee injury. Pick: Colts +6.5

Saints at Falcons, 1 p.m., Fox

The Saints (1-1) were expected to miss running back Mark Ingram (suspended for the first four games over a test for performance-enhancing drugs) on offense. But unless he plans to play defense when he returns, New Orleans has bigger problems. The Saints have allowed 868 total yards through two games, losing to Tampa Bay and just barely beating Cleveland. Now they go on the road to face the Falcons (1-1), a team with an offense that puts those other two teams to shame. Pick: Falcons -3

Titans at Jaguars, 1 p.m., CBS

The Titans (1-1) are looking at starting either a severely limited Marcus Mariota (elbow injury) or a severely limited Blaine Gabbert (overall ability) against the Jaguars (2-0), who just rode Blake Bortles and their strong defense to a fairly easy win over the Patriots. Pick: Jaguars (off)

Bengals at Panthers, 1 p.m., CBS

The Bengals (2-0) are off to an incredible start, especially on offense, and while the Panthers (1-1) have not produced quite as many points, there is every reason to believe that this game will be a high-scoring affair. Cincinnati's Andy Dalton and A.J. Green have looked as good as any quarterback-receiver pair in the N.F.L. besides the Buccaneers' Ryan Fitzpatrick and DeSean Jackson, but Carolina is rightly favored at home. Pick: Panthers -3

Bills at Vikings, 1 p.m., CBS

If not for a cringe-worthy performances by their place-kicker, the Vikings (1-0-1) would be 2-0. To try to avoid such a fate again, they signed Dan Bailey, the second-most accurate kicker in N.F.L. history. Things aren't quite so rosy for the Bills (0-2). The biggest problem with cornerback Vontae Davis's retirement at halftime last week is that now the team's other players know that is an option. Pick: Bills +16.5

Broncos at Ravens, 1 p.m., CBS

The Broncos (2-0) have come from behind in both their wins, and they may have struck gold with running back Phillip Lindsay, an undrafted rookie who has gone for more than 100 yards from scrimmage in both games. But all of that good news is tempered by a lack of consistency on both sides of the ball. The Ravens (1-1) showed last week that their blowout victory in Week 1 was a fluke, but they do enough on defense that this game should be close. Pick: Broncos +5

Bottom-Tier Games

Raiders at Dolphins, 1 p.m., CBS

The most interesting part of this matchup might be the national anthem, when Marshawn Lynch of the Raiders (0-2) will presumably sit on the bench while Kenny Stills and Albert Wilson of the Dolphins (2-0) kneel in a continuation of the protest to raise awareness of police brutality. Once the game starts, the result will most likely be determined by Oakland's ability to turn all of its yardage into points. Pick: Raiders +3

Bears at Cardinals, 4:25 p.m., Fox

The Khalil Mack show is on once a week, and it is must-see TV. The rest of the Bears (1-1) do not live up to their defensive star — quarterback Mitchell Trubisky seemed especially problematic last week — but against the hapless Cardinals (0-2), a one-man show is sufficient. Pick: Bears -6

Cowboys at Seahawks, 4:25 p.m., Fox

The Cowboys (1-1) looked so good on both sides of the ball against the Giants last week that it's surprising the final score — 20-13 — was so close. More surprising is the fact that the Seahawks (0-2) have been fairly competitive despite having no running game and a porous defense. Pick: Cowboys +1.5

Giants at Texans, 1 p.m., Fox

The main difference between these winless teams is that some pundits thought the Texans (0-2) could be good this season while the Giants (0-2) were widely seen as a rebuilding project. Houston has more overall talent, and at some point quarterback Deshaun Watson will explode for a huge game, but he will need consistency from his offensive line for that to happen. Pick: Texans -6

Monday's Matchup

Steelers at Buccaneers, 8:15 p.m., ESPN

The Steelers (0-1-1) are probably not as bad as they have seemed, and the Buccaneers (2-0) should hold off on making Super Bowl plans. But there is no question which team has been having more fun this season.

Ryan Fitzpatrick's connection with DeSean Jackson has been remarkable — and he has been nearly as productive throwing to Mike Evans. But it is worth remembering that while Fitzpatrick's back-to-back games of 400 or more passing yards and at least four touchdowns tied an N.F.L. record set by Dan Marino, the record was also matched by the extremely forgettable Billy Volek back in 2004. In Volek's bid to make it three games in a row with such gaudy statistics, he managed just eight completions and 111 yards.

There is opportunity for another big game by Fitzpatrick, especially given that Pittsburgh allowed Patrick Mahomes to throw six touchdowns last week. And while the Steelers' offense deals with several problems in an early-season slump, Coach Mike Tomlin has to find a way for his team to win or he could find himself on the hot seat, in spite of having won a Super Bowl for a franchise that prizes stability in the head coaching job. Pick: Steelers -1

Vance Joseph: Case Keenum needs to take care of the football better

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 21, 2018

Like last year, Broncos quarterback Case Keenum has shown a knack for beating franchise quarterbacks; he's 2-0 against Russell Wilson and Derek Carr. Unlike last year, Keenum has generated plenty of turnovers.

Coach Vance Joseph told reporters on Thursday that he'd like to see those errors be reduced.

"I think Case would say this: just taking care of the football better," Joseph said, when asked what Keenum should do better. "We're in the high red zone last week and we give one away. We gave three away against Seattle after defensive turnovers, so he would tell you guys probably taking care of the football. Again, I've been really impressed with Case and how he's come back from those plays and continued to play at a high level for our offense."

Keenum had seven interceptions during the 2017 regular season. This year, he already has four interceptions through two games. And his passer rating has dropped from 98.3 in 2017 to 73.6 in 2018.

Still, the Broncos are winning. Which they didn't do nearly enough last year. This weekend, it won't be easy when Keenum returns to Baltimore, for the first time since a controversial game in which he suffered a concussion but wasn't removed from play.

Broncos taking new approach to eastern travel this year

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 21, 2018

The Broncos played five games in the eastern time zone last season and they lost four of them by at least 10 points.

That's led the team to reassess their travel plans for such games and they'll be trying something new this season, starting with this weekend's game in Baltimore. They'll be flying out on Saturday and coach Vance Joseph said he believes it will allow the team's focus to be solely on the game.

"We just want to go out and play the game," Joseph said, via Mike Klis of KUSA. "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."

After facing the Ravens, the Broncos will have a Week Five game against the Jets and a Week 13 game against the Bengals. We'll see if this week's results impact their travel plans for those games.

Wink Martindale: Playing Von Miller like playing LeBron

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

September 21, 2018

With all the Khalil Mack hype — which is well deserved — Von Miller somewhat has flown below the radar this season despite leading the league in sacks. Opponents, though, have noticed the havoc the Broncos linebacker has caused through two games.

“It’s like playing LeBron [James], and . . . every now and then, LeBron is going to clear the lane and go dunk,” Ravens defensive coordinator Wink Martindale said, via Jamison Hensley of ESPN. “Those types of players do that. You always have to account for him, because he’s that special of a player.”

Miller has four sacks, two forced fumbles, a fumble recovery, 12 tackles and a pass defended. He had a strip-sack of Derek Carr negated by a defensive holding penalty Sunday.

The Ravens have allowed six sacks in two games.

Joe Montana: Effort by Hall of Famers should include all players

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 21, 2018

Hall of Fame running back Eric Dickerson wants \$300,000 per year for every Hall of Famer, plus health insurance for all former players. Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana supports the effort, with a caveat.

“They are on the right path,” Montana told Daniel Kaplan of SportsBusiness Daily. “It should be inclusive of all players. I mean, when you look at our pension plan in general — not just for the Hall of Famers, but in general for the NFL — it is terrible compared to all the other sports. We are not even close and yet we are the most at risk.”

The problem for former players is that the pension rights are determined by current players, and current players don’t often think of themselves as future former players.

Dickerson and others hope to leverage payment for Hall of Famers by threatening not to show up for the annual Hall of Fame enshrinement ceremony. Montana, as explained by Kaplan, doesn’t usually attend anyway.

“I understand where they are going, but it should be more,” Montana said. “I just think it should be more than the HOF. I understand what they are doing, they think if they can get the HOF guys moving than that will help everyone in the long run.”

There’s still nothing that can be done, other than hope that threats to not attend the enshrinement ceremony will spark action — or that P.R. will mount in favor of the former players.

FanDuel reverses course, will pay off long shot bets

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

September 21, 2018

The fan in New Jersey who bet \$110 on the Broncos when FanDuel accidentally listed them at 750-1 odds will get his money after all.

After initially saying that it had posted those long shot odds accidentally and wouldn't honor the fan's bet, FanDuel released a statement saying that it will pay off multiple bets that were placed on the Broncos at a time when a glitch resulted in FanDuel listing them as extreme long shots to beat the Raiders, which they did.

"We are paying out these erroneous tickets and wish the lucky customers well. Going forward, we are working with the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement to improve our processes and procedures," FanDuel said in the statement.

FanDuel did make clear, however, that it believes it is not legally required to pay such bets. If FanDuel intends to list a bet at 10-1 but accidentally lists it as 10000000-1, they're only going to pay off at 10-1.

"These kinds of issues are rare, but they do happen," the statement said. "We have clear house rules about how such obvious pricing errors are treated, which is to pay winners at the correct price."

So the fans who found those crazy odds on the Broncos will get paid. The next fan to find such a mistake won't be as lucky.