

# Kiszla vs. O'Halloran: Is the Broncos' quest to win the AFC West dead with a loss to Kansas City?

By Ryan O'Halloran and Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
September 25, 2018

Question: Is the Broncos' quest to win the AFC West dead with a loss to Kansas City?

Kiz: The Broncos looked bad in Baltimore. In fact, they looked eerily like the 5-11 team from last year. But with a 2-1 record, Denver is only a game behind Kansas City in the AFC West standings. The Chiefs are coming to this dusty old cow town for a Monday night tilt, with the whole country watching. This game is critical. That's obvious. But is it too bold to suggest the Broncos can't win the division if they can't defend their home turf against Kansas City?

O'Halloran: Even if the Broncos lose to Kansas City, it doesn't mean their division hopes are dashed. Remember, the Chiefs started 5-0 last year before losing six of their next seven games. Any team coached by Andy Reid has a chance to be a come-from-ahead-to-lose story. Plus, there is always the chance Patrick Mahomes cools off just enough to make things interesting. But Broncos coach Vance Joseph shouldn't listen to me. He needs to treat Week 4 like his job is on the immediate line.

Kiz: The Chiefs have been established as a 5-point favorite as a visitor to Mile High? That's insulting to Broncos Country. But here's what is scary. Remember the eight-game losing streak that nearly cost Joseph his job in 2017? Well, take a look at Denver's upcoming schedule. The Broncos might not be favored to win again until the first weekend of November, with a possible exception of their trip to Arizona. That's why beating K.C. takes on added importance.

O'Halloran: The Broncos should be favored at Arizona, but even the Cardinals should be thinking, "Hey, Sam Bradford or Josh Rosen should be able to dissect that secondary." The Chiefs game is crucial for the Broncos in the aspect they can't get outclassed on their home field a week after getting embarrassed at Baltimore. Yes, fans, it has come to that: The initial hope for Monday night is for the home team to be competitive.

Kiz: The Chiefs are averaging nearly 40 points per game. Those are Star Wars numbers that evoke Peyton Manning's best days in Denver. So as the Broncos install the game plan for Kansas City, what will present the greater challenge: Devising schemes in the secondary to slow down "Showtime" Mahomes? Or finding a way to amp up an inconsistent Denver offense to win a shootout?

O'Halloran: Kansas City is allowing 474 yards and a shade over 30 points per game... and it's 3-0! That shows just how potent the offense has been. The Broncos, if they don't turn it over and keep left tackle Garrett Bolles off the penalty ledger (two big "if's"), should move the ball against the Chiefs. The Broncos' coaches need to use the extra day to come up with a whole new pass defense plan. And that is Joseph's area of expertise as a former secondary coach. The current over/under is 55. I'm taking the over.

# Broncos Film Room: 10 takeaways from Denver's 27-14 loss to the Baltimore Ravens

By Ryan O'Halloran  
The Denver Post  
September 25, 2018

## Third-down fail

1. The Broncos' defensive issues were summarized in one play. The Ravens trailed 14-10 in the second quarter and faced a third-and-2 from the Broncos' 12. At the snap, running back Buck Allen headed to the right flat ... and was covered by linebacker Von Miller. Allen caught the pass behind the line of scrimmage and beat Miller to the goal-line. A red zone third down. And Miller was in coverage instead of rushing quarterback Joe Flacco. Inexcusable.

## Secondary stumbles

2. Another long day for the Broncos' cornerbacks in man coverage: Bradley Roby (6 of 9, 72 yards by Flacco), Chris Harris (4 of 6, 44 yards) and rookie Issac Yiadom (3 of 4, 59 yards).

## Special effort

3. It will be hard for Broncos special teams ace Joseph Jones to top what he did in the opening 90 seconds. He made the tackle on kickoff coverage that forced Baltimore to start at its 16. Following a three-and-out, Jones made another splash play. He blocked Sam Koch's punt 2.09 seconds after the football was snapped, dusting Ravens blocker Tyus Bowser. The Broncos scored one play later for a 7-0 lead.

## Broncos' TDs

4. On that touchdown run by Royce Freeman (six yards), he started left before hopping right. Tight end Jake Butt was the lead blocker, pulling from left to right, but the play was so well blocked, Butt had nobody to hit and crossed the goal-line untouched right before Freeman did. The Broncos' second drive was capped by receiver Emmanuel Sanders' 35-yard touchdown run (end-around). Fullback Andy Janovich wiped out safety Eric Weddle at the 4 and receiver Courtland Sutton walled off cornerback Brandon Carr at the 1 to help Sanders score.

## Rushing the passer

5. The Broncos rushed at least five players on 18 of Flacco's 43 drop-backs (41.9 percent). But Baltimore's commitment to keeping extra blockers was a direct result. On 11 of those pressures, the Ravens had six or more pass protectors. Bradley Chubb had his first solo sack of the year, bull-rushing left tackle Ronnie Stanley (3.06 seconds). Shane Ray beat left guard Alex Lewis (3.22).

## Protecting the passer

6. The Ravens rushed five or more players on 16 of Broncos quarterback Case Keenum's 43 drop-backs (37.2 percent). Outside linebacker Za'Darius Smith beat right tackle Jared Veldheer (2.66 seconds), outside linebacker Terrell Suggs beat left tackle Garrett Bolles (2.84) and Suggs and linebacker Matthew Judon split a sack (booked to right guard Connor McGovern and left guard Ron Leary in 3.39 seconds).

## Rough day at the office

7. McGovern allowed only one quarterback pressure/hit apiece in the first two games, but struggled against the Ravens. Our charting pegged him for allowing a half-sack, two hits, two pressures, and two penalties. Yikes.

#### Third quarter blues

8. Where the game really fell apart for the Broncos. Trailing 20-14, they got possession first in the third quarter and Freeman gained 11 yards. First down: Brent Urban pass bat-down. Second down: Keenum short-hopped Sanders. Third down: Keenum extended the play for 7.45 seconds before getting hit by Weddle as he threw incomplete. The Ravens marched 77 yards on 14 plays to seize control with a touchdown.

#### Wrapping up

9. The Broncos had a season-low three missed tackles (Harris, Chubb and Roby). They have 15 in three games. The run defense was solid with 13 “stuffs” (gain or three or fewer yards). Defensive lineman Derek Wolfe had three stuffs and linebacker Todd Davis had 2 1/2.

#### Going out with whimper

10. The Broncos’ final offensive play was a mess. On fourth-and-goal from the 7, the Broncos used an empty backfield. Suggs rushed from Keenum’s left side and was not blocked. He got in the way enough for Keenum to throw quickly and incomplete. It continues to be amazing how teams don’t communicate better in those situations. Miller is occasionally unblocked as well.

# Why is Broncos quarterback Case Keenum struggling?

By Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
September 25, 2018

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

Tough schedule ahead that most likely will result in a Broncos losing record. How should/will the Broncos approach the next three games?

Kiszla: The Broncos might not be favored to win a game until the first week of November, with possible exception of Thursday night game at Arizona, where Cards are imploding. So your question is a critical one. A must win game in Week 4? Yes. The Broncos have to beat Kansas City at home. Fail to do so and you can kiss any realistic shot at winning the AFC West goodbye. And a two-game losing streak could get out of hand quickly, the same way last season went on a downward spiral so fast it almost cost Vance Joseph his job as coach. Got. To. Beat. The Chiefs.

What's the case for Keenum as quarterback?

Kiszla: I have been telling Broncos Country from the day Case Keenum signed that he's an average NFL quarterback. He's a good man. But has average NFL skills. And he's trying to do too much. It's a bad combination. Relax, Mr. Keenum. Be happy with being a game manager that doesn't turn the ball over.

Is Nikola Jokic as goofy as he seems? I mean that in a good way.

Kiszla: Nikola Jokic is naturally goofy. He's funny. I asked him once: Where do you get your sense of humor. He told me: Friends. I said: Friends back in Serbia, new friends in the USA? He said: No, "Friends." Joey and all the people on the TV show. Nikola will never kick ass and take names. But he's true to himself. He's real. And teammates appreciate that about him. Especially because he likes to pass the rock.

How long until the Broncos are rid of the inept Vance Joseph?

Kiszla: Broncos Country is restless with Vance Joseph. I think he understands that. I think he's a good man. I don't think he's the right coach for the Broncos. I hope he proves me wrong. For the team's sake. For the fans' sake.

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said something revealing in the locker room after the loss in Baltimore. He said the Broncos needed to disguise coverages in the secondary and defensive looks up front better, because Joe Flacco and the Ravens knew exactly what look the Denver defense was going to give them. Two things: 1) Remember when the Super Bowl 50 defense dared you to beat them? Well, that dominant defense is gone. The Broncos need to get "cuter" or at least more imaginative on defense, and 2) Sounds as if defensive coordinator Joe Woods has his work cut out for him with Patrick "Showtime" Mahomes and the high-scoring Chiefs coming to town.

What are your thoughts on the ejection of Phillip Lindsay from yesterday's game?

Kizsla: I love Phillip Lindsay. Love his passion. Willing to believe he was trying to punch out the football from the bottom of the pile rather than take a swing at the Ravens. But here's the deal: You can't help your team win from the pine. Getting kicked out is a mental error. A big mental error. Always. Lindsay knows this. There were some in Broncos Country that wanted to blame the officiating for this loss. It was ticky-tack from the start. Ticky-tack calls. That's irritating. Don't let the refs beat you. Or toss you. That doesn't happen if you have smart coaches that keep players from losing their cool in the heat of battle.

In your view why did the Broncos lose to the Ravens?

Kizsla: Why did Broncos lose to the Ravens? Case Keenum stunk. Absence of Phillip Lindsay really hurt. Von Miller didn't go crazy. The Broncos have big issues in the secondary. Coaching is uninspired and at times bordering on inept. Should I go on? I won't. Let's move on to a happier topic. Cuz I am Mr. Sunshine, ya know?

Is Bill Musgrave calling the right plays for the team?

Kizsla: I think Bill Musgrave's play-calling as the offensive coordinator is not near the top of the Broncos' concerns. But I do think Courtland Sutton needs to be turned loose at receiver, even if it means fewer targets for Demaryius Thomas. And I think Jake Butt — and no one else — should be the primary target at tight end. But offensive line was not good against the Ravens, which made both Musgrave and Keenum look bad.

OK, Mr. Sunshine, how can the Broncos beat the Chiefs?

Kizsla: Score 42 points. Or intercept Patrick Mahomes 3 times. Take your pick.

What do you think of the challenges made in the game?

Kizsla: Dumb and dumber.

Is Joe Woods the right fit for the Broncos defense? I'm expecting seven TDs total against the Broncos next week?

Kizsla: I'm not predicting the Chiefs will score 49. Forty? Maybe. (Hey, they don't call me Mr. Sunshine for nothing.) But I do think Joe Woods has been shaky as the defensive coordinator. He needs to pick up his game.

Regarding DJ LeMahieu's replacement, Jeff Bridich recently said "We're not in the business of gifting opportunities to young players just because they happen to be in the organization. They have to earn it" but they're fine with gifting 1,000 plate appearances to sub-replacement-level Ian Desmond and Gerardo Parra?

Kizsla: Some Rockies fans think I have an axe to grind with Ian Desmond. If I do, it's only this: If you're paid a \$22 million salary, you can't perform at replacement level. Teammates love the grit, determination and professionalism of Desmond. That doesn't make up for hitting into 4-6-3 double plays.

How did Keenum have a great season with the Vikings, and how did/does his offense tools (i.e. Diggs, Thielen, RBs and TEs) compare to the Broncos?

Kiszla: My theory: Case Keenum is a mentally tough son of a gun. He has refused to let the NFL beat him. He hung tough, got a chance with the Vikings and maximized it. Then got paid. My guess: 2017 was a career year for Keenum. He will never be better than 2017. No shame in that. But shame on the Broncos if they thought Keenum was going to grow into a Pro Bowl caliber player in the second half of his career. And know what? I don't think John Elway believed that. I think Elway viewed Keenum as a reasonably priced (by NFL standards) short-term fix at quarterback.

So did Phillip Lindsay take a swing or was he just trying to punch the ball out? It seems to me like that was an overreaction from the refs.

Kiszla: The refs over-reacted to everything in the Ravens-Broncos game. Against both teams. Baltimore had an interception returned for a touchdown, a play that could have put the game on ice, negated by a ticky-tack block in the back call. It is a player's job, one of his first job's, not to let the ref take him out of the game. Period.

Kiz, if there was one good thing from yesterday's game, it was how Josey Jewell looked out there. He's a natural in the center of the field for the Broncos. Has he earned that starting role?

Kiszla: Good point. Good optimistic observation. I think Josey Jewell is a keeper. And even more: I think Josey Jewell will be a starter on defense before this season is over.

Do the Buffs beat UCLA this week to enter the Top 25 polls? What says you, Kiz?

Kiszla: Buffs are undefeated. But the teams they've beaten? Unimpressive. At best. Nebraska is awful. CSU might be worse. And New Hampshire is a beautiful state, but not much of a football program. So it's a flimsy undefeated record. But CU will take it. Gladly. And UCLA? The Bruins seem to be in disarray. I say Colorado should win the game Friday night in Boulder by double digits. And that will put the Buffs in the top 25. For sure. Will it create the same swag and magic of the team from 2016. Maybe. And maybe because the Pac-12 division in which CU resides has all the bad teams this season. Keep winning. Ask what it really means later. And enjoy the party.

Is Chad Kelly ready to be an NFL QB?

Kiszla: Doubt it. But if Case Keenum keeps getting hit like he did in Baltimore, might find out how much game Chad Kelly has sooner rather than later.

Is Patrick Mahomes the best QB from last year's draft even over Mitchell Trubisky who the Bears traded up from the No. 3 slot to get?

Kiszla: I was not a big Patrick Mahomes fan when he played in college. My bad. Mea culpa. All that. Better than Trubisky? Appears so.

Is Kelly the next up for QB after Case leaves? A dark horse like Mahomes?

Kiszla: Chad Kelly is Patrick Mahomes? If you say it 3 times fast, maybe it will make it true.

When's the last time you spoke to a Broncos player? Are they feeling optimistic?

Kizla: I spoke to Broncos players in the locker room after the Baltimore loss. In his presser, Von Miller acted concerned. Genuinely concerned. It was a little disconcerting.

Weird week in the NFL: Pats lose to Lions, Bills beat the Vikings and the Browns actually won a game. Why?

Kizla: Is the beautiful love affair between Handsome Tom Brady and the Hoodie finally over? The rest of the NFL can only hope.

Is the Broncos' defense worse than last year's already?

Kizla: The secondary, particularly at cornerback, is a mess. Until that's fixed, the defense of 2018 is likely worse than the defense of 2017.

What can you take for the headache I have after that nightmare yesterday?

Kizla: I had a bourbon on the rocks after the game. It was good.

The Pats finally look old. Thank god.

Kizla: Misery loves company, eh?

# Broncos cornerbacks Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones expected to return against Chiefs

By Kyle Fredrickson and Ryan O'Halloran

The Denver Post

September 25, 2018

Watch Broncos film from their first three games and one big trend is clear.

Want to attack Denver's defense? Hit their secondary with quick strikes and reap the rewards. Seattle totaled 298 yards passing and three scores. Oakland dropped 288 and one touchdown. Then Baltimore lit up the Broncos for 277 and another score. Opposing wide receivers all feasting on mostly short-to-intermediate routes.

"If teams want to throw the ball that quick, then we have to play closer in coverage and make some plays early," Joseph said. "It's a blue-print on tape now the last couple weeks — throw it quick, challenge the DBs and keep Von Miller and (Bradley) Chubb and those guys at bay."

Help arrives in Week 4 on Monday night against the Chiefs, with two cornerbacks set to return from injury: Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones.

Brock suffered a left groin strain against the Ravens, had an MRI, and Joseph said "it looks to be OK." Brock is expected to practice Wednesday, Thursday and then play Monday night against the Chiefs. Jones missed the week of practice leading up to Denver's trip to Baltimore and joined the inactive list with a hamstring injury. Joseph said he is also expected to be back Monday.

Rookie Isaac Yiadom made his NFL debut as the team's third cornerback in their absence. He was targeted often and finished the day with four tackles.

"Every game, I'll be able to build," Yiadom said. "I made some mistakes and made some plays. I have to fix the mistakes and go into next week and be better."

Lindsay reaction. Joseph addressed rookie running back Phillip Lindsay's Sunday ejection in Baltimore for throwing a punch in a scrum for a loose football.

"I saw him dive into the pile, which is illegal, so he can't do it," Joseph said. "There were three guys who dove into the pile. It was (Marlon) Humphrey for (Baltimore), he was the first guy, then (left guard Ron) Leary dove into the pile and then Phillip into the pile. It should have been three penalties on all three of those guys."

"I didn't see a punch being thrown. ... But we have to own the penalties."

More expected from King. The Broncos signed former Raiders punter Marquette King with the expectation he'd consistently pin opponents deep in their own territory with booming elevation-drive distance. It has yet to materialize. After four games, King checks it at No. 23 league-wide for gross punting (44.6 yards) and No. 15 for net punting (41.6). He's checked opponents inside their own 20-yard line six times.



“He has to simply punt better, no different than our corners have to play better in coverage, and we’ve got to block better,” Joseph said. “He’s a football player and he’s got to do his job. He’s got to punt better.”

Chiefs’ rare situation. Kansas City has been installed as a five-point favorite over the Broncos, putting it in position to be a favorite in Denver for only the third time in 30 years.

In 1991, the Broncos won 19-16 as a 1 1/2-point underdog.

In 2010, the Broncos won 49-29 as a one-point underdog.

# It's the year of ejections in the NFL: Inside the trend

By Kevin Seifert

ESPN

September 25, 2018

It snuck up on us, didn't it? None of us anticipated the NFL's confusing and at times absurd emphasis on roughing the passer penalties in 2018, one that has produced 30 flags through the first 47 games of the season.

So can we all agree not to allow a parallel trend to arrive unannounced as well?

Hiding in plain sight is the sudden realization of a strategy the NFL has been attempting to implement for years. For the first time in memory, the league is using ejections as a regular penalty for and deterrence against on-field behavior -- a potentially season-changing tool given the relative scarcity of NFL games.

We have seen fits and starts of this approach in the past, but nothing that approached the longevity of this effort. In the past 12 weeks of regular-season play, dating back to Week 9 of last year, 20 players have been ejected. That total includes five in 2018 and represents a pace that would double any 17-week total on record prior to the start of the 2017 season.

The origins include a confluence of commissioner Roger Goodell's priorities in recent years, sportsmanship and safety, and can be traced to efforts that began late in the 2015 season. It is a welcome development for many, and a consequence I've advocated for as well, but it is without question having an impact on games.

Sunday, for example, the Denver Broncos could not score after losing leading rushing Phillip Lindsay late in the second quarter of an eventual 27-14 loss to the Baltimore Ravens. Referee Ron Torbert said Lindsay dove into a pile and threw a punch, and it's reasonable to wonder if the Broncos would have fared better if their starting running back had remained in the lineup.

Lindsay said afterward that he was not punching an opponent but instead attempting to recover a loose ball. But Torbert's decision underscored the NFL's emphasis on using the ejection tool.

## Ejections by season

Year	Ejections
2018 W1-3	5
2017 W9-17	15
2017 W1-8	3
2016	13
2015	4
2014	13
2013	6
2012	7
2011	8
2010	5

Source: ESPN Stats & Information

To be clear, referees have for decades resisted ejecting players for anything beyond outrageous behavior. Each game represents 6.25 percent of the season and carries an outsized impact on a team's fortunes, at least compared to the 162-game major league baseball season or the 82-game campaigns in pro basketball and hockey. As the table shows, referees issued an average of seven per season between 2010 and '15.

Neither the NFL nor the Elias Sports Bureau has tracked ejection totals over history, mostly because they have been irrelevant. ESPN Stats & Information records on ejections go back to 2001 and indicate there had never been an NFL season with more than 13 ejections before last season's run began. So as best as we can tell, the league has entered a record-setting era in this space.

Where did it all come from? You have to go back to December 2015, when the NFL office was livid that referee Terry McAulay failed to act more forcefully to a gamelong series of extracurricular pushing and punching between New York Giants receiver Odell Beckham Jr. and then-Carolina Panthers cornerback Josh Norman.

As the table shows, the NFL finished 2015 with only four ejections. Then, referee John Parry failed to eject anyone involved in a series of late-game incidents during a violent playoff game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Cincinnati Bengals. The NFL spent that offseason encouraging referees to use ejections more frequently, and over the next two years added a series of rules that all but guaranteed it.

In 2016, owners approved a rule that required an automatic ejection if a player received two of a certain type of unsportsmanlike conduct penalties in the same game. This season, they mandated that referees eject flagrant violators of the new helmet rule. And, importantly, the league gave senior vice president of officiating Al Riveron the authority to add an ejection to any penalty a referee has called during a game.

When you add up those factors, you have the results we see today. The league has even ventured beyond ejections for sportsmanship and issued two this season for late hits on quarterbacks, the first such ejections since 2009, according to the website Football Zebras.

If the league continues the pace it started in Week 9 of 2017, it will have disqualified 28 players during a 17-week stretch. That's a 115 percent increase from what we can assume is the previous 17-game record, and more than the five seasons between 2010 and '14 combined.

I don't know of a way to measure whether the game is cleaner or safer with the legitimate threat of ejections hanging over players. I do know that I'd rather watch the Broncos with Phillip Lindsay on the field.

But I think we can all agree that there have been other games in recent history marred by behavior that could have been emboldened by a limited menu of consequences. The NFL has fully opened its toolbox for dealing with those situations, and the results are hiding in plain sight.

# What happened to the Broncos' pass defense?

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

September 25, 2018

After the Broncos' Week 2 win over the Raiders, Vance Joseph said the Broncos' cornerback coverage was "too soft." Derek Carr completed all but one pass in the first half and had six completions in the game that spanned 20 or more yards.

"That falls back on the corners," Joseph said at the time. "We have to press the receivers because if he holds the ball, we know that we can get pressure. If it comes up quick and we were 7 or 8 yards off, it's going to be a completed ball and he's going to fall for 5 or 6."

After the Broncos' Week 3 loss to the Ravens in Baltimore, cornerback Chris Harris Jr. had a more damning take on the plan for the cornerbacks. Quarterback Joe Flacco took advantage of the Broncos' depleted secondary and amassed 212 net passing yards in the first half. He found deep completions against rookie Isaac Yiadom in coverage and used his tight ends to gain yardage up the middle.

"We didn't play up to standard," Harris said Sunday evening. "I think Flacco had a good jump on what we were doing defensively. We gotta figure out a way to try to confuse some quarterbacks. We're making it too easy for them. They already know where to throw the ball, so we got to confuse them."

"We got to disguise better as a team and confuse him, try not to give him easy looks to where he already knows where to throw the ball."

The message was an indictment on the Broncos' defensive game plan and play-calling, both of which came up short Sunday in Baltimore. The Broncos' issues in pass coverage have been exposed in recent weeks, but surprising given the strength of the defense in the past.

From 2015-16, the Broncos, with their elite pass rush and self-titled No Fly Zone secondary, led the league in passing yards allowed. Last season, despite a 5-11 finish, the Broncos ranked fourth in passing yards allowed (200.6 per game), as well as fifth against the run (89.4) and third in total yards allowed (290).

And for 37 consecutive games, the Broncos have held opponents to 300 net passing yards or fewer, the longest active streak in the NFL.

But after trading away Aqib Talib in the offseason, the Broncos' secondary no longer seems feared. In fact, passing against the Broncos' defense has become the preferred option.

"It's just the kind of game that you're in," Flacco said. "Honestly, if you want to really say it, this game, we could have thrown the ball 55 times, and I think it probably would have been to our advantage."

After Sunday's games, the Broncos ranked 23rd with 262.7 passing yards allowed. Opposing quarterbacks have completed 69.5 percent of their passes against Denver (25th in the league) and posted an average 102.2 rating (22nd). In the red zone, opponents' completion percentage and average passer rating ballooned to 80 percent and 125.8, respectively.

The numbers get worse when broken down further:

- The Broncos have allowed 13 completions of 20 yards or more, which ties them for 27th in the NFL.
- On first downs, they've allowed an average passer rating of 111.7, which ranks 25th in the league.
- On second downs, Broncos opponents have totaled 341 net yards, averaged a 115.4 passer rating and picked up first downs on nearly 42 percent of their attempts.

Although the Broncos rank fourth against the run (77.7 yards) and allowed only 2.8 yards per carry to the Ravens, the passing game continued to cause problems when they set out to correct issue from the previous week.

Asked if he agreed with Harris' assessment of the game plan for the cornerbacks, Joseph admitted the coaching staff is partially to blame and that it can provide more looks and coverage packages.

"We have to challenge more at the corner position and make more plays," Joseph said. "If teams want to throw the ball that quick, we have to play closer in coverage and makes some plays early that way our pass rush can get there. It's a blueprint on tape right now the last three weeks — throw it quick. Challenge the DBs and throw it quick and keep Von Miller and (Bradley) Chubb and those guys at bay by throwing the football quick.

"But the bottom line is we have to obviously play better, especially in man-to-man situations. We have to coach better and help those guys play more shell defense on certain downs."

At Baltimore the Broncos were without veteran Adam Jones, who played the bulk of the third-cornerback snaps the week prior. They lost fellow veteran corner Tramaine Brock early Sunday because of a groin injury, leaving Yiadom to man the third corner position in his NFL debut.

Joseph said he expects both Jones and Brock to return to practice this week and play next Monday night against the Chiefs, the most prolific offense in the league so far.

But they alone won't fix the issues.

A long-time defensive backs coach before becoming a defensive coordinator and then head coach, Joseph has said he's involved more in the decision-making on defense than offense for the Broncos because of his background.

Game plans are made collectively with the defensive coaching staff and play-calling is shared between him and coordinator Joe Woods.

The system of developing the plan has been in place and use by coaches who were in Denver long before Joseph arrived, such as inside linebackers coach Reggie Herring and defensive line coach Bill Kollar. The system won't change.

But the plan will have to.

“I’m in every meeting, so that won’t stop,” Joseph said. “Again, we have to definitely help our defensive backs more because teams do have a blueprint on how to soften our coverage. And those kids are trying and they’re competing. But it’s our job to make their lives easier, so we will. We will do that, and that’s through the calls we make and that’s how we game plan.

“As they adjust, we have to adjust even faster. Again, we have to coach better and we will.”

# Broncos Denver7 takeaways from loss to Ravens

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 25, 2018

In the tunnel at M&T Bank Stadium, the message is impossible to miss.

"Play Like a Raven" is painted in bright gold, demanding a certain standard from the home players. After the Broncos lost their way and their cool in a 27-14 defeat at Baltimore, it raised the question: What does it mean to play like a Bronco?

When Denver won Super Bowl 50, accountability, toughness (with a dose of nastiness), and consistent leadership defined the team. It has been lacking in varying amounts since. The point remains driven home on the road where Denver has lost eight of its last nine dating to last season, outscored by 13 points per game.

There's no shame in a 2-1 start, but it feels precarious. This is a pivotal week to show improvement as two of the next three opponents are considered Super Bowl contenders, Kansas City and the Los Angeles Rams, sandwiching a roadie at the Jets.

My Denver7 takeaways from the loss:

## 1) Case concerns

When the Broncos added Case Keenum, they needed a rudder. He fills the role of captain comfortably. His production has not matched his status: five interceptions, tied for the league's most, and three touchdowns, ranking 22nd out of 25 qualifying quarterbacks. A learning curve is reasonable for a player on a new team who is adjusting to life as The Man. Still, the Broncos need better, and fast. Keenum held onto the ball too long in Baltimore, and while he minimized turnovers against relentless pressure, he failed to produce the big play.

## 2) Corner market

The Broncos are thinner than Flat Stanley at cornerback, and it bit them at Baltimore. With Tramaine Brock uncertain to play this week because of a groin injury, the team is compromised even with the anticipated return of Adam Jones. General manager John Elway is looking to add another corner. Bashaud Breeland represents arguably best available free agent. He has drawn interest from seven teams over the last several weeks. According to reports, deals never happened because of a previous foot issue and contract demands. Still, he is a name to file away. In absence of a trade or signing, the Broncos could promote Brendan Langley from the practice squad, but he seemed unfit for the task in the preseason.

## 3) Coverage issues

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said what others are thinking: Is it time to make adjustments in coverage? He insisted the Broncos are giving opposing quarterbacks "easy looks," and that Baltimore's Joe Flacco "already knew where to throw the ball and that we have to try and move around to try and disguise (the looks)."

This marks the second straight week a player or coach has questioned defensive coordinator Joe Woods' game plan. Coach Vance Joseph called the coverage "soft" against Oakland. Part of the issue is the lacking depth. However, quarterbacks own a 69.5 percent completion percentage against Denver, eighth best in the league. The Broncos need to figure out a blend of press and matchup zone coverage that fits the current group. Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes enters Monday night with a NFL record 13 touchdowns in the season's first three games.

#### 4) Tackle the job

Left tackle Garrett Bolles struggled mightily and admittedly against Ravens rusher Terrell Suggs. The Ravens sacked Keenum three times, and provided steady pressure. Bad days happen at left tackle, but it looked frighteningly similar to last season. Former Broncos offensive lineman and 104.3 The Fan radio show host Mark Schlereth called for his benching. Regardless, Bolles must improve and respond to adversity better than he did as a rookie.

#### 5) Yellow flags, red faces

The Broncos lacked composure, and the 13 penalties for 120 yards reflected the behavior. Multiple calls were suspect -- specifically, the block in the back on Chris Harris Jr.'s touchdown recovery run -- but it marked a trend. The Broncos cost themselves 20 points because of fouls, including flags on Bolles and guard Ron Leary that knocked the Broncos out of field goal range. The Broncos boast 28 penalties in three games, tied for ninth most. To upset the Chiefs, they need to have no more than five.

#### 6) What's up with King?

Marquette King has a powerful leg. He booms punts. But he has lacked consistency in games. He struggled during the first half against Baltimore. Denver ranks fourth with 17 total punts, and 15th in net average at 41.6 yards, disappointing given King's skillset. King wades into the spotlight this week as he can ill-afford a mistake against the Chiefs' Tyreek Hill.

#### 7) Shine, stars

For the Broncos to be taken seriously as a playoff contender, they must pull off an upset. Or two. The Broncos enter Monday as a 4.5-point underdog to Kansas City -- for good reason. The Chiefs own a 17-1 record in their last 18 AFC West games, and have won five straight against Denver. In primetime, the Broncos need their stars to glisten. Von Miller failed to post a sack against Baltimore. The Broncos are not good enough to win if opponents neutralize him.



# Broncos revert to 2017 troubles in first road game

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
September 25, 2018

Things got so bad at Baltimore for the Denver Broncos that left tackle Garrett Bolles had more tackles than Von Miller.

Three times, Bolles was beaten by Terrell Suggs and rather than give up another sack, he simply tackled the Ravens' ageless pass rusher who still managed 1½ sacks, a tackle for loss and a forced fumble in a 27-14 win over the Broncos (2-1).

Bolles was whistled for two costly holding penalties, one erasing a 39-yard catch by Demaryius Thomas and another at the Baltimore 5-yard line that preceded Case Keenum's fifth interception so far.

Miller was held in check with just two tackles.

After declaring on Friday that "last year's team is dead and gone," coach Vance Joseph's remodeled bunch hit the road for the first time and promptly bared many of those same flaws that led to their downfall in 2017.

Poor protection.

Predictable defense.

Dubious decisions.

Bad discipline.

The Broncos' 13 penalties marked the most by Denver since Week 8 at Philadelphia last season and their 120 yards were the most in 41 games, since a Week 15 loss at Pittsburgh in 2015.

"After watching the film two or three times, it was a lot of self-inflicted wounds," Joseph said Monday, noting that he didn't have a problem with the calls that included an ejection of rookie running back Phillip Lindsay for throwing a punch in the pile.

"I couldn't see if he threw a punch or not," Joseph said. "But I saw him dive into the pile, which is illegal."

Joseph said the Broncos, who host unbeaten Kansas City (3-0) next Monday night, "have to own the penalties."

That includes the one that referee Ronald Torbert inadvertently blamed on Broncos tackle Billy Turner — who wasn't even on the field — for a block-in-the-back foul that negated Chris Harris Jr.'s TD return of a blocked field goal try.

The foul was actually on nose tackle Domata Peko some 20 yards behind Harris.

"I've got to be smarter. Next time that happens, just don't even run, just stop and let them go," Peko said. "But I was just hustling, doing what I'm taught to do and finishing the play, running down and just trying to get a block, man."

"But it seems like the way the league is going now you can't really hit people the way you want to anymore, and so I've just got to be smarter."

Even though it was on the wrong player, Joseph said, "it was a good call."

What wasn't, by his own admission, was Joseph's decision to burn two timeouts late in the first half so Denver could get the ball back at their 15 with under a minute left in a steady rain.

Another three-and-out by the Broncos and another short punt by Marquette King set up the Ravens for a last-second field goal and a 20-14 halftime lead.

"That's totally on me," Joseph said.

A week after criticizing Joe Woods' defensive game plan for having his cornerbacks give too much cushion to Oakland's receivers, Joseph watched his defense do the very same thing at Baltimore.

"We stopped the run again. They averaged 2.8 yards a carry, but the passing game obviously gave us problems," Joseph said. "We've got to challenge more at the corner position and make more plays. If teams want to throw the ball that quick, we have to play closer in coverage and make some plays early. That way our pass rush can get there."

"But it's a blueprint on tape right now the last three weeks: throw it quick, challenge the DBs and keep Von Miller and (first-round draft pick Bradley) Chubb at bay by throwing it quick."

A frustrated Harris said Denver's defense needs to better camouflage its intentions so quarterbacks like Joe Flacco can't pick them apart: "We've got to disguise better as a team. Try to confuse them. Try not to give them easy looks."

Joseph concurred, saying, "We can help those guys with more looks and more coverage packages."

Despite a blocked punt and a blocked field goal, the special teams didn't escape Joseph's aggravation.

"As a punt unit we were not very good," Joseph said. "We gave them the ball twice at midfield. We gave them the ball once after a return and a sideline penalty on (rookie cornerback) Isaac Yiadom, who wasn't even in the game."

Yiadom would soon go in, replacing Tramaine Brock (groin), who was subbing for Adam Jones (thigh).

Both are expected back at practice Wednesday, Joseph said.

# Next-Day Notebook: Destroying the opponent's blueprint

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
September 25, 2018

In the visitors locker room after a 27-14 loss to the Baltimore Ravens, cornerback Chris Harris Jr. shared his thoughts on how the Broncos could avoid future losses.

“We’ve got to disguise better as a team,” Harris said. “Try to confuse them. Try not to give them easy looks. So, we’ve got to move around and try to do whatever we can to disguise [the coverages].”

Head Coach Vance Joseph seemed to at least partially agree with the gist of Harris’ comments.

“Some of the problems could be that, but the bottom line is we’ve obviously got to play better, especially in man-to-man situations,” Joseph said Monday. “We’ve got to coach better and help those guys play more shell defense on certain downs. We can coach and play better. I’m not concerned about the comments, because Chris is playing good football and ... he wants to win. I have no problem with what he’s saying.”

The Broncos, though, didn’t always have the opportunity to disguise their coverages on Sunday against the Ravens. After Baltimore started the game with traditional wide receiver splits, John Harbaugh and his team quickly cut down the distance between their wide receivers and used pre-snap motions make Denver’s job harder.

“Sometimes teams trap you into certain formations where you have to show your hand quicker,” Joseph said. “We’re getting a bunch of reduced splits where guys who are press are playing more off, and it brings your safeties down, so it shows right now, single high. When those things happen, we just have to play through them and play. We can help those guys with more looks and help them with more coverage packages.”

Joseph has been involved in every defensive meeting, and he said Monday that won’t stop. In those meetings, the Broncos set their defensive game plan and come up with a call sheet. And as the team moves forward, those meetings will also be used to find a way to mess up the “blueprint on how to soften our coverage,” as Joseph said Monday.

“Those kids are trying and they’re competing, but it’s our job to make their lives easier,” Joseph said. “So we will. We will do that, and that’s through the calls we make and that’s [through] how we game plan. Obviously we thought going into that game that we could really cover those guys up. With the normal splits, we did. With the cut splits and the motion, we didn’t. I think we have to have a better plan moving forward to help our guys. As they adjust, we have to adjust even faster. We have to coach better, and we will.”

ACCEPTING THE PENALTIES

After watching the film, Joseph seemed convinced that the referees made the correct calls on two of the most critical penalties of the game.

The first came on Justin Simmons' field-goal block, which appeared to end with Harris carrying the ball 58 yards into the end zone for a touchdown. But Domata Peko Sr. — even though the refs mistakenly called the penalty on Billy Turner — was whistled for a block in the back penalty, and the ball came back to the Baltimore 49-yard line.

“Peko had his hands on his back, even though it was 20 yards behind the play [and] it was called very late,” Joseph said. “He had his hands on his back. So again, we have to own it. That’s what they saw, that’s what they called, and really, when I watched the tape, it was a good call.”

The Broncos were penalized again a few moments later when Phillip Lindsay was flagged after jumping late on a scrum that formed after Terrell Suggs strip-sacked Keenum. The referees judged that Lindsay threw a punch, which was grounds to disqualify the rookie running back.

While Joseph said he didn’t see a punch thrown, he acknowledged that Lindsay broke the rules by jumping onto the pile late.

“I couldn’t see whether he threw a punch or not, but I saw him dive into the pile, which is illegal,” Joseph said. “He can’t do it. There were three guys that dove into the pile: [Marlon] Humphrey for them — he was the first guy — then [Ron] Leary dove into the pile, then Phillip dove into the pile. It should’ve been three penalties on all three of those guys, because that’s against the rules. But I didn’t see a punch being thrown. I couldn’t tell if a punch was thrown.”

Joseph, though, wants to see his team take responsibility for the penalties to ensure they don’t happen again.

“[Lindsay] said he didn’t throw a punch, but we have to own the penalties,” Joseph said. “We can’t talk around the penalties. We have to own them. They called them, so we have to own them.”

## MANAGING THE CLOCK

As time in the second quarter wound down, Joseph wanted to be aggressive. The Broncos had just wasted a prime scoring opportunity after a wild sequence — one that included a blocked field goal, strip sack and ejection — ended with a punt. So when the Ravens took over with 1:47 to play on their own 14-yard line, Joseph aimed to get the ball back for his offense.

After a first-down throw went for just 4 yards, Joseph called a timeout. Baltimore picked up a first down on the next play, so Joseph let the clock run. After the Broncos sacked Flacco on an ensuing third down, though, Joseph called the team’s final timeout of the half.

With 51 seconds remaining, the Broncos took over at their own 15-yard line — and that’s where they ran into problems. A first-down Devontae Booker run went for no yards, and the Ravens called a timeout of their own. Then Case Keenum was sacked, and the Ravens called another timeout. When an open Courtland Sutton dropped a pass on third-and-10, the Broncos were forced to punt. Baltimore then took advantage of the short punt and drove 16 yards in 22 seconds to kick a field goal and extend the lead to six points.

"That's on me," Joseph said Monday. "I could've bled [the clock] out, but I was thinking, 'Let's get these points back.' We just lost three points by having penalties, so I was being overaggressive. In hindsight, that was wrong. I should've bled it out and got to the half [at] 17-14. It's our ball coming out. But I chose to call timeouts [and] get the ball back. We're backed up and we missed a second-and-10 and the third down, we had a drop. And we had a bad punt."

"All that being said, that's on me. You go on the road, it's raining, they're going to have us backed up, so I should've just bled it out and got to halftime 17-14, not 20-14. That's totally on me."

#### STRONGER IN THE SECONDARY

The Broncos should be healthier in the secondary when Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs arrive for a "Monday Night Football" matchup.

Joseph said cornerback Tramaine Brock has a left groin strain but that MRI results indicated he should be ready to play against Kansas City. Joseph expects Brock to return to practice either Wednesday or Thursday as the Broncos prepare for the Chiefs.

Cornerback Adam Jones should also be ready to play, Joseph said. Jones missed the last week of practice and Sunday's game against Baltimore with a thigh injury.

# Where do the Broncos rank among the NFL's most valuable franchises?

By STAFF

Denver Business Journal

September 25, 2018

Forbes has released its annual list of the most valuable franchises in the National Football League, and once again, the top spot is held by the Dallas Cowboys, worth an estimated \$5 billion. The Patriots rank second with a \$3.8 billion valuation.

It marks the 12th consecutive year that the Cowboys have been ranked by Forbes as the most valuable franchise in the league. According to the news site, they are the first team in professional sports to hit the \$5 billion mark.

The Broncos, ranked 11th of the NFL's most valuable franchises, saw their valuation increase 2 percent between the 2016 and 2017 seasons, according to Forbes. The team generated \$427 million in revenue last season, and posted \$106 million in operating income.

# NFL sends clear message to players, fans: Get used to penalties for roughing the passer

By Mike Jones  
USA Today  
September 25, 2018

We all knew what our eyes were telling us.

Clay Matthews did not rough the passer. He simply wrapped up Alex Smith as the quarterback clutched the ball and took him to the ground. Sack.

The Packers linebacker didn't hit the Redskins quarterback high nor low. He didn't hoist Smith into air, upend him and violently plant him into the turf. He drove right through him. Perfect form.

Yet the yellow flag came out, and Matthews found himself the recipient of yet another controversial penalty as, for the second time in as many weeks, he landed on the quarterback with all or most of his body weight.

Unlike in Week 2, when Matthews' illegal hit on Kirk Cousins cost the Packers the win as they settled for a tie with the Vikings, the Smith sack had no impact on the outcome of Green Bay's 31-17 loss.

But the penalty – the byproduct of the NFL's new emphasis on protecting the quarterback – represented yet another frustrating episode and apparent threat to both the purity of the game and credibility of the NFL.

Matthews fumed. Packers coach Mike McCarthy was irate. And everyone from Packers players to opposing players and analysts sympathized.

"I understand the spirit of the rule," Matthews told reporters after the game. "I said that in weeks prior. But when you have a hit like that, that's a football play. I even went up to Alex Smith after the game and asked him, 'What do you think? What can I do differently?' Because that's a football play. Like I said last week, the NFL is going to come back and say I put my body on him. But that's a football play."

His frustrations mounting, Matthews said what many of us have thought, "Unfortunately, this league is going in a direction I think a lot of people don't like. I think they're getting soft. The only thing hard about this league is the fines that they levy down on guys like me that play the game hard."

Where's the lie? Where's the misinterpretation?

According to the NFL, right in front of us. Textbook foul, the NFL says.

"If you were to ask me to show you a video of what the rule prohibits, I would show you that play," retired NFL official Ed Hochuli, who now works as a consultant for the league, told USA TODAY Sports on Monday. "That is the most classic, textbook, exactly, example of the foul of landing on a quarterback with all or most of your body weight."

The backlash from players, coaches and fans will not sway the league. This isn't the murky catch rule, which the NFL agreed needed to be corrected this offseason. The roughing the passer standards are clear.

According to Rule 12, Section 2, Article 9, "A rushing defender may make direct contact with the passer only up through the rusher's first step after such release (prior to second step hitting the ground); thereafter the rusher must be making an attempt to avoid contact and must not continue to 'drive through' or otherwise forcibly contact the passer; incidental or inadvertent contact by a player who is easing up or being blocked into the passer will not be considered significant."

This language was actually put into place in 1995. It's only now that the competition committee has stressed the need to actually enforce this rule.

Why now?

Some single out Vikings linebacker Anthony Barr, who broke Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers' collarbone last year on the kind of hit that's now a point of emphasis and wrecked the Packers' season. Others point to the league's ongoing mission to make the game safer as officials strive to avoid risk of further legal action from players regarding concussions.

Regardless, this point of emphasis is here to stay. Players must adjust their techniques, league officials insist, and all of us must adjust our thinking.

Easier said than done, right?

"It's very hard," Redskins linebacker Ryan Kerrigan told USA TODAY Sports on Monday. "If you slow down to ease up, then you could miss the sack (or give the quarterback) more time to make the pass. It's hard."

But Hochuli disagrees. And after he took me through Matthews' play, I'm starting to understand.

"If you watch that play, you will see that the defender is still two steps away from the quarterback when he knows he's got a sack," Hochuli said. "He knows because the ball is still tucked down, and it's not even up in a passing posture. At a step away, there's absolutely no doubt about it and all he's got to do is go to the side. Instead of continuing on straight into the quarterback, he's just got to roll to the side and make it more of an arm tackle instead of a body tackle.

"After he's made contact with the quarterback, he still takes two more steps. After he's made contact before he goes to the ground. Roll off to the side. There were actually many opportunities for Clay to roll to the side. And he is an amazing athlete. These guys are all amazing athletes and the things they're able to do, I may not be able to do, but that's all he's got to do – make that mental adjustment that as he approaches the quarterback."

Slowed down in that fashion, it all makes more sense. But the perception problem remains.

Quarterbacks such as Rodgers and Smith even believe some grey area remains and that the league should clear things up. Other players are under the impression that NFL brass cares only about protecting quarterbacks.



Dolphins coach Adam Gase made a concerning suggestion when he noted that William Hayes suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament Sunday after the pass rusher tried to avoid landing with his body weight on Raiders quarterback Derek Carr.

Responding to that news, 49ers cornerback Richard Sherman tweeted, "(The NFL) don't care about the rest of us getting hurt. Long as the QB is safe."

Others have suggested that these controversial calls have threatened the credibility of the game, following the same thread as Matthews when he suggested the league was "getting soft."

But the NFL seemingly disagrees again.

"I don't think it's a big problem at all," Hochuli said.

He pointed out that Matthews drawing two such penalties brings greater visibility to the issue because he's a high-profile player. But in 3,342 pass attempts across the league through Sunday's, only 30 such plays have drawn roughing the passer penalties. That number is up, however, from 16 through the first three weeks of the 2017 season and 20 in 2016.

The NFL believes that the outcry over this rule eventually will subside. Hochuli pointed to the strong reaction that the rule changes regarding hits to a defenseless receiver initially drew several years ago. Defensive players wondered how they would operate given the new constraints, but they have adapted. This could indeed happen eventually as players and the public come around on the new emphasis on roughing the passer.

But for now, skepticism and concern remain.

# Broncos Twitter Debate: Case Keenum Sucks v. Fire Vance Joseph

By Michael Roberts  
Westworld  
September 25, 2018

The Denver Broncos' 27-14 loss to the Baltimore Ravens on September 23 was the squad's first defeat of the season. Yet the desultory manner in which this particular egg was laid caused many Broncos fans on Twitter to hammer the panic button, calling for quarterback Case Keenum to be replaced, head coach Vance Joseph to be fired, or both.

The reaction was understandable. Denver was given a gift at the outset of the game via a blocked punt and an instant Royce Freeman touchdown, and managed an impressive touchdown drive shortly thereafter that was capped by an exhilarating Emmanuel Sanders end-around. But from there on out, the offense was mainly marked by ineptitude. Keenum tossed yet another interception, his gag-worthy fifth of the 2018 campaign (versus just three touchdown passes), and seemed to get worse as the pressure rose. Every time he absolutely needed to make a play, he didn't.

Granted, offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave's play-calling was frequently uninspired, resulting in a slew of three-and-outs that left the defense on the field for far too long — among last year's major problems. But that still doesn't excuse the squad's inability to consistently pressure Ravens signal-caller Joe Flacco or adequately guard receivers. In particular, Denver doesn't seem to know how to shut down tight ends, and opponents realize it. Expect a lot more ugliness as a result.

Such breakdowns have led to more fingers of blame being pointed in the direction of Joseph, whose seat is already warm thanks to the Broncos' putrid 5-11 record last season. No surprise, then, that there's a [change.org](http://change.org) petition calling for his ouster.

Count down our picks for the twenty most memorable tweets about Keenum and Joseph — and be sure to keep your eye out for a request that Tim Tebow save the day. If Broncos loyalists are getting nostalgic for the Chosen One already, you know things have gotten bad.

Number 20:

Number 19:

Number 18:

Number 17:

Number 16:

Number 15:

Number 14:

Number 13:

Number 12:

Number 11:

Number 10:

Number 9:

Number 8:

Number 7:

Number 6:

Number 5:

Number 4:

Number 3:

Number 2:

Number 1:

From the change.org post (which has been lightly edited):

Fire Vance Joseph!!!!!!!!!!

Vance Joseph is the current Head Coach for the Denver Broncos. It is his second year as a head coach as he is a former defensive coordinator for the Miami Dolphins. Now let's get down to business. We all remember Joseph's first year as head coach last year. He led the Broncos to an atrocious 5-11 record with 8 straight losses. Now here is what I believe most people don't know. 2017 was the Broncos first season to lose 8 consecutive games since 1967 in which they lost 9 games and finished 3-11. Had Vance Joseph lost one more game he would have repeated history from 51 years ago in the worst possible way.

Now let's talk about the 2010 season for a second and Josh McDaniels. Oh yeah that just makes your skin crawl, doesn't it? The 2010 season is the year all Bronco fans want to forget. But let's talk about it. Josh McDaniels got fired and kicked out the door mid season after taking this team to an embarrassing 3-9 record and Denver finished their abysmal season 4-12. So with all this said, Denver fans have to be confused about how Vance Joseph still has a job after the 2017 season and is in his second year as head coach. Granted both years he took Denver 2-0 to start the season, but it all went downhill from there.

This year Denver started 2-0 but both wins were ugly and dangerously close. They just suffered their first loss to the Baltimore Ravens. Had Denver not made that field goal with 6 seconds on the clock to steal the win from the Oakland Raiders in week 2, Denver right now would be 1-2 instead of 2-1. Think about that for a second. Now let's talk about the roster. The team has been beefed up on all sides of the ball during

the off season, offense, defense and special teams. However the defense is lacking secondary depth. But this team, all in all, has the talent to make the playoffs and possibly if coached properly. Joseph just doesn't have the brains to lead this team to the Superbowl.

He lacks energy in the locker room and looks like a deer in headlights on the sidelines The bottom line is, Joseph lost this team last year, and it's a matter of time before he losses it again this year. It is very obvious Denver fans are fed up with him and want him gone as they have continuously voiced their displeasure with him. As to why John Elway didn't fire him after last season, we will never know. This guy needs to go. He's not the guy that can live up to the Broncos coaching expectations. Let's not forget he's the reason Wade Phillips is in L.A. with the Rams right now instead of Denver. The combination between Vance Joseph and Joe Woods is weak. The Broncos are going nowhere but down with him coaching this three-time Superbowl Championship team. Time to get Vance Joseph out of Denver!!!!

# Chris Harris: It's "very easy" for opposing quarterbacks right now

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
September 25, 2018

The Broncos have dismantled the secondary that nicknamed itself the "No Fly Zone" while leading the league in passing yards allowed twice and finishing fourth once over the last three years and the new group hasn't had anything close to the same success to start this season.

Derek Carr completed 29-of-32 passes in Week Two and Joe Flacco was 25-of-40 for 277 yards and a touchdown in Sunday's loss. The Broncos have Von Miller and Bradley Chubb to rush the passer, but Flacco was only sacked twice and cornerback Chris Harris said the team isn't doing enough to confound quarterbacks from snap to snap.

"The quarterbacks are getting the ball out fast, they're not thinking about where they have to go," Harris said, via KUSA. "So, we've got try to confuse them as a defense. Disguise better as a whole in the secondary and move around. We can't just be stagnant, sitting ducks. Right now, we're stagnant, we're not moving around, we're not doing anything to confuse the quarterback and it's very easy right now for them."

It didn't help that they played without Adam Jones on Sunday or that Tramaine Brock joined him on the sideline with a groin injury. Jones is expected back for Week Four, but Harris' comments suggest his return may not be enough to turn things around against Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs.

# Broncos had TD negated by a player not in the game

By Charean Williams  
Pro Football Talk  
September 25, 2018

The Broncos didn't understand the penalty that negated a 58-yard touchdown return by Chris Harris. Referee Ronald Torbert announced an illegal block above the waist on No. 77. Billy Turner is No. 77.

Turner played two special teams plays Sunday, but he wasn't on the field during the one in question.

Domata Peko, who is No. 94, found out during Monday's special teams meeting that he apparently was the player officials cited for the foul.

"No one knew. I didn't know," Peko said, via Mike Kliss of Denver's 9News. "Twenty minutes after the play they threw the flag. That was bogus. I've got to man up to it. It was called on me, and I've got to be smarter."

Justin Simmons blocked Justin Tucker's 43-yard attempt, with Harris returning it 58 yards for a touchdown that would have given the Broncos a 21-17 lead with 4:32 remaining in the second quarter. Instead, Denver took over at the Baltimore 49, and Phillip Lindsay's 15-yard penalty on a disqualification following a sack took the Broncos out of field-goal range four plays later.

Peko was trailing Harris when he was called for the penalty.

"We're coached to run and finish plays," Peko said. "That's what we're doing. Coach mentioned it in the meeting and told me. I've got to be a man and man up to it."

# As league goes overboard to protect quarterbacks, quarterbacks need to protect themselves

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
September 25, 2018

The NFL realizes the bright-line connection between having the best quarterbacks in the sport available to play football and having as many people as possible fully engaged in following the sport. Remove a franchise quarterback from a franchise, and the franchise's fans will be inclined to check out for the rest of the year. Moreover, any nationally-televised games involving the franchise without a franchise quarterback will lose in the ratings to Maury Povich reruns.

But at a time when the NFL has decided to go overboard to protect quarterbacks, particularly with a roughing-the-passer rule that some believe has become virtually impossible to comply with, quarterback need to protect themselves. Whether it's Bills quarterback Josh Allen exposing the McNuggets while hurdling over Vikings linebacker Anthony Barr (Allen got lucky) or 49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo deciding to not to run out of bounds but to plant his left leg, cut back at the left sideline, and drop a shoulder into a defender (Garoppolo didn't get lucky), quarterbacks continue to take unnecessary risk with their own bodies — and with the multi-million-dollar investments teams have made in them.

While it may be a tad insensitive to call out Garoppolo as he waits for confirmation that he has a torn ACL, Garoppolo has only himself to blame for deciding to do something other than the smart thing and step away from contact, not try to embrace it. Why do quarterbacks continue to insist on doing this? What does it prove, other than the quarterback is more brawn than brain?

And yawn will now be the operative word for the 49ers when they participate in four prime-time games in a five-week span: Week Six at Packers on Sunday night, Week Seven vs. Rams on Monday night, Week Nine vs. Raiders on Thursday night, and Week 10 vs. Giants on Monday night. With three of those four evening games at home, look for a lot of traffic problems in Santa Clara.

So that's why the league is protecting quarterbacks. And that's why quarterbacks need to protect themselves.

# Report: Competition committee wants roughing rule applied differently

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
September 25, 2018

The NFL seems to be aware there's a problem. They just don't know what to do about it.

According to Mark Maske of the Washington Post, there's a strong sentiment among members of the league's competition committee that the controversial roughing-the-passer penalties need to be applied differently.

Packers linebacker Clay Matthews is central to the league's dilemma, as penalties against him have been backed by the league office, and even doubled-down upon by making them teaching tools.

But members of the committee don't necessarily agree, as Maske cites people with knowledge of the deliberations saying the interpretations of those penalties may not be "consistent with how the league wants to see the roughing-the-passer rule enforced."

The committee has a conference call next week, which was previously scheduled. While they might talk about how to adjust the enforcement, there's apparently no movement toward changing the wording of the rule.

"I'm not sure we can do anything this year," one person with knowledge of the committee's deliberations said.

Another person close to the process said that the penalties will be called differently, with evidence of the changing emphasis to be explained by officiating videos (so perhaps they'll become useful).

While the offseason talk was largely about the league's new lowering-the-helmet rules, that has since faded from view, as roughing the passer penalties have created a much greater furor. And the people with the ability to influence those rules appear to have heard it.