

Broncos, Vance Joseph take look back before moving forward

By Ryan O'Halloran
Denver Post
September 26, 2018

Broncos coach Vance Joseph's address to his players Monday lasted the usual 20 minutes, and the main theme was obvious but necessary: A recap of the 13 penalties that helped doom them in Sunday's 27-14 loss to the Baltimore Ravens.

Obvious because coaches always do a post-loss review of the key mistakes.

Necessary because the Broncos are already in the mode of making sure their first loss doesn't turn into their first losing streak.

"It has to be reinforced," receiver Emmanuel Sanders said. "You have to come into work after a loss and accept your responsibilities."

The responsibility for the Broncos falling to 2-1 was team-wide.

The defense couldn't produce a turnover and their search to solve opposing quarterbacks is ongoing.

The offense didn't score after the 7:02 mark of the first quarter and their new quarterback who's guaranteed \$25 million through 2019, Case Keenum, leads the league with five interceptions.

And Joseph poked punter Marquette King for another sub-par outing.

All three units played a part in committing 120 yards in penalties.

"(Joseph) wanted to show us and we watched all of the clips that didn't go our way, why they didn't go our way and he showed us how exactly we need to fix it," said right guard Connor McGovern, who had two penalties. "Not a good game for us by any means."

Said Joseph: "We can't talk around penalties, we have to own them. They called them so we have to own them."

The Broncos can take solace that having at least 10 penalties and at least 100 penalty yards is not common. They have not had consecutive games of double-digit penalties since 2014. And they last had consecutive games of at least 100 yards worth of penalties in 1978 — 103 in an overtime win at Seattle and 105 the next week in a 7-6 loss at the Baltimore Colts.

Just as big of an issue for the Broncos: How will they contain Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who has 13 touchdowns, no interceptions and a 137.4 rating during a blazing 3-0 start? Mahomes should be counting the hours until he faces the Broncos' struggling secondary.

Through three games, the Broncos' cornerbacks have no interceptions.

“We’ve got to challenge more at the corner position and make more plays,” said Joseph, echoing his theme from after Sunday’s game. “It’s a blueprint on tape right now the last three weeks: Throw it quick, challenge the (defensive backs), throw it quick and keep Von Miller and (Bradley) Chubb and those (pass rushers) at bay.”

Cornerback Bradley Roby is a former first-round pick who has allowed 14 completions out of 16 targets in man coverage this year. He must be better.

The same goes for another former first-round pick, left tackle Garrett Bolles, who was called for two penalties. The Denver Post’s game charting booked him for one sack and two quarterback pressures.

“He’ll be fine,” Joseph said. “He played against a Hall of Fame-type rusher (in Terrell Suggs) and the guy is crafty and the guy is chippy. It’s like being a corner. Being a left tackle, every play you can be exposed if you’re not playing with great technique. He’ll get better from it and move forward.”

Roby and Bolles are under scrutiny but so should the entire roster after a performance void of composure and execution like Sunday’s loss.

“We have to play smarter football,” Sanders said. “Everybody has to grow from the mistakes. If we don’t, we’re going to be in the same predicament next Monday.”

Broncos Mailbag: Does Denver need to trade for another cornerback?

By Ryan O'Halloran
Denver Post
September 26, 2018

Denver Post Broncos writer Ryan O'Halloran posts his Broncos Mailbag weekly during the season.

You can pose a Broncos- or NFL-related question for the Broncos Mailbag here. Follow Ryan for more daily updates on Twitter.

Denver seems to be stacked at the wide receiver position. What are the chances of trading one (say Demaryius Thomas)? I'm more excited about our rookies and we could use help in several areas.

— Dan, Billings, Mt.

Not sure if stacked is the right adjective — “solid” would apply since they have three receivers (Emmanuel Sanders, Demaryius Thomas and Courtland Sutton) that get the bulk of the playing time. You should be excited about Sutton, but since we don't know too much yet about DaeSean Hamilton, keeping Thomas gives the Broncos a better chance at winning. I'm not sure what kind of value Thomas as at this point. The Broncos need cornerback help and that's extremely tough to trade for in-season.

Hello Ryan, with a much improved offensive line, rushing attack, good run defense and much improved receiving corps how is everyone not talking about Case Keenum's QB rating and lack of scoring drives? I don't care about one last-minute drive to get a field goal or how many penalties our team has. Keenum is throwing too high or too low and not seeing wide open receivers. Case has yet to perform as well as Chad Kelly did against second- and third-string defenses. I prefer losing with Chad who can move the ball consistently and could learn from red-zone picks.

— David Elsberry, Salt Lake City

The woeful offense was addressed in Monday's paper. Keenum has been underwhelming. As columnist Mark Kiszla wrote after the Ravens game, it's becoming clear why Keenum bounced from team to team before striking gold last year in Minnesota. Is he tough? Yes. Does he lead well? By all accounts. But he just isn't clicking on any kind of consistent basis. The accuracy issues are the most surprising part. That said, we're a long way from seeing the No. 6 car (Kelly) taken out of the garage.

Why has DeMarcus Walker been inactive the first three games? It seems that the pressure on the opposing quarterbacks has been generated from the outside, from Von Miller and Bradley Chubb, with not much rush inside. That's what Walker is best at, so why isn't he in there?

— Evan Lukassen, Gunnison

It's something the Broncos should consider, but Walker's role was defined by John Elway on cut-down day when he said only five defensive linemen would be active. Walker is the odd man out so far. The other issue is, if you activate Walker, who do you take out? It would probably have to be Shaquill Barrett since

the five linemen currently dressing are doing good work against the run. But I agree it would be intriguing to see Walker work as a third-down interior pass rusher.

Hi. My question is on the Broncos defense. Can this team at the inside linebacker position get better at covering tight ends and running backs? And can the pass rush in the middle of the D-line get better going through the guards and center?

— Jonathan Misak, Sayreville, N.J.

Sounds like this has been an issue for several years. Yesterday on tight end Mark Andrews' first long catch, both Todd Davis and Brandon Marshall bit on the play action. And on Buck Allen's 12-yard touchdown catch and run, it was outside linebacker Von Miller who was caught a little flat-footed before retreating into coverage. Miller is paid to rush the passer. We're all for smoke and mirrors, but that was inexcusable. As for the interior pass rush, there hasn't been one yet.

I'm curious about how you ink-stained wretches travel to cover away games. Do you travel with the team on the Broncos planes/buses/hotels? Or budget travel provided via The Denver Post? Or just stay at Cousin Larry's condo? Go Broncos!

— David Brown, Lenexa, Kan.

I prefer being called "media swine," to "ink-stained wretch," but I still laughed. The Post travels commercially. For the Baltimore trip, I flew Saturday on Southwest from Denver to Baltimore (landed 1 p.m.), stayed at airport hotel (not where the team stayed) and then a bunch of us were on the 6:30 a.m. flight back to Denver on Monday morning (landed 8 a.m.).

Is it my imagination or does Case Keenum miss a lot of throws high to his receivers, particularly early in games?

— Phil, Fort Collins

His completion percentage of 61.1 would suggest he is missing high throughout the game. What I've noticed, though, is how he tends to throw wide, behind or short of his target.

Between the passive coverage by their cornerbacks and an apparent dearth of talent on the CB position, I have serious concerns about the Broncos' ability to match up with ANY team that has a top-tier quarterback. What are the chances John Elway swings a trade to get a proven, NFL-caliber No. 2 CB so Bradley Roby can move back to his true position at No. 3? And who do you think are realistic trade candidates?

— William Christensen, Orem, Utah

You should have significant concerns about how the Broncos match up against ANY quarterback. Trades are great to talk about but difficult to execute, especially in the NFL and during the season. As soon as Elway starts calling around for help, which he should be doing, rival GMs will know he's desperate and they have all the leverage in terms of compensation. As I wrote in Monday's paper, help is not on the way. No real list of possibilities comes to mind because teams want to keep three quality cornerbacks.

Like most Broncos fans, I'm worried about the secondary and wondering if Isaac Yiadom wouldn't be a better fit back there than the two aging corners, Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones. Yiadom is more of a press corner, and wouldn't putting him in allow Denver to play more man-to-man coverage, which has been strength of the team the last few years? Right now it seems that there's a big hole at the No. 3 corner spot.

— Mitchell Reiter, Canon City

There's a hole at the Nos. 2 and 3 cornerback spots. Yiadom got his chance Sunday, playing 31 snaps because of Jones' injury (thigh) and then Brock's in-game injury (groin). Yiadom was ticketed a redshirt-type year until injuries hit. He did flash on a couple of plays against Baltimore.

Any reason as to why we didn't make the Raiders wear their black jerseys in Week 2 given it was the hottest Broncos game ever played in September?

— Gustavo Gonzalez, Upland, Calif.

I'm new to Denver, but I don't ever recall the Broncos wearing white jerseys at Mile High.

Josey Jewell, Broncos starting inside linebacker. Has a good ring to it, don't you think? Did he do enough on Sunday to claim that spot?

— Mikey D., Arvada

Jewell made six tackles against the Ravens and whether he's ready or not, he could be transitioning into a starter alongside Todd Davis because of Brandon Marshall's knee injury. The Broncos may opt to use Jewell in base and have Marshall for nickel/dime. Jewell is a part of the future, too.

What the heck was going on with Vance Joseph's challenges against the Ravens? He's definitely made some questionable moves since he's become Denver's head coach, but those completely perplexed me.

— John, Boise, Idaho

The challenge was puzzling. Joseph threw the red flag too quickly — one look at the replay showed that Michael Crabtree had control of the football and was in-bounds. The second attempt showed a lack of knowledge about the rules but it still cost the Broncos a timeout because Joseph took one to get a look at the spot (which would have been a yard or two in the Broncos' favor). Not good.

Kansas City Chiefs scouting report: Offensive powerhouse visits Denver Broncos on Monday

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

September 26, 2018

Coach: Andy Reid (sixth year with Chiefs — 56-27 regular season, 1-4 postseason; 20th year overall — 186-120-1 regular season, 11-13 playoffs).

Record: 3-0 (first in AFC West).

Last week: Beat San Francisco 38-27.

Next week: vs. Jacksonville.

OFFENSE

Play caller: Coach Andy Reid.

Analysis: Reid, 60, relinquished the play-calling duties late last season to Matt Nagy, who parlayed that role into the Chicago head coaching job. Former Colorado running back Eric Bienemy is the Chiefs' offensive coordinator. He was CU's coordinator from 2011-12 before joining Reid's original Chiefs staff. ... KC has the league's best offense through three weeks — first in scoring (39.3 points per game), second on third down (50 percent) and in the red zone (91.7 percent) and seventh in yards (398.3). ... The Chiefs have bludgeoned teams in the first quarter (49-6). ... Second-year QB Patrick Mahomes started last year's win at Denver and is already in the MVP race. He possesses terrific arm strength, anticipation, mobility and command of the offense. He leads the league in TD passes (13) and rating (137.4). ... RB Kareem Hunt won last year's rushing title (1,327 yards), but is 17th this year (168) and has only a 3.2-yard average. Spencer Ware and Damien Williams are the backups and FB Anthony Sherman has two catches for 52 yards. ... TE Travis Kelce has been named to the last three Pro Bowls, targeted at least 103 times in each year. He has 229 yards receiving on a team-high 16 catches. Kelce has at least one catch in 66 consecutive games. ... Backup TE Demetrius Harris had a 13-yard TD catch against San Francisco. ... The offense revolves around Kelce and the receivers: Sammy Watkins, Tyreek Hill and Chris Conley. Hill, one of the league's fastest players, and Watkins, the Bill-turned-Ram-turned-Chief each have 14 catches. Conley plays in three-receiver personnel and two of his five catches have been TDs. ... The offensive line is LT Eric Fisher, LG Cameron Erving, C Mitch Morse, RG Laurent Duvemay-Tardif and RT Mitchell Schwartz. Fisher was the second overall pick in 2013, Erving a former first-round pick for Cleveland. Schwartz will be making his 100th career start. ... The Chiefs have an NFL-low one turnover.

DEFENSE

Play caller: Coordinator Bob Sutton.

Analysis: Sutton, 67, in his sixth year as the Chiefs' play-caller. He was the Jets' coordinator from 2006-08. To say the least, he is embattled despite a 3-0 start. The Chiefs have only one interception in 141 opponent's pass attempts and six sacks. A headline on a Chiefs fan site: "What Exactly Is Bob Sutton Being Paid To Do?" ... The Chiefs are last in yards allowed (474.0), 30th against the run (11.13), 27th against the

pass (362.7) and 30th in scoring (30.7). ... On the filp side, they are first on third down (25.8 percent). ... Teams have had to get pass happy against the Chiefs; they have allowed only 43 first-half points. ... KC plays a base 3-4 scheme. ... Up front, the Week 3 starters were NT Xavier Williams, DE Chris Jones and DE Allen Bailey. Jones becomes an interior pass rusher on third down. Depth is provided by NT Derrick Nnadi (rookie third-rounder) and DE Jarvis Jenkins. ... Veterans Justin Houston and Dee Ford play the OLB spots. Houston, Ford and Bailey have two sacks apiece. ... Houston had seasons of 10, 11 and 22 sacks from 2012-14, but hasn't cracked double digits since. ... The ILBs are Anthony Hitchens (ex of Dallas) and Reggie Ragland (ex of Buffalo). Hitchens leads KC with 32 tackles. ... The secondary has played without two-time All Pro S Eric Berry, out all three games with a heel injury. He tore his Achilles' in the 2017 opener. ... The top three CBs are Kendall Fuller, Steven Nelson and Orlando Scandrick. Fuller was acquired from Washington in the trade for QB Alex Smith. Scandrick played for Dallas, was released by the Redskins in camp and serves as the nickel. ... S Eric Murray is filling in for Berry and is second on the team with 20 tackles. S Ron Parker was released by KC on March 12 when he was unwilling to take a pay cut. But he re-signed Sept. 1 and has 19 tackles and the team's only interception.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Coordinator: Dave Toub.

Analysis: Toub, 56, is regarded as one of the league's top special teams coaches and has held a coordinator role since 2004. ... The Chiefs are first and sixth, respectively, in punt and kick coverage, and first and tied for 25th, respectively, in punt and kickoff returns. ... Hill is a dynamic punt returner (91-yard TD in Week 1 against the Chargers) and De'Anthony Thomas' only punt return went for 48 yards. ... P Dustin Colquitt has only nine attempts, but a whopping 49-yard net average. ... K Harrison Butker has made all 18 of his kicks (two FGs and 16 PATs).

Broncos mailbag: What officials missed in Lindsay melee

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 26, 2018

It's time for the Broncos mailbag! Let's jump right in:

What a crazy game! Some points:

1. Agree with you on past assessment on how team will finish.
2. Case Keenum seems uncomfortable at times but this should get better (I still believe he is an improvement).
3. With everything that went wrong (Sunday) they still had a chance.
4. I believe this is a better team than last year. (One exception is the secondary with the injuries)

Issues:

1. Help Garrett Bolles with adjustments when it's obvious he is struggling with someone like Terrell Suggs (who is a great player).
2. The issues in the secondary may not be a quick fix with all these injuries. (This is biggest issue and worry).
3. We really live and die with the D-line pass rush (Von Miller & company) especially with a hurt secondary.

With all the bad things that happened (Sunday) they should have been blown out -- yet they still had a chance.

And I think they can rally around lessons learned and be competitive in the AFC West.

Looking forward to your next report!

--Mike MacGuire

Mike -- You make good points. My prediction was 8-8. I think the Broncos are better than last year and 8-8 is three wins better.

But I wasn't ready to leap to, say, 11-5 and the playoffs because I'm not sure how this team will respond when it takes on a little water. Last season, the team sunk to adversity. Quickly.

The Ravens' loss exposed some familiar concerns. But a home win against the Kansas City Chiefs on Monday night -- and beating the league's worst defense would hardly be the biggest upset in NFL history -- would be the kind of confidence booster that could allow them to reach the week 10 bye week with a winning record and eventually prove me wrong.

Why couldn't we (Vance Joseph) challenge the ruling on the field that disqualified Phillip Lindsay?

If we're going to review all scoring plays, why shouldn't we review all plays that disqualifies a player?

It was stupid to jump into the fray, but with no whistle blown and no declaration of recovery, can the play be considered over?

--Jim Ingolia

Jim – It's the type of subjective, judgment call that's not reviewable – kind of like pass interference – but that won't stop us from reviewing it.

What can't be disputed is referee Ronald Torbert and his crew botched their call on the fumble recovery melee.

What should have been called: Broncos' guard Ron Leary jumped into the pile way late and should have been flagged for unnecessary roughness; Baltimore safety Marlon Humphrey came in even later and landed a more potent body blow and should have been flagged for unnecessary roughness; Lindsay should have been flagged for coming in late, too.

It did look like Lindsay threw a couple jabs – not at the ball, as he said afterwards, but at the Ravens' No. 99, Matthew Judon, who – in what I thought was a dirty play – first threw his full, 261-pound body weight on Lindsay and then forcefully pushed his hand on Lindsay's throat.

Lindsay gave two quick, open-handed – I thought they were open-handed – jabs at Judon to get his hand off his throat.

Tough break for Lindsay. Judon was the perpetrator but it's always the retaliatory strike that gets caught. I don't fault the officials for ejecting Lindsay because it did look like he threw punches. It's too bad the officials didn't see Judon's dirty play but it's clear by now the stripes didn't keep their composure amid the chaos.

But here was the underrated, yet highly significant aspect of how the call was botched: It should have been offsetting penalties, ball at the Ravens' 37, where Broncos' right tackle Jared Veldheer recovered the Terrell Suggs strip-sack fumble on Case Keenum.

Instead, Lindsay got the only penalty, which was a farce, and therefore the infraction was solely against the Broncos. The ball was placed back 15 yards from the spot of the foul.

The Broncos should have had third-and-13 at the Ravens' 37. Instead, they were given third-and-28 at their own 48.

From the 37, the Broncos could have run Royce Freeman for 5 yards and had Brandon McManus kick a 50-yard field goal. Instead, the Broncos had to send out Marquette King for a punt.

All of this occurred a couple plays after Chris Harris Jr.'s touchdown return was called back by an absurdly late illegal block call against Domata Peko Sr., who was trailing the play by 20 yards.

This unfortunate series of events in a short period cost the Broncos the game. Torbert and crew should receive a harsh evaluation from the folks in New York.

Why do so many people give you crap? Thanks for being a reliable reporter.

--Leaeen Bird

Leaeen—You made me smile. People give me the business? I can sense it sometimes, but I'm mostly unaware. The people I run into on the street or grocery store or eating establishments are always nice.

Reporting information is an honorable endeavor, Leaeen, but there's a lot of "blame the messenger" out there, from all sides.

I do understand it's more vicious in the social media coliseum. I liken it to road rage – something about the shield from direct person-to-person contact makes us less civilized.

Occasionally, a well-meaning friend will point out a cheap shot someone else directed at me and I'll take a look and I might fire a shot back in the name of defending one's honor.

Usually, I don't, but regrets? I've had a few. The Broncos' beat is not for the thin-skinned. Now, if you'll forgive me, I have to interrupt this mailbag, so I can break the news that the Broncos signed a punter to their practice squad.

The penalties and the mistakes come back to the head coach not having the players focused and mentally prepared for the game. My question is WHO IS THE LEADER OF THIS TEAM on the field? Who is the spokesperson to rally the troops?

--G. Pen

Pen – There is no question, 13 penalties for 120 yards – six of which potentially cost the Broncos up to 38 points – was a sensational display of undisciplined football. To Joseph's credit, he accepted responsibility.

As for the on-field leader, it's Case Keenum. He is the quarterback and the clear leader of the offense. But here was the problem Sunday: Keenum wasn't playing well.

It reminded me of something manager Jim Leyland once said while I was covering the Rockies' baseball team in 1999. You have to be careful about naming captains, Leyland said. If your captain is in a slump and is busting up the water coolers with his bat in fits of frustration, do you want the rest of the team following him?

The 162-game season is why baseball teams don't usually have captains – all those games mean so much failure.

Back to the Broncos and their defense, Von Miller is the guy everyone looks to because he is their best player. He doesn't have to say anything. The team just looks at him and expects him to take over.

The problem Sunday was Miller didn't have a sack and I found it a little odd he was on the sideline for more than 20 plays. So, he wasn't in his usual position to lead.

But by and large, the best leaders are the best players. I mean, the backup guard who doesn't play may have all the leadership characteristics but if he stands on a box and starts delivering a motivational speech, but the other 52 guys will tell him to shut up and step down.

Will the Broncos trade for a corner?

--Dan Birk

Dan – The trade deadline is Tuesday, October 30, two days after the Broncos play their eighth game overall, and second game against Kansas City. If the Broncos leave Arrowhead Stadium with a 5-3 record, general manager John Elway would be more inclined to give up a draft pick for a quality cornerback who presumably would be in the final year or two of his contract.

If the Broncos are 3-5 at that point, Elway would be less inclined to give up a draft pick.

Elway knows he needs another quality cornerback. Maybe the play of Adam Jones, Isaac Yiadom and maybe Tramaine Brock against the Chiefs this Monday will change his mind.

But just because you need a cornerback doesn't mean you should give up a second-round pick for a guy unfamiliar with your system and probably has his own issues if he's available.

Elway will look to make a deal, or claim a cornerback off waivers, or sign one off a practice squad, but he's not going to going to make a trade that harms the team in the long run.

Some fixes are tougher in-season than others.

Broncos send message to Marquette by signing punter to practice squad

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 26, 2018

The Broncos sent at least a tepid warning to Marquette King by signing punter Colby Wadman to their practice squad.

To make room for Wadman, who was undrafted coming out of University of California-Davis last year, the Broncos released defensive lineman Niles Scott.

King is a former Pro Bowl punter for the Oakland Raiders who was released by new coach Jon Gruden in late March. The Broncos signed him to a three-year, \$6 million contract (just this year's \$2 million is fully guaranteed) and cut their own punter, Riley Dixon, who is now with the New York Giants.

King ranks 22nd in the league with a 44.6-yard average and is 14th with a 41.6-yard net. He struggled in the rain Sunday at Baltimore, delivering multiple low, short punts, most notably a poor 35-yarder with 33 seconds left in the first half that gave the Ravens the ball at midfield. The Ravens wound up getting a long field goal from Justin Tucker to finish the half.

"He has to simply punt better," Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said at his press conference Monday. "No different than our corners have to play better in coverage, and we've got to block better. He's a football player and he's got to do his job. He's got to punt better."

Ordinarily, teams fill their 10-man practice squad with five offensive players and five defensive players as they help fill out the scout team in practice. Adding a punter is most unusual.

Wadman punted briefly for the Raiders during the past offseason but he has never punted in an NFL game. In his senior year at CU-Davis, Wadman ranked No. 8 in the nation with a 43.2-yard average.

It would not be a surprise if the Broncos brought Niles Scott back as Broncos coaches and staff were impressed with his attitude and work ethic.

Broncos have struggled defending tight ends, and Travis Kelce is next

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 26, 2018

The Denver Broncos' defense is a leaky faucet.

It's a maddening drip, drip, drip that just keeps happening no matter how much tinkering, tightening and talking you do to fix it.

But one consistent problem over the past two seasons is stopping the opposing tight end.

"The tight ends, we haven't fixed that yet," is how Broncos coach Vance Joseph has put it already this season.

Consider it a work in progress. Over the past 18 games it's gone from A (Andrews) to almost Z (Witten) as tight end after tight end, regardless of age, experience or résumé, has romped through the Denver defense. It's beyond a trend at this point, and it's definitely on the front burner because the next one in line is Kansas City's Travis Kelce.

Kelce has three career games with more than 130 yards receiving, and two of those have come against the Broncos over the past two seasons -- 160 yards on Christmas night in 2016 and 133 the day before Halloween last season.

"We face good ones almost every week it seems like," Broncos linebacker Todd Davis said. "That's always a concern ... that's been one of the ways offenses come after our defense at times. We always want to do a good job with that."

Last season, tight ends Jason Witten -- who is now an analyst on Monday Night Football and will be on hand when the Broncos host the Chiefs -- plus Kelce, Charles Clay, Evan Engram, Trey Burton, Julius Thomas, Tyler Croft and Vernon Davis all had touchdown receptions against the Broncos. And three weeks into this season, the Broncos have surrendered a 100-yard game to a tight end -- Seattle's Will Dissly had 105 yards on three receptions with a touchdown in the opener.

This past Sunday, Ravens rookie Mark Andrews, who had all of six receptions coming into the game and no receptions longer than 12 yards, had a 30-yard catch-and-run through the heart of the Denver defense. Andrews later had a 29-yard effort on a third-and-8 that moved the ball to the Broncos' 4-yard line.

"We had times we didn't keep them from what they wanted to do," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "And once quarterbacks find something they're going to keep going at it until you stop it. Doesn't matter what it is."

Joseph has talked about the difficulty of the "athletic matchup" today's NFL tight ends present. Many of these tight ends are like jumbo slot receivers, too big for safeties to manage and far too fast for most linebackers, with hands like a go-to guy in almost any offense.

And the Chiefs line Kelce up almost anywhere in the formation. The Broncos have seen Kelce in a variety of places in the motion-heavy Chiefs attack, and it makes it difficult to slow him down at the line of scrimmage because he's often starting his route out of a cluster of receivers.

Once an untouched Kelce gets into his route, the Broncos -- and most of the NFL -- struggle to find the right player to shadow him well enough to keep the ball out of his hands.

"We just need that combination of pressure and coverage," linebacker Von Miller said. "We've been close where we get pressure sometimes and the coverage isn't all the way there or the DBs cover everything up and we don't get the pressure ... we're close to getting that together."

The Broncos have tried safety Justin Simmons -- whose athleticism was on full display against the Ravens when he leaped over the line to block a field goal -- on Kelce, with some good results and some not so good. Linebacker Brandon Marshall has taken his turn at times, and even Miller has found himself in the passing lane in front of Kelce.

Rookie linebacker Josey Jewell made a coverage play down the field against the Ravens' Andrews, but Kelce is a far more difficult matchup in those downfield situations. Kelce already has two 100-yard games this season -- 109 against the Steelers and 114 in Week 3 against the 49ers -- as the pedal-to-the-metal Chiefs lead the league in scoring (39.3 points per game).

"Those are the kind of physical mismatches for a lot of safeties and definitely for a lot of linebackers," Joseph said. "You need a plan where you treat a player like that like a wide receiver, as far as where you put the help. And always you have to rush the passer, speed the quarterback up back there. It's not just one guy or one thing, you have to get a lot of things in place because those kind of players demand it."

Worried about Case Keenum? Despite 5 interceptions in 3 games, Broncos say they're not

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

September 26, 2018

About nine minutes remained in the fourth quarter and the Broncos, needing two touchdowns to claim the lead over the Ravens, lined up at Baltimore's 15 with a chance to get one. Case Keenum, in shotgun with an empty backfield, fielded the snap and threw the ball up the middle for Jeff Heurman on a crossing route. A split-second before the ball grazed his fingers, it landed into the arms of linebacker Patrick Onwuasor, who jumped the route for the interception and ran the length of the field for a touchdown.

The score would be nullified because of a Ravens penalty on the play, but the turnover stood and the damage was done. The Broncos would get one more chance in the red zone, but it would be killed by penalties.

After a promising start to the season, Denver dropped to 2-1 with a slew of questions and many of the same issues from 2017 — issues the Broncos hoped and believed they solved in the offseason with changes to the coaching staff and scheme and personnel.

When the Broncos signed Keenum to a two-year, \$36 million contract in March, general manager John Elway said he was the perfect fit, especially after the run Keenum had in Minnesota when he guided the Vikings an 11-3 record as a starter, took them back to the postseason and orchestrated the "Minnesota Miracle" in a divisional playoff win.

"Case was in a good situation last year with the Vikings," Elway said six months ago. "My plan is to put him in that same situation this year where he can be successful and have the year, if not a better year this year than he had last year and continue on."

And Elway, on paper, did. Tweaks to the line improved the front five. Additions in the draft provided Keenum more offensive weapons and bolstered Denver's defense. And wholesale changes to special teams improved a unit that struggled mightily last year.

When training camp opened, Keenum appeared as advertised. For the first six days of camp, he didn't throw a single interception. The offense was moving and producing and scoring and was wholly unlike the offense that sputtered in 2017.

"He's better, in my opinion, than what I saw on tape," Joseph said in late July. "Even talking to (Gary) Kubiak this morning about Case — we had him in Houston — and how much he's grown as a quarterback. His accuracy, his command, his smarts, his feel, he's better now than he was last year, in my opinion."

Although it's still early and although the Broncos own a winning record thanks to a pair of fourth-quarter comebacks, their loss at Baltimore generated another round of questions about Keenum — his fit now and his trajectory as the starter.

The quarterback who threw only seven interceptions last year as a fill-in starter for Minnesota already has five through the first three games this year. His stats, and often his decisions and throws, appear uncharacteristic from what he showed in 2017.

Last year, 4.6 percent of his pass attempts resulted in touchdowns. So far this year, 4.6 percent of his pass attempts have resulted in interceptions.

Last year his touchdown-to-interception differential was 15 (22 touchdowns, seven interceptions). So far this year it's -2 (three touchdowns, five interceptions).

Last year his completion percentage and passer rating were 67.6 percent (second-best in the NFL) and 98.3, respectively. So far this year it's 61.1 percent and 71.6.

Last year, his completion percentage under pressure was 55.7 percent, per Pro Football Focus, which ranked second among QBs with a minimum of 50 dropbacks. So far this year it's dropped to 50 percent to rank 16th.

But after the first two weeks, the Broncos focused on the intangibles that made Keenum the right guy. For months, Broncos players lauded his leadership and stressed the value of having a reliable and resilient guy in the locker room, in the huddle and at the line of scrimmage.

Keenum's play, while hardly perfect, showed the resiliency that aligned with what the Broncos saw in him in years past as he made the leap from an undrafted quarterback to one coveted on the open market.

"I like his grit and I like what he's about," Elway said on a radio show earlier in the season. "So I have high expectations about Case going forward."

But the first road test was a doozy, and with the most prolific offense in the NFL rolling in next week, Keenum's play will inevitably be judged against the Chiefs' young quarterback, Patrick Mahomes, and the Broncos' trials of the past.

"For me, I've got to do a better job at getting the ball out at the correct time and to the correct receivers," Keenum said after the loss. "It was a lot of things for us today. I missed some guys, when they were open, and it seemed to me we had a lot of tipped balls."

As much as Joseph wants to move on from 2017, the similarities between their losing season and their performance at Baltimore were too great to ignore. But as they try to turn the page to Week 4 and their Monday night meeting with Kansas City, Joseph reiterated the Broncos' faith in Keenum and stressed patience.

Worried about their quarterback?

"I'm not," Joseph said. "And again, this is Case's first time being 'the guy' right out of the gate. I think Case is going to play better and better with time. He missed practice on Wednesday (last week) and that could have affected how fast he played with the ball. But I am not concerned. He does so many good things during the game, it keeps you hopeful that he's going to play better and better as we go along here. That's a tough defense to prepare for. They gave us some different looks that we weren't prepared for. We adjusted, obviously. He didn't play perfect, but he didn't play bad either."

Nike's marketing strikes a chord without hurting business

By Mae Anderson
Associated Press
September 26, 2018

Nike caused an uproar earlier this month with its ad featuring former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick that debuted just as the football season was about to begin. But the shoe maker's stock is up and sales have been steady.

The furor seems to have largely died down and the company reported an earnings beat on Tuesday.

While purpose-driven marketing can be a land mine for some companies, others like Nike have found it a useful way to appeal to their core demographic and differentiate themselves in an increasingly polarized political landscape.

"I don't think it was a big gamble. Historically, Nike has always done this so it was no shock," said Antonio S. Williams, who teaches sports marketing at Indiana University. "They're the king of emotional marketing so everything they do, they do it with emotion."

For the quarter ended Aug. 31, Nike's net income rose 15 percent to \$1.09 billion, or 67 cents per share, from \$950 million, or 57 cents per share in the prior-year quarter. Analysts expected 63 cents per share. Revenue rose 10 percent to \$9.95 billion, edging past analyst expectations of \$9.93 billion, according to FactSet.

The results don't have anything to do with the Kaepernick ad, which came out shortly after the quarter ended. Instead, the quarter benefited from the FIFA World Cup of soccer that showcased many players and teams wearing its clothing and shoes, as well as the "athleisure" trend that continues to be strong.

But Nike has long boosted its global brand with edgy visual ads. On Monday, it celebrated another controversial athlete, Tiger Woods, who Nike stuck by during a 2009 sex scandal. Its latest campaign, a two-image Instagram ad celebrating Woods's first PGA Tour win in five years, went viral. The first image shows his back, with the words, "He's done." But a swipe through to the second image shows the front of him giving a fist pump and the words "it again."

The Kaepernick campaign included a print ad that featured a close-up of his face and the words, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," as well as a TV ad that featured many Nike athletes and a voiceover by Kaepernick in celebration of the 30th anniversary of Nike's "Just Do It" tagline. Kaepernick was the first NFL athlete to take a knee during the national anthem to protest police brutality.

People online were divided over the ads. Some burned their Nike socks and threatened boycotts while others saluted the company's message. Overall, revenue hasn't been dampened and the boycotts seem to have fizzled out. This week, in fact, a Rhode Island town council that had approved a nonbinding resolution to boycott Nike products reversed course.

In a call with analysts, Nike CEO Mark Parker said the campaign has inspired "record engagement with the brand," and an uptick in traffic and engagement "socially and commercially," although he did not give specifics.

He said Nike marketing is always about addressing "how do we connect and engage in a way that is relevant and inspiring to the consumers we're here to serve."

Taking a political or social stand is anathema to most brands, who aim to appeal to the broadest amount of people possible in order to get them to part with their dollars. They don't always work out. For example, Etsy, the craft-centric e-commerce company, rose to prominence as a B Corp., a type of for-profit company that has been certified to meet social sustainability and environmental performance standards. But once Etsy went public, its board voted to give up its B Corp. status to maintain its corporate structure.

In another case, an 84 Lumber Super Bowl ad in 2017 that tried to tackle immigration came across as overly complicated and tone deaf. Similarly, a 2017 Airbnb Super Bowl ad that aimed to celebrate diversity ended up inadvertently echoing Airbnb's own problem with combating discrimination by some hosts.

But if it fits with the brand, a social stance can work. Outdoor clothing company Patagonia has had success taking a stand on environmental issues because that resonates with its main customers: buyers of high end outdoor clothing gear. And as opposition swelled against the Trump administration policy to separate migrant families, American Airlines and United Airlines, as well as other carriers, issued statements that said they did not want to use their flights to carry migrant children to temporary shelters.

As for Nike, "they hit it out of the park with the Kaepernick ad," said Bob Phibbs, CEO of New York-based consultancy the Retail Doctor. "This ad is completely in line with who Nike is and what they stand for. That authenticity resonated and will continue to resonate with their customers."

Woody Paige: Patrick Mahomes and Kansas City Chiefs bring lots of offense to Denver matchup

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 26, 2018

The Chiefs are the paradoxical unstoppable force and the movable object.

Midway in between are the Broncos.

The twain shall meet on Monday night.

The 3-0 Chiefs are reminiscent of the 2013 Broncos and the Broncos of exactly 50 years earlier. The Broncos of 2018 are more suggestive of last season with a 2-1 record.

Those Peyton Manning-inspired Broncos five seasons ago went wild with 49, 41, 37, 52, 51, 35, 33 and 45 points. They produced another 51-point outburst and ended up with 606 points (37.9 points a game)

Manning threw an NFL-record 55 touchdown passes (3.4 average per) as the Broncos won 13 games gushing to the Super Bowl.

Another quarterback with identical initials, P.M., is on pace to shatter the Manning mark.

Patrick Mahomes averaged 4.3 passing touchdowns in the first three games.

Manning tied an NFL record with seven TDs in the opener against the Colts, and added five more in the next two. Patrick has 3, 6, 4 to (sur)pass Peyton 13-12 at this juncture.

Oddly enough, Mahomes' first start last season as a rookie was in the finale in Denver. He had no touchdowns, but the Chiefs won.

Is Mahomes Manning reincarnate? No. That's a premature evaluation.

But, consider: Manning threw touchdown passes to eight receivers in 2013. Mahomes already has thrown touchdown passes to nine Chiefs.

Aside: Manning likely will be a witness at the Monday game.

Peyton led the Broncos to seven consecutive victories against the Chiefs from 2012-2015, but the only time in his career he was removed from a game because of injury/inefficiency was on Nov. 15, 2015, in a home loss to the Chiefs.

The Chiefs seek their sixth straight victory over the Broncos.

They have been amazing offensively this year with constant motion creating confusion. The Chiefs have scored 38 points twice (Chargers and 49ers) and 42 against the Steelers.

These Chiefs are averaging 39 points, while the 2013 Broncos had a 37.8 average through the season.

The current Broncos are averaging 20.3 points after beating the Seahawks and the Raiders and fading like a madras shirt in Baltimore.

But, here's the plot twist:

While the Chiefs rank No. 1 and the Broncos 16 in scoring, the visitors are a crummy 30th in points permitted (30.7 average). The local lads also are 16th (23.3) in that category.

The 1963 Broncos were torched for a 33.6-point average in a 14-game schedule.

The Chiefs are seventh in passing offense, the Broncos 16th again. But the Broncos are third in rushing in the league, the Chiefs 15th.

Defensively, the Broncos are fourth against the run and 22nd against the pass, while the Chiefs are tied for 18th and tied for last.

K.C. intercepted one pass, recovered one fumble and lost another. Mahomes hasn't been intercepted. Denver has two picks and a fumble recovery, but Case Keenum has been intercepted five times (with only three touchdowns).

So, which team has the edge? The Chiefs, according to the Las Vegas oddsmakers, are consensus five-point favorites.

The over-under total for the game is 56 — the highest predicted combined score of the third week.

The Chiefs (originally the Dallas Texans) possess a 61-54 regular-season record vs. the Broncos, but the Broncos lead the series in Denver, 35-23, and 1-0 in the only postseason game.

Nobody can expect a duplication of the 49-39 Chiefs' victory of 1964 or the Broncos' 49-29 victory in 2010.

Yet, the Kansas City 7-3 triumph in Denver in 2011 isn't expected, either.

The Chiefs have superlative overall receiving and running talent with Tyreek Hill, Sammy Watkins, Travis Kelce and Kareem Hunt providing Mahomes an array of choices. The defense, though, isn't much to behold beyond Justin Houston and Eric Berry, who will be out with a heel injury.

The 116th confrontation of these adversaries will be their most significant — until they oppose each other again on Oct. 28.

Before then, the Chiefs have the Jaguars, the Patriots and the Bengals, while the Broncos are in New Jersey (Jets), at home (Rams) and in Arizona (Cardinals).

The Broncos will have a movable feast on Monday night, but they can't stop the Super Chief locomotive, which used to pass through Kansas City, Mo., and La Junta., Colo., and the Mahomes Express in a 31-27 defeat.

Power Rankings Roundup: A slight stumble

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

September 26, 2018

ESPN

Current ranking: 17_

Last week: 15_

The Broncos have pressured opposing quarterbacks on 26 percent of dropbacks when they send a blitz, the third-lowest rate in the NFL. Their blitz has generated just one sack in their past two games combined.

NFL.com

Current ranking: 22_

Last week: 18_

After eking out wins the first two weeks, the Broncos fell into the loss column on Sunday. The offense? Problematic. The defense? Er, needed more help from the offense. After a strong start, Case Keenum and friends stalled, with penalties being the familiar culprit. Familiar because every phase of the game contributed to a whopping 120 yards from yellow flags. Six huge points were taken off the board when Denver was called for an illegal block during the touchdown return off a blocked field goal. A score there could've changed the entire complexion of the game. Oy.

Pro Football Talk

Current ranking: 21_

Last week: 18_

Case Keenum is two interceptions away from matching his full-season total in 2017.

USA Today

Current ranking: 21_

Last week: 14_

Case Keenum among five QBs on pace to lead league with 27 INTs, though he's lowest rated (71.6), which would be the worst of his checkered career.

Andrea Kremer, Hannah Storm to become first all-female broadcasting pair to call NFL game

By Tom Schad

USA Today

September 26, 2018

Andrea Kremer and Hannah Storm will make broadcasting history Thursday night.

Amazon Prime Video announced Tuesday that Kremer and Storm will become the first female pair to call an NFL game when they share the booth for Thursday's game between the Los Angeles Rams and Minnesota Vikings, the first of 11 Thursday night NFL games that will be carried by the streaming service this year.

According to the news release, Amazon Prime members will be able to tune into Kremer and Storm's commentary as one of four available options while viewing the game. The other options include Fox's standard broadcasting team of Joe Buck and Troy Aikman, a Spanish broadcasting team and a broadcasting team from the United Kingdom.

Kremer, who was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame earlier this year, currently works for NFL Network and HBO Sports after a lengthy, award-winning career as a sideline and feature reporter. Storm is a well-known anchor for ESPN's "SportsCenter," among other programs.

"I can't imagine embarking upon this new role with anyone better than Andrea," Storm said in a statement. "A lifelong friend with Pro Football Hall of Fame credentials, she is the perfect partner. Together we're looking forward to offering a new option for Prime members on Thursday nights and I'm excited to get to work!"

NFL Competition Committee members reportedly uncomfortable with roughing the passer calls

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

September 26, 2018

The story of the first three weeks of the NFL season -- besides Patrick Mahomes' rapid ascent to the top of the MVP leaderboard -- is roughing the passer. According to ESPN, officials have already flagged roughing the passer 34 times, which marks a sharp increase from 2016 and 2017, when there were 20 and 16 roughing calls through the first three weeks of each respective season.

Fans, players, and coaches aren't the only ones concerned about the enforcement of the rule. So are members of the competition committee.

According to NFL.com's Judy Battista, some members of the competition committee are "uncomfortable" with the roughing the passer penalties we've seen thus far, most notably the Clay Matthews penalty during the Packers' tie with the Vikings in Week 2.

Battista reported that there will be a discussion next week, but members are "unsure" if immediate changes will be made. ESPN's Dan Graziano reported something similar, confirming that some members are concerned and that there is a call scheduled. Changes aren't expected to come this year, Graziano added.

Their reports:

However, according to The Washington Post's Mark Maske, "it is expected that the roughing-the-passer rule will be called differently, with the shift in emphasis becoming clear through officiating videos distributed by the league." In other words, the rule probably won't change, but the enforcement of the rule might.

So, hope for change remains after the first three weeks saw countless controversial roughing penalties. There was the Matthews hit on Kirk Cousins. There was Matthews' hit on Alex Smith on Sunday. And there were more than a few during the Steelers' Monday night win over the Buccaneers.

The root of the problem dates back to the offseason, when the league made the body weight aspect of the rule, which restricts defenders from landing on the quarterback with all of their body weight and driving the quarterback into the ground with excessive force, a point of emphasis.

The intent of the rule might've been good (nobody wants Aaron Rodgers breaking his collarbone again), but it's nearly impossible for defenders to avoid landing on a quarterback because of, well, physics.

What was Matthews supposed to do differently here?

Same question for the sack below:

Again, the intent of the rule is good. Quarterbacks (and players, in general) should be protected, in part because the moment the Aaron Rodgers and Kirk Cousins of the NFL are replaced by the Brock Osweilers and DeShone Kizers of the NFL is the moment the NFL goes from the most exciting sport on the planet to the most unwatchable. But the league needs to find a way to balance its desire to protect quarterbacks with common sense.

Recognizing and admitting that there is a problem is an important first step. We'll see if changes follow.

Can the NFL Back Its Way Out of Controversial Roughing Calls?

By Conor Orr

MMQB

September 26, 2018

Back in early September, we predicted that the new leading-with-the-helmet rule could be a thread that pulls away at the wavering portion of the NFL's fan base in 2018. Some people forget that Donald Trump's September 2017 rally speech about Colin Kaepernick and the league wasn't just about the national anthem; he also blasted the NFL for what he considered the softening of a violent game. ("Today if you hit too hard—15 yards! Throw him out of the game! ... They're ruining the game!") And when the President speaks at his rallies, he has a captive audience that the league is worried about losing.

Turns out it wasn't the helmet rule that has become a lightning rod this season but a slight rewording and new emphasis on the rule against a player landing on a quarterback with his full body weight. Costly roughing the passer calls have been a sharp red line in a handful of pivotal games so far. Coaches and players are speaking out.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, typically attuned to the current president's rhetoric and conscious of his own fan base, on Tuesday dismissed the idea that pro football is a finesse game, and said the NFL had to set itself apart from high school and college football in that regard. "You're paid a lot of money to go out and incur those type situations that have more risks in them," he said, via 105.3 The Fan in Dallas.

It was fascinating to see Monday Night Football color commentator Jason Witten, longtime tight end for Jones's Cowboys, make a Freudian slip during this week's broadcast, calling the new focus on the rule "left wing," though an ESPN spokesman said Witten's comment had nothing to do with politics.

Of course, as the NFL attempts to address the uproar over the calls while continuing to place the burden on officiating crews still trying to figure out how to apply the new emphasis, it's difficult to separate this particular controversy from the wider context in which it's taking place. The point of the new rule was to provide further protection for quarterbacks—the big stars, the ticket-sellers, the ones who drive ratings. There's pushback from players who have lobbied for a safer NFL, newly concerned about their own long-term health, but who are divided on the route to get there. There's frustration from coaches who are losing games due to this rule change, and confusion and dissatisfaction from fans who see yet another instance of a league stumbling over itself. All of it comes against a backdrop of strong, divisive voices reminding us—not necessarily for purely sporting reasons—of how great it used to be.

It will take the skills of a surgeon to pluck the league's current infighting over these contact rules from the political attachments that are mixing everything together. Maybe, like the anthem policy, the NFL just stuffs the rule emphasis back under the bed and hopes that a few great games make people forget the strange undertones of this season's first month. It's worked before. As far as the politics goes, we've seen that strategy win a few times already.

NFL Power Rankings Poll: Chiefs Take No. 1, Patriots Down to 11

By STAFF

MMQB

September 26, 2018

The Jaguars only last one week in the top spot, and now we have a new AFC team getting a turn at No. 1. The Saints made the biggest jump up, while the 49ers lost their franchise QB and had the biggest drop. And the Patriots have fallen “all the way”—by their standards at least—down to 11.

This week's voters:

Ben Baskin, Staff Writer

Mitch Goldich, Producer/Writer

Jonathan Jones, Staff Writer

Kalyn Kahler, Writer/Producer

Bette Marston, Senior Producer

Mark Mravic, Executive Editor

Conor Orr, Staff Writer

Jenny Vrentas, Senior Writer

1. Kansas City Chiefs (3-0)

Last Week's rank: 3

Points in poll: 253

Highest-place vote: 1 (5)

Lowest-place vote: 2 (3)

Last week's result: Win vs. San Francisco 38-27

Next game: at Denver

2. Los Angeles Rams (3-0)

Last Week's rank: 2

Points in poll: 251

Highest-place vote: 1 (3)

Lowest-place vote: 2 (5)

Last week's result: Win vs. Los Angeles Chargers 35-23

Next game: vs. Minnesota

3. Philadelphia Eagles (2-1)

Last Week's rank: 7

Points in poll: 233

Highest-place vote: 3 (6)

Lowest-place vote: 7 (1)

Last week's result: Win vs. Indianapolis 20-16

Next game: at Tennessee

4. New Orleans Saints (2-1)

Last Week's rank: 12
Points in poll: 225
Highest-place vote: 3 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 7 (1)
Last week's result: Win at Atlanta 43-37 (OT)
Next game: at New York Giants

5. Jacksonville Jaguars (2-1)
Last Week's rank: 1
Points in poll: 219
Highest-place vote: 4 (5)
Lowest-place vote: 15 (1)
Last week's result: Loss vs. Tennessee 9-6
Next game: vs. New York Jets

6. Minnesota Vikings (1-1-1)
Last Week's rank: 4
Points in poll: 205
Highest-place vote: 5 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 9 (2)
Last week's result: Loss vs. Buffalo 27-6
Next game: at Los Angeles Rams

7. Carolina Panthers (2-1)
Last Week's rank: T-13
Points in poll: 197
Highest-place vote: 6 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 10 (3)
Last week's result: Win vs. Cincinnati 31-21
Next game: Bye

8. Atlanta Falcons (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 8
Points in poll: 196
Highest-place vote: 4 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 16 (1)
Last week's result: Loss vs. New Orleans 43-37 (OT)
Next game: vs. Cincinnati

9. Miami Dolphins (3-0)
Last Week's rank: 15
Points in poll: 190
Highest-place vote: 5 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 15 (1)
Last week's result: Win vs. Oakland 28-20
Next game: at New England

10. Green Bay Packers (1-1-1)

Last Week's rank: 6
Points in poll: 189
Highest-place vote: 7 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 11 (3)
Last week's result: Loss at Washington 31-17
Next game: vs. Buffalo

11. New England Patriots (1-2)

Last Week's rank: 5
Points in poll: 175
Highest-place vote: 5 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 23 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Detroit 26-10
Next game: vs. Miami

12. Pittsburgh Steelers (1-1-1)

Last Week's rank: 16
Points in poll: 161
Highest-place vote: 9 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 22 (1)
Last week's result: Win at Tampa Bay 30-27
Next game: vs. Baltimore

13. Los Angeles Chargers (1-2)

Last Week's rank: 11
Points in poll: 155
Highest-place vote: 9 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 20 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Los Angeles Rams 35-23
Next game: vs. San Francisco

14. Cincinnati Bengals (2-1)

Last Week's rank: 10
Points in poll: 142
Highest-place vote: 11 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 19 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Carolina 31-21
Next game: at Atlanta

15. Baltimore Ravens (2-1)

Last Week's rank: 20
Points in poll: 141
Highest-place vote: 13 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 19 (1)
Last week's result: Win vs. Denver 27-14
Next game: at Pittsburgh

16. Washington Redskins (2-1)

Last Week's rank: 23
Points in poll: 137
Highest-place vote: 10 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 23 (1)
Last week's result: Win vs. Green Bay 31-17
Next game: Bye

17. Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2-1)
Last Week's rank: 9
Points in poll: 135
Highest-place vote: 13 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 22 (1)
Last week's result: Loss vs. Pittsburgh 30-27
Next game: at Chicago

18. Denver Broncos (2-1)
Last Week's rank: T-13
Points in poll: 126
Highest-place vote: 15 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 21 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Baltimore 27-14
Next game: vs. Kansas City

19. Chicago Bears (2-1)
Last Week's rank: 19
Points in poll: 123
Highest-place vote: 10 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 24 (1)
Last week's result: Win at Arizona 16-14
Next game: vs. Tampa Bay

20. Tennessee Titans (2-1)
Last Week's rank: 22
Points in poll: 110
Highest-place vote: 13 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 23 (1)
Last week's result: Win at Jacksonville 9-6
Next game: vs. Philadelphia

21. Seattle Seahawks (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 21
Points in poll: 96
Highest-place vote: 19 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 27 (1)
Last week's result: Win vs. Dallas 24-13
Next game: at Arizona

22. Detroit Lions (1-2)

Last Week's rank: 27
Points in poll: 94
Highest-place vote: 17 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 23 (4)
Last week's result: Win vs. New England 26-10
Next game: at Dallas

23. New York Giants (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 28
Points in poll: 84
Highest-place vote: 18 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 26 (1)
Last week's result: Win at Houston 27-22
Next game: vs. New Orleans

24. Cleveland Browns (1-1-1)
Last Week's rank: 30
Points in poll: 76
Highest-place vote: 21 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 26 (2)
Last week's result: Win vs. New York Jets 21-17
Next game: at Oakland

T-25. Dallas Cowboys (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 17
Points in poll: 59
Highest-place vote: 20 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 29 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Seattle 24-13
Next game: vs. Detroit

T-25. New York Jets (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 24
Points in poll: 59
Highest-place vote: 25 (6)
Lowest-place vote: 28 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Cleveland 21-17
Next game: at Jacksonville

27. Buffalo Bills (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 32
Points in poll: 48
Highest-place vote: 22 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 31 (1)
Last week's result: Win at Minnesota 27-6
Next game: at Green Bay

T-28. Indianapolis Colts (1-2)

Last Week's rank: 25
Points in poll: 40
Highest-place vote: 26 (2)
Lowest-place vote: 30 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Philadelphia 20-16
Next game: vs. Houston

T-28. San Francisco 49ers (1-2)
Last Week's rank: 18
Points in poll: 40
Highest-place vote: 26 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 30 (1)
Last week's result: Loss at Kansas City 38-27
Next game: at Los Angeles Chargers

30. Houston Texans (0-3)
Last Week's rank: 26
Points in poll: 39
Highest-place vote: 16 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 31 (1)
Last week's result: Loss vs. New York Giants 27-22
Next game: at Indianapolis

31. Oakland Raiders (0-3)
Last Week's rank: 29
Points in poll: 15
Highest-place vote: 30 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 32 (2)
Last week's result: Loss at Miami 28-20
Next game: vs. Cleveland

32. Arizona Cardinals (0-3)
Last Week's rank: 31
Points in poll: 11
Highest-place vote: 30 (1)
Lowest-place vote: 32 (16)
Last week's result: Loss vs. Chicago 16-14
Next game: vs. Seattle

Broncos add punter Colby Wadman to practice squad as competition for Marquette King

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
September 26, 2018

The Denver Broncos may have signed punter Marquette King to a three-year contract this offseason. However, his claim to a roster spot in Denver may be far more tenuous than it would seem after a poor outing against the Baltimore Ravens on Sunday.

According to Mike Klis of 9News, the Broncos added punter Colby Wadman to their practice on Tuesday to serve as a not-so-subtle suggestion to King to fix whatever issues he may be having.

King had seven punts against the Ravens that averaged 41 yards per punt. However, that number is somewhat offset by a 55-yard effort. Six of King's even punts were 42 yards or less with four being under 40 yards. Three of the punts were inside the Baltimore 20-yard line.

"He has to simply punt better," head coach Vance Joseph said at his news conference Monday. "No different than our corners have to play better in coverage, and we've got to block better. He's a football player and he's got to do his job. He's got to punt better."

King's 44.6 yards per punt gross average ranks 22nd in the league through three weeks. His 41.6 yards per punt net average is 14th best.

NFL disputes reported apology to Jets for holding penalty

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

September 26, 2018

Although the league seems to be getting away from the business of publicly admitting officiating errors, the NFL still provides private apologies when warranted. But the NFL privately disputes a new report regarding an officiating error that the league supposedly acknowledged.

A source with knowledge of the situation tells PFT that the league did not informally apologize to the Jets for the holding penalty called on cornerback Morris Claiborne while covering Browns receiver Antonio Callaway in the second half of Thursday's game. The foul, coupled with a penalty on the Browns, gave Cleveland a second chance to tie the game at 14, after the first attempt resulted in a sack of quarterback Baker Mayfield.

Manish Mehta of the New York Daily News reported that the league privately apologized for the holding penalty. The video of the play shows Claiborne clearly grabbing and pulling Callaway's jersey. The league office, per the source, regards the hold as "obvious."

Nike CEO is “very proud” of the company’s work with Colin Kaepernick

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 26, 2018

Earlier this month, Nike made waves by announcing a deal with free-agent quarterback Colin Kaepernick. The company also has made plenty of money, in the form of both revenue and corporate value.

“We feel very good and are very proud of the work we’ve been doing,” CEO Mark Parker said during a corporate earnings call, via Darren Rovell of ESPN.com. “We know it’s resonating quite strongly with consumers here in North America and around the world.”

Parker added that the 30th anniversary “Just Do It” campaign, with Kaepernick in a prominent role, has resulted in “record engagement with the brand.”

So, yes, it’s clear that Kaepernick moves the needle. And the irony for the NFL is that, with the 49ers facing four prime-time games between Week Six and Week 10 and with C.J. Beathard as the current starter, Kaepernick is the one free agent the league should want the 49ers to sign, given the impact he’d have on viewership, both from those who support him and those who would huff and puff about not watching but still tune in.

Flopping invades football

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

September 26, 2018

The NFL's obsession (potentially temporary) with roughing the passer invites a new dynamic: Quarterbacks engaging in soccer-style flops in order to draw fouls when otherwise a foul wouldn't be called.

It happened on Monday night when Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger collapsed like a Jenga tower in a wind tunnel after being tapped on the head by Buccaneers defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul. Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott also seemed to embellish a bit when hit by Seahawks defensive lineman Quinton Jefferson.

Peter King suggested during Tuesday's PFT Live that perhaps the NFL would have to make flopping a foul of its own. Of course, kickers and punters (primarily punters) will ham it up when grazed, hopeful to draw a foul. But that happens fairly rarely, and there's a bright-line rule about touching or not touching the kicker or the punter once the ball is away. For quarterbacks, the opportunities to take a dive are plentiful — and maybe there needs to be a way to discourage Oscar-quality (or otherwise) performance from quarterbacks looking to get a cheap 15 yards.

Mike Pereira predicts league will adjust how officials interpret roughing rule

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

September 26, 2018

During FOX's broadcast of the Cowboys-Seahawks game Sunday, Troy Aikman was critical of the NFL's roughing the passer point of emphasis this year. The Hall of Fame quarterback further explained during a FOX conference call Tuesday why he doesn't like the way officials are being told to enforce the rule.

"I think that everyone understands player safety," Aikman said. "I think the league overreacted. I think they'll continue to look at it with the controversy that it's created. I don't know. I just think sometimes some rules, even the helmet rule — it was called during the preseason and hasn't been called as much [during the regular season]. But based on the way that rule is written, I watch games every week in preparation, with a lot of film, and there are several plays in every game I watch where by the [helmet] rule and the way in which it's written, there should be penalties, but they stopped calling it. I thought that was what was going to happen [with the roughing rule] after the penalty two weeks ago on Clay Matthews, and yet it happened again in this last game. . . . I don't like it. It changes the outcomes of games, which is severe, and as I've said before, ultimately for some of these coaches, it'll cost them their jobs. I think the league will look at it, and the right decisions will be made going forward."

Four roughing the passer penalties were called Monday night, making 13 in Week Three and 34 for the season, Kevin Seifert of ESPN reports.

FOX's rules analyst Mike Pereira said last week he disagrees with the league on how it's interpreting and enforcing the rule. The competition committee has the rule on its agenda for a regularly scheduled conference call next week, and the league's former head of officials expects a change in how roughing the passer is officiated.

"I think common sense really factors in," Pereira said on the FOX call. "Troy made mention of the fact that in the helmet rule that he sees three or four every game that should be called or that were called in the first two weeks of the preseason and are not being called now. I think common sense will factor into it. . . . Adjustments can be made in how you interpret the rule during the season. I think we all agree that it's gone a little too far now. I think that adjustment will be made, and we'll probably start seeing it shortly."

Pereira pointed out that 51 helmet penalties were called in the first two weeks of the preseason. Two were called in the first two weeks of the regular season as both players and officials adjusted.

"I think we all have felt like it's gone a little bit too far," Pereira said. "I think it'll seek a level. It'll seek a level that will get it back in synch with what the players think and what we pretty much all think. Any time you put a new point of emphasis in, there's an adjustment that goes really to the players and to the officials. This one has taken a little bit longer than the helmet rule. . . . I think we'll see the same thing here. I really do think it'll find a middle ground to where it doesn't become as much of an issue as it is now."

“I’m all for player safety. I think everybody is, but you can move it a little bit too far. We all think that’s happened a little, but I think it’ll work back to something that’s acceptable.”

Pereira said Matthews’ hit on Kirk Cousins should not result in a penalty and thinks the competition committee “feels that way also.” Pereira expects the league to emphasize to officials that in order to call a foul, the defensive player has to commit a “second act” of “lifting and driving” the quarterback into the ground.