

# Kiszla: Needing signature win, Broncos coach Vance Joseph must ask tough question: Are Patrick Mahomes and Chiefs soft?

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
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When punched in the mouth, does Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes bleed?

Let's find out. How else are we going to know if the defensive reputations of Denver coaches Vance Joseph and Joe Woods are worth more than the paper their resumes are printed on? With Kansas City coach Andy Reid and his offensive scheme blowing up scoreboards throughout the NFL, are the Broncos bold enough to tell "Showtime" Mahomes: Not in our house!

In his 20th game as Denver coach, Vance Joseph desperately needs a signature victory to win the faith of Broncos Country. Here's his chance: Beat the Chiefs.

"They're averaging almost 400 yards and 40 points a game. The quarterback is playing at a high level. Along with Reid's system, it's going to be difficult for us to get them stopped," Joseph said Wednesday. "We're looking forward to the challenge, but being a six-point underdog, I'm not surprised. They've won the last three times in Denver. They've beaten the Broncos five straight times. I'm not surprised they're favored. That means nothing."

As Joseph spoke, it was impossible not to notice his anxiety. His comments were punctuated with tension. Joseph was uncommonly uptight, resembling the rookie head coach of 2017 who often seemed as if the job was too big for him.

Perhaps there was anxiety for good reason. Mahomes is a star on the rise, spinning the football as if his next stop after 15 years as the quarterback in K.C. will be Canton, Ohio.

But, in this situation, what would Wade Phillips do?

That Son of Bum would attack the quarterback. A confident defensive game plan would aggressively get after Mahomes, in much the same manner the Broncos stalked Cam Newton until he cracked in Super Bowl 50.

Don't get it wrong. This is not a call to violence against Mahomes. That would be foolish at a time when NFL officials throw a penalty flag when so much as a single bubble of wrap is popped by any defender who falls on the quarterback.

But let me say this, with all due respect: The Chiefs are soft.

OK, maybe that's smart way to play football in 2018, at a time when everybody from Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger to Green Bay linebacker Clay Matthews have questioned whether the

league has gone soft with an obsession to protect the quarterback. “You just want us to two-hand touch him or what?” Houston defensive end J.J. Watt said.

What I want is the Broncos get after Mahomes with as many speed rushers as possible, because if this Denver defensive backfield sits back and plays soft against the Chiefs, it will get eaten alive. Four sacks in three games make it appear as if Kansas City is doing a good job of protecting Mahomes. But he has been hit 20 times. Von Miller, Bradley Chubb and the gang can get to him.

The Kansas City offense is as fun as fireworks. What’s more, at age 60, Reid has brought spread-offense innovation to a league that refused to believe all that track-meet-on-turf college stuff would work at the pro level.

But we have seen these Chiefs before around here. They were called the 2013 Broncos. Peyton Manning and his offensive teammates put up Star Wars numbers, winning by video-game scores of 49-27 and 51-48, daring anybody to stop them. Guess what? In Super Bowl XLVIII the Seahawks did, bursting the Broncos’ bubble with a one-two punch from iron fists.

“Showtime” Mahomes is now the odds-on favorite to be named MVP. After only three games? Are you kidding me?

Yes, Mahomes’ 13 TD passes and 137.4 QB rating are very Manning-esque. Consider this a mea culpa for being unimpressed with Mahomes when the Chiefs traded up to take him No. 10 overall in the 2017 NFL draft.

So pardon this irreverent question, but I also have a sneaking suspicion: Are the Chiefs soft?

In the defensive game plan being installed by Denver, we will discover if Joseph and Woods are the strong and confident coaches to aggressively seek an answer.

If Joseph and Woods back down and play it safe now, they might as well start looking for their next NFL jobs.

# Broncos rush defense rising with Chiefs' Kareem Hunt on deck

By Kyle Fredrickson  
Denver Post  
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Running back Kareem Hunt hardly expected to play the last time Kansas City traveled to Denver, in Week 17 last year with a Wild Card berth in check, but he did receive one first-quarter carry in a tight Chiefs victory to close a dreadful Broncos season.

Hunt ran 35 yards, cementing himself as the NFL's rushing champion (1,327), and then into the Mile High end zone.

"He's a guy that can run between and outside the tackles, can catch the ball, get to the sideline and turn up-field before your guy — and everything else," defensive end Adam Gotsis said.

Hunt returns to Broncos Stadium on Monday night after a breakout rookie season but is still gaining traction in Year 2. He's averaged a paltry 3.2 yards per carry and has yet to crack the century mark in three games.

That hasn't softened the Broncos' approach in containing the 23-year-old former Toledo star. Denver is rightfully optimistic they'll get the job done, because a shaky pass defense has given way to a stout rush stop entering Week 4.

"Our front seven has played very well in all three games, as far as keeping the run to a minimum," coach Vance Joseph said. "That's putting more burden on the back end. We have to go continue to stop the run and obviously play better in the back end."

Denver has allowed only two runs of 12-plus yards — Chris Carson of Seattle (24) and Alex Collins of Baltimore (14). And, per Denver Post game charting, the Broncos have recorded 36 combined "run stuffs" or gains of three-or-fewer yards — not counting short-yardage or kneel-downs. Among Denver's more active stuffers are nose tackle Domata Peko (4) and linebacker Todd Davis (6-1/2).

"We've got solid players like (Derek) Wolfe, Adam, big Shelby (Harris) and Zach (Kerr) — all veteran players who are really stingy against the run," Peko said. "We don't like people to run on us. When people run on you, they're controlling you."

The Broncos' run-D has excelled when most required early in drives. They've allowed opponents 3.74 yards per rush on first-down attempts, according to STATS, as the 11th-best mark in the NFL.

"If you can't put them behind the sticks on first down, it puts them in a tough situation," Gotsis said. "Second-and-long is not where a lot of teams want to be. It makes them more predictable and the play-calling a bit easy. We've got to dominate KC early, shut them down and see which way the game flows. But winning first down is the most important thing."

Denver's attention to rush defense must also extend to second-year quarterback Patrick Mahomes, whose pocket mobility has created broken-play magic on more than one occasion this season. The Broncos blueprint for Russell Wilson's feet worked wonders in the opener (five yards rushing and six sacks). More of the same is expected against Kansas City.

"We're ready to go in there and be dominant," Gotsis said.

# Broncos Briefs: Sub-par start by Marquette King not unnoticed by Vance Joseph

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

Sept. 27, 2018

A familiarity with Broncos special teams coordinator Tom McMahon combined with the struggles of punter Marquette King helped Colby Wadman land on the team's practice squad Tuesday.

Wadman, 23, traveled to Denver from his parents' home in Thousand Oaks, Calif., for a workout with the Broncos before signing.

"I knew (McMahon) back from when he was in Indianapolis and he was one of the first ones to start scouting me (at UC Davis)," Wadman said after practice Wednesday.

McMahon visited Wadman on-campus and later brought him to the Colts' minicamp. He had also worked out previously for the Broncos.

King enters Monday's game against Kansas City ranked 23rd in gross average (44.6 yards), 15th in net average (41.6 yards, which is gross average minus return yardage) and tied for 10th in punts inside the 20-yard line (six).

"We have to get better there so we're looking forward to Marquette having a good week of punting," coach Vance Joseph said. "But it's a performance-based business."

Per the Denver Post's game charting, King's average hang time on 17 punts this year is 3.91 seconds, below the desired 4.00 seconds that produces a combination of good distance and time for the coverage team to get downfield.

King averaged 4.11 seconds on six punts against Seattle in Week 1 and three of his punts had a net of at least 45 yards. The hang time remained solid in the Week 2 win over Oakland (4.35 seconds).

But the Ravens game was a struggle. King averaged only 3.50 seconds on seven punts, including ones of 3.20, 2.93 and 2.67 seconds. Only one punt had a net of more than 41 yards.

The Chiefs have a premier punt returner in Tyreek Hill, who scored a 91-yard touchdown in Week 1 against the Los Angeles Chargers.

"(Hang time) is going to be key with this guy," Joseph said of Hill. "He's a dangerous returner. He doesn't fair-catch the football. We have to do a good job of keeping him from hurting us with punt returns."

Impressed with Chiefs. The juggernaut that is Kansas City's offense will arrive with gaudy statistics and a talented depth chart.

"They're averaging almost 400 yards (398.3) and almost 40 points (39.3) per game, the quarterback (Patrick Mahomes) is playing at a high level and he has multiple weapons along with Coach (Andy) Reid's

system,” Joseph said. “It’s going to be difficult for us to get them stopped, but we’re looking forward to the challenge.”

Rare situation. If the Chiefs hold as a favorite of four or more points, it will put the Broncos in an unfamiliar position.

Only three times since the start of 2011 have the Broncos been a home underdog of at least four points: Against the New York Jets (6 1/2 points, won 17-13) and New England (7 points, lost 41-23) in 2011 and the Patriots last year (7 points, lost 41-16).

“I’m not surprised they’re favored,” said Joseph, citing the Chiefs’ three-game win streak in Denver. “That means nothing.”

Footnotes. The Broncos practiced without pads on Wednesday. Inside linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) was the only non-participant. Cornerbacks Adam Jones (thigh) and Tramaine Brock (groin) returned to practice. Jones missed the Baltimore game and Brock was injured after six snaps of work. “They both looked fine,” Joseph said. ... Joseph downplayed linebacker Von Miller playing 49 of 72 snaps against the Ravens. “If we play 70 snaps and he plays 50, that’s a good number,” Joseph said. Miller played 50 of 57 against Seattle and 50 of 65 against Oakland. The beneficiary was Shaq Barrett, who played 21 snaps in Weeks 1-2 but 28 in the Ravens game.

# Ties to Broncos' Case Keenum, Chiefs' Patrick Mahomes makes Texas Tech coach interested observer on Monday night

By Ryan O'Halloran  
Denver Post  
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The Broncos' game against Kansas City on Monday night will have an interested observer in Lubbock, Texas.

Texas Tech coach Kliff Kingsbury was on the University of Houston's staff when Broncos quarterback Case Keenum was setting multiple NCAA passing records and was Texas Tech's head coach/play-caller when Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes developed into a first-round draft pick.

"That will be tough," Kingsbury told The Denver Post. "I'm cheering for all offense."

Kingsbury's quarterback "tree" started with Keenum and continued with Johnny Manziel (Texas A&M) and Baker Mayfield and Mahomes at Texas Tech. Keenum's early season with the Broncos has been up and down — a 2-1 record but five interceptions. Mahomes has been one of the NFL's best stories, leading the league in touchdown passes (13) and quarterback rating (137.4).

Kingsbury called Keenum and Mahomes "both such remarkable stories." Keenum had one scholarship offer coming out of high school and Mahomes had one Power Five opportunity. Kingsbury completed his playing career for the Canadian Football League's Winnipeg Blue Bombers in 2007 and began his coaching career at Houston the next year when Keenum was a third-year player. He was an offensive quality control coach for two years before coach Kevin Sumlin promoted him to co-offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach for 2010-11.

Keenum set NCAA records for career passing yards (19,217) and passing touchdowns (155).

"Just an incredible young man," Kingsbury said. "Great personality. Very humble. Very open to working. Me having played quarterback in a similar offense to what we were running (at Houston) and playing Texas high school football and being the sons of coaches, we clicked early on. We were both football junkies and loved the X's and O's.

"He always wanted to know more and wanted to get better and that really helped me as a young coach."

During their first season together (2008), Kingsbury saw NFL traits in Keenum's game.

"He made some plays that were wow-type moments for me, things where I thought he had a chance to be a special, special player," Kingsbury said. "He obviously isn't a 6-5 guy who can throw it 90 yards, but the vision he has and the pocket feel, I knew that he could play at that level based on his skills, accuracy and feel for the game."

Keenum tore his ACL in 2010 but was granted a sixth year of eligibility for 2011. By then, to say he and Kingsbury were on the same page was an understatement.

“I would be checking things in my mind and then telling the (coaches) upstairs to check (the defense) and as I was waiting for them, Case was checking to the right play,” Kingsbury said. “He was a coach on the field.”

As Keenum started his NFL journey, Kingsbury followed Sumlin to Texas A&M and coached Manziel in 2012 when he won the Heisman Trophy. Kingsbury was then hired by Texas Tech, his alma mater, to take over as head coach. In 2013, Mayfield became the first true freshman walk-on quarterback in FBS history to start a season opener, but transferred to Oklahoma after one season.

“Baker was very similar to Case in his approach to the game and how he saw the field and made quick decisions and got the ball out quickly,” Kingsbury said.

Mahomes was ranked by Rivals as a three-star recruit. In two-plus years as the Red Raiders’ starter, he had 93 touchdowns and 11,252 yards passing before becoming a first-round pick by Kansas City in 2017.

He sat out last year until starting in a win at the Broncos in the season finale when Kansas City’s playoff spot was already secured. When the Chiefs traded Alex Smith to Washington in March, that opened up the starting spot for Mahomes.

After the Chiefs’ win over the Los Angeles Chargers in Week 1, Kingsbury told reporters Mahomes is the “most talented quarterback I’ve probably ever seen. There are only a handful of guys in that league that can do what he can do.”

And thanks to Kingsbury, Mahomes is plenty familiar with his quarterback counterpart Monday.

“We watched Case’s film – his 2008, ’09 and ’11 as teaching tape,” Kingsbury said of the Texas Tech quarterbacks. “He did things so well by the end of his career, he set the standard for everybody I’ve been with, whether it’s Patrick, Johnny, Davis Webb or Baker. They’ve all watched Case Keenum film and seen how he operated in the system because he did it at such a high level and was such a great leader in our system.”

Keenum, 30, and Mahomes, 23, have taken different paths to Monday night but Kingsbury is the thread that binds.

“To watch them develop and get into the situations they’re in, I couldn’t be more proud,” Kingsbury said. “We’ll be hoping for a high-scoring, close affair.”

# **Broncos to wear all-blue uniforms vs. Chiefs for Monday Night Football**

By Jeff Bailey  
Denver Post  
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You either love them or hate them, but the all-blue uniforms are back. The Broncos announced the team will wear the all-navy uniforms against the Kansas City Chiefs in Denver on Monday Night Football.

According to the Broncos, they will also be wearing the blue tops in Week 15 against the Cleveland Browns, no decision has been made on bottom color for that tilt.

The Broncos will also bust out their color rush uniforms in Week 12 when they play host to the Pittsburgh Steelers at Broncos Stadium at Mile High on Nov. 25th.

# Not too long ago, the Broncos' newest punter was delivering pizzas and lived with his parents

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Wadmania is shaking the walls at Broncos' headquarters.

At this time last year, Colby Wadman had a better chance of getting a \$5 tip as a delivery person for Pizza Guys in Davis, Calif., then he did of walking into an NFL locker room.

But he's got his own NFL locker now, if in the practice squad section, for two reasons: One, Marquette King, the Broncos' current punter, has been inconsistent through three games; and two, Tom McMahon, the Broncos' special teams coordinator, has been enamored with Wadman for a while.

"When he was in Indy he started scouting me back then," Wadman said. "He visited me in Davis for a workout and he brought me in to Indy for a minicamp. We've had a few workouts together."

When McMahon moved his coaching talents from the Indianapolis Colts to the Broncos this year, he brought Wadman in to the UCHHealth Training Center this summer for a minicamp look.

But at that point, the Broncos were confident King would be their Pro Bowl-caliber punter. While King has had some terrific punts, he's also had some duds, in particular in the rain Sunday at Baltimore.

And so Wadman was signed to the practice squad Tuesday and practiced with the team Wednesday.

"We have to get better," Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said Wednesday. "We're looking forward to Marquette having a good week of punting, but it's a performance-based business, so we're trying to get better there."

Wadman punted for the University of California-Davis through the 2016 season. He wasn't drafted and didn't have much past the minicamp tryouts in 2017 so he went back to Davis, California to keep in shape.

From June until mid-December, when he moved back to his parents' home in Thousand Oaks, Wadman delivered pizzas.

"Worked for tips," he said. "I was living with my teammates and finishing school, too."

He finished his degree in managerial economics and "I was actually about to start looking for jobs before I got the text from my agent."

He understands his presence has created some questions about King's future.

"I haven't heard anything," Wadman said. "I'm just taking it day by day. Whatever the coaches tell me on the field and in meetings, I'm just going to soak it up and punt."

And how did King interact with him during practice Wednesday?

“He was good,” Wadman said. “We know each other from minicamp. Marquette’s been cool with me. Great guy.”

#### BRONCO BITS

The Broncos got their two injured veterans cornerbacks -- Adam Jones (hamstring/thigh) and Tramaine Brock (groing) back in practice Wednesday. ...

Inside linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) sat out practice Wednesday.

# Von Miller gives 'Dancing with the Stars' advice to DeMarcus Ware: 'Don't sweat, man'

By Allison Sylte

9 News

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DeMarcus Ware must be glad he has a friend in his corner when it comes to “Dancing with the Stars.”

He asked Denver Broncos linebacker and DWTS alum Von Miller for his advice ... and filmed what he said in an Instagram video inside the locker room.

“When the lights get bright man, you’ve got to just hold it in,” Miller said. “Don’t sweat man. Just let it go.”

Ware admits he was sweating last week.

Miller was eliminated during week seven of the 2016 season of “Dancing with the Stars.” It was Icons night ... one that will never be forgotten for the wrong reasons in the community of Von Miller fans.

Here's DeMarcus Ware looking darn good during the season premiere:

He jumped over his partner in his debut, which is pretty epic.

His cha cha routine ultimately scored a solid 23, and Ware will be coming back next week.

Judge for yourself if that 23 was good enough below. He didn’t look that sweaty.

# How Chris Harris Jr.'s versatility can help Broncos slow Chiefs

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Champ Bailey called it.

Eight years ago, the cornerback and Pro Football Hall of Fame candidate had seen an undrafted rookie -- a guy who wasn't invited to the scouting combine and got the last contract the Denver Broncos had to offer to an undrafted player -- work through a few hours of training camp and pronounced he was "going to be here a long, long time."

That rookie, Chris Harris Jr., is 29 now. He has been named to three Pro Bowls, he has been a first-team All Pro and he has a Super Bowl ring.

And he might still be one of the most difficult players for any team to acquire. In fact, there are personnel executives in the NFL who, after putting franchise quarterback in Sharpie at the top of the hard-to-find list, would say a cornerback who can do what Harris does week to week might be next in line.

With all of the restrictions on defensive backs and the pass-heavy offenses and the accurate passers, this might be one of the most difficult eras to succeed in coverage.

Harris has flourished, playing at an elite level on the outside and covering many of the league's fastest receivers in open spaces, but also in the slot. Harris is at his most proficient working in high-traffic areas in the middle of the field.

It's simple to say, but in reality, vastly different skill sets are always difficult to find in one player.

"A guy who can play both positions is just really, really rare, there's no other way to say it," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph, a former longtime defensive backs coach in the league. "To be an outside corner, having long speed, movement, ball skills and quickness, and to be an inside corner, you need those same skills but linebackers' eyes with the toughness to tackle in the box, play leverage, blitz, all those things."

It also puts the Broncos, who have finished first, first and fourth in the league in pass defense over the previous three seasons, in the position of trying to decide the best way to use Harris to maximize results. So far, the results haven't been what they want. Russell Wilson, Derek Carr and Joe Flacco have completed a combined 69.5 percent of their passes in the Broncos' first three games of the season with a passer rating of 102.2. And now the Broncos are set to face the Kansas City Chiefs at home on Monday night. Quarterback Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs are averaging nearly 300 passing yards per game.

Bradley Roby is still working into his new job description as an every-down cornerback who has taken Aqib Talib's old job in the defense. The Broncos added two cornerbacks in free agency -- Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones -- to play one of the outside spots when needed in the specialty packages, but both of those players already have battled injuries.

The dilemma is Harris is the team's best cornerback outside and also the best in the slot, but he can only play one of those spots at a time. So, part of an opponent's planning has been to use formations and personnel groupings at times to try to limit Harris' ability to affect a play.

"I've always just tried to be as good at everything as I could be," Harris said. "... Some games they don't throw at me at all, but my job is be ready all the time to make a play no matter where I am."

The Chiefs lead the league in scoring, at 39.3 points per game, and Kansas City coach Andy Reid employs a wide array of impact players in a motion-filled assortment of formations. In short, getting Harris in the best spots to do his best work is part of what the Broncos will try to do this week. But Harris also represents a luxury most defenses don't have.

"I don't think there are many, maybe not any, guys like Chris," Broncos linebacker Von Miller said. "Especially now, when everybody, it seems like, has receivers and tight ends who all run fast and catch the ball."

So Harris has to be fast with the fastest and physical with the strongest. And he has to handle calls in the secondary.

"Chris isn't as big as some corners, but he can play outside because he's got great, great, great quickness and he's aggressive and he can always find the ball," Joseph said. "You watch Chris against big guys, he has great timing, great feel for the play; even with the back-shoulder throws, he finds the ball. And in the slot, everything happens so fast and the guy has a three-way go on every play -- inside, outside or go vertical -- so you have to know the offensive concepts to even play in there and also be smart enough to fit in the run game.

"It's part linebacker, part corner, part safety with a tremendous football IQ; that's really, really hard to find a guy like that."

# How the Chiefs have handed the Broncos season-altering losses in recent years

By Nicki Jhabvala  
The Athletic  
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The last time the Broncos beat the Chiefs, Denver was on its way to winning its third Super Bowl, owned the best defense in the league and still had Peyton Manning, at age 39, as its quarterback.

That was more than three years ago.

In Week 2, the Broncos came from behind for an improbable 31-24 win at Arrowhead Stadium, sealing the victory in the waning seconds. On what should have been the Chiefs' final drive before overtime, Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall punched the ball out of Jamaal Charles' hands and cornerback Bradley Roby recovered it and ran it back 21 yards for the game-winning score.

The win was the Broncos' second of 11 in 2015 that were decided by seven points or fewer. The Broncos had a knack for thrills that year and The Roby Game may forever remain among their finest.

But the five meetings with Kansas City since have been season-altering, often demoralizing, losses for Denver. As the Broncos prepare to face a new-look Chiefs team, featuring young quarterback Patrick Mahomes, here's a look back at both the good and the bad of the Broncos' recent history with their AFC West rival.

Nov. 15, 2015: Manning sets record. Manning gets benched.

Manning entered the game needing only 3 yards to supplant Brett Favre as the NFL's all-time leader in career passing yards. He couldn't do it against his former team in Indianapolis the week prior, but he would get it unceremoniously against the Chiefs. After throwing an interception and getting strip-sacked to start the game, Manning found running back Ronnie Hillman for a 4-yard completion to secure the record.

Then, two quarters later, Manning was benched after completing only 5-of-20 passes for 35 yards, four interceptions and a 0.0 passer rating. The Broncos' star quarterback had been dealing with rib soreness, a bum shoulder and a foot injury that would land him in a walking boot and in the training room for weeks until the Broncos' season finale.

"I didn't play well, I had a bad game and I'm not sure what else you can say about that," Manning said after the 29-13 loss in Denver. "Whether it was because of my injuries or my poor decision making, I tend to lean on the poor decision making and some bad throws. I had some underthrows to some guys, so I wish I would have played better."

Brock Osweiler started the next seven games and helped the Broncos to five wins before Manning returned and led the way through Super Bowl 50.

Nov. 27, 2016: Broncos lose in OT at home

The showdown in Denver left many raising their hands and wondering what the heck they just witnessed. Trevor Siemian, the seventh-round pick out of Northwestern who won the starting job after Manning's retirement, had 368 passing yards and three touchdowns, but he also took five sacks and couldn't do enough to help the Broncos' overcome the Chiefs in overtime.

Kansas City's star rookie, Tyreek Hill, had a rushing touchdown, a receiving touchdown and a kickoff returned 86 yards for a touchdown; tight end Travis Kelce had 101 receiving yards

With about a minute left in the extra period and the game tied, coach Gary Kubiak took a gamble and decided to have kicker Brandon McManus try for a 62-yard field goal. The kick fell short and Kansas City's Cairo Santos booted a 34-yarder to win it, 30-27.

"We're going to try to win," Kubiak said after. "I've seen B-Mac do that many times in practice. It's on me. I just gave them a chance. I thought we could do it and we didn't get it done. Give them credit."

The Broncos lost the game as well as their quarterback to a foot injury and their fullback, Andy Janovich, to an ankle injury. The Broncos would go on to lose three of their next five games to fall out of playoff contention for the first time since 2010.

Dec. 25, 2016: A Christmas the Broncos would like to forget

The Chiefs' playoff bid was secure before they took the rain-soaked field at Arrowhead Stadium. But the Broncos would soon lose their final shot at returning to the postseason with another dreadful showing on both sides. The Broncos' defense allowed 484 net yards to Kansas City, including 330 in the first half alone. Kelce accounted for 160 of those, plus a touchdown.

Siemian, meanwhile, completed only 17-of-43 pass attempts for 183 yards and an interception — on the final play of the game. The Broncos collectively had three turnovers, and just to twist the knife a little more, 346-pound defensive tackle Dontari Poe tossed the final touchdown, a 2-yard completion to Demetrius Harris.

"It's frustrating, but the way we played today, we don't deserve to be in the playoffs," Chris Harris Jr. said after the 33-10 loss. "They had a great game plan. We didn't stop anybody today. We don't deserve to make it."

But the worst news developed behind the scenes. During the road trip, Kubiak informed general manager John Elway he planned to resign as head coach. The next game, a Broncos win against Oakland on New Year's Day, would be Kubiak's last on the sidelines for Denver.

Oct. 30, 2017: Broncos' losing streak drags on

The Broncos had just been shut out for the first time in 25 years, against the Chargers, and their return to Arrowhead Stadium would produce a third consecutive loss (29-19) in a string of eight straight.

Denver committed five turnovers, tied for the second-most since Pat Bowlen purchased the team in 1984: Siemian threw three interceptions, Jamaal Charles fumbled in the first quarter and Kansas City recovered and returned it 45 yards for a touchdown; and Isaiah McKenzie muffed a punt.

Kelce pasted another 100-yard game (133 yards with one touchdown) on the Broncos, and Harrison Butker nailed five field goals. As was the case in many of the Broncos' losses last season, they struggled in every phase.

"This team has worked all week to play a good football game tonight," Joseph said. "It is sad we gave the game away again. Very sad."

Osweller would get the start for the next game, at Philadelphia, setting in motion a quarterback carousel that spun round and round until the season's end.

Dec. 31, 2017: Denver hosts Mahomes' breakout game

The Broncos' season was all but over so second-year quarterback Paxton Lynch got the start for the team's finale. It was a tryout of sorts, as the Broncos capped a season-long rotation at quarterback and began to take inventory at the position. Elway had already begun to scout new talent, but another glimpse at what Lynch could do was needed.

Lynch produced 254 passing yards, two touchdowns, two interceptions and an 87.3 rating in what would be his final regular-season game as a Denver Bronco. But the spotlight was owned by the Chiefs' first-round pick, Mahomes.

In his NFL debut, Mahomes tossed for 284 yards and guided the Chiefs on an 11-play, 67-yard scoring drive for a 27-24 win in Denver. His play was impressive enough to prompt Kansas City to ship out Alex Smith and make Mahomes their starter — a move that so far has paid dividends.

"He's definitely more confident," Joseph said of Mahomes on Wednesday. "As you watch him in the first three games, they're doing more on offense with him. So having an entire spring and an entire training camp, it's a lot of offense, and that makes it a tough out. With his talent, with the skill he has around him, with the running back (Kareem Hunt) and the scheme, it makes it tough."

Last weekend, Mahomes had 314 passing yards and three touchdowns in the Chiefs' win over the 49ers. His 13 touchdowns through three games surpassed Manning (12 in 2013) for the most touchdown passes by a player in his team's first three games of the season. And the Chiefs' 16 total touchdowns and 39.3 points per game lead the league.

"They're explosive. Right now, they're averaging almost 400 yards a game and almost 40 points a game," Joseph said. "The quarterback is playing at a high level. He's got multiple weapons. Along with (Andy) Reid's system, it's going to be difficult for us to get them stopped. We're looking forward to the challenge, but being a six-point underdog, I'm not surprised. They've won the last three times in Denver. They've beaten the Broncos five straight times. I'm not surprised they're favored. That means nothing."

# Tyler Polumbus: Broncos have a long list of mistakes to clean up before facing the league's top offense

By Tyler Polumbus

The Athletic

Sept. 27, 2018

It was the kind of start that a head coach can only dream of. The Broncos' defense forced the Ravens to go three-and-out on their first possession, then linebacker Joe Jones blocked a punt on Baltimore's 13-yard line with a nice inside move on Tyus Bowser. One play later, the Broncos walked into the end zone for a 6-yard touchdown and were off to the races with a 7-0 lead.

Although the Ravens answered with a six-play scoring drive, Denver reused a play from the preseason to give receiver Emmanuel Sanders his first career rushing touchdown. With tremendous effort from fullback Andy Janovich running 30 yards down the field to make a cut block on Ravens safety Eric Weddle, Sanders was able to go untouched for the full 35 yards.

The Kansas City Chiefs were the first to find creative ways to use their speedy receiver, Tyreek Hill, and I love the way Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave is scheming up creative ways to get Sanders the ball without even having to throw it to him.

Musgrave has given the ball to Sanders off reverses and fly sweeps directly in front of the quarterback and this will pay off tremendously in the run game by holding off the backside defensive end. Even when the Broncos only fake the reverse or fly sweep to Sanders, backside defensive ends and linebackers will have to honor him and create a large vacancy for whichever running back the Broncos hand the ball.

But the Broncos ultimately lost at Baltimore because of a slew of mistakes, especially their 13 penalties for 120 yards. They had issues in all three phases — offense, defense and special teams — and have a long to-do list before facing the hottest offense in the league Monday.

Here's a closer look at some things that hindered the Broncos in Week 3, and what awaits them against the Chiefs.

## Soft coverage from the cornerbacks

The Broncos had the momentum to start, and the rain was hardly conducive to throwing the ball 40 times, which the Ravens did. So how did the Broncos lose last weekend? It starts with the same issues in the secondary that hurt the Broncos against Oakland. Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said after the game: "We've got to disguise better as a team. 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 them."

The Broncos worked with a single high safety for the majority of the game, and much like they were against Oakland, the defensive backs were forced to play anywhere from 6 to 10 yards off the line of scrimmage, allowing Joe Flacco uncontested short completions.

This play is on a third-and-10. Generally, this is the type of situation where no defensive back would complain about playing off. After all, the Ravens have to go 10 yards. Invite the shorter route, close on the receiver and the series is over.

Roby is more than 10 yards from his man before the play even begins. Fortunately for the Broncos, Crabtree inexplicably runs a route 1 yard short of the first down, but Roby stands no chance of closing on him and breaking up the ball from that distance.

#### Poor field position

The biggest hindrance to the Broncos maintaining their early momentum was their field position, thanks to some very poor punts by Marquette King.

For a punter that was guaranteed \$2 million before the start of the season (\$1.5 million salary and \$500,000 signing bonus), King is expected to kick farther than 38 yards and 41 yards, especially when his team is off to a hot start in enemy territory.

#### O-line miscues

Playing left tackle in the NFL can be a lonely feeling when things aren't going well. Things did not go well at all for Garrett Bolles on Sunday when he faced off against Terrell Suggs. Bolles was called for two very obvious holding penalties, but it could have been three or four.

After this play, which negated a 39-yard completion to Demaryius Thomas, Bolles threw his hands in the air as if he couldn't believe it was a hold. But any NFL tackle will tell you this was bad. When you have your hands outside and ride a guy into the ground without ever disengaging your hands, this will get called every time.

In the first two weeks, Bolles was arguably the Broncos' most improved player. Unfortunately, the loss at Baltimore was reminiscent of 2017, when Bolles was flagged 13 times, tied for the second-most penalties in the league.

Bolles' holding penalties generally come when he does not focus on his punch. He has a tendency to wrap his arms around his defender in a catching motion rather than deliver an aggressive punch to the defender's chest. He can help himself by changing up the impact point between him and the pass rusher with a variety of short sets, angle sets and vertical sets.

Even if it is his best pitch, a pitcher can't throw a fastball every time. It is no different for offensive tackles.

#### What lies ahead ...

Although it is a long week before the Broncos face the most explosive offense in the NFL on "Monday Night Football," their defense has to shore up its secondary — immediately. Patrick Mahomes has done what no quarterback has ever done through the first three weeks of a season by tossing 13 touchdowns. Combine those with zero interceptions in that span and you have the NFL's hottest quarterback.

The good news for Broncos fans is that the NFL season is long and Mahomes has a ways to go to prove his touchdown-to-interception ratio is sustainable.

In order to slow down Mahomes and the Chiefs' fast-break offense, Denver will have to get negative plays — tackles for loss, quarterback sacks and takeaways. If it allows the down and distance to stay on schedule, the Chiefs will stay on the ball, prevent Denver's defense from substituting and explode when the defense fatigues.

Offensively, the Broncos will have to score copiously. I was always told as a player that if our team put up 24 points in a game that we did our job as an offense to win the game. The Chargers put up 28 points, the Steelers put up 37 points and the 49ers put up 27 points against Kansas City. All of them lost.

Some analysts might say that the Broncos have to control the clock against the Chiefs, but that will not be enough. Time of possession is the second-most important stat in the game next to turnover ratio, but when you play a team that can go 80 yards in 30 seconds, ball control alone will not suffice. The Broncos will likely have to score 30 or more points, which they accomplished only twice in the last two seasons.

For the Broncos to be explosive in the passing game, it must take advantage of Kansas City's No. 18-ranked rush defense (111.3 rushing yards allowed per game). When the Broncos, who own the third-best rushing offense in the league (144.7 yards) run the ball well, they set up max-protection play-action throws that give Case Keenum time to survey the field and his receivers ample opportunity to shake defenders.

Here is hoping for some fireworks on "Monday Night Football," with Broncos lighting up the scoreboard as quickly as the Chiefs.

# Broncos underdogs at home vs. Chiefs for only second time in 27 years

By Troy Renck  
KMGH  
Sept. 27, 2018

When Peyton Manning exited the building, the Chiefs entered the side door and took their seat on the throne. Of all the notable differences in the Broncos since the quarterback's retirement, perhaps nothing reflects his absence more than seismic change in the AFC West.

With Manning under center, the Broncos dominated the division. Since his departure, the Broncos have not won a division road game. What's more, the Chiefs have become who the Broncos used to be. They have won 17 of their last AFC West contests, including five straight against Denver.

So it has to come to this: the Broncos enter Monday as an underdog at home against Kansas City for the second time in 27 years. The Chiefs are favored by 5 points on most boards. For the Broncos to return to the playoffs for the first time since Super Bowl 50, this game represents an important rung in the climb back to relevance.

"We have to reset now. The Baltimore game is over. We can't sit around and sulk about it. We should have won. That's a game we should have won," defensive end Derek Wolfe told Denver7. "When you are winning like we were the last two weeks, some of the stuff that's going wrong gets swept under the rug. Obviously, we have something to clean up."

The Broncos face a Chiefs team that looks a lot like when Manning was under center. Second-year quarterback Patrick Mahomes, the godson of former Rockies reliever LaTroy Hawkins, has thrown an NFL record 13 touchdowns in the first three games, eclipsing Manning's mark. He has yet to throw an interception.

"We understand why they are favored," coach Vance Joseph said. "But that doesn't matter."

This is chilling for a Broncos defense that has allowed quarterbacks to complete 69.5 percent of their passes, ranking eighth worst. The heat on defensive coordinator Joe Woods has grown to a simmer. In consecutive weeks, his game plans have been questioned, first by coach Vance Joseph and last week by cornerback Chris Harris Jr., who said easy looks have left quarterbacks knowing "exactly where to throw the ball."

How will Woods respond? And how much will Joseph be involved in the play-calling? Joseph admits playing a part in the planning, but it's not uncommon for head coaches to take over on game day when things get sideways. And let's be honest, Joseph operates with little margin for error after a 5-11 debut.

The Broncos' defense needs to find a way to generate pressure up the middle to make Mahomes uncomfortable. That calls for more blitzing than Denver has employed the first three weeks.

Offensively, the Broncos must find a way to score while winning the time of possession battle. When looking back at teams that gave Manning issues during his first three years in Denver, there was a

common thread: keep him off the field. The challenge is daunting. Case Keenum is tied for the league-high with five interceptions. At one point against the Ravens, Keenum looked dazed after the hit that led to the fumble and subsequent Phillip Lindsay ejection (there's a chance Lindsay could be suspended, but it's unlikely).

The Broncos have seven three-and-out drives the past two games, and punted on seven consecutive possessions at Baltimore. With 30 points likely necessary to upset the Chiefs, such clumsiness will spell doom on Monday.

Still, the Broncos are at home. They know the stakes. The sense of urgency is real. And according to BetDSI, the last time the Broncos were underdogs against the Chiefs at home, they won 19-16 on Oct. 20, 1991.

So I am saying they have a chance.

# Broncos bring in practice squad punter to push King

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
Sept. 27, 2018

Marquette King has not lived up to the lofty expectations the Denver Broncos had of the athletic punter working at altitude, so now he's got some competition.

The Broncos signed rookie punter Colby Wadman from UC Davis to their practice squad in hopes of snapping King out of his funk.

"Well, we've had him here in the mandatory minicamp, he's been with Tom (McMahon, the Broncos' special teams coordinator), and we have to get better there," coach Vance Joseph said Wednesday. "So, we're looking forward to Marquette having a good week of punting.

"It's a performance-based business, so we're trying to get better there."

King averaged just a 39.3-yard net on seven punts in Denver's 27-14 loss at Baltimore, where he failed three times to flip the field with booming punts that were his hallmark before his release from the Oakland Raiders in the offseason.

King hasn't had the hang time the Broncos expected of him, something that will be imperative to improve on Monday night against the Kansas City Chiefs.

"You want to hang the ball with Tyreek Hill," Joseph said. "That's going to be the key with this guy. He's a dangerous returner. He doesn't fair-catch the football. But I think hanging the ball high is going to be one of the keys to containing him. But again, it's going to take our entire coverage team and we have to do a good job of keeping him from hurting us with punt returns."

King signed a three-year, \$7 million deal with the Broncos after Raiders coach Jon Gruden cut him in March. Afterward, the Broncos traded Riley Dixon, who averaged 45.7 yards in his two seasons in Denver with a net of 40.8 yards, to 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 has to simply punt better," Joseph said earlier in the week. "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."

# Former Bronco, first black starting QB, reflects on changes in game, society

By Cliff Brunt  
Associated Press  
Sept. 27, 2018

Marlin Briscoe didn't want to be pigeonholed simply because of stereotypes against black men. He was a star quarterback in college and he believed he had the talent, intelligence and leadership skills to be one in the pros.

Fifty years ago, during an era of massive social upheaval in the United States, just getting a chance to prove it took a risky ultimatum.

Briscoe refused to switch positions after being drafted as a cornerback by the Denver Broncos, telling his team that he'd return home to become a teacher if he couldn't get a tryout at quarterback. Denver agreed to an audition, and that season the 5-foot-10 dynamo nicknamed "The Magician" became the first black quarterback to start a game in the American Football League.

"It's just so many different historic things that happened in the year 1968, it was unfathomable," Briscoe said. "It just seemed poetic justice, so to speak, that the color barrier be broken that year at that position. For some reason, I was ordained to be the litmus test for that. I think I did a good job."

Briscoe's groundbreaking accomplishments were somewhat lost in the shuffle during one of the most transformative years in U.S. history. Civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated in 1968. Civil rights riots broke out across the country and there were numerous protests of the Vietnam War. And less than two weeks after Briscoe's first start, U.S. track and field stars Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised black-gloved fists on the medal stand at the Olympics to protest America's social injustices.

But Briscoe's legacy resonates among his contemporaries 50 years later, hitting on race as well as the pressures athletes face in pro sports. The Pro Football Hall of Fame calls Briscoe the first African-American starting quarterback in modern pro football history. Carolina's Cam Newton and Seattle's Russell Wilson have both considered Briscoe's past as they contend for championships.

Doug Williams, the first black quarterback to win a Super Bowl, counts Briscoe as one of his most important inspirations.

"I know the little bit that I had to go through, so I can imagine what he had to go through," said Williams, who won the 1988 Super Bowl with Washington. "People were a little more accepted when I came through than when he came through."

Wilson and Newton can relate to Briscoe's resistance to switch from quarterback. Both dealt with being steered toward other positions.

“I had a couple opportunities —well I wouldn’t say opportunities, I think quarterback’s the opportunity I wanted — but more so, people wanted to change me to play defensive back,” Wilson said. “Even my freshman year in college. But I had other plans, and I guess God had other plans.”

Though he’s happy more black athletes are playing quarterback at the professional level, Briscoe sees parallels with his experiences even five decades years later. Last week, a white Texas school superintendent resigned after posting on Facebook that “You can’t count on a black quarterback,” while talking about Houston quarterback Deshaun Watson.

“It’s unfortunate because in sports is the one realm in which race, you forget about it for the good of the outcome of a game or whatever you have from a sports standpoint,” Briscoe said. “To have that broken with attitudes like that from an executive — it’s mind boggling. It hurts. It really does.”

## GETTING ON THE FIELD

Briscoe said the pedestal for quarterbacks in the hierarchy of sports made his quest about much more than football.

“People of color were only expected to reach certain heights in life,” Briscoe, now 73, told The Associated Press. “In my particular instance, it was the packing house. They (white people) thought that was our end-all, be-all. It came back to my wanting to play that position.”

Though Briscoe starred at Omaha University and eventually landed in the College Football Hall of Fame, the odds were stacked against him in Denver. He was drafted as a cornerback in the 14th round, and during his three-day tryout, Briscoe started last among the eight quarterbacks during drills.

“When it got to me, all of a sudden, the reps got shorter. Instead of 10 reps, I got five,” he said. “So I made sure that all of my passes were completions with zip on the ball. When it came to the long bomb, I’d wait till the receiver would get damn near out of sight. They couldn’t believe a kid this small could throw the ball that far.”

Though the AFL was considered more progressive than the rival National Football League, a black man didn’t play quarterback in a regular-season game until its ninth season.

Briscoe broke through helped by injuries and erratic play. He eventually stepped in for the Broncos as a reserve on Sept. 29, 1968, nearly leading a comeback against the Boston Patriots. He earned the next start against the Cincinnati Bengals, making him the first black quarterback to start in the AFL.

Briscoe started five games that season and was runner-up for AFL rookie of the year, attracting strong crowds to games and energizing a franchise that had yet to establish a winning tradition.

But when the games ended, reminders of racism came quickly.

“Here you are just playing a professional football game and endeared by the public as an athlete, then you go to a restaurant and you can’t get something to eat,” Briscoe said. “Those were the times that we lived in.”

Despite his electrifying season — he passed for 1,589 yards and 14 touchdowns and ran for 308 yards and three scores — Denver didn't give him a chance to compete for the quarterback job in 1969. He said he was never given a reason why, so he asked to be released.

"The more I've known him and been around him and talked to him, you've got to give him respect for what he did during that time and what happened to him after that time," Williams said. "That's the part that gets me. But that's the time he was in."

Briscoe headed briefly to British Columbia but decided Canadian football wasn't for him. He returned to the United States and was picked up by Buffalo. He became a Pro Bowl receiver with the Bills and won two Super Bowls with the Miami Dolphins.

Briscoe played on the 1972 Dolphins team that had a perfect season. But he never started at quarterback after 1968.

#### MENTORING HARRIS

As a senior at Grambling, James Harris kept up with Briscoe's 1968 season by going to the library to look up his statistics.

As fate would have it, Buffalo drafted Harris as a quarterback in 1969, putting him on the same team as Briscoe. It was Harris who became the AFL's first black quarterback to open the season as a starter, and he said his roommate Briscoe was a critical mentor.

"We used to talk a lot about the dos and don'ts and things that he had been through. He was telling me the things I needed to be prepared for," Harris said. "I felt that Marlin was the only person on the team that understood what I was going through."

That included death threats, Briscoe said. "We had the race card on our careers because we were the first," he said.

Harris refused to show the Bills the full range of his athletic ability because Tennessee State's Eldridge Dickey and Michigan State's Jimmy Raye, two quarterbacks he considered capable, were drafted in 1968 and forced to switch positions.

Grambling coach Eddie Robinson noticed the trend and told Harris not to run the 40-yard dash for scouts. The Bills still wanted him to practice at receiver while learning to play quarterback, and Harris responded by running less than full speed in drills.

"I knew they were looking for the opportunity to switch me, and I didn't want to face that," he said. "So when we're out there just working out, if anybody was around, I didn't want anybody to think about my speed."

Harris blossomed at quarterback. In 1974, he played for the Los Angeles Rams and became the first black quarterback to win an NFL playoff game. He also was Pro Bowl MVP that year.

#### GROWTH OF BLACK QUARTERBACKS

The list of prominent black quarterbacks eventually grew.

Warren Moon is in the Hall of Fame. Steve McNair was the first black quarterback to be named NFL MVP. Michael Vick is the NFL's all-time rushing leader for quarterbacks. Randall Cunningham, one of the most electrifying players in NFL history, was a first-team All-Pro twice. Wilson became the second black quarterback to win a Super Bowl.

Newton said the strategy of the position itself has shifted dramatically along with racial dynamics.

"It doesn't even have to be African-American," said Newton, who met with Briscoe at a quarterback camp about 10 years ago. "The quarterback position is kind of molding and changing over the years. You see the Carson Wentzes taking a more athletic approach to that position and making it more dynamic for teams to prepare for."

Briscoe said more work needs to be done both in the league and society. He has noticed that Colin Kaepernick has not been given a contract since his decision to kneel during "The Star Spangled Banner" to protest racial and social inequality. He believes President Donald Trump, who has been an outspoken critic of Kaepernick and other black NFL players who have protested to draw attention to issues like incarceration and the shootings of unarmed black men by police, also bears some responsibility for the Watson quip and others like it.

Trump's rhetoric toward people of color, Briscoe says, has made some people feel safe expressing overt racism. After all these years, Briscoe still sees shades of his old struggles.

"I grew up in the '50s and the '60s, when all that stuff was rampant, but you knew where you stood," Briscoe said. "Today, you thought that all those attitudes were nonexistent or filtered away to some degree, but with the Trump-isms, his philosophy has brought out of the woodwork that old-time thought process. That's scary — it really is."

# David Ramsey: Loss to mighty Chiefs could plunge Broncos toward yet another season-long disaster

By David Ramsey  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
Sept. 27, 2018

It's only the fourth game of the season. So, yes, it's early.

But Monday's clash with the entertaining and dangerous Kansas City Chiefs carries the feel of a momentous game, no matter the date on the calendar. The Chiefs have beaten the Broncos five straight times, including three straight at Mile High. The Chiefs boast the game's most dazzling young talent in quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

Here's what worries me: The Chiefs could devour the Broncos on national TV and send us into yet another fall spent wishing a different team played on the edge of downtown Denver.

Coach Vance Joseph stood outside the sunshine on Wednesday afternoon and marveled at the strength of the Chiefs. His was not the voice of strident optimism.

"They're explosive," he said. "Right now, they're averaging 400 yards a game, almost 40 points a game. The quarterback is playing at a high level. He's got multiple weapons. ... It's going to be difficult for us to get them stopped, but we're looking forward to the challenge."

Odds makers appear to have listened to Joseph's assessment. The visiting Chiefs are five-point favorites.

"I'm not surprised," Joseph said. "I'm not surprised that they are the favorites. That means nothing."

Well, it means something. The extraordinarily happy times of the Peyton Manning era (2013-2016) hide the bitter times more often found in the last dozen years. During the Peyton years, visiting teams didn't march into Mile High as heavy favorites.

In the eight seasons when Peyton was not leading the offense, the Broncos finished 51-64 and it usually was a solid idea to bet on the visitors.

We're still discovering if Case Keenum follows a recent, depressing norm. Kyle Orton, Tim Tebow and Trevor Siemian were backup quarterbacks forced to start because Broncos leaders paid to find NFL-starter-caliber talent failed to find NFL-starter-caliber talent. (Paxton Lynch is, it turns out, not even a worthy backup.)

I applauded John Elway's decision to sign Keenum in the offseason. He had delivered a superlative season for the Vikings, throwing 22 touchdowns and only seven interceptions while performing a strong, season-long imitation of great Drew Brees.

But there were questions hovering over Keenum: Was he a one-season wonder? Was the quarterback nobody wanted in July 2017 worth \$20 million in March 2018?

Let's just say Keenum has left those questions hovering. He's been consistently erratic. His late interception doomed all hope at Baltimore on Sunday, and the Broncos won despite him in the opener against Seattle.

Another bumbling Keenum game will inspire loud and rude booing from fans at Mile High. Trust me on that one. And, more important, another bumbling game will inspire Keenum's Bronco teammates to wonder if he's an NFL-quality starter.

Last season, Joseph often looked helpless and overwhelmed. The Broncos were sinking, on their way to a 5-11 record, and the rookie coach just sort of stood around and watched.

He's become an aggressive activist in his second year. On Sunday in the Baltimore rain, punter Marquette King struggled mightily. He averaged only 39.7 net yards on seven kicks and never remotely resembled a punter worthy of a \$2 million annual paycheck.

Joseph knew Tyreek Hill would be catching Bronco punts Monday. Hill, mega-scary, has sprinted to four touchdowns on only 68 career returns. Joseph moved decisively, and wisely, signing free agent punter Colby Wadman to either take King's job or awaken the slumbering punter.

"It's a performance-based business, so we're trying to get better there," Joseph said.

It is a performance-based business, coach. Be sure to keep that in mind.

# Broncos Injury Report: Adam Jones, Tramaine Brock return to practice

By Aric DiLalla  
Denver Broncos  
Sept. 27, 2018

If Wednesday's practice is any indication, the Broncos should field a stronger secondary when they face the Kansas City Chiefs on Monday night.

Cornerbacks Adam Jones and Tramaine Brock both participated during the media-viewing portion of practice.

The Broncos will not release their first practice participation report until Thursday afternoon, but Head Coach Vance Joseph seemed to affirm his comments on Monday that both cornerbacks should be available to play against the Chiefs.

"They both looked fine," Joseph said Wednesday.

Jones missed the last week of practice and Sunday's game with a thigh injury, while Brock exited the Broncos' game against the Raiders in the first quarter after suffering a groin strain.

Safety Dymonte Thomas also returned to the practice field after missing Week 3 with a abdominal injury.

Linebacker Brandon Marshall was the lone Broncos player who missed practice. He played in Sunday's game, but missed the preceding week of practice with knee soreness.

# **Broncos, Noble Energy to host Broncos en Español on Friday**

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

Sept. 27, 2018

The Denver Broncos and presenting partner Noble Energy will host Broncos en Español, the Broncos' Hispanic Heritage Month signature event, on Friday at Broncos Stadium at Mile High from 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Supported by KNRV, Telemundo Denver, King Soopers, Coca-Cola, Verizon, Ford and U.S. Bank, Broncos en Español opens the stadium doors to all fans. The event will feature photo and autograph opportunities with Broncos players, cheerleaders and Miles the Mascot in addition to fun activities and an opportunity to win tickets to a 2018 Broncos home game.

While the event is free to fans, a ticket is required for entry. Tickets can be obtained at the ticket office at Broncos Stadium at Mile High (walk-ups are welcome).

Fan parking is available in Lots A and C on the southeast side of the stadium. Entry to the event is located at Gates 4 and 10.

# Arizona Cardinals president Michael Bidwill still supports Brett Kavanaugh after third accuser comes forward

By A.J. Perez  
USA Today  
Sept. 27, 2018

Arizona Cardinals president Michael Bidwill remains a backer of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh despite the allegations of sexual misconduct that have been voiced publicly by three women.

Bidwill was among the more than 60 people who knew Kavanaugh in high school who called the allegations made by Julie Swetnick on Wednesday “reprehensible” and vouched for the “honor, integrity and compassion” of Kavanaugh.

“In the extensive amount of time we collectively spent with Brett, we do not recall having ever met someone named Julie Swetnick,” said a letter of support released by the White House on Wednesday. “Nor did we ever observe Brett engaging in any conduct resembling that described in Ms. Swetnick’s declaration.”

Swetnick said in a statement that Kavanaugh would drink heavily and witnessed efforts by Kavanaugh and classmate Mark Judge to get teenage girls “inebriated and disoriented so they could then be ‘gang raped’ in a side room or bedroom by a ‘train’ of numerous boys.”

“We never witnessed any behavior that even approaches what is described in this allegation,” the letter stated.

Swetnick joins Christine Blasey Ford and Deborah Ramirez, who earlier publicly alleged sexual misconduct by Kavanaugh.

Bidwill, a classmate of Kavanaugh’s at Georgetown Prep in suburban Washington in the early 1980s, was among dozens from the school to voice support of Kavanaugh in a letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee in July.

New York Yankees GM Brian Cashman’s name, which also appeared in the July letter, was not among the signees of Wednesday’s letter.

Senate Judiciary Committee spokesman Taylor Foy said in an email to USA TODAY Sports he was not aware whether Cashman has withdrawn his support of Kavanaugh.

Messages left with the Arizona Cardinals and New York Yankees by USA TODAY Sports were not returned Wednesday.

# Report: Nike nearly cut ties with Colin Kaepernick before making him the face of ad campaign

By Jack Baker  
Yahoo Sports  
Sept. 27, 2018

Nearly a month after Nike announced that Colin Kaepernick would be the face of its “Just Do It” 30th Anniversary ad campaign, the decision appears to be paying off.

Nike’s stock price hit an all-time high at \$83.47 less than two weeks after the announcement and has since continued to rise, peaking at \$85.55 last Friday and closing at \$83.70 on Wednesday. The company has enjoyed positive press and encouraging consumer data in its target markets, seemingly vindicating the risk it took in embracing quite possibly the most politically divisive person in sports.

And yet, all that might not have happened had it not been for one executive afraid of some bad press.

The New York Times reported Wednesday that Nike was very close to cutting ties with Kaepernick last year, when the quarterback remain unemployed and a political lightning rod. While the relationship has obviously since blossomed, tensions behind the scenes reportedly raged.

Nike’s relationship with Kaepernick had been strained

Back in 2017, when Kaepernick was in his first season of free agency and mired in a collusion lawsuit against the NFL, Nike executives reportedly didn’t know what to do with an athlete that had nearly no chance to see an NFL field again and faced a sea of public negativity.

Per the Times, Nike’s top decision-makers had actually decided to end the company’s contract with Kaepernick, which would have dealt a significant public blow to Kaepernick. That move was stopped by the efforts of one executive: head of communications Nigel Powell, who reportedly “went ballistic” when he head of the decision.

The simple reason for wanting to keep Kaepernick was that Nike was more interested in the demographics they’d anger by cutting Kaepernick than the demographics they’d anger by embracing him.

Powell argued that Nike would face backlash from the media and consumers if it was seen as siding with the N.F.L. rather than Kaepernick. And Nike, along with most apparel companies, is desperate to attract urban youth who increasingly look up to Kaepernick; the largely white, older N.F.L. fans angry at the league over the protests are not a priority for those companies, analysts say.

Per the report, Nike eventually decided to hold onto the athlete, then allow his contract to quietly expire in 2019. That plan still drew anger from Kaepernick’s representative, who argued the contract required Nike to still use the quarterback in ad campaigns or products. Ultimately, Nike realized there was profit to be had from Kaepernick’s status as a civil rights figurehead.

How Nike’s Colin Kaepernick campaign came about

The Times reports that Nike's ad agency Wieden & Kennedy "urged" the company to use Kaepernick in its upcoming "Just Do It" campaign, despite the potential for massive blowback from the NFL, an business with which Nike has a relationship in the hundreds of millions of dollars. However, with Nike's financial ties reportedly set to shrink in 2020 due to a prior licensing agreement, the company decided to take the risk.

Wieden & Kennedy "pushed to use Colin Kaepernick as the face of the 30th anniversary Just Do It campaign," a designer at the firm wrote in September on a website showcasing his work. He added: "Nike agreed to it. We made it. Colin posted it. People lost it."

According to people who worked on the campaign, Kaepernick's role came together rather quickly, with significant elements completed just weeks before the release. Wieden & Kennedy didn't finalize the agreement for the edited image of Kaepernick with text until Aug. 27, and Lacey Baker, a skateboarder featured in the ad, said Nike did not reach out to her until mid-August.

Kaepernick campaign has since flourished

The short-term blowback that Nike received for its big move with Kaepernick was both very loud and very predictable.

Boycotts were planned, people burned their already purchased Nike gear and several conservative figureheads blasted the move, most visibly of all the President of the United States. Donald Trump tweeted twice about a topic he has been obsessed with, claiming that Nike was getting "absolutely killed with anger and boycotts" and asking what the company was thinking with their divisive decision.

That's the negative for Nike. The positive is that the company has been seeing record engagement, increased sales and strong consumer data in the younger markets it covets.

# Carr wishes Hayes landed on him instead of tearing ACL

By Herbie Teope

NFL.com

Sept. 27, 2018

The NFL's desire to eliminate defensive players from intentionally placing body weight on a quarterback, an act designed to protect signal-callers around the league, has been covered in length in recent days at NFL.com.

Week 3, however, provided an example of the flip side to the equation.

Miami Dolphins defensive end Williams Hayes was fully aware of the league's emphasis on the rule when he sacked Oakland Raiders Derek Carr in the second quarter. Hayes appeared to kick out his right leg to prevent landing on Carr, but the motion resulted in Hayes tearing an ACL.

"I wish the guy would have just landed on me instead of tearing his ACL," Carr said Wednesday, via Michael Gelhken of the Las Vegas Review-Journal. "For him to tear his ACL, nobody wants that. I don't want that."

Carr isn't alone in not wanting to see defensive players suffer injuries while attempting to hold back when going after a quarterback.

Houston Texans signal-caller Deshaun Watson understands why the rule is in place, but expressed concern over the league-wide 34 roughing the passer penalties since the regular season started.

"I'm cool with it because I want to be safe and sound, but at the same time, let's play football," Watson said, via John McClain of the Houston Chronicle. "It goes both ways. Some of the times, when the defensive guys are trying to hold up, they get hurt. I'm the quarterback, and I'm being honest with you, let the guys play and see how it goes."

In the meantime, the building controversy over the rule, which is arguably beginning to mirror past confusion over what is a catch, isn't going anywhere in the near future.

The NFL Competition Committee will hold a regularly scheduled teleconference with the media next week, and New Orleans Saints coach Sean Payton, a member of the committee, said Wednesday morning that some of the called infractions over a player intentionally placing body weight on a quarterback should not have drawn a penalty flag.

Nevertheless, the more infractions surrounding roughing the passer that could occur in Week 4 are sure to add to angst around the league, and make for a spirited conference call.

NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Kurt Warner agrees with many of his peers that the new rule is perhaps causing too much confusion among the players, pointing to Green Bay Packers outside linebacker Clay Matthews' most recent infraction.

"To me, that was a great football play, a great move at the line of scrimmage," Warner said. "He ran through the quarterback, he wrapped him, he didn't pick him up, he didn't throw him down, he just

happened to land on him. Because that what happens in football. When you tackle a guy in front of you, you land on him. ...

"Now, I love taking the helmet out of the game. I love, you can't drop and use your helmet as a weapon, because that protects everybody, the person getting hit and the person that is making the hit. But these plays are ridiculous and it's gotten so far that it's just hard for everybody on the defense now to know what to do."