

Broncos tight end Jake Butt tears ACL, expected to miss rest of season

By Ryan O'Halloran
Denver Post
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Expected to increase his production as he gets acclimated to the NFL game, Broncos tight end Jake Butt's season ended Thursday when he sustained a torn left ACL.

Butt sustained the injury during the Broncos' morning walk-through per a source. The Denver Post reported mid-day Thursday that Butt was headed toward an MRI, which confirmed the injury.

In a statement released by the team, coach Vance Joseph said: "Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him. He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever."

Butt tore his right ACL twice during his college career at Michigan (2014 and '16). The second injury occurred in the Wolverines' Orange Bowl game against Florida State and cost Butt his rookie season with the Broncos.

Butt played 97 snaps in the Broncos' first three games and is third on the team with eight catches for 85 yards. A solid blocker, Butt would have made his biggest impact as a receiver; he had showed good hands since the start of the offseason program in late May and showed in the regular season he could gain yards after the catch. In the Broncos' system, Butt also displayed versatility, lining up everywhere from lead blocking back to slot and wide receiver.

The Broncos now have Jeff Heuerman and Matt LaCosse as their remaining healthy tight ends. Brian Parker is on the practice squad and is the likely call-up candidate because his knowledge of the offense will make him available Monday night against Kansas City.

Brock sits out. After practicing Wednesday, cornerback Tramaine Brock (groin) sat out Thursday.

"He just wasn't feeling to going full speed so being smart with him for one more day and help him get healthy," coach Vance Joseph said.

Brock was injured in Sunday's loss at Baltimore.

Limited were cornerback Adam Jones (thigh), linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) and defensive lineman Shelby Harris (ankle). Marshall sat out Wednesday.

"One day at a time," he said. "I don't know which way it's going, but I'm trying to get out there."

Footnotes. As a part of ESPN's coverage of the Chiefs-Broncos game on Monday night, the network will hold the first 60-75 minutes of its pregame show outside the south end of Broncos Stadium at Mile High near Parking Lot B.

The show begins at 4 p.m. ... Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes on facing the Broncos in last year's regular season finale (a 27-24 Kansas City win): "Just playing against some of those guys, I could see the talent they have. I know it was the last game of the season but you had Von (Miller) out there and some guys who could make a lot of plays. For me to play against them, I have a general idea of what they can do." ... Broncos quarterback Case Keenum on his knee injury: "It felt really good (Thursday). It's getting better every day."

Broncos Four Downs: CB Chris Harris treating Monday with “championship game” urgency

By Ryan O’Halloran
Denver Post
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FIRST DOWN: Making progress

Broncos quarterback Case Keenum’s individual statistics aren’t flashy. He ended Week 3 ranked 29th in passer rating (71.1) and his five interceptions were tied for most in the NFL with Cincinnati’s Andy Dalton and the New York Jets’ Sam Darnold.

“Overall, I guess you could say I’m a long way from where I want to be,” Keenum said after Thursday’s practice. “I feel like this offense can be really, really, really good. And, at times, we’re moving and we’re rolling. At other times, for whatever reason, we’re getting off the field.”

The plus for the Broncos is they are third in rushing (144.7 yards per game) and ninth on third down (42.9 percent). But they’re 19th in points per game (20.3).

“Just keep building this house,” Keenum said. “Every day, we learn something new and we’re talking through new things.”

SECOND DOWN: Mahomes playing turnover free

Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes leads the NFL with 13 touchdowns, but just as impressive is that he has no interceptions. The Chiefs have an NFL-low one turnover during their 3-0 start.

The key?

“Just having a good game plan and knowing when to take chances and shots and then when to take what’s there,” Mahomes said during a conference call with the Denver media. “Whenever you’re upright and the line is blocking for you, you can see the holes and the receivers getting open and it makes my job a lot easier.”

The Broncos’ defense has not produced a takeaway in the last two games and has only one interception.

Mahomes’ 13 touchdowns through three games are an NFL record to start a season, breaking Peyton Manning’s mark of 12 for the Broncos in 2013. Tampa Bay’s Ryan Fitzpatrick has 11 this year, tied for third-most all-time.

THIRD DOWN: Harris: “A championship game”

Broncos cornerback Chris Harris knows what is at stake Monday night against Kansas City.

“This is a championship game,” Harris said. “If you’re not studying and preparing for a championship game, you don’t know what AFC West division football is. You try and have everybody (with the) mindset that this is the championship and this will help us in the race to get in the playoffs.”

The Broncos should also be aware of the schedule. After Kansas City, October includes a home game against the Los Angeles Rams, a short-week road trip to Arizona and a rematch with the Chiefs.

“You don’t want to play your best football early, but you don’t want to play bad,” Harris said. “We want to continue to get better and better and as the season goes on, keep growing and growing and hopefully by playoff time, we’re ready to go.”

FOURTH DOWN: Bent-but-not-broken defense

Kansas City’s defense has allowed the third-most yards in the league (474) during its 3-0 start. A dive into the statistics reveals that opponents aren’t piling up garbage time yards with the Chiefs in a big lead.

The Chiefs have allowed 48 percent of their opponents’ yards (683 of 1,422) in the first half even as Kansas City led the Chargers 17-12, was tied 21-all with Pittsburgh and led San Francisco 35-10 at halftime.

The Chargers gained 212 first-half yards, followed by Pittsburgh (192) and San Francisco (179).

Third down is saving the Chiefs’ defense from appearing broken. Teams are only 4 of 17 on third down in the first half against Kansas City this year.

“They’re great on third down, first in the league,” Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. “That’s their team formula: Score points, bend-but-don’t-break on defense and take the ball away. ... It’s worked for them.”

Broncos tracker: ESPN to host Broncos Stadium parking lot pre-game show

By Ryan O'Halloran and Kyle Fredrickson

Denver Post

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1:15 p.m. — Butt getting knee examined

Per a source, Broncos tight end Jake Butt is not practicing today because he is getting his left knee evaluated.

It is unclear when Butt began to experience discomfort. He was present for the media viewing period of Wednesday's practice.

Butt tore the ACL in his right knee playing for Michigan in the December 2016 Orange Bowl. He sat out last year with the Broncos.

If Butt is out, the Broncos have only two tight ends on the 53-man roster: Jeff Heurman and Matt LaCosse. Brian Parker is on the practice squad.

12:56 p.m. — ESPN planning parking lot pre-game show

As a part of ESPN's coverage of the Chiefs-Broncos game on Monday night, the network will hold the first 60-75 minutes of its pregame show outside of Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

The pregame show starts at 4 p.m. and will include host Suzy Kolber and analysts Matt Hasselbeck, Randy Moss, Charles Woodson, Steve Young and Louis Riddick.

Fans can watch the pre-game show — set up like College Game Day — in the B Parking Lot outside the stadium's south side.

The pre-game show will wrap up on the sideline inside the stadium leading up to the 6:15 p.m. kickoff.

11:40 a.m. — Reid respects Keenum

Broncos quarterback Case Keenum is off to a sort-of shaky start in his first season as an unquestioned NFL starter with five interceptions through three games. Don't expect that to change the outlook of Kansas City coach Andy Reid with the Chiefs coming to town for Monday Night Football.

In 2013, Keenum started at quarterback for the Texans against the Reid-coached Chiefs. Keenum completed 15-of-25 passes for 271 yards and a touchdown in a 17-16 Houston defeat.

"We've played against Case before I've got a lot of respect for Case," Reid said on a conference call. "He's a good football player and you've seen it everywhere he's been, and most recently, you saw it last year."

Broncos pleased with Bradley Chubb's edge rush, developing coverage skills

By Kyle Fredrickson
Denver Post
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Bradley Chubb can't really explain it, but going back to his early days playing football, the Broncos rookie outside linebacker has a proven knack for making a great impression. As in, Hello Mr. Ball Carrier. Welcome to the ground.

The first defensive snap of his senior season at North Carolina State? A tackle-for-loss of South Carolina running back Rico Dowdle.

The first defensive snap of his Broncos rookie season? A half-sack of Seattle's Russell Wilson.

Chubb's second snap (geeze, what took him so long?) last week? A full-sack of Baltimore's Joe Flacco. "It's crazy," Chubb said. "It just always seems to happen like that."

Fast starts in the NFL, though, are not measured by just plays, but instead through complete games, and with three to Chubb's credit in orange-and-blue, it's time to audit the player many considered the best defensive prospect in the 2018 draft class. And, to better understand his early development, compare Chubb's production to recent top-five picks who had enormous edge-rushing expectations.

Through three games as rookies during their respective seasons, Chubb has played more snaps, 152, than did Myles Garrett (Browns), Joey Bosa (Chargers) and Jadaveon Clowney (Texans). Chubb's sack total, 1.5, also eclipsed Khalil Mack's introduction in Oakland. Chubb falls behind the group in quarterback hurries (two) and tackles (eight).

However, Denver certainly isn't dependent on Chubb alone to create pressure with arguably one of the league's deepest pass-rush units. The Broncos' nine team sacks rank tied for seventh-most in the NFL.

"I've been very pleased with Bradley," coach Vance Joseph said. "Every game he has gotten better and better. He's getting more comfortable dropping (into coverage). He's winning his one-on-ones as far as pass rush. He's getting Von Miller more one-on-ones."

The learning curve is steepest for Chubb's transition from his college duties to a hybrid SAM linebacker role chasing quarterbacks and covering pass catchers. Chubb said he "went straight ahead 90 percent of the time, and when I did drop back, it was in zones" in college. Denver often placed Chubb in man-up situations in the opener against Seattle and tight end Will Dissly feasted with 105 yards on just three receptions.

"Having to do the whole man-to-man thing, it was different and I'm still getting used to it," Chubb said "It's never perfect. I always want to get better. But over the past couple of games I've been progressing."

Linebacker Shane Ray, whom Chubb credited among his mentors in refining coverage techniques, added: "It's the little things. You have the athletic ability to make up on anybody with speed and size. But you've

got to be in the right place leverage-wise. ... The thing that we really love about Chubb is with the talent level in our room, we look at ourselves as elite outside linebackers, for him to already come in here as a rookie and be at that level with us is big-time. That's what we expect of him."

Chubb is starting to catch his niche in Denver's defense as the initial spark.

He doesn't want it to stop there.

"Whether it's just me excited to be out there or what-not, it's just a normal thing that happens," Chubb said. "Hopefully it's a trend I can keep going, progress throughout the whole game and make even more plays."

ROOKIE IMPACT

Looking back at the production of notable recent rookie pass rushers after their first three NFL games.

Team Player Season Snaps Tackles Sacks

Broncos Bradley Chubb 2018 152 8 1.5

Browns Myles Garrett 2017 109 11 4

Chargers Joey Bosa 2016 130 11 4

Raiders Khalil Mack 2014 191 19 0

Texans J. Clowney 2014 94 4 0

Former Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning fires up Coors Field during Rockies' final homestand

By Kyle Newman

Denver Post

September 28, 2018

Rockies manager Bud Black has been trying to recruit the services of Peyton Manning for a while now, hoping the former Broncos quarterback could somehow inject his energy into Coors Field.

And during Thursday's series finale against the Phillies, The Sheriff delivered the goods to get the hometown crowd roaring in what is the final pivotal homestand of Colorado's playoff push.

Manning, who played in Denver from 2012-15 and won Super Bowl 50 with the Broncos, appeared on Coors Field's recently renovated jumbotron to pump up the fans in the seventh inning of Colorado's game against Philadelphia.

Todd Helton's former college teammate at the University of Tennessee implored the Rockies' faithful. "Get on your feet, let's go Rockies," he said. They did so, rising from their seats en masse as Colorado held a commanding 5-1 lead over the Philadelphia, looking for the sweep.

Broncos tight end Jake Butt: 'I made a cut and knew it right away. But I'm lucky'

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 28, 2018

They don't make 'em like Jake Butt.

Here, the Broncos' tight end had just suffered his third anterior cruciate ligament tear in 4 1/2 years around noon Thursday at his team's UCHHealth Training Center headquarters and what were his sentiments by early evening?

"I feel lucky," he said in a phone interview with 9News. "I have so many wonderful people around me for support. I've had so many people reach out to me and tell me they're praying for me and thinking of me. I'm so blessed."

Butt tore the ACL to his left knee during a non-contact special teams practice Thursday, an injury that will finish his season after just three games. Although it happened prior to the official start of practice that is open to the media, Butt wanted it clear the injury did not occur during a walkthrough portion of practice as was widely reported, including by 9News.

"I'm not that soft," he said. "I don't want people thinking I was walking around and stepped on a pebble or something."

The injury occurred as Butt decelerated while covering a kickoff in practice.

"I made a cut and I knew it right away," he said.

Unfortunately, he knew from way too much experience. Butt had suffered two torn right ACLs during his college career at Michigan. Each injury required surgery to repair and Butt is slated for a third ACL surgery in the near future.

It's devastating news not only to the Broncos, who lost their best tight end receiving threat – Butt had eight catches for 85 yards through three games – but to player himself.

"Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him," head coach Vance Joseph said in a statement. "He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever."

Butt won the John Mackey Award as the nation's best tight end during his senior season at Michigan in 2016, but he suffered a torn ACL in the Orange Bowl.

That injury forced Butt to slip from a second-round projection in the 2017 draft to fifth round by the Broncos.

"Yeah it was difficult but it's really difficult for everybody on draft day," Butt said in a sit-down interview with 9News last week. "Everybody has an idea where they're going to go, where they think they should go, and then the reality of where they do go. My set of circumstances were different, I got hurt. So my idea once I got hurt is you can't look back on it. You can't get down on yourself. It is what it is and wherever I ended up I was going to give it my best and be grateful for the opportunity.

"It ended up working out great. I'm really happy I'm here in Denver. I think I have a great opportunity with a good tight end room under a good coaching staff to really set my career off on the right tone and hopefully have a long successful career."

While many question how much of a career he will have now that he's suffered his third torn ACL since February 2014, several players have returned from three ACL injuries, including Carolina Panther All Pro linebacker Thomas Davis and former Pittsburgh Steelers defensive lineman Casey Hampton, a five-time Pro Bowler.

So don't count out Butt, who said he is planning to play next season. The knee may be damaged but not his indomitable will.

"It's my other knee," he said. The grueling, grind of "rehab isn't so bad," he said. "It's not being out there when you want to that makes it tough."

With Butt finished for the season -- surgery will be determined in the next couple days -- Matt LaCosse figures to become Jeff Heurman's partner at the Broncos' tight end position. The Broncos are also expected to call up Brian Parker from the practice squad. It's also wouldn't be a surprise if the Broncos placed a call to Austin Traylor, a tight end who was with the team from 2016 until he was among the final cuts earlier this month. The Broncos have another tight end, rookie Troy Fumagalli, on season-ending injured reserve with a sports hernia/groin injury.

In a cruel twist, Heurman suffered a torn ACL during a similar kickoff coverage drill during the Broncos' rookie minicamp in 2015. Heurman missed that season and has just now developed into the kind of quality, starting tight end the Broncos envisioned when they drafted him in the third round out of Ohio State.

DaeSean Hamilton catches punts in the rain, awaits first reception

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 28, 2018

DaeSean Hamilton just started telling his inquisitor how he went about easing concerns as a punt returner in his NFL debut, in soggy, hostile conditions when teammate Phillip Lindsay came over to lend support.

“Yeah, I was prepared,” Hamilton said. “Prepared well throughout the week ...

“Proud of my man here,” Lindsay said as he put his arm around his fellow Bronco rookie’s shoulders. “He returned punts. It was helmet-to-helmet though, I’m just saying. My man here should get a check.”

In Hamilton’s first-ever punt return, he got crushed on his lid by the crown of Patrick Onwuaser’s helmet. The officiating crew made several questionable calls Sunday in the Broncos’ 27-14 loss to the Baltimore Ravens. They missed the flagrant helmet-to-helmet hit against Hamilton, who fell to the ground upon contact to his head.

“It was a welcome to the NFL moment,” Hamilton said. “It wasn’t that bad.”

The Broncos entered their game last week with no Adam Jones, their veteran punt returner. It was raining outside, all morning and most of the game. The game was in the hostile environment of Baltimore’s M&T Bank Stadium. The Ravens had a veteran punter in Sam Koch.

The Broncos were going to have one of two rookies who never caught a punt in a game before, Hamilton and maybe Lindsay, as their punt returner.

It was one of the Broncos’ biggest concerns going into their game against the Ravens. It turned out to be the least of their problems. Lindsay got ejected late in the second half, leaving Hamilton to handle the punt return duties by his lonesome.

He came through every time, returning three for 31 yards and making a clean fair catch inside his own 10-yard line.

Easy as Hamilton made it look, the rain was a challenge.

“I mean it definitely didn’t help, especially since it was my first NFL action with the ball in my hands,” he said. “The rain was something I was concerned about a little bit, thinking about, but I did my best to not let it affect me. And I did my best to not let it affect my mindset and mental state. I just went out there and tried to do my job to the best of my capabilities.”

About that “first action with the ball in his hands.” Broncos’ quarterback Case Keenum has been throwing to three receivers but not four. Hamilton, the Broncos’ No. 4 receiver, is still looking for his first NFL catch.

He has played anywhere from 12 to 15 snaps in each of the Broncos' first three games, but he has yet to be targeted with a pass, much less get his first reception.

Hungry for that first catch?

"Yeah, but at the same time I'm taking it week by week, not trying to force the issue," he said. "Let the game come to me. I know I'm a rookie so my chances, my opportunities will come when they come. I have to be ready whenever they do. That's really the least of my concerns. I just want to go out there and make sure I'm doing my job to the best of my capabilities, put my team in the best position to win, make sure I'm on top of everything I'm doing and not be negative."

Broncos TE Jake Butt tears left ACL in practice

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Denver Broncos tight end Jake Butt tore his left ACL in the team's walk-through Thursday and will miss the remainder of the season.

It is the third torn ACL Butt has suffered in the past four years but the first to his left knee. He tore his right ACL during conditioning drills at Michigan in the spring of 2014 and then tore his right ACL again in his final game at Michigan in the 2016 Orange Bowl.

"Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said as the team confirmed his latest setback. "He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever."

Joseph said after Thursday's practice that Butt was sent for a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exam after suffering a left knee injury in practice -- "he's being evaluated for a knee, left knee," Joseph said.

Butt suffered the injury in what is always largely a noncontact portion of practice.

Butt was examined initially by the team's medical staff at the Broncos' complex, and at that time there was concern Butt had torn his ACL. Butt was then taken for an MRI, which confirmed the initial exam.

The Broncos had hoped the second-year tight end could become an impact player in their passing game. In three games he had eight receptions for 85 yards. Butt played 36 plays in the season opener against Seattle, 26 snaps in Week 2 against Oakland and 35 plays this past Sunday against Baltimore.

Butt was a fifth-round pick in the 2017 draft by the Broncos. He spent his rookie season on injured reserve as he recovered from his Orange Bowl injury.

Early on in training camp this summer, Butt said, "This is probably the best I've felt in my career getting a whole year under my belt with professional strength coaches."

"When you've been away from football like I have a couple times, you know you can't take any opportunities you have to play for granted," he added.

The Broncos have two other tight ends on their roster -- Jeff Heurman and Matt LaCrosse -- to go with Brian Parker on the practice squad. Parker would be the quickest move the team could make because he was with the Broncos throughout the offseason program and training camp.

Broncos TE Jake Butt done for the season with torn left ACL

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
September 28, 2018

Chris Harris Jr. has played the Chiefs 14 times in his career and won eight of them, but the one he probably remembers the most was on Sept. 17, 2015. That was the last time the Broncos defeated the Chiefs. That was the only time Harris recorded an interception against Denver's AFC West rival.

That was the last time the Broncos were a bona fide playoff-caliber team; they would go on to win Super Bowl 50 that season.

Much has changed for the Broncos since they captured their third Lombardi Trophy. Peyton Manning is gone. Gary Kubiak is no longer on the sideline. And the historically elite defense that carried them that season has struggled in recent games.

But the Broncos' next meeting with Kansas City, on "Monday Night Football" in Denver, will be the defense's toughest test of the year, and likely a turning point of the Broncos' season.

Most meetings with the Chiefs are.

Upset the league's most prolific offense and the Broncos are suddenly 3-1 and riding a wave of momentum. Lose at home in prime time, and the same issues that cratered their 2017 season and resurfaced in Week 3 could doom them once more.

"This is a championship game," Harris said. "If you're not studying and preparing for a championship game, you don't know what AFC West football is. ... Trying to have everyone's mindset that this is a championship."

But to have a shot against the league's leading team in scoring (39.3 points per game) and the most successful quarterback in the game through three games (13 touchdowns and zero interceptions for Patrick Mahomes), the Broncos have a lengthy to-do list in cleaning up mistakes and plugging holes in the defense.

In their last two games, the Broncos have allowed an average of 357.5 net yards, in part because of their coverage plan at cornerback.

Harris, never one to hide his true feelings, said after the loss at Baltimore that the Broncos have "to disguise better as a team" and "try to confuse" opposing quarterbacks so as not to "give them easy looks."

The blunt honesty was an indictment of the Broncos' defensive play-calling, but Harris said the issues go both ways. He also believes the Broncos still have plenty of ways to change up the calls to keep opposing quarterbacks — and coaches — on their toes.

“Oh yeah, we haven’t run anything,” Harris said. “We got a lot of tricks up our sleeve at our disposal that we can run anytime. We just have to make sure we can execute that. (Defensive coordinator) Joe Woods, he’s called some great calls and we didn’t execute. It’s been both ways with it. We have to work together with that and make sure that when he calls a great call, we have to execute it and do our job to the best of our ability.”

But Kansas City features myriad offensive weapons that have caused problems for the Broncos over the years. Tight end Travis Kelce has totaled 394 receiving yards (15.2 average), two touchdowns, 18 first-down catches and three receptions of 25 yards or more in his last three games against Denver.

Running back Kareem Hunt, who already has 168 rushing yards and two touchdowns on the season, ran the ball 22 times in his first meeting with the Broncos last year.

And Tyreek Hill, the Chiefs’ speedy receiver and returner, had a kick returned for a touchdown, a rushing touchdown and a receiving touchdown in his first game against the Broncos in November 2016. So far this season Hill has three receiving touchdowns and a punt returned 91 yards for a score. That one clocked in at 21.8 mph, according to the NFL’s Next Gen Stats.

“Tyreek, he’s the fastest person I’ve ever seen on the field,” Harris said.

The trick to covering a player with his speed?

“Just play great technique,” Harris said. “You can’t be scared. If you’re scared, go to church. You have to be ready to challenge everybody.”

The mindset is one Harris hopes has been instilled throughout the rest of the Broncos’ defense, especially the secondary, which has undergone significant changes this past year.

Aqib Talib was traded to the Rams, Bradley Roby was elevated to the No. 2 spot as an every-down corner, and Tramaine Brock and Adam Jones were brought in to fill the void at the No. 3 corner spot. But both have been dealing with leg injuries and missed last Sunday’s game at Baltimore.

The lingering uncertainty and inconsistency with the position have hindered a secondary that called itself the No Fly Zone. And the chemistry that once required little to no effort to maintain among the Broncos’ corners hasn’t had a chance to fully develop yet.

“You want to have that done before the season,” Harris said. “But unfortunately we haven’t been able to get that situation done. We need somebody to take ownership of that No. 3 spot and make big plays.”

With both Brock and Jones still unable to practice fully (Brock did not practice Thursday and Jones was limited), the Broncos must prepare for the Chiefs without knowing their available depth at the position.

But Harris has already divulged his ideas to improve the defensive backfield, and he hasn’t been shy about sharing them with Woods and coach Vance Joseph.

“I mean, I do that every week,” he said with a laugh. “Hopefully they listen. I think they’ll listen to me.”

“We always want to be an attack football team here. That’s our motto here. It’s been like that since I’ve been here. It’s just always what we’ve done, being in attack mode, not sitting back, being aggressive and giving (Mahomes) different looks. That’s what we have to do. We have to try to confuse him and give him something that he hasn’t seen. I mean, Andy Reid has played us a lot of times, so we have to try change it up and try to trick him a couple times.”

Broncos TE Jake Butt done for the season with torn left ACL

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
September 28, 2018

Jake Butt waited 618 days to play in a game after his lengthy recovering from an ACL tear in his right knee — his second in that knee. The injury was sustained in his final game with the Michigan Wolverines and the rehab spilled over in his first season as a Denver Bronco.

Now, only three games in his pro career, Butt faces another lengthy recovery.

The second-year tight end suffered a third ACL tear, this one in his left knee, during a Broncos walk-through Thursday. He will miss the remainder of the season after undergoing surgery.

“Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him,” coach Vance Joseph said in a statement. “He’s a great kid who’s developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever.”

The loss is tremendous for the Broncos, who believed they had only scratched the surface of Butt’s potential as tight end and consistent target for quarterback Case Keenum. The news is worse for Butt, who has already spent the majority of his NFL career recovering instead of playing.

The Broncos deemed Butt a steal after drafting him in the fifth round in 2017. The John Mackey Award winner as the best tight end in college football tore his right ACL in the 2016 Orange Bowl and his draft stock tumbled as a result.

The Broncos were undeterred, and held out hope that he would be able to return at some point in his rookie season. But as their season spiraled, Butt was held out for the full year. The team had a three-week window to either activate Butt or leave him on injured reserve for the rest of the year and, after he experienced some soreness in his right knee after practice in that span, the decision was all but made.

“The thing that I look at most and, take this however you want it, it’s just I see a lot of people that doubt me,” Butt told The Athletic in April. “There are a lot of people that talk about, oh he’s injury-prone, or he’s this or he’s that. I got very unlucky with my knee. It’s not like I have bad knees. I just got hit in the wrong way. Here I am working like nothing’s ever happened.”

After a long wait, Butt took the field for his first regular-season game against the Seahawks. His first completion was a 7-yard catch in the second quarter that helped to set up a touchdown by Emmanuel Sanders. But his final game of the year would be a rain-soaked loss at Baltimore.

In three starts, Butt recorded eight catches for 85 yards.

His injury leaves Denver with two other tight ends on the active roster: veteran Jeff Heuerman, who suffered an ACL tear in a similar manner during rookie minicamp in 2015, and Matt LaCosse. The Broncos could also promote Brian Parker from the practice squad to help fill the void.

Eric Reid is no longer unemployed. What might that mean for his collusion claim — and for Colin Kaepernick?

By Lindsay Jones
The Athletic
September 28, 2018

Across the NFL on Thursday, there was a common reaction to an unexpected free agent signing: “It’s about time.”

Safety Eric Reid is no longer unemployed after signing a one-year deal with the Carolina Panthers to help bolster a secondary that has been decimated by injuries. What’s notable about the transaction is that it came two months after Reid filed a collusion claim against the NFL, alleging that he had been effectively black-balled during the 2018 offseason for his social justice protests. Reid was the first player to kneel alongside Colin Kaepernick in 2016, when they were teammates on the San Francisco 49ers, and he continued to kneel in 2017.

“Somebody finally stepped up and did what was right and signed him,” Denver Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall told The Athletic. “He’s a hell of a safety, a really good player. The fact that he got signed, I was really excited.”

But is this simply a football move, as the Panthers indicated on Thursday, or will Reid’s new contract have larger implications, both with his own grievance against the NFL, or for Kaepernick, who remains unemployed?

ProFootballTalk.com reported Thursday that the Panthers did not put any conditions on Reid that he drop his grievance or promise not to protest, and a sports law expert told The Athletic that there’s no reason Reid’s claim could not continue.

“His claim would be that up until he got signed [there was a conspiracy], so the fact that someone signed him now, that does not necessarily mean that there might not have been a boycott previously,” said Matthew Mitten, a law professor at Marquette University and the executive director of the National Sports Law Center.

“He may well try to go forward with that claim and try to prove that for this particular period up until now, there was a boycott and if there wasn’t, I would have been employed, and try to seek damages for that period of time.”

Mitten said the timing of Reid’s signing could reduce his potential damages because he’s missed just three games of the 2018 season, though he could also argue that if not for a conspiracy among multiple teams during the offseason, he would have received a higher salary.

Los Angeles Chargers left tackle Russell Okung, an ally of Reid and Kaepernick, said he believes Reid and his legal team should continue to aggressively work to prove collusion against Reid for the six months he was unemployed. While the free agent safety market was cool this year, there were other potential landing spots for Reid — like Tennessee and Atlanta, both of whom have lost starting safeties — that

didn't work out. Reid, a first-round pick in 2013, has started 70 games over the past five seasons, was a Pro Bowler in 2013 and has 10 career interceptions.

"I think the league honestly can't justify its actions," Okung told The Athletic's Sam Fortier. "Here's the truth: There needs to be a lot of discovery around the safety market and one can't justify their actions of collusion by signing him midway through the season. It's very proven he's a Pro Bowl player and for him to sign this late into the season, at that salary, is a slap in the face to the game of football."

Reid's signing should have no bearing on Kaepernick's collusion claim, which is heading toward a full hearing before arbitrator Stephen Burbank, Mitten said.

Late last month, Burbank found in favor of Kaepernick after a summary judgment hearing in which the NFL argued to dismiss the suit.

"I think it's kind of a hard case to settle," Mitten said. "You typically settle cases, and say, OK we're going to settle this but upon the understanding that we're not admitting any liability to the claims or that they're true. It might be hard for the league for PR purposes to do that because some could view it as, despite any language to the contrary in a settlement, that jeez there was enough here, and you're at least implicitly acknowledging it. So I would expect it goes forward and the arbitrator renders a decision on it based on the evidence."

Kaepernick seems further from landing a new job in the NFL than Reid was. He's been unemployed longer, plays a more high profile position, had more debatable on-field skills and now has become the controversial face of the NFL's social justice movement.

The one team that clearly has a need at quarterback now is his former one, the San Francisco 49ers, and it seems like one of the least likely to sign him, given his history with the team. He opted out of his contract in March 2017, with the understanding that if he hadn't, new general manager John Lynch and new head coach Kyle Shanahan would have released him.

Niners quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo suffered a season-ending ACL injury last week, and plan to start C.J. Beathard this week.

"Yeah, they'd be like, no we don't want him," Marshall said. "So they're just going to tank, I guess."

But those are big questions for other teams. For now, many of Reid's colleagues are just happy to see him back on a roster.

That includes Dolphins wide receiver Kenny Stills, who along with teammate Albert Wilson are the only players who have continued to kneel in the 2018 season, and Reid's younger brother Justin, who is a rookie starting safety for the Houston Texans.

"I'm just happy for him, excited to see him get out there on the field and be the impact player that we all know that he is," Stills said. "Obviously I feel like he should have been signed first day of free agency so it's a long time coming, but I'm excited for him and I can't wait to see him ball."

Justin Reid called the Panthers an "awesome opportunity" for his brother.

“It’s just been a journey for him, you know? He’s been out of the league for a little while. He’s kept up with his fitness, though. He’s been consistently prepared for when this opportunity did come. I know he had a chance to go to the Titans, and that didn’t work out,” Justin Reid said.

“But this new opportunity showed up, and he’s going to be able to take advantage of it. The Panthers just got a whole lot better. Their team got a whole lot better having him on their squad. It’s good for the organization, and it’s good for him.”

Broncos Case Keenum faces first adversity with new team

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 28, 2018

Case Keenum arrived in Denver with defined expectations: return the Broncos to the playoffs for the first time since Super Bowl 50.

He stabilized the position, providing leadership, accountability, relentless work ethic, and a dry wit. One thing is missing: consistency. Keenum has excelled in the fourth quarter in three games, but it was needed, in part, because of his uneven play through the first 45 minutes.

The numbers are telling, and hint of the improvement needed moving forward. Coach Vance Joseph insists he is not concerned -- and the small sample size provides a strong defense for this -- but the reality is sobering. If Keenum doesn't start starring, the Broncos' chances of reaching the postseason will nosedive.

"Overall, I'm still a long way from where I want to be," said Keenum to my question of how he would evaluate his season. "This offense has a chance to be really, really good."

Where adjectives fail, numbers succeed in explaining the first crossroads of Keenum's stay in Denver. In the fourth quarter, Keenum has completed 20 of 27 passes for 265 yards, one interception and one touchdown. He shows efficiency and benefits from uptempo.

The first three quarters suggest he's still learning to eliminate and isolate receivers with his new team and new offense. He has connected on 46 of 81 passes for 478 yards, two touchdowns and four interceptions. That represents a problem for a team attempting to rebound. The 57-percent completion percentage during the first 45 minutes pales to his 67.6 percent in games last season.

Of course, there are reasons. By coordinator Bill Musgrave's admission, Keenum continues learning the offense, figuring out not only when to let it loose, but when to eat the ball. Against Baltimore, Keenum, for the first time, began to anticipate pressure when I watched the game live and on replay. This creates issues for quarterbacks because their feet can become off-balance, their eyes can go down, making it difficult to throw accurately as they move through progressions.

The pressure on Keenum was real as Terrell Suggs harassed him. On the sack that led to a fumble and Phillip Lindsay's ejection, Keenum appeared dazed, down on the ground for several seconds as the melee played out. He said today he was looking around to see what happened, jarred by the hit. He never missed a snap, but was unable to guide a comeback, picked off as the Broncos attempted to rally.

This represents a greater concern this week because of the Chiefs. The Broncos offense likely needs to score 30 points to have a chance to upend the AFC West kings. Patrick Mahomes has posted the finest three-game start to a season, firing 13 touchdowns with no interceptions. Of course, part of Denver's plan will include playing keep away, gorging the clock to limit Kansas City's possessions. Regardless, the Broncos need a more efficient passing game.

The Chiefs present an ideal place to start. Kansas City ranks 32nd in net yards allowed and 31st in pass defense. Completions exist across the field, with multiple favorable matchups for receivers Emmanuel Sanders, Demaryius Thomas and Courtland Sutton.

"When Von is over on the sideline pumping the crowd up and I'm out there trying to keep him quiet while we're moving down the field," Keenum said. "That's our best offense. Keeping the Chiefs off the field."

Can Keenum bounce back?

Keenum ranks tied for last in the NFL with five interceptions. Prior to the season, I advanced the importance of a three-to-one TD to pick ratio or fewer than 10 picks to push the Broncos back to the playoffs. Keenum showed the ability to pull that off last season. So the Broncos have seen it from afar. It's time for it show up this week at Mile High Stadium.

How No. 4 plays will go a long way in determining if the Broncos snap their five-game losing streak to Kansas City.

Footnotes

Tight end Jake Butt was not at practice on Thursday because of a left knee injury sustained in a non-contact drill Wednesday. He is expected to undergo an MRI. Of course it's a concern for a player who has dealt with multiple knee injuries, including two ACL surgeries on his right knee. ... Cornerback Tramaine Brock, who is dealing with a groin injury, worked out on the side with trainer Tramaine Brock. ... Linebacker Brandon Marshall (knee) was practicing during the limited media viewing period. ... Chris Harris Jr. backs down for no one. He delivered the quote of the day about facing #KCChiefs high-powered offense. "If you're scared, go to church. You got to be ready to challenge everybody." Damn straight. Only way to stand a chance as an underdog. ... More from Harris: "This is a championship game. If you're not studying and preparing for a championship game, you don't know what AFC West football is. ... Trying to have everyone's mindset that this is a championship."

Broncos Jake Butt tears ACL in left knee, season over

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 28, 2018

Jake Butt's second season will end like his first. Butt will miss the remainder of this year after tearing the ACL in his left knee in a non-contact drill at practice Thursday.

"Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him," coach Vance Joseph said. "He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever."

Butt missed his rookie year while rehabbing the second torn ACL on his right knee. Both of those injuries were suffered before he arrived in the NFL. Butt worked diligently to return to the Broncos, and provided a spark for the offense in the first three games. He caught eight passes for 85 yards, and set up the winning score against Seattle with a critical third down catch.

As news surfaced, it hit teammates hard. The reactions varied from "sad," to disbelief to linebacker Brandon Marshall summing it up, "that's (expletive)."

Butt tore the ligament during a coverage drill at practice. It mirrored how the Broncos lost Jeff Heurman to a knee injury prior to his rookie season. The Broncos will turn to Heurman, who has battled his own knee injuries, and Matt LaCrosse. It's possible they will add another tight end for depth. They cut Austin Traylor in training camp after LaCrosse beat him out. Brian Parker could be a candidate as well.

Third ACL injury sidelines Broncos tight end Jake Butt

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 28, 2018

Denver Broncos tight end Jake Butt tore his left ACL during a walkthrough practice Thursday and is headed for injured reserve for the second straight season.

Butt spent his rookie season last year on IR while recovering from the same injury to his other knee.

"Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him," coach Vance Joseph said in a statement after an MRI confirmed the team's fears .

"He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever," Joseph added.

So, the Broncos (2-1), who host Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs (3-0) Monday night, find themselves waiting for Butt to get healthy once again.

Butt had eight catches for 85 yards this season in his comeback from his last knee injury. He also tore his right ACL in spring drills as a sophomore at Michigan.

That medical history helped drive his draft stock down last year, making him the forgotten member of 2017's deep tight end class even though he won the John Mackey Award as the nation's top tight end his senior season.

Many teams considered Butt as talented as first-round selections O.J. Howard, Evan Engram and David Njoku, but he slipped to the fifth round after tearing his right ACL in Michigan's 33-32 loss to Florida State in the 2017 Orange Bowl. He was the eighth tight end drafted last year.

Butt had a solid offseason and took most of the first-team snaps while Jeff Heurman missed two weeks of training camp with a sore knee.

Butt's injury leaves the Broncos with two fourth-year tight ends in Heurman and Matt LaCosse, plus Brian Parker on their practice squad.

Chiefs-Broncos Capsule

By STAFF

Associated Press

September 28, 2018

KANSAS CITY (3-0) at DENVER (2-1)

Monday, 8:15 p.m. ET, ESPN

OPENING LINE — Kansas City by 3½

RECORD VS. SPREAD — Kansas City 3-0, Denver 0-2-1

SERIES RECORD — Chiefs lead 61-55

LAST MEETING — Chiefs beat Broncos 27-24, Dec. 31, 2017

LAST WEEK — Chiefs beat 49ers 38-27; Broncos lost to Ravens 27-14

AP PRO32 RANKING — Chiefs No. 2, Broncos No. 19

CHIEFS OFFENSE — OVERALL (7), RUSH (15), PASS (7).

CHIEFS DEFENSE — OVERALL (32), RUSH (18T), PASS (31T).

BRONCOS OFFENSE — OVERALL (11T), RUSH (3), PASS (16).

BRONCOS DEFENSE — OVERALL (14), RUSH (4), PASS (22).

STREAKS, STATS AND NOTES — Chiefs winners of five straight in series following seven straight losses. ... Chiefs third NFL team to score 38 or more points in first three games (2007 Patriots, 1967 Colts). ... QB Patrick Mahomes has NFL record 13 TDs through three games and zero interceptions. Mahomes leads league with 137.4 passer rating. ... Mahomes made first NFL start Dec. 31 at Denver. ... RB Kareem Hunt has 796 scrimmage yards, five TDs in seven games vs. AFC West teams. ... WR Tyreek Kill has two TD runs, TD catch and KR-TD in three career games versus Denver. ... LB Justin Houston had two sacks, two forced fumbles last week. ... Denver QB Case Keenum threw for 271 yards, TD in only career game against Chiefs (in 2013 with Texans).

Keenum has five interceptions this season after throwing just seven in 2017 for Vikings. ... Rookie RB Royce Freeman had TD run last week after rookie RB Phillip Lindsay's ejection for throwing punch in pile. Lindsay was first undrafted player in league history to eclipse 100 scrimmage yards in first two NFL games. ... Broncos disappointed in P Marquette King's pedestrian stats, brought in practice squad punter during week to push him to play better. ... WR Emmanuel Sanders had first career rushing TD last week against Baltimore. ... WR Demaryius Thomas has TD catch in five of last six home games. Since 2012, Thomas ranks second in league with 491 catches, third with 7,963 yards, and fifth with 52 TD receptions. ... LB Von Miller tied for league lead with four sacks. Miller has eight sacks, 11 tackles for loss versus Kansas City. ... DE Derek Wolfe had eight tackles, sack in last home start against Kansas City. ... Rookie LB Bradley Chubb had

first full sack as pro last week. ... CB Chris Harris Jr. was critical of defensive calls last week, suggesting Broncos weren't disguising intentions well enough and were easy pickings for opposing QBs — who have completed 70 percent of passes against Denver. ... Fantasy tip: In two road starts, Mahomes has 582 yards passing, 10 TD throws and zero interceptions for 143.3 passer rating.

NFL defends lawsuit alleging Super Bowl ticket violations

By David Porter

Associated Press

September 28, 2018

The National Football League defended itself Thursday against charges that its ticketing policies for the 2014 Super Bowl violated New Jersey's consumer fraud law, in arguments before the state Supreme Court that reached a granular level with disputes over words in the statute including "the" and "those."

The case was spurred by a 2014 federal lawsuit filed by a New Jersey man who claimed he was forced to pay more than double the \$800 face value for a ticket on the secondary market because of the NFL's policy of making just 1 percent of the tickets available to the public through a lottery. Josh Finkelman is seeking class-action status for himself and thousands of other fans in a case that could translate to millions of dollars in damages.

His attorney, Bruce Nagel, argued Thursday that the NFL's policy violated the part of New Jersey law requiring events to make 95 percent of tickets available to the public, considered the strictest law of its kind in the country at the time. That portion of the law has since been repealed.

"The NFL has never denied they never made 95 percent available," Nagel told the court. "That is proof positive that the statute not only is applicable but has been violated."

Attorneys for the NFL countered that the lottery didn't constitute a public sale, and thus didn't trigger the consumer fraud law. Attorney Jonathan Pressment said it has been known for years — including by those in New Jersey who sought to attract the game — that the league's signature event doesn't release tickets to the public in the same way as music concerts or even other sporting events. Most tickets go to the league's 32 teams plus sponsors and other insiders.

"What the plaintiff is really asking this court to do is declare that the first and only Super Bowl held in New Jersey was an unlawful event that somehow unfolded in plain view in front of the state's public officials, from the governor to the attorney general," Pressment said.

Both sides withstood pointed questions from the justices, some of whom appeared skeptical of the NFL's claim that the lottery wasn't a public sale.

"That doesn't seem to make sense," Justice Barry Albin said during one exchange. Asked by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner whether it would be considered a public sale if the NFL sold all the tickets in a lottery, Pressment said it wouldn't.

"Then what is it?" Rabner asked.

"It's a contest. It offers fans an opportunity to have a chance to purchase tickets," Pressment replied.

The law's language also came in for some parsing that could go a long way toward determining how the dispute is decided.

Nagel argued that the law's reference to 95 percent of "the tickets" and "those tickets" referred to all tickets for an event — in the case of the Super Bowl, about 82,000 tickets at MetLife Stadium. Pressment argued the phrases referred only to the tickets made available to the public — in this case, the 1,000 tickets in the lottery.

If the state Supreme Court rules in Finkelman's favor, the lawsuit will proceed in federal court. A federal judge in New Jersey had twice dismissed the lawsuit in recent years, but the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia ruled last December the case could go forward pending the state court's ruling.

Way Back When: The Broncos' blood feud with the Chiefs

By Jim Saccomano
DenverBroncos.com
September 28, 2018

“Monday Night Football” and the Denver Broncos vs. the Kansas City Chiefs marks the renewal of one of the great blood feuds in the National Football League.

A "blood feud" is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a rivalry between different clans or families."

These teams meet for the 117th time tonight, the seventh time on “Monday Night Football,” and this is one of those rivalries that is not marked by a single game but by the essence of rivalry itself, like the Bears against the Packers.

One might point to the Oakland Raiders as Denver's chief rival, but I submit that Oakland started out American Football League play much like the Broncos did. Both were among the dregs of pro football.

But the Chiefs were not. They were royalty from the start (beginning as the Dallas Texans before their 1963 move to Missouri), and they seemed to revel in pounding the Broncos into submission.

Denver went 1-19 vs. the Chiefs in the entirety of AFL play and they held a 2-25 record midway into the fourth year after the AFL-NFL merger.

But had it not been for Lamar Hunt, founder of both the Chiefs franchise and the AFL in 1960 — and as legitimate a Hall of Famer as any administrator ever — there would have been no Broncos at all.

So this feud is among two teams that are close geographically, and it has that familial feel of a little brother who just had the bejeebers kicked out of him by the older brother. In fact, during the course of that winning streak by Kansas City cited earlier, the Chiefs scored 45 points or more eight times against Denver, and our fans truly learned to hate the Chiefs more with each grain of sand kicked in the Broncos' collective faces.

Yet, there is a great dignity and nobility to this rivalry.

A real rivalry must have greatness, and this one has plenty.

The Chiefs were first quarterbacked by Hall of Famer Len Dawson, and later by Joe Montana, who faced off against the Broncos' own nonpareil signal caller John Elway.

This being a Monday-night game, what fan does not remember one of the greatest “Monday Night Football” games of all time, the 1994 31-28 Kansas City win in the Mile High City in which each quarterback had a last-minute go-ahead touchdown drive, with Montana's unfortunately coming last.

Following Elway, Peyton Manning completely had his way with the Chiefs, winning all eight games in his four years in this rivalry.

Denver is 3-4 in Monday-night games vs. Kansas City, beginning when Ring of Fame quarterback Charley Johnson passed for over 400 yards in a 42-34 loss to the Chiefs.

There is a saying that revenge is best served cold, and since that ignominious 2-25 start against Kansas City, Denver has gone 53-36, including that exquisite win in the 1997 divisional playoff game on the road to the Broncos' Super Bowl XXXII championship.

No one has ever had as much Super Bowl revenge within the same division as the Broncos, who since then have been to eight title games, the second-highest total of any team, with Denver being one of nine teams claiming three Super Bowl wins.

How Case Keenum could be the Broncos' first line of defense vs. Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 28, 2018

Most of the questions this week about how to stop Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs' offense will be lobbed at Vance Joseph, Joe Woods, Von Miller and Chris Harris Jr.

And for good reason.

Joseph and Woods will take the lead on assembling a defensive game plan that can slow the NFL's top scoring team, and Miller and Harris will guide the group looking to execute that plan.

Case Keenum, though, may be almost as important to the Broncos' efforts.

In some ways, he's the first line of defense.

"For me, there's nothing I can do to defend their offense except keep them on the sideline," Keenum said. "For us, it's converting third downs. It's making first downs, scoring points, keeping their offense on the sideline. We've got confidence in our defense to stop them, especially when we really need them to — just like they've done all year.

"But I think our best defense is when Von is over on the sideline pumping the crowd up — and I'm trying to get them to be quiet — while we're moving down the field."

Keenum's goal to hold the ball and move down the field will not be without challenges. The Chiefs may rank 29th in the league in points allowed, but they've allowed their opponents to convert just 25.8 percent of their third-down attempts. That's the best mark in the league, and it's a big reason the Chiefs are 3-0.

"Obviously, they're scoring a lot of points," Keenum said. "Statistically, they're giving up yards, but man, they're doing really well on third down. They're getting teams in third-and-long. Obviously, they can rush the passer. They've got some guys that can get after the quarterback. And they're solid in the back end. They've got some veteran guys that have played a lot back there. They give you a lot of different looks.

"I'm excited to get out there on Monday night. We've got a really, really good challenge for us."

After watching Keenum during the first three weeks, Joseph said he has reason to believe the Broncos' quarterback will continue to improve. That could bode well for the Broncos' chances to convert third downs and score points against the Chiefs.

"Case is getting better and better each week," Joseph said. "Week 1 — outside of the turnovers — he made some plays for us, same with Week 2. Week 3, we ran the ball, made some plays. It was really penalties that pushed us out of scoring range. We could've scored 20 more points last week. If we do that, everything changes. I've been really pleased with how Case has played. He's going to play better and better for us."

Keenum seemed to agree with the final line of Joseph's assessment, which allowed for room for the seventh-year quarterback to continue to grow in his first year with the Broncos.

"At times, I'm where I want to be, but at times I'm not," Keenum said. "I guess you could say, overall, I'm still a long way from where I want to be. I feel like this offense can be really, really, really good, and at times we are. At times, we're moving, we're rolling, and other times, for whatever reason, we're getting off the field. Just keep building. We're going to keep building this house, we've built a great foundation."

If that foundation is strong enough, it could help the Broncos beat the Chiefs.

Broncos defense plans to be 'in attack mode' against Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes

By Zach Pereles

DenverBroncos.com

September 28, 2018

Through the first three weeks of the season, the Broncos have faced three very different quarterbacks.

In Week 1, they faced Russell Wilson, one of the best scrambling quarterbacks in NFL history. In Week 2, Derek Carr — armed with a very quick release and an accurate arm — paid a visit to Broncos Stadium at Mile High and, like Wilson, left with a loss. In Week 3, strong-armed Joe Flacco played well at home and handed the Broncos their first loss of the season.

Week 4 brings a new type of challenge: a quarterback with athleticism similar to Wilson but size and arm strength closer to Flacco— as well as a group of receivers and runners around him that are among the league's best.

Patrick Mahomes — by way of 13 touchdowns, zero interceptions, a 3-0 record and the league's top-scoring offense — has become one of the most talked-about players of the young season.

It's up to the Broncos to change the tune of that conversation — and that starts with a game plan that will introduce a variety of looks to Mahomes in what will be his fifth career NFL start.

“We always want to be an attacking football team here,” cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said Thursday. “That’s our motto here. It’s been like that ever since I’ve been here. It’s always what we’ve done: just be in attack mode, not sit back; be aggressive and give him different looks. That’s what we’ve got to do. We’ve got to try to confuse him and give him something he hasn’t seen. [Chiefs head coach] Andy Reid’s played against us a lot of times, so we’ve got to try to change it up, try to trick him a couple of times.”

Even after three weeks, Harris believes the Broncos’ defense has plenty to unveil on “Monday Night Football.”

“We haven’t run anything,” Harris said. “We have a lot of tricks up our sleeve at our disposal that we can run any time. We’ve just got to make sure we can execute that. [Defensive Coordinator] Joe Woods has called some great calls, and we didn’t execute. ... We’ve got to execute it and do our job to the best of our ability.”

Mahomes followed a concrete plan in his rookie season last year, sitting behind starter Alex Smith for almost the entire season. With the Chiefs' playoff seeding secured in Week 17, though, Mahomes started the contest against the Broncos. Mahomes completed 22 of 35 passes for 284 yards and an interception in a Kansas City win.

Joseph believes that game can help provide at least a preliminary blueprint for preparing for Mahomes.

“It's Andy Reid’s offense vs. our defense, so there’s going to be some similarities from that football game last year,” Joseph said Wednesday. “We’ll look at it.”

But like any young player, Mahomes has also developed significantly over the past 10 months.

“The biggest difference is just the general knowledge I have of the offense,” Mahomes said Thursday. “Then for defenses, I know so much more now about what the defenses are trying to get you to do and what we’re trying to do. Being able to utilize my weapons and utilize the answers I have within the offense is probably the biggest difference I have at this point.”

The Chiefs' offense presents a difficult task. Andy Reid has incorporated some tendencies from the spread offense to allow his quarterback to distribute the ball to speedy wide receivers Tyreek Hill and Sammy Watkins, former All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce and versatile running back Kareem Hunt, who led the league in rushing yards last season as a rookie.

For the Broncos to slow down this explosive offense, it has to start early: The Chiefs have scored touchdowns on every opening drive this season and outscored opponents 49-6 in the opening period. Last week, the Chiefs scored touchdowns on five straight drives to open their game against the 49ers.

Getting pressure on Mahomes will be an important part of starting off well defensively and setting the tone for the rest of the game. That likely starts with the Broncos' front seven, especially Denver's plethora of edge rushers. The Broncos sacked Mahomes twice in the season finale last year.

“We’ve got to hit him some way, try to get pressure on him,” Harris said. “That’s the best way to rattle a quarterback that’s hot like this.”

While Mahomes has only been sacked four times — tied for second-fewest in the league — he's been hit 20 times, 11th-most in the league. The Broncos must make sure to both contain Mahomes in the pocket and bring him down if they get to him.

“I’ve seen a lot of similarities between him and Russell [Wilson], the way he can makes plays with his feet...” outside linebacker Bradley Chubb said. “There’s a lot of similarities between the quarterbacks we’ve seen. We’ve just got to do our job, and let’s get after them. I feel like if we get to them, then that can make things happen for us.”

Monday night is a big opportunity for the Broncos. In front of a national audience, they can rebound from the first loss of the season and announce their presence in the AFC West against a divisional rival, one that has held the division crown back-to-back years. The significance of this game — even in Week 4 — certainly isn’t lost on the leader of the secondary.

“This is a championship game,” Harris said. “If you’re not studying and preparing for a championship game, you don’t know what division and AFC West football is. That’s what it is. You try to have everybody’s mindset that this the championship and this is going to help us in the end, in this race and getting in the playoffs. We’ve got to gain that mind control of that.”

Jake Butt suffers torn ACL, expected to miss remainder of 2018 season

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 28, 2018

Tight end Jake Butt suffered a torn ACL in his left knee during Thursday's practice and is expected to miss the remainder of the 2018 season, the team announced.

The Broncos are expected to place Butt on injured reserve in the coming days and will be able to add a player to their 53-man roster.

"Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him," Head Coach Vance Joseph said in a statement. "He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever."

Through three games, Butt totaled eight receptions for 85 yards. He averaged 10.8 yards per reception.

Butt missed the entire 2017 season as he recovered from an ACL tear in his right knee. He suffered that injury in the Orange Bowl on Jan. 1, 2017, a few months before he was drafted by the Broncos in the fifth round.

The Broncos now have two healthy tight ends on the active roster: starter Jeff Heuerman and fourth-year tight end Matt LaCosse. Denver also has Brian Parker on its practice squad.

Broncos Injury Report: Jake Butt being evaluated for knee injury

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 28, 2018

Tight end Jake Butt is being evaluated for a left knee injury he suffered during Thursday's practice, Head Coach Vance Joseph announced.

Butt was listed as limited on Thursday's practice report.

Cornerback Tramaine Brock missed Thursday's practice after participating Wednesday, but Joseph said Brock did not suffer a new injury.

"He just wasn't up to going full speed today, so we thought [we would] be smart with him one more day," Joseph said. "[It] should help him get healthy."

Safety Dymonte Thomas, linebacker Brandon Marshall and cornerback Adam Jones were all limited.

Thomas and Jones have now practiced in some capacity during both sessions since missing Sunday's game.

Marshall did not practice Wednesday, but returned to the field on Thursday.

Joseph said quarterback Case Keenum, who missed a practice last week with knee soreness, is continuing to improve.

"He's doing fine," Joseph said. "I thought Case came out of the game fairly healthy. He had no swelling, he had no issues. So he should obviously feel better this week."

Through My Eyes: Bradley Chubb's speech to Columbine High School's football team

By Bradley Chubb
DenverBroncos.com
September 28, 2018

Bradley Chubb spent part of his off day on Tuesday visiting with Columbine High School's football team. The Rebels are taking part in this week's Denver Broncos High School Game of the Week, so Chubb gave a speech to the team about his time in high school and his path to the NFL.

Congratulations on being the High School Game of the Week and being 5-0 to start. That's huge. I remember my senior year of high school, we went 11-1 and ended up losing in the second round of the playoffs, but it's all good — that won't happen to y'all.

How many seniors are in the group right now? Senior year, I remember it like it was yesterday. It flies by. Enjoy the people around you, because these people — no matter if you're going off to college or to do different things — I feel like my high school teammates, my high school group of friends, were the people I was closest with. I played football with those guys from when I was 6 years old until when I was 17 years old.

For me, it was kind of hard in high school. I didn't know what my identity was yet. My freshman year, I was about 5-foot-8, 160 pounds. I wasn't big at all. My brother was the star linebacker on the team. I didn't know what to do. I was like, "All right, my brother's the star linebacker. I'm just this small kid. Nobody is really talking about me." My sophomore year, I got a little bit bigger. I didn't really know my way on the football field yet. I was trying out at running back, fullback, outside linebacker — just different things. And then my junior year was when I hit my growth spurt. Going into my junior year of high school, I hit my growth spurt and got to 6-foot-2, 6-foot-3, put on some weight. I was like, "OK, this is the year." I went out there and played three games, solid. I was being talked about and everybody was loving me. And then my fourth game, I went and tore my ACL.

At that time, my brother was at Wake Forest University. He was like the star linebacker there. And my dad had played at Georgia, you know, before we were even thought of. So, my whole life, it was like, "Your brother's a star in college. Your dad was a star in college. Now what are you going to do?" When I got hurt and tore my ACL, I thought everything was over with. I thought, "Man, I'm not going to play on the college level. I'm not going to make it to the NFL. I'm not going to live my dreams. I'm not going to do everything I want to do." But I had my mom around me, my whole family around me, just pushing me, making sure I did everything in my recovery the right way, making sure that everything went smooth.

So I came back my senior year — and I feel this is why my senior year was so special — I came back, got like 10 scholarship offers before I even played a game. I just did different things and then ended up going off to college to North Carolina State. I feel like I had a pretty good senior year of high school, and then I went to NC State.

I thought I was this big shot, that nobody could talk to me, that nobody could do anything. And then I got humbled real quick. I was fifth on the depth chart, wasn't getting any playing time. I almost got redshirted, but somebody got hurt so I had to play special teams. That was another humbling moment. I was like, "My

brother's doing this. My dad did that, and he made it to the NFL. And I'm fifth on the depth chart right now."

But I put my head down and worked. My sophomore year I came out, and it was my first year starting. On my team, I was the newcomer of the year that season. My junior year I had the opportunity to leave for the NFL or stay for my senior year, and I decided to come back to school for my senior year. And here I am now.

It's been a long journey, a tough journey. It hasn't been easy. I know people see an NFL player and they think, "Oh, he has it made." It was not easy at all. I had to fight through different things, injuries, stuff in my own thoughts.

If y'all are in a place now where you feel like you're down, just get somebody that's close to you. Talk to them. Talk to whoever you need to and pick yourself up and get to work. I feel like hard work is the main thing that will get you to the end of a situation.

NFL: No change to way roughing the passer penalties will be called in 2018

By Nate Davis
USA Today
September 28, 2018

Despite the hue and cry from many players and fans, the NFL revealed Thursday that it won't be altering the way roughing the passer penalties are officiated this season.

The league announced that its competition committee conducted a conference call Wednesday evening "to discuss the enforcement of roughing the passer rules with a specific emphasis on the use of body weight by a defender."

The group reviewed infractions of the rule, which has been in place since 1995 but is being re-emphasized in the name of quarterback safety, from both this season's games and last year's.

Per the NFL's executive vice president of football operations, Troy Vincent, the committee ultimately "determined there would be no changes to the point of emphasis approved this spring or to the rule.

"To ensure consistency in officiating the rule, the committee clarified techniques that constitute a foul."

NFL Network reported earlier this week that some committee members were not happy with the way the rule was being applied, specifically in regard to some hits by Packers linebacker Clay Matthews.

Through three weeks, there have been 34 roughing the passer calls, three against Matthews, who's drawn controversial flags in the past two games. Just 16 roughing calls had been called league-wide at the same point of the 2017 season.

After being penalized for his would-be sack of Washington's Alex Smith on Sunday (a week after his hit on Minnesota's Kirk Cousins was flagged, negating a game-sealing interception), an exasperated Matthews called the NFL "soft." Neither one of his penalties in the last two weeks was among the eight hits outlined in the league's video as either acceptable or impermissible.

Pete Prisco's NFL Week 4 Picks: Vikings-Rams a nail-biter, Broncos upset Chiefs juggernaut

By Pete Prisco
CBS Sports
September 28, 2018

It was not a good week picking games last week, dropping me to just one game above .500 against the spread.

The final tally for the week was 6-10, which is actually putrid. It won't stay that way. It's time to get back on track -- starting with Thursday night game in Los Angeles.

I love the Vikings to keep it close and cover. Minnesota laid an egg last week, but they will bounce back under fiery coach Mike Zimmer, who certainly tore into his team in Zimmer-esque fashion -- with a ton of words too bad to write here.

So let's get back on track this week. I don't want to slip under .500, which would mean a spot in Loserville for the first time this season.

Minnesota at Los Angeles Rams
Time: Thursday, 8:20 p.m. ET (NFLN)
Line: Rams -7

The Vikings were awful against the Bills, so the focus should be good on a short week. The Rams are flying high on offense, but they have some issues on defense this week with both corners out with injuries. That will help the Vikings keep it close.

Pick: Rams 24, Vikings 21

So which teams should you back in Week 4 of the NFL season? And which team with postseason aspirations gets absolutely stunned on the road by an underdog? Visit SportsLine now to see which teams are winning more than 50 percent of simulations, all from the model that has outperformed 98 percent of experts tracked by NFLPickWatch.com the past two seasons.

New York Jets at Jacksonville
Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (Fox)
Line: Jaguars -7.5

The Jaguars lost at home to the Titans last week and didn't play well on offense. The Jets are coming off a road loss, but they will have extra time off having played on a Thursday. The Jaguars will get it back going on offense this week, and Sam Darnold will struggle against the Jacksonville defense.

Pick: Jaguars 23, Jets 10

Miami at New England
Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (CBS)

Line: Patriots -6.5

The Dolphins are flying high at 3-0, while New England is floundering. That's usually a bad spot for a road team coming to Foxborough. But this Dolphins team is playing outstanding defense and I think that continues against a depleted New England offense. Miami hangs around and could pull off the upset.

Pick: Patriots 26, Dolphins 23

Philadelphia at Tennessee

Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (Fox)

Line: Eagles -4

The Eagles got Carson Wentz back last week and he did some good things, but he still didn't look like his pre-injury self. This will be a tough challenge as well. The Titans played well on defense last week against the Jaguars, but this is another step up in terms of offense. Even so, I think the Titans find a way. Upset.

Pick: Titans 21, Eagles 20

Houston at Indianapolis

Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (CBS)

Line: Colts -1

The Texans are 0-3 and have been awful so far. The Colts have morphed into a defensive team the past two weeks with Andrew Luck struggling to drive the ball. That defense will keep this one close and Luck will win it late.

Pick: Colts 21, Texans 18

Buffalo at Green Bay

Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (CBS)

Line: Packers -9.5

The Bills are playing consecutive road games outside the division. That's brutal for a young team. They played well last week, but the Packers are coming off a loss. I think that combination will make it tough on the young Bills. Packers take it big.

Pick: Packers 31, Bills 17

Detroit at Dallas

Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (Fox)

Line: Cowboys -3

The Lions are coming off an impressive showing against the Patriots last Sunday night, a game they hope to build on going forward. But this is a tough spot on the road against a Cowboys defense that can get after the quarterback. Look for that defense to get after Matt Stafford. Cowboys take it at home.

Pick: Cowboys 23, Lions 18

Tampa Bay at Chicago

Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (Fox)

Line: Bears -3

Ryan Fitzpatrick will start here at quarterback for the Bucs even with Jameis Winston back. This will be the game where he plays himself into being a backup again. I think the Bears defense will get the best of him. Chicago takes it.

Pick: Bears 27, Bucs 20

Cincinnati at Atlanta

Time: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET (CBS)

Line: Falcons -5

This will be a shootout. The Bengals are having issues on defense – such as being last in the league on third down – and the Falcons are now without three starters. That means plenty of points. Matt Ryan will have another big day to pull this one out for the Falcons.

Pick: Falcons 34, Bengals 27

Seattle at Arizona

Time: Sunday, 4:05 p.m. ET (Fox)

Line: Seahawks -3

Josh Rosen makes his first NFL start here for the Cardinals, who have been lifeless on offense. It's the right move. He might have some tough going early, but he will respond and play well. The Seahawks played better last week, but that was at home. They are a different team on the road. Rosen will win his first start.

Pick: Cardinals 20, Seahawks 17

Cleveland at Oakland

Time: Sunday, 4:05 p.m. ET (Fox)

Line: Raiders -2.5

This will be Baker Mayfield's first start -- and it's on the road. That's tough. He did some good things in relief last week, but this is a bigger challenge now that there is tape on him. The Raiders have struggled going 0-3, but they've been in every game. I think they pull out a close one here.

Pick: Raiders 23, Browns 17

New Orleans at New York Giants

Time: Sunday, 4:25 p.m. ET (CBS)

Line: Saints -3.5

The Saints are playing consecutive road games and the defense has been a major issue. The Giants seemed to find something on offense last week against the Texans. This will be a fun offensive show. At home, Giants take it.

Pick: Giants 27, Saints 26

San Francisco at Los Angeles Chargers

Time: Sunday, 4:25 p.m. ET (CBS)

Line: Chargers -10

With Jimmy Garoppolo out, C.J. Beathard gets the start for the 49ers. That's not a good thing, even though Beathard has starting experience. The Chargers are home for the first time after two road games and badly need a victory. I say they get it here with a big game from Philip Rivers with Beathard struggling on the other side.

Pick: Chargers 31, 49ers 17

Baltimore at Pittsburgh

Time: Sunday, 8:20 p.m. ET (NBC)

Line: Steelers -3

The Steelers got back on track against the Bucs in the win column, but they still look to have issues on defense. The Ravens have come alive on offense this season, and I think that will carry over here. There should be a lot of points in this one, but Baltimore will pull it out late.

Pick: Ravens 31, Steelers 30

Kansas City at Denver

Time: Monday, 8:15 p.m. ET (ESPN)

Line: Chiefs -5

Patrick Mahomes has been on fire, while the Denver defense hasn't played up to expectations yet. I think that changes here. The Chiefs have defensive issues as well, so the Broncos can get their offense rolling some too. The Broncos take it in an upset.

Pick: Broncos 28, Chiefs 27

Eric Reid is finally back in the NFL, signs with Panthers

By Ryan Wilson

CBS Sports

September 28, 2018

One of the best available free agents finally has a home: The Panthers signed safety Eric Reid on Thursday.

"Eric has been a starting safety in the NFL and has played at a high level throughout his career," general manager Marty Hurney said, via the team's website. "After we put (safety) Da'Norris Searcy on injured reserve, Ron (Rivera) and I discussed our options, and Eric was at the top of our list. He is a physical safety with good ball skills and play-making ability."

Reid, a 2013 first-round pick of the 49ers, knelt alongside Colin Kaepernick during the 2016 season to protest social injustice, and did the same in 2017, went unsigned this offseason and was passed over by several teams -- including the Titans and Falcons -- in need of help at safety before the Panthers signed him. In May, Reid filed a collusion grievance against the NFL, and a week later the NFL Players Association filed a non-injury grievance on his behalf.

According to Pro Football Talk's Mike Florio, "Reid did not agree to dismiss or settle his collusion grievance as part of his contract in Carolina."

In Carolina, Reid joins a defense that has uncharacteristically struggled this season; the unit, regularly among the league's best, currently ranks 23rd overall, via Football Outsiders' metrics, and are 20th in pass defense. Reid should help improve those numbers. The Panthers, who are in a three-way tie atop the NFC South, are on their bye. They'll host the Giants in Week 5 and we're guessing there's a good chance Reid plays for the first time since Dec. 2017.

Reports: Broncos TE Jake Butt's career derailed again by another ACL tear

By Jason Owens
Yahoo! Sports
September 28, 2018

The young career of Denver Broncos tight end Jake Butt has been derailed yet again by an ACL tear.

The second-year tight end suffered a non-contact knee injury in Thursday's practice feared to be an ACL injury. MRI results confirmed those fears Thursday afternoon, according to multiple reports.

Second ACL tear for Butt; first was in Orange Bowl

The Broncos selected Butt out of Michigan in the fifth round of the 2017 draft after the Wolverines tight end tore his right ACL in the Orange Bowl against Florida State. He was selected for the Mackey Award in 2016 as college football's best tight end and considered one of the top NFL prospects at his position.

His draft stock slid after the injury, with the Broncos ultimately pulling the trigger on the injured tight end.

Butt: 'Nobody wants to be a comeback story'

Butt wrote about the disappointment of watching his draft-day slide for a Players' Tribune piece last December titled "Nobody wants to be a comeback story."

"But rounds 2 and 3 were when I didn't really know how to feel, because even though I honestly had no idea when I was going to get drafted, I still had high hopes for those second and third rounds. You know, maybe a team would take a chance on me based on what I had accomplished during my entire college career."

Thursday's injury was reportedly to Butt's left ACL.

After sitting his entire rookie season recovering from the Orange Bowl injury, Butt made his NFL debut in Week 1 this season. Through three games, he has eight catches for 85 yards.

NFL fans struggled to find the Hannah Storm-Andrea Kremer broadcast on Amazon Prime

By Chris Cwik
Yahoo! Sports
September 28, 2018

Amazon Prime made history Thursday. The streaming service's "Thursday Night Football" booth featured Hannah Storm and Andrea Kremer. It was the first time an all-female broadcasting team covered an NFL game.

Problem is, no one could find the broadcast.

When fans initially tuned in to watch the Minnesota Vikings take on the Los Angeles Rams on Amazon Prime, they were treated to the normal Fox broadcast of Joe Buck, Troy Aikman and Erin Andrews. In order to hear Storm and Kremer, they had to change a couple settings on Amazon.

The process caused confusion and frustration.

Peter King ✓

@peter_king

Just spent 10 minutes, after having signed up for Amazon Prime, trying to find a way to watch Storm/Kremer tonight. Gave up. Waaaay too complicated. Turned back to Fox.

Luke Brown ✓

@MLukeBrown

Wait. So Amazon gets Kremer and Storm, and it's just a separate audio feed? We still have to look at Joe Buck and Troy Aikman while the women are commentating? Half measure indeed.

Hey @PrimeVideo i was excited for Kremer/Storm tonight. It's terrible that after promoting this pairing, I had to search and hunt to find a setting in which I could hear their broadcast. Classic bait and switch.

— Blake Runions (@BlakeRunions) September 28, 2018

Drew Corrigan ✓

@Dcorrigan50

Pretty insane they are hiding Hannah Storm and Andrea Kremer on a hidden audio setting on amazon prime tv smh default audio is buck and troy

In order to get the feed of Storm and Kremer, fans had to go to the audio settings area and find the Storm-Kremer feed. You could only get audio of the duo.

Both Kremer and Storm tweeted out instructions on how to access the feed prior to the game.

Amazon Prime is set to stream 10 more NFL games this season. After Thursday night's confusion, the company might want to consider making the Storm-Kremer feed more visible moving forward.

Broncos TE Jake Butt out for season with torn ACL

By Herbie Teope

NFL.com

September 28, 2018

The Denver Broncos will be without their starting tight end for the foreseeable future.

Jake Butt suffered a non-contact knee injury during Thursday's walkthrough practice session and the Broncos feared the tight end had a torn ACL, NFL Network's Ian Rapoport and James Palmer reported. An MRI later confirmed their fears. Butt will miss the remainder of the season, the team confirmed.

This marks the second such injury for Butt, who missed his rookie season in 2017 while recovering from an ACL tear to his right knee suffered in the Orange Bowl during his senior season at the University of Michigan. Palmer reported the current injury is to Butt's left knee.

Losing the 6-foot-6, 250-pound Butt for the season deals a blow to a Broncos offense at this early stage of the season. Butt's eight catches rank third on the team, while his 85 yards receiving rank fourth.

The Broncos have tight end Jeff Heurman on the active roster and Brian Parker on the practice squad.

Comp. committee clarifies techniques on sack fouls

By Herbie Teope

NFL.com

September 28, 2018

Recent controversy over the NFL's point of emphasis on a defender avoiding the placement of body weight on a quarterback prompted the NFL competition committee to meet Wednesday night via teleconference.

The committee determined that no changes would be made to the point of emphasis, which was approved during the league's annual meeting in the spring, or the roughing the passer rule, which has included the body weight provision since 1995, NFL executive vice president of football operations Troy Vincent announced in a statement.

Vincent also points out in his statement, however, that the committee clarified techniques that represent an infraction in an effort to provide uniformity with officials making the calls.

In total, there have been 34 roughing the passer penalties through three weeks of action. New Orleans Saints coach Sean Payton, a member of the committee, pointed out during a Wednesday teleconference with reporters that some called penalties were wrong and there was a need for consistency among officiating crews.

The league provided a video narrated by senior vice president of officiating Al Riveron showing four examples of a foul and four examples of legal contact on a quarterback to avoid the placement of full body weight.

Missing from the video was Green Bay Packers outside linebacker Clay Matthews' penalty after his sack of Washington Redskins quarterback Alex Smith drew a flag, marking the second consecutive week Matthews was penalized for roughing the passer.

Matthews, speaking to reporters Thursday, isn't sure how the video provides a clear definition of what constitutes a legal hit on a quarterback.

"After seeing the video, too, all hits on the quarterback that came from straight on, which is what they teach you since Pee Wee football with running backs, receivers or whatever is to approach them head on if you can," Matthews said, per The Athletic. "Those were all illegal hits [on the video], much like the two hits I had on Cousins and [Alex] Smith last week, which were conveniently left out of the video.

"All of the acceptable hits which were legal came from off the edge or quarterbacks that were trying to fight out of a sack," Matthews continued. "If they continue to call it like that, I think there's going to be more penalties, players are obviously going to be upset, coaches are going to continue to not know how to coach it and fans will continue to be upset by the fact that the NFL can't seem to get out of its own way."

While the league backed the officials for penalizing Matthews against Washington, the play was among numerous examples from Week 3 to draw league-wide confusion and comments from players.

N.F.L. Week 4 Picks: Can the Dolphins Shock the Patriots Again?

By Benjamin Hoffman
New York Times
September 28, 2018

With the Rams and Vikings facing each other on Thursday night, and the Chiefs not playing until Monday, Sunday will have an excitement deficit that the N.F.L. has avoided so far this season.

The Dolphins will be the lone undefeated team in action on the league's main day of action, though there should be plenty of reason to tune in to other games, with Baker Mayfield making his first start, Carson Wentz trying to go 2-0 and Ryan Fitzpatrick trying to rekindle FitzMagic while running away from Khalil Mack.

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

Last week's record: 7-9

Overall record: 28-19-1

Top-Tier Games

Dolphins at Patriots, 1 p.m., CBS

To say that the Dolphins (3-0) have Coach Bill Belichick's number would be a dramatic overstatement, as the Patriots (1-2) under Belichick are 23-13 against Miami. But with a winning percentage against the Dolphins (.639) that trails his overall percentage (.753) by a decent amount, and several of those losses being shocking, it might be fair to say Miami has given him more trouble than would seem warranted based on its quality over two decades.

Though it may be more amusing than relevant, Belichick was even 0-2 against the Dolphins in his years as the head coach of the Cleveland Browns.

Still, Belichick is Belichick, and Tom Brady is Tom Brady, and that, along with home-field advantage is why they are favored despite Miami having passed for more yards, rushed for more yards, allowed fewer rushing yards and allowed nearly as few passing yards. The Dolphins have scored 18 more points than the Patriots and have allowed 25 fewer.

[View image on Twitter](#)

So what has gone so right for Miami in its undefeated start? A strong connection between Ryan Tannehill and Kenny Stills is a major factor. They have connected for 184 yards and three touchdowns despite a fairly conservative offensive approach. Last week, Stills's fellow wide receiver — and fellow national anthem kneeler — Albert Wilson got in on the action with a game that included a 52-yard touchdown pass and a 74-yard touchdown reception.

Miami's hot start has come against fairly bad competition, and that makes this game harder to judge. So do a few key injuries to New England players. The Patriots are likely to win at home, but there is at least a potential for an upset, and a point spread of just under a touchdown seems too large. Pick: Dolphins +6.5

Browns at Raiders, 4:05 p.m., Fox

If Baker Mayfield were to call it a career right now, fans of the Browns (1-1-1) would very likely support him in a run for mayor of Cleveland and campaign for him to be put in the Hall of Fame. That's what happens when you come into a game for just over two quarters of action and end a 635-day winless streak.

The key to this game, however, will be Cleveland's much-improved defense continuing its strong start to the season by joining the parade of teams that has frustrated and beaten Derek Carr and the Raiders (0-3). A lot was expected of Oakland under Coach Jon Gruden's system, but so far it has resulted in an extremely high completion percentage and very few touchdowns. If Carr continues to have turnover problems, the Browns could easily take advantage, taking some pressure off Mayfield in his first career start. Pick: Browns +2.5

Eagles at Titans, 1 p.m., Fox

There was some concern after two weeks that the Eagles (2-1) were in a slump after last season's Super Bowl win, but Carson Wentz's return got them back to a winning record, even if the victory over Indianapolis was not exactly emphatic. Philadelphia will have to hope it can show a little more burst on both offense and defense against the Titans (2-1), a team that has been banged up and fairly mediocre thus far but has lulled teams into playing down to their level. Pick: Eagles -4

Buccaneers at Bears, 1 p.m., Fox

Ryan Fitzpatrick is who we thought he was. The veteran quarterback had what qualifies as a career sampler last week, taking huge risks, some of which were rewarded and some of which were punished. That style is what has led to his 184 career touchdown passes (more than several Hall of Fame quarterbacks, including Joe Namath, Roger Staubach and Troy Aikman) as well as his 140 career interceptions and his career record of 50-71-1.

Regardless, Fitzpatrick became the first quarterback ever to throw for 400 or more yards in three consecutive games, and that has appeared to earn him at least one more start despite Jameis Winston no longer being suspended. An official announcement of the team's starter has yet to be issued.

Should he start, Fitzpatrick may wish that Tampa Bay had gone with Winston, as the starter will spend his day running away from Khalil Mack and a Bears (2-1) defense that puts incredible pressure on quarterbacks and has shown a knack for taking advantage of even the slightest mistake. Pick: Bears -3

Thursday's Matchup

Vikings at Rams, 8:20 p.m., Fox

The Rams (3-0) have scored 33, 34 and 35 points in succession so far this season, looking even more devastating on offense than they did last year. The problem, though, is the team's rebuilt defense has

suddenly lost all of its secondary depth. Aqib Talib is on injured reserve after ankle surgery, and Marcus Peters is questionable with a calf strain. Going against the Vikings (1-1-1), a team with terrific depth at wide receiver, that could be a real issue.

Minnesota has its own defensive problems with Everson Griffen seeking treatment for mental health issues, so this is setting up as a video game-like shootout. The Vikings should rebound some from last week's embarrassing loss to Buffalo, but against the Rams they are outgunned. Pick: Rams -7

Second-Tier Games

Ravens at Steelers, 8:20 p.m., NBC

If Monday's game had ended at halftime, all of the hand-wringing the Steelers (1-1-1) had endured in the first few weeks of the season would have faded away. But Pittsburgh, which had been up by 30-10 at halftime, let Tampa Bay storm back to make it a 3-point game, and the result was in doubt into the final minutes. The Steelers, despite generating numerous turnovers in the first half against the Buccaneers, clearly need a total overhaul of their defense, and even once you allow for the lack of Le'Veon Bell, they need to find something approaching consistency on offense.

This week is not a must-win game in the traditional sense, especially with so much season left, but if the Steelers want to convince anyone that they are still real contenders, they will need to beat a decent Ravens (2-1) team at home. Pick: Steelers -3

Saints at Giants, 4:25 p.m., CBS

The Saints (2-1) showed a lot of defensive improvement last season, which along with an emphasis on the running game finally let Drew Brees relax a little. This season has provided no such respite, as New Orleans has allowed 103 points over three games and has generated just 82.7 rushing yards a game, partially as a result of Mark Ingram's suspension. The Giants (1-2) are not a very scary team, even when they are playing at home, and with Alvin Kamara nursing a knee injury, Ingram still suspended, and the Saints' defense performing so poorly, it says something about the faith people have in the Giants that New Orleans remains the favorite. Pick: Saints -3.5

Jets at Jaguars, 1 p.m., Fox

The Jaguars (2-1) reminded everyone what the term "trap game" means last week when they lost shockingly to the Titans. There is no excuse for the defeat, but it should, at the very least, convince them to take the Jets (1-2) seriously. If all goes to plan, Calais Campbell, Yannick Ngakoue and the rest of the Jaguars defense will make sure no one uses the word "poise" to describe the rookie quarterback Sam Darnold for at least a week. That being said, it seems generous to make a team that scored 6 points last week a 7.5-point favorite. Pick: Jets +7.5

Lions at Cowboys, 1 p.m., Fox

If the Cowboys (1-2) find a way to give Ezekiel Elliott the ball 20 or more times, the Lions (1-2) should have their winning streak stopped at one game. For some reason, that strategy isn't a given. Pick: Cowboys -3

Bills at Packers, 1 p.m., CBS

The Bills (1-2) just pulled off what will most likely be the biggest upset of the season. They came in as 16.5-point underdogs, yet beat Minnesota by 21 points. It was a game where everything went right for Buffalo, including two early turnovers that they capitalized on with touchdowns. Repeating that sort of magic against the Packers (1-1-1) seems unlikely even when you consider how limited Aaron Rodgers has looked. With the game in Green Bay, the Bills should try for the same formula of pressuring the quarterback and letting Josh Allen take care of the rest, but that's easier said than done. Pick: Packers -9.5

Seahawks at Cardinals, 4:05 p.m., Fox

Did the Seahawks (1-2) right the ship, or are they just good at home? That's the big question for the season, but not one that will necessarily be answered against the Cardinals (0-3), a team that has been downright awful and will be starting a rookie quarterback, Josh Rosen. Pick: Seahawks -3

Bengals at Falcons, 1 p.m., CBS

The Falcons (1-2) do not get any real credit for almost beating the Eagles and Saints, but in those close games, and in a win over Carolina, they have shown themselves to be a team that is no fun to play against. Having the rookie wide receiver Calvin Ridley improve from 0 catches in Week 1, to four for 64 yards and a touchdown in Week 2 to seven for 146 yards and three touchdowns in Week 3 should make the Bengals (2-1) nervous, especially with Julio Jones around in case Cincinnati decides to get cute and shift their coverage too much toward Ridley. Pick: Falcons -5.5

Bottom-Tier Matchups

49ers at Chargers, 4:25 p.m., CBS

Colin Kaepernick, who has been in the news quite a bit recently, is a former starting quarterback for the 49ers (1-2) who would seem to give them a better chance of beating the Chargers (1-2) than C.J. Beathard. The same might be true of Steve Young, despite the 56-year-old Hall of Famer not having taken a snap since 1999. The question is if Los Angeles can stay interested enough to win by 10 or more points. Pick: 49ers +10

Texans at Colts, 1 p.m., CBS

It is probably not fair to judge Deshaun Watson and the Texans (0-3) so early in the season, especially when you consider the severity of the injury he is coming back from, but there is no question that Houston has underperformed, and a road game against the Colts (1-2) seems like a recipe for an 0-4 start to the year. Pick: Colts -1

Monday's Matchups

Chiefs at Broncos, 8:15 p.m., ESPN

Patrick Mahomes did nearly anything he wanted on offense, while the Chiefs (3-0) looked atrocious on defense. That was the story of Week 3, and Week 2, and Week 1. There might be a pattern. The second-year quarterback is an absolute sensation, and is using the entire field, and all of his receivers, in a way that few have ever tried. His 13 touchdown passes are the most a quarterback has ever had after three

weeks, and the Broncos (2-1), who have allowed just under 290 passing yards a game, are probably not the team that is going to slow him down. Until further notice it should just be expected that Mahomes will run up the score, and then Kansas City's defense will do its best to make things interesting. Pick: Chiefs
-4.5

No Longer Anonymous, Former N.F.L. Cheerleaders Demand More to Protect Women

By Juliet Macur
New York Times
September 28, 2018

Some of their former teammates publicly called them liars and traitors and attention-seekers who disrespected every woman who had ever worn the Washington Redskins cheerleading uniform.

Yet, even as their allegations caused an outcry and prompted calls for change, the five former Redskins cheerleaders who spoke anonymously to The New York Times in May about what they called an environment of sexual harassment and intimidation on the job silently endured the insults.

Now, however, two of the women are coming forward to denounce attempts to discredit them and to speak on the record about their experiences and their frustrations at what they consider the slow pace of change to protect N.F.L. cheerleaders from degrading treatment.

Their names are Rebecca Cummings and Allison Cassidy, and they said they agreed to be named now to bolster the credibility of their allegations and to inspire other women to speak out about workplace harassment.

“Our main goal was for the Redskins to make a safe working environment for the cheerleaders,” Ms. Cummings said. “But even after we laid out all the shady situations we were forced to be in, the team failed to really fix things.”

The Redskins conducted a three-month investigation into their cheerleading program after The Times report described some of the most egregious behavior toward cheerleaders, which included accounts of uncomfortable events and interactions with well-heeled supporters of the team and a 2013 calendar shoot in Costa Rica. On that trip, the five women said, male sponsors invited to the photo sessions ogled scantily clad, and sometimes topless, cheerleaders and the squad’s director sent cheerleaders to entertain the men at a nightclub.

Although the resort trip did not involve any expectations of sex with the sponsors, and none of the cheerleaders have claimed that they were physically harmed, the women described feeling unsafe and harassed by team managers and the sponsors.

The Redskins’ internal inquiry determined that the core of the women’s story was true, but that it was “greatly exaggerated,” and the team insisted that no cheerleader was forced to do anything against her will, said Maury Lane, a team spokesman. Still, it led the Redskins to make changes this season intended to improve the safety of cheerleaders and to portray the team as more family-friendly.

Those changes include new uniforms, which show slightly less skin, for a group of cheerleaders who mingle with fans but do not perform on the sidelines. An elite group of supporters and suite owners this year were not invited to a team calendar shoot, in Mexico, and two female police officers accompanied the team to provide security. The cheerleaders also will no longer be assigned to private events.

Ms. Cummings, 31, and Ms. Cassidy, 29, said those changes, while welcome, fell short of their expectations of broader moves to eliminate the culture of harassment, such as the removal of the program's leadership that intimidated cheerleaders into silence.

Although a Redskins executive who oversaw the cheerleading program resigned after the Times article was published, the team director, Stephanie Jojokian, who the women said had orchestrated the events where harassment occurred, is still with the team. The Redskins said she was unavailable for comment, but in the past she has denied putting any cheerleader in harm's way.

Both women said they were surprised Ms. Jojokian has kept her job.

Across the N.F.L. several teams have made adjustments to their programs after the reports about the Redskins, and allegations of improprieties within other teams, came to light. A handful of lawsuits and legal complaints have been filed against at least four teams this year, claiming harassment, unfair wages and unequal treatment.

The New York Jets, which in 2016 paid to settle a class-action lawsuit with its cheerleaders over wages, added more modest uniforms that look like what high school cheerleaders might wear, including one-piece dresses that cover cheerleaders' bellies and cleavage. Two teams, the Los Angeles Rams and the New Orleans Saints, added male cheerleaders, but neither team made them available for interviews with The Times. The Saints also changed to uniforms with more coverage and discontinued their annual swimsuit calendar.

The league's front office has sought to keep the turmoil at an arm's distance, saying the cheerleader programs operate independent of the N.F.L., although several league representatives have met with Sara Davis, a lawyer for some of the cheerleaders, after she asked the league to make binding rules for the programs. No agreement has been reached.

"We've certainly worked with the clubs and encouraged them to review their programs," said Brian McCarthy, a league spokesman.

Ms. Cummings, however, said that the N.F.L. wasn't doing enough.

"The changes some teams are making right now are just Band-Aids to hide the really serious issues, like better pay and a safer workplace," she said. "It's time for the N.F.L. to basically man up, stop looking the other way and start treating women the right way."

Ms. Cummings, a nutrition consultant, and Ms. Cassidy, a defense contractor, began training as dancers when they were children and eventually joined the Redskins because they wanted the chance to dance professionally.

They reluctantly followed the code of silence that permeates the world of professional cheerleading where many women fear ostracism or dismissal if they publicly criticize the team.

After the Times article was published, one former Redskins cheerleader wrote on her own Facebook page, "You're trying to be anonymous, but trust us, we know," before calling on the women to turn in their team rings.

Both women said they have lost many friends since they spoke of their experiences. They said they were sickened as they watched current and former cheerleaders on social media label the five anonymous cheerleaders as has-beens just looking to regain the spotlight while sullyng the profession.

“You would think I kicked someone’s dog or said their mom was ugly when all I did was tell the truth,” Ms. Cassidy said.

They said they mostly enjoyed being cheerleaders, the adrenaline rush of dancing for 80,000 or more fans at FedEx Field and visits to charities, including military hospitals where they met wounded soldiers.

But the other workplace experiences, when they felt unprotected and “pimped out,” in Ms. Cassidy’s words, have left them shaken.

Ms. Cummings, who keeps her Redskins’ cheerleader memorabilia on the top shelf of her kitchen pantry, next to a few cans of paint, and Ms. Cassidy said they did not previously speak out with their names because they had signed nondisclosure agreements when they were hired. They have decided to do so now because they believe highlighting the issue of the treatment of cheerleaders is worth the risk of legal action.

Still, they said they did not participate in the Redskins’ investigation of the program.

Both women received several voice messages from Will Rawson, who, they learned subsequently, is an assistant general counsel at the Redskins. In those messages, which were reviewed by The Times, Mr. Rawson said he was calling from the Redskins and wanted to ask some questions about their time as cheerleaders.

They did not call him back, they said, because they suspected that the Redskins were just trying to determine which cheerleaders might have breached the confidentiality agreement, though Mr. Lane, the spokesman, said the team was trying to talk to as many people as possible so it could conduct a thorough investigation and improve working conditions.

He said the women should not fear any legal ramifications in light of the confidentiality agreement.

Mr. Lane said the team interviewed 22 people involved with the program from 2011 to 2013, which overlapped with Ms. Cummings’s and Ms. Cassidy’s time on the team. Among those interviewed were Ms. Jojokian, the cheerleading director, and Jamilla Keene, the assistant director, and also a makeup artist, a hair stylist and photographers who worked the Costa Rica trip.

Though the Redskins said they had several employees who reached out to every cheerleader on the Costa Rica trip either by phone or by email — 36 attended that photo shoot — at least four cheerleaders from 2013 told The Times that they never received any queries from Mr. Rawson or anyone from the Redskins.

Even before the investigation was completed, a few cheerleaders made appearances in the news media to say the organization treated them well and defended the cheerleading program and Ms. Jojokian.

Still, Ms. Cummings and Ms. Cassidy said they were not surprised, but are disappointed, that more women have not come forward about their treatment with the team.

Ms. Jojokian was always quick to remind the team that every cheerleader was expendable, they said.

“They’re acting like a united front and we’re not because those women don’t speak for me and for many other teammates who are still afraid to speak out,” Ms. Cummings said.

Once, after Ms. Cassidy said she would not go on a recurring assignment that included attending a small gathering of men drinking alcohol and watching football at a private house, she said Ms. Jojokian reprimanded her for having “a negative attitude that’s dragging down the team.”

“It’s like the women there have been brainwashed to think it’s O.K. to be treated like garbage,” Ms. Cassidy said. “So many of them are afraid that pointing out injustices will lead to the program folding, or that will lead to the collapse of their social circle, but it doesn’t have to be that way.”

Ms. Cummings, the mother of two young sons, said she had long regretted not coming forward and was prepared for any backlash.

“Having kids, I realize that I want to look back and see that I was on the right side of it all, and stand up for myself and for other women,” she said. “I’m not O.K. with how I was treated, and I hope I can light a fire under teams to make real changes and inspire other women to speak up, too. This is more than just a story about Redskins cheerleading.”

Carolina Panthers Sign Free Agent Eric Reid

By Andrew Beaton
Wall Street Journal
September 28, 2018

The Carolina Panthers signed free agent Eric Reid, the former safety for the San Francisco 49ers who filed a grievance against the league for colluding against him because of his role as a face of the player protests during the national anthem.

Reid, 26 years old, had played his entire five-year career with the 49ers until he became a free agent this off-season. He went unsigned, which he has alleged was because of his outspoken political views. Reid was one of the leading players who took a knee during the national anthem to call attention to social issues such as police brutality and racial inequality.

Reid, a former first-round pick who made the 2013 Pro Bowl, filed a grievance against the league in the spring, following in the footsteps of his former teammate Colin Kaepernick, who had previously done the same. The NFL Players Association also filed a grievance on behalf of Reid, saying at least one owner asked Reid about his intentions to protest during the national anthem, which the NFLPA said violates league policy. An NFLPA spokesman said the cases will proceed at this time.

“Our union is proud to [stand by] one of its strongest player leaders and we congratulate Eric for making it back to doing the job he loves,” NFLPA president Eric Winston said.

On the team website, the Panthers did not address these issues. The team’s general manager, Marty Hurney, said Reid has “played at a high level throughout his career” and that Reid was at the “top” of their list after they placed safety Da’Norris Searcy on injured reserve. “He is a physical safety with good ball skills and play-making ability,” Hurney said.

The move comes during a season when the NFL does not have a policy for the player demonstrations after briefly implementing one during the off-season. The league’s owners had created a policy that mandated players on the field stand and “show respect” during the national anthem or otherwise stay in the locker room.

When the NFLPA challenged the policy, saying they were not consulted on it and that it violated the collective bargaining agreement, the league suspended the policy while it discussed the issue with players and their representatives. The policy has not been re-implemented.

Amazon Adds Interactivity to Thursday Night Football Stream

By Jen Booton
Sports Techie
September 28, 2018

Twitch adds NFL emojis to Thursday Night Football stream. (Courtesy of Twitch)

Amazon is launching new interactive video features for its Thursday Night Football stream on Twitch and Prime Video. This year the technology giant will stream 11 TNF games, starting with the Minnesota Vikings v. Los Angeles Rams on Sept. 27.

Shortly after Thursday's game, Amazon-owned Twitch will debut a computer screen digital overlay that enables fans to better control their experience by pointing-and-clicking on prompts. Dubbed "extensions," this will enable viewers to see stats such as NFL standings and Team Stat Pages without interrupting the game video.

Viewers will also be able to make game and quarter play guesses, with a leaderboard tracking how well they performed against others.

The platform will enable co-streaming again this year for the Twitch TNF stream, where popular Twitch streamers—often esports personalities—will be able to add their own commentary, thereby expanding the reach of football to new online communities. The co-streaming initiative will begin this Thursday with video game personality GoldGlove.

Fans can also respond to the TNF stream with Twitch emotes. Twitch has developed emotes specifically for the NFL, including every team logo plus others that celebrate touchdowns, flags, catches, and runs.

Separately from Twitch and exclusively on Prime Video, Amazon is launching a feature called X-Ray that feeds fans more detailed information about the game. Viewers will be able to use a "game leaders" and "team stats" function to keep track of live game stats, such as top players' rushing, passing, and receiving.

Also on Prime Video, viewers will be able to use a "play history tab" to access a history of play statistics that occurred earlier in the game, including how many yards a team gained. A "teams" tab will provide viewers with more information about each franchise, such as team history, facts about any player, and the roster.

Amazon will also offer fans access to alternate commentary audio as it works to broaden the appeal of football. This will include a Spanish-language commentary team, a U.K.-based team aimed at international audiences, and the first all-female NFL duo.

SportTechie Takeaway

Through Twitch and Prime Video, Amazon is hoping to usher in a new era of interactivity for the game-watching experience that meshes the primary and second-screen experiences.

Before sporting events were regularly accessible on the internet, fans would use second screens, such as their smartphones or tablets, to access real-time stats, highlights, and social media reactions to live events. Now, Amazon is hoping to combine those experiences into one by allowing fans to not only watch sports live on its platform, but also control their experience with real-time stats and digital overlays.

Broncos confirm torn ACL for Jake Butt

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

Broncos tight end Jake Butt missed all 16 games in his first NFL season because of a torn ACL and he'll miss the final 13 games of his second season for the same reason.

Butt injured his left knee in Thursday's practice and the Broncos confirmed reports that he tore the ligament later in the day.

"Jake has worked his tail off to recover from his previous injuries, and we feel terrible for him," head coach Vance Joseph said in a statement. "He's a great kid who's developed into a very good football player. We have no doubt Jake will come back stronger than ever."

Butt tore the right ACL in his final game at the University of Michigan — he also tore his right ACL in 2014 — and the Broncos drafted him in the fifth round of the 2017 draft. He had eight catches for 85 yards in three starts for Denver this season.

Report: Jake Butt tore his ACL

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

Broncos head coach Vance Joseph announced on Thursday that tight end Jake Butt injured his left knee in practice and word is that the team fears a serious injury for the 2017 fifth-round pick.

NFL Media reports that the Broncos fear Butt tore his ACL. He went for an MRI to confirm that initial feeling and is waiting for the results.

It would be a third torn ACL for Butt. He tore his right ACL in February 2014 while at the University of Michigan and returned to play that fall. Butt also tore his right ACL in his final college game, which caused him to miss his entire rookie year before he made his regular season debut for Denver this year.

Butt, who started all three Broncos games, has eight catches for 85 yards this season. Jeff Heuerman and Matt LaCosse are the other tight ends on Denver's roster.

Competition committee conference call specifically called to discuss roughing

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

September 28, 2018

The league's competition committee will have its regularly scheduled conference call next week. The call committee members participated in Thursday was a specially called meeting, according to Judy Battista of NFL Media.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell requested the call "at the last minute" Wednesday "presumably to give officials clarity before another week of games started."

NFL executive vice president of football operations Troy Vincent said in a statement after the meeting that the competition committee determined it would not change the rule or change roughing as a point of emphasis. However, Vincent also added that "to ensure consistency in officiating the rule, the committee clarified techniques that constitute a foul."

Since none of Clay Matthews' three roughing the penalty hits were on the video, it is presumed that officials no longer will call those. Matthews, though, said Thursday he remains uncertain what officials will call roughing after watching the video and reading Vincent's statement.

Kenny Stills wants Colin Kaepernick to be signed next

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

Safety Eric Reid has a job represents a start. Dolphins receiver Kenny Stills now wants the NFL to go the rest of the way and bring quarterback Colin Kaepernick back into league.

"I'm happy that Eric is going to be playing," Stills said Thursday, via ESPN.com. "He's a game-changer on the defensive side of the ball. I'm excited to see him play. I definitely think he should have been signed a long time ago. As far as what it means, it means a team was finally able to look past the protest. I think we're making some progress as far as how the owners, teams and G.M.'s are understanding what the protest is about. . . .

"That's progress, but we still have one of the best quarterbacks in the league sitting at home waiting to be signed. That'll be the ultimate say of how people look back on the NFL at this point in time. You got one of the best guys not playing on a team and there are teams out there that need quarterbacks."

Stills, one of two remaining players who kneel during the national anthem to protest social injustice, said that he spoke to Kaepernick on Thursday morning.

"I said, 'What are you doing?'" Stills said. "He said, 'Just came from a workout. I'm ready to go.' He wants to play. He's good enough to play. He deserves to play. I'm not sure why a team hasn't signed him yet."

Kaepernick became a free agent in March 2017, after opting out of his contract with the 49ers, who have said that he would have been released if he hadn't elected to leave. The Seahawks visited with him in the 2017 offseason, but the Seahawks did not offer him a contract. During the 2018 offseason, the Seahawks had a workout scheduled for Kaepernick, but the workout was canceled.

Panthers never asked Eric Reid if he'd kneel again

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

The Panthers didn't make the mistake the Bengals made this offseason.

And it's nice that they have that luxury now, to make decisions that only pertain to football.

According to multiple sources in Carolina's football operation, the question of whether free agent safety Eric Reid would continue to kneel during the national anthem never came up during their discussions this week. During a free agent visit to Cincinnati earlier this year, Bengals owner Mike Brown asked Reid about his future protest plans. Subsequently, Reid was not signed by the Bengals.

In Carolina this week, it was never a factor.

Simply put, it's a move that never would have been made under former owner Jerry Richardson. And while the football operation wants to focus on how much Reid will help a team that lost starting safety Da'Norris Searcy, they know even if they won't say it that having David Tepper in charge gives them a liberty they never previously enjoyed. (Of course, they haven't used that liberty to sign the backup quarterback they desperately need, but when you've been crawling for 23 years, expecting a sprint is probably unfair.)

Richardson had a deeply patriarchal view of his football team, and it reflected in the transactions they made. To call the Panthers conservative understates the case profoundly. Richardson bragged to Charlie Rose (in a visual made ironic given each of their future public humiliations) about No. 1 overall pick Cam Newton not being allowed to get tattoos. A fringe player (defensive back Marcus Ball) mysteriously disappeared from the roster after raising his fist last September at the peak of anti-Donald Trump sentiment. Defensive end Julius Peppers stayed in the locker room that day in his own silent protest, but since he's a future Hall-of-Famer, he remains employed. Richardson's desire to not risk offending his Old South base (i.e. conservative and white) was woven into the organizational culture, and the Panthers 192-192-1 record in 23 years was a metaphor for many things.

But Richardson's gone, after selling his team in the wake of allegations of workplace misconduct that included racial and sexual harassment. In his place stepped a man who once called the commander in chief "a demented, narcissistic scumbag" and "the father of lies." While Tepper's still very supportive of some of Trump's policies (no one that rich isn't), he has also been an active proponent for and participant in their efforts for social causes. This week, the Panthers were packing supplies for flood victims in Eastern North Carolina, and Tepper was elbow-to-elbow with players and staffers in the assembly line. He also impressed his players in his first meeting with them after the purchase, telling them that he cared about the issues they cared about, and was serious about allowing them to work for change.

Assuming he's in football shape, Reid should absolutely contribute to a football team that needs him. But whether he does or doesn't, he already contributes to a culture that has changed, which certainly needed to.

NFL could tell referees to penalize only clear instances of roughing the passer

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

For plenty of NFL penalties, it's obvious if a violation did or didn't occur. Offside, illegal procedure, illegal formation, and delay of game are some of the examples of black-and-white NFL rules.

Roughing the passer, in many cases, resides in the gray. And as the NFL tries to find a way to better balance protecting passers while also letting football players play football, one possibility entails instructing referees to flag only blatant instances of roughing the passer, allowing the league office to parse out close cases and, when necessary, to impose discipline via the fine process.

This would promote greater consistency among the 17 referees who have exclusive jurisdiction over roughing the passer, with the textbook calls (like the Clay Matthews hit on Alex Smith from Week Three) being made and the borderline-at-best calls (like the Clay Matthews hit on Kirk Cousins from Week Two) not being made.

It still won't be easy to ensure consistency, but it will be the league's obligation to do whatever needs to be done to ensure that the 17 referees apply the same or similar standard. And there are more than enough examples of violations that can be used to drill into the referees what is and isn't a blatant case of roughing.

With Eric Reid signed, is Colin Kaepernick next?

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

The decision of the Panthers to sign safety Eric Reid constitutes a stunner, because many had presumed that the NFL's owners would never relent or retreat in the face of the collusion grievances filed by Reid and former 49ers teammate Colin Kaepernick. So now that Reid has been signed, is Kaepernick next?

It's a fair question, since it's possible that Carolina's decision to proceed — and the public reaction to it — could give a team that needs help at the quarterback position confidence that, if Kaepernick is signed, the fans won't rush for the exits, the sponsors won't abandon the team en masse, and the TV ratings won't plummet.

If anything, adding Kaepernick could help a team. Especially if that team currently is facing, for example, the balance of a season without a franchise question like Jimmy Garoppolo. The 49ers have four prime-time games from Week Six to Week 10, and the ratings for those games instantly would be dramatically higher if Kaepernick were back playing quarterback for the team that drafted him in 2011.

While the league should want that increased interest, the league may not want it on those terms.

For the 49ers, who like every team are in an entertainment business, the increased interest could be welcome. And justified. Sure, it would be a challenge to get Kaepernick up to speed quickly, but just as the Broncos dramatically retooled their offense in 2011 for Tim Tebow, the 49ers could do the same for Kaepernick.

Whether it's the 49ers or someone else, it's beyond argument that he's talented enough to have one of the top two spots on plenty of depth charts. It will be interesting to see whether the willingness of the Panthers to sign Reid will make a team that needs an upgrade at quarterback to sign Kaepernick.

Eric Reid's deal with Panthers has no impact on his collusion case

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 28, 2018

The most immediate question regarding the return of safety Eric Reid to the NFL is whether the deal with the Panthers has any impact on his pending collusion case.

Per a source with knowledge of the situation, the contract with the Panthers does not impact Reid's collusion grievance against the NFL. Specifically, Reid did not agree to dismiss or settle his collusion grievance as part of his contract in Carolina.

The ongoing unemployment of Reid was only making the collusion more conspicuous. And there's one potential piece of evidence that could make the collusion even more conspicuous: If the Panthers cleared the move with the league office before making it, the mere effort to get the green light from the league before signing Reid would be evidence of an atmosphere of collusion. Absent an atmosphere of collusion, there would be no need to get the league's nod of approval before signing Reid.

Green light or not, the Panthers did the right thing by looking past non-football matters and making a football decision. Earlier this week, Panthers receiver Torrey Smith lobbied publicly for the Panthers to consider Reid. To their credit, the Panthers did — with no assurances or promises that Reid won't continue to pursue legal rights against the NFL, which necessarily includes the Panthers.