

Broncos make decisions with Peyton Manning in mind, but look to future, too

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
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Today's question about the Broncos comes from Cal Roth. To submit a question for consideration, send an e-mail to The Denver Post's Jeff Legwold.

Q: Do you think that Peyton Manning requested upgrades at offensive guard and slot receiver therefore the Broncos signed Louis Vaquez and Wes Welker?

A: Cal, there is no question any time a team has a franchise quarterback, plenty of decisions get made with that franchise quarterback in mind.

The Patriots construct things around Tom Brady, the Packers around Aaron Rodgers, the Saints around Drew Brees and on and on. That's how it is, quarterbacks with title potential are the league's Alpha Dogs.

They are easily the most coveted player for anyone who makes a living trying to build an NFL roster. You can win without one, but it's much more difficult to win over the long haul and everything else has to go almost perfectly.

And, essentially, you still need something historical somewhere else on the roster.

In the sea of franchise quarterbacks who've won the majority of the last 20 Super Bowls or so, everyone points to the 2000 Ravens and the 2002 Buccaneers. Those teams were able to win the title with Trent Dilfer and Brad Johnson behind center, respectively.

True enough. But the Ravens' defense set the NFL record for fewest points allowed in a 16-game season in 2000, while in '02 the Buccaneers were first team since the fabled '85 Bears to lead the league scoring defense, total defense and interceptions in the same season.

So, the Broncos are certainly going to make plenty of decisions with Manning in mind, but executive vice president of football operations John Elway has said he wants the team to be in a position to compete for a title after Manning "hangs them up." That means the Broncos aren't going to crater their salary cap — at least they haven't thus far — or let their roster get too old overall to simply appease Manning in some way.

And they shouldn't. At least if they are really interested in what the Broncos will look like in five years.

Manning has plenty of say about the offense and has plenty of influence about how things go inside the Broncos' Dove Valley complex, simply because of who he is and what he's accomplished. Former offensive coordinator and current Chargers coach Mike McCoy may have said it best during his tenure in Denver:

"We have a system, we have a way of doing things we believe works, but you would be an idiot if you didn't see what (Manning) thought about things," McCoy said. "He's Peyton Manning, that's a resource other people don't have and we do. And you should always use all of the resources you have to try to be successful."

Manning would suggest a player — he told the Broncos they should take a look at Brandon Stokley last offseason after Stokley had been a part of Manning's workouts at Duke. But he wouldn't go to the team and say specific upgrades are needed at specific positions.

He would say what needs to be better overall, pieces of the offense, particular packages perhaps, including in his own game. But the Vasquez signing came because the Broncos have four starters in the offensive line coming back from some kind of surgery and they needed to protect the middle of the formation better against opposing pass rushers.

That's where defenses attacked the Broncos' protection schemes and that's the kind of pressure that affects Manning the most. It was a personnel decision made for the quarterback, not by the quarterback.

As John Fox said, "We needed help there, we couldn't sit there and hope that everybody came back healthy. I mean we could, but I'm not sure that would have been the wisest thing to do. ... Basically there were a couple guys we started studying and liked. We were very excited to get Louis."

Welker's signing is a \$12-million indication the team is going to continue the trend it started down the stretch last season — to basically work out of a three-wide look the majority of the time.

They liked what Stokley did last season as the No. 3 receiver and Stokley's agent was working the Broncos pretty hard to bring Stokley back before the Broncos signed Welker. But Welker is considered the best slot receiver in the league and the Broncos were fortunate Welker was looking for a winning team with an established quarterback if he left the Patriots.

His signing actually came at the expense of Stokley, who is one of Manning's closest friends.

As Manning has often said, "They have people upstairs to make those decisions. I'm not the GM."

Drafting a QB is tough, but so is surviving the decision

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
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Four Fridays from now the first round of the 2013 NFL draft will be in the books.

We aren't going to know what the NFL's decision makers really think of this year's quarterback class until those picks are made April 25.

Some of those folks say they like some passers on this draft board, and they don't like others. But there is no consensus other than the desperation is so great for passers capable of winning the big trophy that two, three or maybe more quarterbacks will be taken in that opening round.

While there is room for plenty of reasoned debate about who does — or doesn't — deserve one of those opening-round selections, there is no debate that the people making those decisions have their jobs in the balance if they take the wrong quarterback.

Look at the 2006 through 2009 drafts, which would include players entering their fifth through eighth pro seasons in 2013, essentially the prime years for your franchise passers. The tendency is to look at what happened to the quarterbacks involved, but how they turned out affects the job security of those drafting them.

Three quarterbacks were selected in the first round of the 2006 draft — Vince Young at No. 3, Matt Leinart at No. 10 and Jay Cutler at No. 11. None of the men who picked those three QBs for the Tennessee Titans, Arizona Cardinals and Broncos, respectively, are still on the job with those teams.

And none of the three quarterbacks are with those teams. Young is trying to get back into the league, having just made an appearance at Texas' pro day.

Two quarterbacks were selected in the first round of the 2007 draft — JaMarcus Russell at No. 1 and Brady Quinn at No. 22.

None of the people who made those picks are still on the job and neither quarterback is with the team that selected him. Russell is regarded as one of the biggest busts in NFL draft history and is out of the league.

The 2008 draft provided a bit of a reprieve with Matt Ryan at No. 3 to the Atlanta Falcons and Joe Flacco at No. 18 to the Baltimore Ravens. Ryan has been a two-time Pro Bowl selection and has directed his team to four postseason appearances.

Falcons general manager Thomas Dimitroff has the coin flipped for Atlanta to get that No. 3 pick that year encased in a display box on his desk. He and coach Mike Smith are still going strong on the job.

Flacco has been to the postseason in all five of his seasons, including a memorable run through the 2012 playoffs that concluded with a Super Bowl victory in New Orleans. Ozzie Newsome continues to cruise along as Baltimore's top football decision maker and might be the best general manager in the league.

Three quarterbacks were selected in the first round of the 2009 draft — Matthew Stafford at No. 1, Mark Sanchez at No. 5 and Josh Freeman at No. 17.

Stafford has put up a pile of passing numbers — back-to-back 4,900-yard seasons — but he's only 17-28 as a starter for a Detroit team that is in many ways still climbing out of a winless 2008 season.

The folks who presided over Sanchez's selection in New York are no longer on the job, and Sanchez might be the most scrutinized and criticized quarterback in the league.

While general manager Mark Dominik, who selected Freeman, still is in place at Tampa Bay, former head coach Raheem Morris was fired after the 2011 season. Greg Schiano, who was hired as Morris' replacement, had barely finished the 2012 season before saying Freeman can expect competition for the job this season.

It's a snapshot that shows how important the decision is, not only for the quarterbacks but for the people who make the call.

NFL quarterbacks vexed by speed and size of contemporary pass rushers

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
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Former Tennessee Titans general manager Floyd Reese once was asked why so many organizations believed any quarterback prospect who was shorter than 6-foot-2, 6-3 or 6-4 — depending on the team — would have an issue playing in the NFL.

"Look at the guys chasing him," Reese said. "They look like power forwards in pads. That reach is a problem. The (quarterback) has to be able to get the ball out from the pocket or move well enough to get the ball out someplace else. Either way, I don't care how good his arm is if the ball doesn't make it out."

In a draft loaded with defensive linemen, there is no shortage of those duck-under-the-door guys on the edge. Eleven defensive linemen who were invited to this year's scouting combine in Indianapolis measured 6-5 or taller. That's two starting hoops lineups, plus one sixth man.

By contrast, only two quarterbacks at the combine measured 6-5 or taller — Tennessee's Tyler Bray at 6-6 and North Carolina State's Mike Glennon at 6-7.

Two of the biggest reasons so few NFL personnel staffers are excited about this quarterback class are the players' lack of height and questions about their ability to be accurate passers.

The rushers with the NBA look are all over the board, with Brigham Young's Ezekiel Ansah (6-5), Oregon's Dion Jordan (6-6), Southern Methodist's Margus Hunt (6-8), Illinois' Michael Buchanan (6-5) and Michigan State's William Gholston (6-6) leading the way.

Ansah is a raw player, still relatively new to football. He has played only three years but is one of the better athletes to enter the NFL draft in the past decade. He once ran 100 meters in 10.91 seconds. He ran the 40-yard dash in 4.62 seconds at the combine, while weighing 271 pounds. The fact he attended classes full time before going to Indy, rather than leaving school to train full time, as many of the top prospects do, is an indication there may be better things to come.

Jordan recently had surgery on his right shoulder to repair a partially torn labrum, but he has teams' attention because he played some linebacker for the Ducks and often dropped into coverage.

Hunt is a matchup nightmare. He has one of the largest arm spans of any prospect: 82 inches. And in a profession where reach really matters for both offensive and defensive linemen, that gives him an instant advantage against the vast majority of blockers.

He also ran a staggering 4.60 in the 40-yard dash at the combine to go with a vertical leap of 38 inches and 38 repetitions of 225 pounds in the bench press — a notable feat for a player with arms as long as Hunt's. He might be the most difficult to throw over in this draft.

Hunt blocked an NCAA-record 10 field-goal attempts at SMU, seven of those blocks coming in his first year with the team. It's all the more amazing, given the native of Estonia didn't play football until 2009.

Toss in guys in the middle of the field such as Georgia Tech defensive tackle T.J. Barnes (6-6, 369) and Georgia defensive tackle Kwame Geathers (6-5, 342), and you can see why it's so difficult for quarterbacks to see.

McShay tabs big names for AFC West

By Bill Williamson

ESPN.com

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ESPN draft analyst Todd McShay has offered another mock draft in an Insider piece. This time, McShay is going two rounds deep. Let's take a look at his choices for the AFC West teams:

First round

1. Kansas City: Luke Joeckel, OT, Texas A&M,

My take: This looks like the most official pick at this point. Things can change, but it looks like Joeckel.

3. Oakland: Geno Smith, QB, West Virginia

My take: This is very interesting. But with the Carson Palmer situation percolating, Smith may be the choice. Still, Oakland has great needs on defense.

11. San Diego: Star Lotulelei, DT, Utah

My take: This would be awesome value and the Chargers would have a nasty front three. But where is the left tackle? It's the Chargers' greatest need. But Lane Johnson is off the board, so I like the Star choice.

28. Denver: Manti Te'o, LB, Notre Dame

My take: It could happen, but the Broncos also need a running back and a pass-rusher. But if Te'o is the best player on the board, he should be the choice.

Second round

45. San Diego: Terron Armstead, OT, Arkansas-Pine Bluff

My take: There's the tackle for San Diego. Is he ready to start? We'll see, but he was a combine star. Great athlete.

55. Denver: Sio Moore, LB, Connecticut

My take: He's an athletic weakside linebacker.

Note: Kansas City and Oakland do not have picks in the second round.

Watching the Mocks: March 28

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DenverBroncos.com

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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- When we first scoured the web for mock drafts post-NFL Scouting Combine, the consensus seemed to be that the Broncos would select a defensive tackle with the 28th overall pick in the 2013 NFL Draft.

Now, the position groups are a little more varied, ranging from linebacker to cornerback, linebacker, defensive end, defensive tackle and running back.

Here's a look at who the experts predict Denver will select in April.

ESPN's Todd McShay: Notre Dame LB Manti Te'o

Denver would like to find a replacement for departed DE Elvis Dumervil, but middle linebacker is also a top need and the Broncos offer the perfect scheme fit for Te'o. He plays fast enough to get from sideline to sideline, and he could be a very good player with Denver's defensive linemen protecting him. And with Peyton Manning leading the way, the Broncos have the leadership in place to deal with any concerns about Te'o fitting into the locker room.

ESPN's Mel Kiper, Jr.: Washington CB Desmond Trufant

Champ Bailey may be good when he's 50 at this rate, but the Broncos could still use another corner, and Trufant is an experienced player who can help immediately because he can mirror receivers both on the edges and in the slot. He utilizes great footwork, has underrated ball skills and can turn and run with anybody.

Sports Illustrated's Don Banks: Florida State DE Tank Carradine

In light of the Elvis Dumervil plot twist, the Broncos checking out the defensive end market stands to reason. Carradine is an intriguing possibility. After his November ACL injury, the jury is still out on him, at least until he shows how much mobility he has recovered in the weeks just before the draft. If the Broncos can live without much early impact from him this season, he could wind up being a steal at the bottom of the round.

National Football Post's Russ Lande: LSU DE Sam Montgomery

After losing Elvis Dumervil due to fax mistake, the Broncos need to get another pass rusher to keep offenses from focusing solely on Von Miller. Montgomery is an

excellent run defender who gets more pressure than expected through strength, effort and hand use.

NFL.com's Gil Brandt: Trufant

Trufant, who has probably made as much progress as any prospect this year, had a fantastic workout at Washington's Pro Day. Denver needs corners; as the best remaining one on the board at this point, Trufant is a good fit for the Broncos. He has speed and athletic ability, and he will tackle. Trufant's brothers, Marcus and Isaiah, both play in the NFL.

NFL.com's Charley Casserly: Texas A&M DE Damontre Moore

Moore, who terrorized the SEC last season, plays faster than his timed speed.

NFL.com's Daniel Jeremiah: Trufant

The Broncos need to get younger at cornerback. Trufant has seen his stock soar since the end of the college season.

NFL.com's Matt Smith: Florida State DE Bjoern Werner

A bad combine saw his stock slide perhaps more than that of any other player (expect maybe Damontre Moore). Before Indianapolis, there was talk that Werner might have been the first defensive player taken in the draft. The Broncos got their corner in free agency (Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie), so here they nab an end to help out that secondary even more.

NFL.com's Bucky Brooks: North Carolina DT Sylvester Williams

John Fox wants to fortify the Broncos down the middle. Williams is an energetic three-technique with the first-step quickness to create disruption at the point of attack.

NFL.com's Josh Norris: Trufant

Defensive tackle is a possibility, but the Broncos re-signed Kevin Vickerson and (signed) Terrance Knighton. Champ Bailey isn't getting younger, and Trufant has very quick feet to mirror receivers downfield.

NFL.com's Charles Davis: Georgia LB Alec Ogletree

A top-10 talent who might slide due to off-the-field concerns. If so, Ogletree's speed will make an already great defense even better.

USA Today's Nate Davis: Moore

His stock has taken a beating ever since a horrid showing at the scouting combine. Still, Moore managed 12½ sacks for the Aggies last season, and the Broncos could use a young pass rusher in the wake of the Elvis Dumervil debacle. Perhaps a reunion with former A&M teammate Von Miller would be a needed boon to Moore.

USA Today's Jarrett Bell and Jim Corbett: Trufant and Moore, respectively

CBSSports.com's Rob Rang: Werner

While the Broncos deserve a great deal of credit for an impressive haul of free agents, the slip-up which caused Elvis Dumervil to become an unrestricted free agent could come back to haunt them. Therefore, adding another pass rusher to counter Von Miller is important. Werner doesn't possess elite athleticism and therefore could slip on draft day. He's instinctive and technically-sound, however, and would prove a steal if playing opposite an established star like Miller.

CBSSports.com's Dane Brugler: Williams

The Broncos re-signed Kevin Vickerson and added Terrance Knighton, but interior defensive line depth is needed. With Elvis Dumerville signing with the Ravens, the Broncos could go pass rusher like Damontre Moore here, but Williams is an athletic and versatile player with an intriguing NFL upside.

CBSSports.com's Pat Kirwan: Ohio State DT Johnathan Hankins

The Broncos signed wide body Terrence Knighton, but still need a disruptive defensive tackle with skills to penetrate. They could consider Sylvester Williams or Jesse Williams in this spot, too. One thing for sure: If they don't take one here, the good ones all will be gone by the next time they pick.

CBSSports.com's Pete Prisco: Alabama DT Jesse Williams

They need to improve in a big way in the middle of their defense.

CBSSports.com's Will Brinson: Moore

John Elway was crushing free agency until he allowed Elvis Dumervil to walk. Now he's got a need at pass rusher (even if the Broncos sign John Abraham or Dwight Freeney) and Moore's slipped because of poor testing results. Putting him in their rotation, along with his versatility, would be a nice fit.

CBSSports.com's Clark Judge: Alabama RB Eddie Lacy

Willis McGahee can't keep running until he's 50. Fresh legs are needed, and Lacy's the best back on the board.

FOXSports.com's Peter Schrager: S. Williams

The Broncos re-signed Kevin Vickerson and went out and got Terrence Knighton in free agency, bolstering their interior defensive line. Their work might not be done at the position. Williams is a 6'2, 313-pound run stuffer who can get to the QB. He excelled on a UNC defense loaded with stars. I think he could end up being a better pro player than college player.

SB Nation: Carradine

After the Elvis Dumervil fiasco, the Broncos could be in the market for a defensive end. For a team with as strong a roster as Denver's, Tank Carradine would make a ton of sense. He may not be back to full strength at the beginning of the season after tearing his ACL in November, but the upside he presents at the defensive end spot is higher than any player in this class. If he's healthy by mid-season, the rest of the league will be kicking itself.

Bleacher Report's Matt Miller: Mississippi State CB Johnthan Banks

The Denver Broncos have been active in free agency, and even though they added Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, the team needs another young player at the position to play behind the aging Champ Bailey.

Johnthan Banks is a physical, man-coverage cornerback who has the skill set to attack the ball as a cover man and a tackler. Banks could easily be the team's No. 3 cornerback in 2013 and then make his move to the starting lineup in 2014 as Bailey's replacement. Talk about a smooth transition.

Miller's picks for rounds two through seven:

Two: Western Kentucky DE Quanterus Smith

Three: Syracuse S Shamarko Thomas

Four: Illinois DT Akeem Spence

Five: Tennessee TE Mychal Rivera

Seven: Ohio DE Tremayne Scott

Mason's Mock 2.0

Andrew Mason

DenverBroncos.com

March 28, 2013

1. KANSAS CITY (2-14): OT Luke Joeckel, Texas A&M

Previous: Same.

The trade for Alex Smith means the Chiefs don't have to reach for a quarterback, and the release of Eric Winston after franchising Branden Albert leaves a hole on the offensive line. Joeckel is too good to pass up, and with the re-signing of Dwayne Bowe and presence of Pro Bowl running back Jamaal Charles, gives Smith the key weapons he needs to help marshal a quick turnaround. Kansas City might be the Broncos' biggest roadblock to a third consecutive AFC West crown, and Joeckel would help their cause.

2. JACKSONVILLE (2-14): DE/LB Dion Jordan, Oregon

Previous: Same.

Jordan won't have another workout to impress teams in the next few weeks, since his Combine session was his last before surgery to repair a torn labrum. At 248 pounds, Jordan wouldn't seem to be the most logical fit as a 4-3 end, but that's the exact same weight as Bruce Irvin, who Jaguars head coach Gus Bradley unleashed as Seattle's defensive coordinator in 2012. The Jaguars have needs all over the place, but the need for explosion and speed trumps others.

3. OAKLAND (4-12): QB Geno Smith, West Virginia

Previous: DT Sharrif Floyd.

Rumblings that quarterback Carson Palmer is reticent about restructuring his massive contract offer a sign of dissatisfaction with Palmer, even though he's hardly the weakest spot on the roster and could start for plenty of quarterback-needy teams. Still, this is a team looking at the long haul as it looks to shed all the onerous contracts it collected in recent years, and since Palmer seems unlikely to be a part of the Raiders when they finally plug all of their holes, the Raiders could seek their franchise quarterback now -- even if No. 3 is a bit of a reach for Smith.

4. PHILADELPHIA (4-12): DT Sharrif Floyd, Florida

Previous: DE Sheldon Richardson.

Floyd is the best player on the board and fills one of many Eagles needs. Since all signs point to them keeping Trent Cole as their primary pass-rusher while moving

him to outside linebacker, edge rusher isn't the overwhelming need it appears to be.

5. DETROIT (4-12): OT Eric Fisher, Central Michigan

Previous: CB Dee Milliner.

Detroit needs a cornerback, but needs a quality tackle more after losing Jeff Backus to retirement and Gosder Cherilus to free agency. In spite of significant defensive needs, keeping Matthew Stafford upright must be the Lions' paramount priority.

6. CLEVELAND (5-11): CB Dee Milliner, Alabama

Previous: DE/LB Ziggy Ansah.

Cleveland's free-agent splash saw plenty of upgrades in the front seven, but little beyond that. The Browns could still land a free-agent cornerback, but Milliner is potentially better than anyone still on the market except Nnamdi Asomugha -- and there is no indication the Browns are in the running for his services. Milliner also partners well with the kind of pass rush the Browns hope to create.

7. ARIZONA (5-11): DE/LB Ziggy Ansah, BYU

Previous: OT Eric Fisher.

Offensive line remains a pressing need, but with no obvious quarterbacking prospect of good value, the Cardinals need to stockpile playmakers at key positions. Ansah is raw, but his ceiling is elite, and the Cardinals can afford to be patient with a project-type of player, especially since it will take a minor miracle for them to escape last place in what appears to be the league's toughest division.

8. BUFFALO (6-10): WR Cordarrelle Patterson, Tennessee

Previous: QB Geno Smith.

Buffalo wants a quarterback, but Doug Marrone can find his old college passer, Ryan Nassib, in the second round, so with Smith off the board, the Bills would be best served by waiting and addressing the other half of the passing equation. Patterson is the best of a shaky wide receiving crop, but isn't the reach that a quarterback would be, and has top-five upside. With Stevie Johnson around, Patterson wouldn't be asked to be a focal point right away, easing his transition.

9: N.Y. JETS (6-10): NT Star Lotulelei, Utah

Previous: DE/OLB Barkevious Mingo, LSU.

It's no surprise that Lotulelei should rise after concerns about his heart condition abated; he's arguably the best interior lineman in the draft and is an excellent fit for the Jets' scheme.

10. TENNESSEE (6-10): G Chance Warmack, Alabama

Previous: Same.

The Titans could go safety, cornerback, linebacker or offensive line, but Warmack is a potential 10-year starter at a slot where the Titans have a desperate need, since the signing of Andy Levitre from the Bills only addressed half of their issues at guard. This is usually a bit high for a guard, but as Titans general manager Ruston Webster said last week, "I have never been one to say you don't take a guard in the first round."

11. SAN DIEGO (7-9): OT Lane Johnson, Oklahoma

Previous: Same.

If Johnson falls to this point, it's a perfect match of skill set and a team's desperate need. San Diego's offensive tackle play can only improve from last year's often-rancid performance, and although Johnson isn't as refined as Fisher or Joeckel, he is the most athletic of the three and can be coached up over time. But if the Chargers sign Eric Winston, the need is not as obvious; although Winston is flexible enough to move inside, the Chargers could target a guard like Jonathan Cooper if their pursuit of the ex-Chief is successful.

12. MIAMI (7-9): CB Xavier Rhodes, Florida State

Previous: DE/OLB Bjoern Werner.

There are plenty of pass rushers on the board, but Rhodes isn't a reach (the draft gets so bunched up from this point that few plausible targets are reaches now) and the Dolphins are cornerback-needy after losing Sean Smith in free agency.

13. TAMPA BAY (7-9): DE/OLB Bjoern Werner, Florida State

Previous: CB Desmond Trufant.

The Bucs' secondary is a problem, but if Werner drops this far, he'll go no further. The loss of Michael Bennett in free agency creates a hole that the players on hand might not be able to fill, and with six games a year against Matt Ryan, Drew Brees and Cam Newton for the foreseeable future, the Bucs' top defensive priority has to be pass rush.

14. CAROLINA (7-9): DT Sheldon Richardson, Missouri

Previous: WR Cordarrelle Patterson, Tennessee.

The Panthers' needs are many, and their cap room scarce, evidenced by their relative inactivity in free agency. They could trade up and try to move in position to draft Joeckel, Fisher or Johnson, but if they stand pat, they should be able to wait and target a position of need and get value for the pick. Richardson's availability at the 14th slot fits the bill.

15. NEW ORLEANS (7-9): DE/OLB Barkevious Mingo, LSU

Previous: DT Star Lotulelei, Utah

With the transition to a 3-4 defense, the Saints need pressure from the edge, and Mingo can eventually provide that. Mingo needs to be coached up, but his athleticism, speed (4.58 in the 40 at the Combine) and quick first step will be an immediate asset for new coordinator Rob Ryan.

16. ST. LOUIS (7-8-1): G Jonathan Cooper, North Carolina

Previous: Same.

The Rams' eggs are firmly in Sam Bradford's basket, and their revival is predicated upon keeping him upright and giving him the best chance to succeed -- which means protection and targets. The acquisition of Jake Long was the first step of that equation, and Cooper helps complete the upgrade. Targets will come later.

17. PITTSBURGH (8-8): DE/OLB Jarvis Jones, Georgia

Previous: Same.

Some teams will be scared off by Jones' spinal stenosis diagnosis, but Pittsburgh won't be. He's a natural fit for its scheme -- and with the departure of James Harrison, a pressing need.

18. DALLAS (8-8): S Kenny Vaccaro, Texas

Previous: Same.

New defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin has plenty of needs on the shaky defense he inherits. But Vaccaro is the best candidate to help the Cowboys immediately, which is a priority, since the Cowboys, now and seemingly forever, will be in win-now mode.

19. N.Y. GIANTS (9-7): OT D.J. Fluker, Alabama

Previous: Same.

Fluker isn't in the elite class with Joeckel, Fisher and Johnson, and projects more as a right tackle than one who can play on the left. To pick a right tackle much earlier than this is a reach; but this is the sweet spot for Fluker. But if Jones, Werner or Mingo drop, expect the Giants to pounce in a bid to replace Osi Umenyiora.

20. CHICAGO (10-6): WR Tavon Austin, West Virginia

Previous: Same.

There are all sorts of possibilities for the Bears, but their quickest, clearest path back to the playoffs is by giving Jay Cutler another target to partner with Brandon Marshall -- and one who has a completely different body frame and skill set.

21. CINCINNATI (10-6): LB Alec Ogletree, Georgia

Previous: Same.

The Bengals have never been shy about gambling on talented prospects with character concerns. They re-signed Rey Mauluga, but he is expected to move to strongside linebacker. Put Vontaze Burflic in the middle, and let Ogletree operate in space -- and plenty of it, given the team's strength up front.

22. ST. LOUIS (FROM WASHINGTON): WR Keenan Allen, California

Previous: Same.

Assuming Allen's upcoming workout on April 9 reveals no issues with his surgically repaired knee, he's the logical choice with Patterson and Austin off the board. The Rams have targeted mid-round receivers in recent years, but haven't gotten the return they'd hoped to find.

23. MINNESOTA (10-6): DT Sylvester Williams, North Carolina

Previous: WR DeAndre Hopkins.

With two picks in three selections, the Vikings will take the one who is most likely to be poached by the team selecting in between -- which is why they'll wait to take a wide receiver until the 25th pick. Minnesota's interior core up front needs an infusion of youth, and Williams' work ethic and consistency give him the edge over Ohio State's Johnathan Hankins.

24. INDIANAPOLIS (11-5): DE/LB Tank Carradine, Florida State

Previous: CB Xavier Rhodes.

Indianapolis lacks premium, prime-form pass rushers. Dwight Freeney is gone; Robert Mathis is still effective, but aging (he's 32) and free-agent pickup Eric Walden has just nine sacks in the last three seasons. Carradine's stock is rising, and even though he's a one-year wonder with injury concerns, that's the type of gamble you have to make to find a pass rusher outside of the first 15 picks.

25. MINNESOTA (FROM SEATTLE): WR DeAndre Hopkins, Clemson

Previous: DE/OLB Damontre Moore (when Seattle had the pick).

Just because the Vikings signed Greg Jennings doesn't mean they don't need a wide receiver, and with Allen, Austin and Patterson gone, Hopkins is the next best option. He has holes in his game -- particularly as a blocker and in being physical -- but Jennings should help guide him.

26. GREEN BAY (11-5): DE Datone Jones, UCLA

Previous: RB Eddie Lacy.

Jones isn't the most obvious fit as a 3-4 defensive end, but is large enough (283 pounds) and physical enough to handle the workload. No defensive lineman on the Packers had more than four sacks last year, so Jones fits the need for more punch up front.

27. HOUSTON (12-4): TE Tyler Eifert, Notre Dame

Previous: LB Kevin Minter.

Houston has some significant needs for a team coming off two consecutive division titles, but needs to replenish its targets. Owen Daniels is 30 and just had 62 receptions, so he's still in the mix, but the Texans need another target to take the pressure off Daniels and Andre Johnson, who remains a premium target but turns 32 this summer. Eifert is easily the best receiving tight end in the draft class, although the Texans might elect to target linebacker or wide receiver here and wait on a tight end in the second or third round -- perhaps the athletic Vance McDonald of Rice.

28. DENVER (13-3): DE/OLB Damontre Moore, Texas A&M

Previous: DT Sylvester Williams.

Moore's stock has slid in recent weeks, and whoever drafts him will have to trust the tape on the 6-foot-5, 250-pounder, which shows an array of pass-rush moves. gradually increasing production from his freshman through his junior year and some big games against the most demanding opposition; four of his 12 sacks last year came against Florida and Alabama. With Elvis Dumervil gone to Baltimore and Robert Ayers' contract expiring after 2013, this is a need whether the Broncos sign a veteran free agent or not.

29. NEW ENGLAND (12-4): DE Margus Hunt, SMU

Previous: Same.

Defensive tackle is a possibility, and Purdue's Kawann Short and Ohio State's Johnathan Hankins could also be in the mix. But Hunt's upside is massive, and there is the potential for him to become a poor man's J.J. Watt, or maybe a modern-day Ted Hendricks. Bill Belichick will gamble on athleticism, even if it is unpolished.

30. ATLANTA (13-3): CB Desmond Trufant, Washington

Previous: DE Datone Jones.

The signing of Osi Umenyiora relieves the need at defensive end for the short term, and assuming that Brent Grimes doesn't return, the Falcons need reinforcements at cornerback. If Trufant is still on the board at No. 30, Atlanta will be ecstatic.

31. SAN FRANCISCO (11-4-1): S Jonathan Cyprien, Florida International
Previous: Same.

The 49ers might take a hit in free agency in the defensive backfield, and would count on Cyprien, whose stock has been rising since the Senior Bowl, to become an immediate starter. San Francisco will reportedly visit with Cyprien this week.


32. BALTIMORE (10-6): LB Manti Te'o, Notre Dame
Previous: OT Terron Armstead.

How much did Manti Te'o really do to improve his draft stock at his Pro Day workout? His 40-yard dash time came in 11-hundredths of a second faster than at the Scouting Combine, but that falls within the margin of error. Of more value is Te'o's interviews, which have been stellar, according to multiple reports.

DenverBroncos.com's Divisional Draft Predictions

By DenverBroncos.com
March 28, 2013

At the beginning of March, the DenverBroncos.com staff made their first set of predictions for how the AFC West teams would use their first-round picks in April's NFL Draft. Now, as March comes to a close, here are our updated predictions (read: guesses) for the first-round picks of the Chiefs, Chargers, Raiders and Broncos.

Team	Pick No.	Gray Caldwell Team Media Editor	Stuart Zaas Digital Media Coordinator	Chris Hall Team Media Manager	Andrew Mason Independent Analyst
	1	Luke Joeckel T, Texas A&M	Luke Joeckel T, Texas A&M	Eric Fisher T, Central Michigan	Luke Joeckel T, Texas A&M
	3	Sharrif Floyd DT, Florida	Sharrif Floyd DT, Florida	Dee Milliner CB, Alabama	Geno Smith QB, West Virginia
	11	Jonathan Cooper G, North Carolina	Lane Johnson T, Oklahoma	Jonathan Cooper G, North Carolina	Lane Johnson T, Oklahoma

	28	Margus Hunt DE, SMU	Manti Te'o LB, Notre Dame	Bjoern Werner DE, Florida St.	Damontre Moore DE/OLB, Texas A&M
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Broncos Position Breakdown: Secondary

Andrew Mason

DenverBroncos.com

March 28, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Even in the throes of the frenzied week that began free agency, you couldn't overlook the Broncos' addition of Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie and what it said about the importance of building a deep, diverse secondary going forward.

First, there's Rodgers-Cromartie's frame; at 6-foot-2, he becomes the Broncos' tallest cornerback, and provides a physical presence they lacked last year, when no cornerbacks were taller than 6 feet. But the most important aspect of the Rodgers-Cromartie signing was how it reflects the modern NFL, where your third cornerback is a first-teamer. The 2012 playing-time distribution reflects this; the Broncos averaged 2.75 cornerbacks on the field for each play.

The notion of starting two cornerbacks and needing only four for a season is antiquated. Had the Broncos not received a breakout campaign from Chris Harris and a solid season from Tony Carter, their coverage efforts might have been sunk after Tracy Porter's seizure issues and slide down the depth chart. Even Omar Bolden, the No. 5 cornerback one year removed from a torn ACL, was forced into extensive action as a third cornerback in Week 16 after Porter's brief return to the lineup was scuttled by a concussion, while Carter was inactive to make room for Porter.

The fifth cornerback must be ready to play -- extensively so -- if injuries strike, and all of the top four will be asked to contribute. Harris, Carter, Porter and Champ Bailey each played at least 300 snaps in 2012; this year, Bailey, Harris and Rodgers-Cromartie should lead the way in playing time. Whether Harris or Rodgers-Cromartie ends up as the "starter" is relatively irrelevant; both are likely to play at least 70 percent of the snaps, assuming they stay healthy.

Rodgers-Cromartie got only a one-year contract -- the same length as the one given in 2012 to Porter, another veteran hitting free agency for the first time. The deal safeguards the Broncos in the event Rodgers-Cromartie doesn't work out, but if he plays up to his potential after an up-and-down four seasons in Arizona and Philadelphia, he might be a part of the long-term solution.

So could Harris, if he continues his trend of steady play with few mistakes. According to Pro Football Focus, quarterbacks amassed a piddling 68.2 rating when

throwing in his direction last year -- comparable with the 67.3 rating on passes thrown at Bailey. He also scored as many touchdowns (two) as he allowed. Harris, like Rodgers-Cromartie, has a contract that expires after this year.

But with Bailey's experience, the potential for a move to safety in 2014 -- also the final year of Bailey's current contract -- and the expiring contracts of Harris and Rodgers-Cromartie, it would surprise no one if the Broncos pick a cornerback early in the draft -- even though they're counting on improvement from Carter and Bolden.

Safety is a different matter, and if the Broncos don't add one in the draft, the competition will resemble the start of 2012 training camp -- which was before the Broncos added Jim Leonhard to bolster the depth.

When camp began, Rahim Moore, Quinton Carter and Mike Adams split the first-team snaps, just as they had through offseason work. It looked as though the three-way battle for two starting spots would persist, but then Carter hurt his hamstring, which compounded with the knee discomfort he'd felt in the offseason to sideline him. By the time he'd returned, Adams and Moore were entrenched, and Carter's knee never improved, necessitating microfracture surgery that cost him most of his second year but should have him back for OTAs.

Moore's last-minute-of-regulation misplay on Joe Flacco's 70-yard touchdown pass to Jacoby Jones in the divisional playoff loss was disheartening to himself, the Broncos and their fans, but doesn't overshadow the massive improvement he showed last year. He buried all notions of being a bust, reversing course from a rookie season in which he was tentative at some junctures, over-aggressive at others and was benched for Carter at midseason.

If Carter has recovered, he could push for playing time, but it would appear he's more likely to scrap with the veteran Adams for a starting slot.

The Broncos could elect to use a draft pick bolster their depth, but with David Bruton signed to a three-year deal to back up and lead the special teams and Duke Ihenacho in a similar role as the fifth safety, the depth chart appears solid. Bruton's previous starting experience, straight-ahead speed and comfort with his role makes him an ideal relief option.

Broncos Draft History: Defensive Backs

Gray Caldwell

DenverBroncos.com

March 28, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- As we begin to wrap up the preview of the cornerbacks and safeties available in the 2013 NFL Draft, let's take a look back at the defensive backs the Broncos have drafted.

Below are some of the notable players in the defensive secondary drafted by the Broncos throughout the team's history.

Player: Quinton Carter

Year Drafted: 2011

Round: 4 - 108 Overall

College: Oklahoma

Broncos Career: Carter started the final 10 games for the Broncos in 2011, including the team's two postseason contests. He finished the year with 49 tackles and one sack, and added two interceptions in the postseason. He became just the ninth rookie in the Super Bowl era to post an interception in consecutive postseason games. Carter played in three games in 2012 before being placed on injured reserve.

Player: Rahim Moore

Year Drafted: 2011

Round: 2 - 45 Overall

College: UCLA

Broncos Career: Moore has made 102 tackles with two interceptions and nine pass breakups in his 31 career regular-season games played, with 22 starts. He played the most snaps of any Bronco on defense in 2012 while posting the third-most tackles on the club.

Player: Darrent Williams

Year Drafted: 2005

Round: 2 - 56 Overall

College: Oklahoma St.

Broncos Career: Williams was the first of three cornerbacks drafted by the Broncos in 2005. His impact was felt immediately on defense and in the return game, nabbing six interceptions - returning two for touchdowns - and leading the team in punt returns. Williams died in the early morning hours of New Year's Day 2007 after being shot near downtown Denver just hours after he and the Broncos completed their 2006 season.

Player: Steve Atwater

Year Drafted: 1989

Round: 1 - 20 Overall

College: Arkansas

Broncos Career: Atwater was a starter from the day he arrived in Denver and quickly gained the reputation as one of the toughest safeties in all of football. He finished his illustrious career with 24 interceptions and was named to eight Pro Bowls. Atwater was inducted as the 20th member of the Broncos' Ring of Fame in 2005.

Player: Dennis Smith

Year Drafted: 1981

Round: 1 - 15 Overall

College: Southern California

Broncos Career: Smith manned the Denver secondary for 14 years and was considered one of the most ferocious hitters in the NFL. A six-time Pro Bowler, Smith finished his career ranked third all time in games played (184) by a Bronco and fifth in games started (170). He was inducted into the Ring of Fame in 2001.

Player: Louis Wright

Year Drafted: 1975

Round: 1 - 17 Overall

College: San Jose St.

Broncos Career: For 12 electrifying years, Wright was a stalwart in the Broncos' secondary. He played 166 games in orange and blue, starting 163, and was named to five Pro Bowls. He concluded his career with 26 interceptions and was named to the Ring of Fame in 1993.

Player: Billy Thompson
Year Drafted: 1969
Round: 3 - 61 Overall
College: Maryland-Eastern Shore

Broncos Career: Thompson started the Broncos' legacy in the defensive backfield, playing 13 seasons in Denver. A team captain for many years, Thompson finished his career with more starts (178) and games played (179) than any player in team history - and currently ranks third and 10th, respectively, in those categories. Thompson was inducted to the Ring of Fame in 1987 and currently serves as the Broncos' Director of Community Outreach.

Player: Paul Krause
Year Drafted: 1964
Round: 12
College: Iowa

Broncos Career: While the Hall of Famer never played for the Broncos, he was drafted by the team in the 12th round of the 1964 AFL draft. Unfortunately for the Broncos, Krause was also drafted by the Washington Redskins in the NFL Draft where he started his career.

For more on the team's defensive back draft picks, read Jim Saccomano's blog.

Other defensive backs drafted:

Year	Rd.	No.	Name	College
2012	4	101	Omar Bolden	Arizona State
2011	2	45	Rahim Moore	UCLA
2011	4	108	Quinton Carter	Oklahoma
2010	5	137	Perrish Cox	Oklahoma St.
2010	7	225	Syd'Quan	California

Thompson

2009 2a	37	Alphonso Smith	Wake Forest
2009 2b	48	Darcel McBath	Texas Tech
2009 4a	114	David Bruton	Notre Dame
2008 4b	119	Jack Williams	Kent St.
2008 7a	220	Josh Barrett	Arizona St.
2005 2	56	Darrent Williams	Oklahoma St.
2005 3a	76	Karl Paymah	Washington St.
2005 3b	97	Domonique Foxworth	Maryland
2004 3	85	Jeremy LeSuer	Michigan
2004 5	152	Jeff Shoate	San Diego St.
2002 4	131	Sam Brandon	Nevada-Las Vegas
2002 7a	228	Chris Young	Georgia Tech
2001 1	24	Willie Middlebrooks	Minnesota
2000 1	15	Deltha O'Neal	California
2000 2b	45	Kenoy Kennedy	Arkansas
1987 12	334	Tyrone	North

Braxton Dakota St.

1980 5a 131 Mike Harden Michigan