

# Hochman: Football vs. baseball — it's past time to change pastime

By Benjamin Hochman  
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America, really, is the smuggest smug of nations, for our things are superior to your things, even if your things are kind of cool, because our things are lathered in irrefutable American awesomeness.

It's true, right? Have someone from another country try to tell you that their something is better than our anything — suddenly you have more American pride than Ted Nugent in Constitution swim trunks, backstroking through a pool of fresh bullets like he was Scrooge McDuck.

As such, and this pains me so, I think it's time to officially change our most-cherished thing — our national pastime, the thing of all of our things that makes us us.

Baseball was our national pastime, and it dutifully served this role for generations. I'm an admitted baseball romantic, and to me, this game is our identity — it's a beautiful game with time-honored heroes, played upon a green stage in our country's version of cathedrals. Yeah, yeah, there were rampant cheaters injecting themselves with steroids and god-knows-what-else, but the smell of freshly cut grass, oh my!

But even I have to face reality — football is clearly our national pastime. Like, clearly. Give it the title, throw on the title belt, put it on its business cards: "Football, National Pastime of the United States of America."

How is it not our pastime? I had this debate on "CJ and Les," a local Denver radio program, and it was only hammered home on Wednesday morning, when ESPN aired coverage of Jadeveon Clowney's pro day, with three expert analysts live on the scene.

Football is us. Americans play football and fantasy football and video-game football, while also betting on football while draped in their prized football jersey and waiting, impatiently, for something, anything football-y to happen in their lives, such as televised coverage of a player's pro day, with three expert analysts live on the scene.

Of the 35 most-watched, prime-time programs this past year, 34 of them were NFL games. That's absurd. And how about this — the REGULAR-SEASON, Chiefs-Broncos game had more viewers than GAME SEVEN of the NBA Finals. Let this sink in. This NBA game featured LeBron James, perhaps the most marketed athlete on the planet, playing in a game that would determine a sport's champion, and fewer viewers watched that than a regular-season NFL game. Incidentally, baseball's fall classic, featuring big-market Boston, had just an 11.3 rating, compared to the 16.6 of the Broncos game and 15.5 of the LeBron game.

As I recently wrote, there is nothing more "2014" than NFL football, a made-for-TV gladiatorial version of "America's Got Talent," or one of these reality shows that get ridiculous ratings. There are heroes and villains. There's unabashed, infectious pride for one's city or region (or country or nation). There are parties! There's parity! And have you seen the cheerleaders?

Oh, I love baseball so. But it's about as entertaining on TV as " Step by Step" starring Suzanne Sommers and Patrick Duffy. And in previous generations, simpler times, baseball stars were part of our nation's fabric, celebs really. Joe DiMaggio. Mickey Mantle. Ted Williams. Now, except for Derek Jeter and maybe David Ortiz, which baseball player would be more recognized in public than like the 10th-best NBA player or 10th-best quarterback?

We will always still love baseball. After all, it's one of our country's things, so it's better than any silly sport your country might have, but when it comes to our primary national pastime, it's football (or, possibly, tweeting selfies or clicking "maybe" on a Facebook event invite).

# Montgomery to get first look as starting C

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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As they look at their most recent arrival as well as review the combinations they will try in the offensive line when their offseason work gets underway, it's clear the Denver Broncos see Will Montgomery as a potential starter at center.

The Broncos added Montgomery to their list of free-agent acquisitions Tuesday and his arrival does give them more options once their organized team activities (OTAs) begin as they try to replace Zane Beadles, who signed with the Jacksonville Jaguars in free agency.

But Montgomery, who has played both guard spots and center in his career, is now expected to get the initial look at center. If the Broncos like what they see, and Montgomery put plenty on video for them to look at having started every game over the last three seasons for the Washington Redskins, they will simply have to decide what to do at guard.

The way head coach John Fox has outlined the plan is the Broncos will play "the best five" in the offensive line. If Montgomery were the center, the Broncos would be left with, at least with the current roster, the decision to move Manny Ramirez into the left guard spot or move Orlando Franklin there from right tackle and play Chris Clark at right tackle.

Fox has also said the Broncos will "work a million combinations" in the offensive line during offseason workouts and perhaps training camp before making the decisions. But quarterback Peyton Manning is known to want as much continuity as possible as early on in the offseason workouts. Last season the Broncos moved Ramirez to center early in the offseason workouts and left him there.

Ramirez went on to start every game this past season at center. But the Broncos' pro personnel department sees Montgomery as a potential upgrade at center.

Montgomery had been released by the Redskins just after free agency opened last month, a move the team made to save \$1.93 million against the salary cap. The Redskins were also looking to get more physical on the inside, having played with

zone-run scheme under former coach Mike Shanahan, which put a premium on movement skills rather than man-on-man power.

# Inside a Day of Rehab with Chris Harris Jr.

Stuart Zaas  
DenverBroncos.com  
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**ENGLEWOOD, Colo.** – While much of the NFL enjoys some R&R during the early portion of the offseason, those two letters stand for something different in the eyes of Chris Harris Jr.

For the fourth-year cornerback, his offseason R&R isn't rest and relaxation — it's rise and rehab.

Harris' mornings begin at 7:30 a.m. at the Broncos' Dove Valley headquarters. Five days a week, Harris spends five hours a day at the team's facility rehabbing from the ACL injury he suffered during the Broncos' Divisional-Round win vs. San Diego.

"Oh, I haven't missed a day," Harris said. "I just wanted to make sure I come back next year better physically, mentally and everything. I knew that in order to come back, I had to be in here every day and put the work in and follow their instructions."

Upon arrival, the first step in Harris' daily rehab regimen is pool work. Then he hits the bike for a bit before working on strengthening his knee. Last on the agenda is core work.

"I've done so much core work now, it's ridiculous," Harris laughed. "Just really maintaining all the other muscles and strengthening this left leg. So whenever they say it's time for me to run, I'll be ready to go."

Harris is hoping to come back and build upon a 2013 campaign that saw him tie for the club lead with three interceptions. His 65 tackles a year ago were second-most among Broncos' defensive backs

His injury came away from the ball during Denver's 24-17 win vs. San Diego in the AFC Divisional Round. Since then, Harris' focus has been on doing everything he can to get back on the field in 2014.

"It's coming along great," he said of the rehab. "Just taking it day-by-day and following the instructions of the trainers. I'm feeling fine, I'm feeling great. I think I should be ready by the season."

While many players chose to train or rehab away from Denver, Harris has done of all his work at the team's facility.

"The reason why I did train here is because I know that 'Greek' (Head Athletic Trainer Steve Antonopulos) and them have our best interest in mind," he explained. "A lot of people do train away and do rehab other places, but I just feel like our trainers are the best out there."

# Broncos Draft Prospects: Tight End

Andrew Mason

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**IDEAL DRAFT RANGE:** Third day, specifically rounds 6 to 7.

The value isn't there at the position in the early rounds, unless you have an unexpected descent from a top-flight prospect like North Carolina's Eric Ebron or Washington's Austin Seferian-Jenkins.

But the Broncos don't need a ready-made tight end, anyway, and the position is of a relatively low priority given the talent on hand. Another developmental tight end in the later rounds would not be a surprise, but the Broncos may also opt to see how Gerell Robinson develops in his conversion from wide receiver, and that may be the Broncos' developmental focus, instead of a rookie out of the draft.

**RECENT BRONCOS HISTORY:** Give credit to the Broncos for patience with the last two tight ends they selected -- Julius Thomas and Virgil Green. Both were selected in the 2011 draft, and their development came at a deliberate pace, during which the Broncos got by with veterans including Daniel Fells and Dante Rosario (both in 2011) and Joel Dreessen and Jacob Tamme (2012-onward).

Thomas, as a fourth-rounder, could become one of the biggest draft steals in Broncos history. Certainly he has played well above his status, something that could not be said for 2009 second-rounder Richard Quinn and 2006 second-rounder Tony Scheffler, the last tight ends drafted by the Broncos before Thomas and Green. Scheffler was solid and productive, but never broke out, and Quinn's blocking-first skill set was ill-suited to his draft status; you can usually find effective blockers in the later rounds.

Sixth-rounders Jeb Putzier (2002) and Desmond Clark (1999) were good, productive players who outplayed their draft status. The only other tight end drafted by the Broncos in the last 20 drafts was Kansas State's Justin Swift in the seventh round of the 1999 draft, making just seven draftees in two decades.

**BRONCOS OUTLOOK:** Four expiring contracts in the next 12 months loom for the tight ends that return from last year's 53-man roster, so there could be some shuffling as the Broncos plan for long-term depth at the position. But assuming they can keep Thomas and Green around, the long-term task would be only to develop depth -- and even that might not be necessary if converted wide receiver Robinson blossoms this summer in his first full-contact work at the position.

A relatively stable roster at most spots means that the Broncos have few pressing needs. If the "best player available" in a mid-to-late-round slot is a tight end, they could add one for depth.

But in an ideal scenario, Thomas is both the present and the future; having displayed elite receiving talent, he gives the Broncos the kind of threat that is at the level of generally acknowledged top-tier tight ends like New Orleans' Jimmy Graham, Dallas' Jason Witten, San Diego's Antonio Gates and New England's Rob Gronkowski. These types of weapons are difficult to find, and with Thomas, the Broncos are blessed to possess one for the first time since Shannon Sharpe's heyday.