

Virgil Green breaks out as receiver for Broncos

By Troy Renck
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A battery of players defected as the Broncos sat on the curb and watched the parade go by in March. Free agency demands priorities and restraint, and Denver made difficult choices.

Throughout the process, tight end Virgil Green remained a top target. They weren't going to let him walk away given how well he profiled in coach Gary Kubiak's offense.

In the preseason opener at Seattle, Green delivered an intriguing performance laced with irony. For starters, Green has good hands. Just like everyone knew who watched him team at Nevada with Colin Kaepernick.

Green caught three passes on the Broncos' second drive, exploiting the underbelly in Seattle's zone coverage. That's three more passes than he caught last preseason.

"I went to the sideline, and I was like, 'This really is a tight-end friendly offense, '^" said Green, who signed a three-year, \$8.4-million deal to remain in Denver. "It just came real easy. But I can do a little better in my route running. I was getting a little excited out there."

Just as surprising was Green's trouble blocking. He earned "The Hulk," nickname because of his strength and power at the point of attack. Friday, he struggled, allowing linebacker Cliff Avril a free hit on quarterback Brock Osweiler, while drawing a flag for a false start.

For Green, it tempered his breakout as a receiver.

"It was not good. Not acceptable. My protection wasn't good at all. My run block was decent, but it can be better. I have high expectations for my blocking," Green said. "And it wasn't good at all."

Green's history suggests he will figure it out. He was a strong run blocker last season. A transition exists in pass protection. Green wasn't a regular on throwing downs last season — or any season — but Kubiak employs his tight ends in similar sets to create disguises to open up play action. He must do both well. It is a work in progress as he grows more comfortable in the communication differences in protection calls.

Green began Monday by working on his footwork and staying lower in his stance.

With Owen Daniels resting, Green showed potential Kubiak envisioned when he took the job. Green proved steady on short passes. And after Brock Osweiler found receiver Cody Latimer on multiple crossing routes, it freed Green to run free up the middle of the field as the safety bit on a 17-yard touchdown pass to Green. For Osweiler, practice sessions over the spring and summer at Kent Denver High School came to life.

"We have developed a real cohesiveness," Osweiler said.

Green credited Osweiler's read, calling it a "great decision."

As a free agent, Green explored the market, but never wanted to leave Denver. He appears to have made a solid choice. He is no longer typecast, and promises to grow into his larger role.

"I will get those blocking issues cleaned up," Green said. "I would always love to score touchdowns. What guy wouldn't? But I was fine with my old job because we won a lot of games, and that's all that is important. It's different for me now. I am understanding coverages better. I am having fun. When you stress out, you can't make plays. When I am having fun, everything just comes naturally."

Highs and lows of training camp: Von Miller dominating in Broncos training camp

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Highlight: Nothing Von Miller does in practice seems to surprise anyone anymore. The Broncos' outside linebacker has dominated just about every offensive lineman throughout camp, and on Monday, he showed the entire first unit how bad it could get.

With J.J. Watt, Vince Wilfork and the Texans awaiting them this weekend, perhaps that's a good thing.

Miller, working in one-on-one drills against the offensive line, burned through three players with ease. His speed and flexibility, combined with his hand placement and instincts on each move were unstoppable.

Miller set the tone for the defense Friday, with a strip-sack of Russell Wilson 39 seconds into the preseason game. The defense followed with six more sacks, by six players, and held Seattle to 181 net yards.

"We did a lot of great stuff," Miller said. "It just carried over from a lot of the stuff we did in practice. We had two good weeks of practice before we played them, and we're going to try to do the same coming into the second preseason game."

Lowlight: Zac Dysert struggled with his timing in Friday's victory — he was called for delay of game penalty early in the third quarter — and faced issues with it Monday.

During team drills, Dysert held onto the ball before throwing it away to the right sideline. Coach Gary Kubiak was not pleased with the decision, implying he waited too long and missed open men down the field.

Dysert completed two of five attempts Friday for 14 yards and a 47.9 quarterback rating. Trevor Siemian, one of the Broncos' seventh-round draft picks, who is listed as the No. 4 quarterback on the depth chart, impressed with his play in the fourth quarter Friday, especially with his 41-yard pass to Bennie Fowler. Siemian finished 5-of-6 for 90 yards and a 118.8 rating.

Position battle: Fowler issued a reminder Friday: The competition for the Broncos' backup receiver slots is open. Fowler, who spent last season on the Broncos' practice squad, led all receivers in Friday's victory at Seattle with 67 yards on three receptions (22.3 average), including the diving 41-yard catch from Siemian in the fourth quarter that is drawing rave reviews. Fowler is one of many on the Broncos' training camp roster battling for the receiver spots behind Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders and Cody Latimer.

He made a strong case Friday for being among the top contenders for the remaining two or three spots, but he's competing with Andre Caldwell, an eighth-year veteran familiar with the team and Peyton

Manning. Also in the mix are Nathan Palmer, Jordan Norwood, Isaiah Burse, Jordan Taylor, Solomon Patton and Corbin Louks.

QB Watch: Manning resumed drillwork with the first offensive unit, and Brock Osweiler manned the second unit. Manning found Demaryius Thomas on a handful of cross-routes and appeared comfortable playing under center.

"When he's fresh, I think, for me — this is my first time around with him — but I notice it and we're going to stay to our plan," Kubiak said. "He's running the no-huddle stuff excellent. I really like the way our team practiced today."

Safety Darian Stewart picked off one of Manning's passes in team drills and deflected another that was caught by T.J. Ward.

Osweiler picked up where he left off Friday with his quick release and decision-making, but overthrew a few deep passes. He delighted fans, though, with a deep pass to Fowler in the far left corner of the end zone during team drills.

Camp facts: The Broncos return to Dove Valley Tuesday for workout (9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.) that will be open to fans for free. Parking and seating near the field house is on a first-come, first-serve basis, and gates open at approximately 8:30 a.m.

Spencer Lanning kicking off in 1st day of Broncos camp

By Nicki Jhabvala

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In a surprise move Friday, the Broncos claimed punter Spencer Lanning off waivers hours before they were set to kickoff in Seattle. The team has made it clear it's looking to keep only two kickers on the final roster, which would require one of them to double-up on duties — either kick off and punt, or kick field goals and kick off.

But veteran punter Britton Colquitt recently agreed to a reduced salary for 2015, and the Broncos subsequently waived Karl Schmitz, whom they signed in March. All signs pointed toward Colquitt remaining their punter for the season. Until Friday.

Lanning, the Browns' full-time punter the past two seasons, has experience kicking off, and in college at South Carolina, he performed all three kicking duties.

In his first workout with the Broncos on Monday, Lanning rotated with Brandon McManus and Connor Barth in kicking off, and despite one botched kick, consistently hit them high and long.

"I think it's obviously something that would help my cause," he said of being about to kick off. "It was always one of those things I had in my back pocket. I did all three in college. Coming out I was probably a better kicker than I was a punter. At pro day, I had a better day punting, so all of a sudden you're a punter. It's just the crazy way of the NFL."

New gameplan. Emmanuel Sanders was with the team in Seattle and worked out beforehand, but didn't play. He's been dealing with a nagging hamstring injury that sidelined him for much of last week in camp and again on Monday.

Coach Gary Kubiak said the team has altered its plan for Sanders and will rest him a couple more days in camp before putting him back on the field.

Harris playing it smart. Chris Harris did not travel with the team last weekend because of a hamstring injury, but was back out in shells and a helmet Monday. He ran through individual drills but was held out of team drills as he slowly eases his way back.

Harris said he could have played Friday, but neither he nor the team wanted to risk it.

"It's just being smart," he said. "I don't want to play the whole year with a nagging injury or a setback, so it's just being smart about it and following what Greek's (trainer Steve Antonopoulos) instructions are and just going with that."

Footnotes. Ronnie Hillman has garnered attention for his runs — and his mouthguards. The Broncos' running back has worn mouthguards that have designs of animal fangs. ... Harris and the Broncos' secondary failed to make NFL's Top 100 rankings, a list voted on by fellow players. But Harris received a top rating in Madden 16. "Finally to get that recognition is definitely good," he said. "I'm actually trying to be No. 1 on there this season."

Spencer Lanning discusses fallout from Antonio Brown kick in 2014

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Yes, he knows the first thing you probably thought of when you heard the Broncos claimed him off waivers was that infamous kick-to-face he took from Antonio Brown last September.

Spencer Lanning, the former Cleveland Browns punter, was kicked by the Steelers receiver as he returned a punt in the second quarter of a wild game in Pittsburgh on Sept. 7. Brown attempted (but failed) to hurdle Lanning as he ran the ball back, and was called for unnecessary roughness on the play.

It's a moment that has stuck with Lanning, so, inevitably, he was asked about it in his first day with the Broncos.

"I knew exactly what he was trying to do, and it makes sense," Lanning said Monday. "He was trying to save himself once he realized I wasn't going under. He jumped to hurdle me and I didn't cut under, so he just sort of got stuck in no-man's land. It's football, right? I get it."

Everyone else didn't though. Immediately after the game, Lanning's phone blew up with text messages from friends, strangers, acquaintances he hadn't heard from in years.

"Everybody was like, 'Were you mad?' No, I'm pissed we gave up a big return," he said. "I was ready to bite on the middle, because I thought he was going outside. So I'm leaning and all of sudden. I told him, 'If you had gone outside, you would have scored a touchdown.'"

"I had my phone off during the game, and then afterward I turned it on to shower and then come back. I had a bunch of media right next to my locker and I totally forgot it happened, because it happened the first half and a lot of stuff happened — we almost came back and won. I was like, 'Man, I must have had a pretty good day of punting,' and the very first question was, 'Talk to me about getting kicked in the face.' I was like, 'Ah, yes. That is why all these vultures are here. That is what's going on.' I looked at my phone and I had 180-something texts. I had to delete Twitter because every time I turned my phone on, Twitter would just drain it because of alerts. It was nuts. And like half the numbers I had never even seen before. 'Spencer, are you all right?!' 'What the hell happened?' Uh, yeah, you tell me."

Broncos back to work to prep for Houston Texans

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Next up: Houston.

The Broncos returned to Dove Valley for training camp Monday after their preseason-opening victory at Seattle to begin prepping for their next opponent, the Texans.

Joining them was one new face, punter Spencer Lanning, whom they claimed off waivers Friday. Chris Harris, who did not play Friday because of a hamstring injury, also rejoined the team in individual drills but did not participate in team drills. And Omar Bolden, the team's No. 1 punt and kick returner who did not play Friday because of a hamstring injury, returned — a promising sign after the Broncos' struggles on special teams in Seattle.

"I'm feeling better," he said. "It was just limited reps, but it's getting better."

The absence of Bolden on Friday added to the Broncos' lackluster showing on special teams. The team yielded 236 yards and one touchdown — a 103-yard return by rookie Tyler Lockett — on kickoffs, while gaining only 84 yards. They also gave up 18 yards on three punt returns and responded with zero yards on two attempts.

As expected, Joe DeCamillis emphasized special-teams work in Monday's practice, coordinating three special-teams periods with the entire team — save for the quarterbacks — participating in the drills.

Brandon McManus, Connor Barth and Lanning rotated in kicking off, with McManus consistently performing the best. Lanning botched his first kick, but booted a trio of deep and high kicks thereafter.

Coach Gary Kubiak kept the same offensive line units, with Ty Sambrailo, Max Garcia, Matt Paradis, Louis Vasquez and Ryan Harris with the first team. Kubiak again said he was pleased with the play of the first group in Seattle, but noted that the second unit — Chris Clark, Ben Garland, Gino Gradkowski, Shelley Smith and Michael Schofield — could have been better.

"The first thing that impressed me with our first group was Matt Paradis running the group," Kubiak said. "He's got to be a quarterback, and I know he's been here a year, but let's remember he's really a rookie here, too."

"I was a little disappointed in the second group. They played hard, but there are some guys there that have played some football and our communication was not real good with that group. We have to bounce back and be better."

The Broncos head to Houston this weekend to take on J.J. Watt and the Texans on Saturday in their second preseason game.

WATCH: Will Von Miller be the NFL Defensive Player of the Year?

Footnotes: Receiver Emmanuel Sanders (hamstring) worked out before the game in Seattle, but Kubiak said there continues to be soreness. The team will take a different approach with him this week and rest him a couple more days before having him return to the field. ... Nose tackle Marvin Austin (groin) and outside linebacker Larentee McCray (groin) observed from the sideline. And offensive tackle Charles Sweeton was carted off early with a dislocated finger. ... Many members of the Nuggets front office and coaching staff watched Monday's workout from the sideline, including general manager Tim Connelly and coach Michael Malone. ... Air Force football coaches were also in attendance. ... Larry Eustachy, Colorado State's basketball coach, was also watching from the sideline.

Life's too short to be a jerk to gay people

By Benjamin Hochman

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I want to leave you with something.

As you may have heard, this is my final week at The Denver Post. I'm moving to my hometown of St. Louis to be the columnist for the Post-Dispatch. I adore Denver, and I wasn't looking to leave, but home came calling.

After this column here, I'll write one more — a proper goodbye and thanks to Denver.

So, in this penultimate column (thanks, thesaurus), I wanted to leave you with some lasting words.

Life is short.

We're all going to die.

Don't be a jerk to gay people.

Force yourself to be more accepting and tolerant. Imagine a man on his deathbed, realizing he had lived his entire life as a lie, because he was afraid of how people would respond.

Here's the undeniable reality about our sports world: There are clearly hundreds if not thousands of closeted LGBTQ athletes in our country, and they're afraid to come out. It could be your favorite Broncos player. Or a female collegiate athlete. Or your kid's high school teammate. And a big reason they don't come out is the fear of not being accepted.

I've written about this topic many times over the years, to varying responses, but I feel that if I or others don't keep talking about it, little will change. I understand you might not see homosexuality as natural, or it might make you uncomfortable. Your feelings could be religious-based. I just want to implore you to be more accepting. Challenge yourself by asking hard questions. What am I doing that is emotionally hurting others? How can I alter my ways, my behaviors? Am I being a bully and not realizing it?

Broncos rookie Shane Ray played on the Missouri Tigers team that accepted Michael Sam, who was out of the closet to his teammates, but not to the public. Think about this: A group of college dudes were able to look past their stereotypes and beliefs to accept Sam. We'll look back years from now at this as one of the cooler things of this sports generation.

I asked Ray about lessons he learned from what happened, lessons he could share with Colorado-based athletes about having an LGBTQ teammate.

"Honestly, the only lesson is, in this day and age, it's something you might have to deal with," Ray said, "so more than anything, you've got to have the mental capacity to understand that and worry about your own business. And that's what it was. Whatever Mike did, that's what Mike did. He came in, got his

job done, he worked, he left. You've got to accept it, whether you like it or not, because that's what it is.
...

"He's on your team, he's not going to go anywhere, so you have to deal with it."

OK, how about at a high school level?

One of my favorite people in Denver is Micah Porter, who made headlines as an openly gay high school coach.

"The most important step is starting the conversation," Porter said. "Coaches, ADs and athletes need to be willing to have open, honest and caring conversations about one's sexuality. For the young athlete in the closet, this could make all the difference in providing the environment necessary for all athletes to reach their utmost potential."

Honestly, coaches, it'll take less than a minute. Just tell let your team that you have the back of any student who comes out as gay or bisexual — and that the team should, too, because that's what a team is, after all.

Whatever your thoughts are about gay social issues, the reality is they will stay front and center. More athletes are going to have the bravery to come out. It's happening in real time. Life is short. We're all just humans. Just be nicer. Please.

Encourage courage.

After quality preseason outing, Broncos' Bennie Fowler keeps his momentum

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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As Demaryius Thomas, Cody Latimer and some of the Denver Broncos' other receivers watched Bennie Fowler reel in a long catch-and-run for a touchdown during Monday's practice, Latimer shouted "I see you Bennie" as Fowler blazed by just after the ball had landed on Fowler's fingertips.

Latimer's not alone, because it seems a lot of people are noticing what Fowler has done as the Broncos have progressed through training camp. He led the team in receiving in Friday night's preseason opener with 67 yards worth of catches, including a 41-yard reception on a throw from rookie Trevor Siemian.

"I think that you guys see it just like me," Gary Kubiak said after Monday's practice. "He's had a good camp. The strength of his camp has probably been the last two weeks. In the game, he played really well. He played well on special teams and you saw him practice today. It's interesting, young players see the light and say, 'I can do this. I can contribute.' It's fun to watch that light go on."

There is room on the Broncos' depth chart for two, or perhaps three, receivers to make cut beyond Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders and Latimer. Fowler, at 212 pounds, has shown he can work on the outside as well as in the slot and has blocked well in the run game.

Monday was also the kind of practice that gets a player in Fowler's position noticed even more. He followed a quality performance in a game with another quality performance in the next practice. So while what he had done against the Seahawks was fresh in the coaches' minds, Fowler went out and got their attention again Monday morning.

With Sanders held out of Monday's work with a sore hamstring, the Broncos also offered a glimpse of where things stand on the depth chart at wide receiver after the top three, as Fowler and Jordan Norwood got plenty of work.

For both Fowler and Norwood to make the cut to 53 they would have to dislodge veteran Andre Caldwell, who has been with the Broncos for the last three seasons. Having just turned 30, Caldwell has maintained his speed throughout his career, has been a reliable option at times, and can serve as a kickoff returner if needed.

For now Fowler said he's just trying to keep himself in the conversation.

"I've been building chemistry with all the quarterbacks, just getting the reps in practice and then moving on to the game," he said. "I just felt comfortable out there. I was just really more comfortable out there."

Broncos ready for their 'Hard Knocks' cameo against Texans

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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The Denver Broncos haven't been one of the teams that was looking to jump to the front of the line to be featured on HBO's "Hard Knocks."

But given the Broncos will face the Houston Texans Saturday night in NRG Stadium, the Broncos will have bit parts in the annual series, which goes behind the scenes, all-access style, with a team during the preseason.

The Texans have the NFL Films crew in tow this summer as they go about their daily business. Some of the Broncos players said while they hadn't watched much, or any, of the series, they thought Denver's locker room would fit into the show's theme.

"That'd be kind of weird here just because you kind of do get a little bit more privacy," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "That might be fun though. Give fans a look at how crazy our locker room is. They might like that."

Linebacker Von Miller was asked after Monday's morning practice if he had seen any of this summer's episodes with the Texans and said, "No, we have curfew at 10:30, so you have to pretty much get everything in in 30 minutes. I'm asleep when 'Hard Knocks' comes on."

But asked who in the Broncos' locker room would be featured if the cameras were following the Broncos, Miller named some of the team's biggest names.

"I mean, besides me, (No.) 18 (QB Peyton Manning) would probably be up there, Demarcus (Ware), (No.) 88 (Demaryius Thomas), we have a lot of stars. Emmanuel (Sanders), he'd love that. It's probably a good thing that we haven't had them yet. We have a lot of guys that love the cameras, especially Emmanuel. He does the TV show during the season and all that stuff."

Broncos will hold Emmanuel Sanders out of practice 'couple more days'

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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The Denver Broncos have decided wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders' hamstring needs a couple more days to heal.

Sanders has been limited over the last two weeks with the injury. He did not play in Friday night's preseason opener in Seattle and did not practice Monday.

The Broncos say they are not concerned about the injury when it comes to impacting Sanders' ability to be full speed at the start of the regular season, but they want to err on the side of caution.

"The biggest thing with Emmanuel, he worked out before the game in Seattle, he worked out good, there continues to be some soreness after a workout," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "So, we're going to take a little different plan with him this week. We're going to give him a couple more days."

Following practice Sanders said he felt "really good, just getting it right."

Also Monday, reserve tackle Charles Sweeton dislocated a finger and did not finish the workout. Cornerback Tony Carter left practice with some hamstring soreness.

Nose tackle Marvin Austin Jr. (groin) and linebacker Lerentee McCray (groin) did not practice. Austin has not practiced since Aug. 3 and rookie Darius Kilgo has been working as the backup nose tackle, behind Sylvester Williams, in Austin's absence.

Gary Kubiak: Current offensive line has earned right to stay together

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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When the Denver Broncos took the practice field Monday morning, it was plainly evident the latest combination in the offensive line had done enough over the past two weeks and in the preseason opener this past Friday night in Seattle to stay together.

Once again, as it has been the last two weeks in front of quarterback Peyton Manning, it was the youthful look of rookies Ty Sambrailo (left tackle), Max Garcia (left guard) and Matt Paradis (center) with their combined zero regular-season starts, to go with Louis Vasquez at right guard and Ryan Harris at right tackle.

After taking some of the weekend to review how things went, the Broncos came away feeling like the group continues to be the best option in what has been a rather extreme makeover up front. The Broncos tried several combinations during their offseason program as well as into the first week of training camp.

“The first thing that impressed with our first group is Matt Paradis running the group,” Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said after Monday’s practice. “He’s got to be the quarterback. ... I like the way he ran the group, thought we played extremely hard, thought we made mistakes and came back and made the next play. I just like our effort. I think if Matt can continue to hold the group together, we can continue to grow. ... I like the way the first group played. They’ll stay together and we’ll keep going.”

The current five has been the most consistent grouping the Broncos have tried through the offseason workouts and into training camp. Kubiak has consistently lauded Paradis, in particular, throughout camp.

It was also evident Kubiak was not as excited about how things went after the starters left the game. Garcia played 58 percent of the team’s offensive snaps against the Seahawks. Sambrailo and Paradis played 56 percent, and Harris played 44 percent.

Vasquez, the most accomplished player in the group having been an All Pro in 2013, played just 16 snaps.

And when all of those starters left the game, Kubiak said there was too big a drop-off for his liking.

“I was a little disappointed in the second group,” Kubiak said. “They played hard, but there are some guys in there who’ve played some football and our communication was not real good with that group.”

Peyton Manning: 'You have to work, earn every step'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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Are you surprised that just a year and a half after winning the MVP, all anyone wants to ask you about is when you're retiring?

Peyton Manning: Maybe that's just a factor of age. I've played a long time. That's how it goes. I really just try to live in the idea of getting to work and doing my part for the team. You want to carry your weight, do your part. That's what I concentrate on: preparing, practicing, doing the things that need to be done. What people do or don't say don't really impact that. Guys in the locker room make some jokes about my age and ask me what it was like before color TV, but that's about it.

As you were trying to decide whether or not to return for this season, did the Broncos' request for you to take a pay cut make it a more stressful decision? Did it impact it?

Manning: Stress is a word you always try to avoid, it's not healthy for you, but I guess my nature would be I really like to know what's going on so I can get to work on it. What do I need to do? Let's get going, otherwise you're behind. Once all that kind of resolved itself, it was kind of, "Let's go." Go and don't look back. One thing I don't do is look back. I've got good practice at that from choosing a college at Tennessee. You can't get there and say, "I wish I would have gone somewhere else." I stayed for my senior year. College was the biggest one for me to that point. Staying was the biggest for me at that point. You get an injury, you have a bad game, if you stayed, and I did, you can't look back. I wanted to be here, this is where I wanted to be. So, don't look back. I was glad to get that part of it resolved, and let's go.

Can you fit an offense that isn't pass-first?

Manning: I've said many times I believe I can play almost any offense and do what is required. Maybe not Tubby Raymond's [Delaware Wing T], but I can make good decisions, make good throws, get us in good plays, and as long as we can score points, move the ball and win games, that's important. My job is to execute the plays that are called, and I'm all-in on what we're doing.

Physically, is it the injuries that are tougher at age 39 or the ability to recover from them?

Manning: I look at it as just taking care of myself, getting myself ready to play. And I think in the offseason I took that real good assessment of where I'm at physically and mentally. ... To me, it's supposed to answer itself. I don't think I've been shorted as far as playing. Even like a few years ago (after neck surgery in 2012), if that had turned out differently, 13 years of unbelievable health and playing, that's special. I was pleased when I got back the feedback and the answers and the adjustments I had to make [this offseason].

Why haven't the Broncos closed the deal on a title run in past four years?

Manning: You have to do everything right, prepare well, practice well, all through the season, then play your best in those playoff games. We haven't done that; I know I feel like there's more I can do in that

way. All you can do is go back, look at it, make the adjustments, make the changes of what didn't go right and get back to work. Nothing replaces the work, nobody is going to feel bad for you because it didn't work out. You have to work, earn every step.

Tuesday camp preview: Sam Bradford under the microscope

By Jeff Legwold and ESPN.com Staff

ESPN.com

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NFL Nation reporters look ahead to Tuesday's practices:

AFC EAST

Buffalo Bills: After a scorcher of a joint practice Monday, the Bills and Browns will get some relief from the heat when they meet again Tuesday evening. The key for the Bills will be staying healthy. They've lost two defensive players to ACL injuries since last week and have more than a half-dozen running backs and wide receivers out with various ailments. -- Mike Rodak

Miami Dolphins: The Dolphins are traveling Tuesday in preparation for their joint practices against the Panthers. Keep an eye on new Miami receiver Kenny Stills as he returns from a calf injury. -- James Walker

New England Patriots: It's a workout-then-travel day for the Patriots, who are scheduled to have an early practice before hitting the road to West Virginia, where they'll meet up with the Saints for joint practices Wednesday and Thursday. This is a big week for Tom Brady after he missed time last week because of settlement hearings in court, and he should get a lot of work. Brady and coach Bill Belichick have said the joint practices can be as good, if not better, than preseason games because of the quantity of quality repetitions. -- Mike Reiss

New York Jets: The Jets, back on the practice field after a day off, have a lot of work to do on offense. New starting quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick has had only three practices with the first-team offense, and the lack of chemistry is evident. The next 12 days, with seven practices and two games, will be critical. -- Rich Cimini

AFC NORTH

Baltimore Ravens: The Ravens wrap up the 20th training camp in team history on Tuesday, and linebacker Terrell Suggs has only gotten stronger throughout it. He was relentless in the pass rush and was disruptive against the run. There were some concerns about Suggs' conditioning when he reported to camp, but he had his best practice on one of the hottest days this month. -- Jamison Hensley

Cincinnati Bengals: Russell Bodine's bad snaps have been a consistent problem during Bengals training camp. Offensive coordinator Hue Jackson was "pissed" Monday after witnessing another botched exchange to quarterback Andy Dalton. In one practice during a joint workout last week with the Giants, Bodine sent two over Dalton's head, causing the quarterback to scream at him. Bodine has plenty of time to fix the problem. For the third time in four days, the Bengals aren't scheduled Tuesday to practice. -- Coley Harvey

Cleveland Browns: The Browns return to Pittsford, New York, for a second day of work against the Buffalo Bills at St. John Fisher College. The first morning's work was not sterling, as the Bills had more energy and emotion during the two hours of work. Cornerback Justin Gilbert especially struggled. Browns coach Mike Pettine said he hoped his team would recognize the higher level of intensity on the second day, with practice set for 6-8 p.m. -- Pat McManamon

Pittsburgh Steelers: After 15 training camp sessions, the Steelers have a day off, then three more days before packing up and leaving Saint Vincent College. The Steelers would like to see a few things from their team in the final days. Defensive backs should be more active in passing lanes. No more drops in punt return drills (Dri Archer had one Monday). And a more explosive pass rush off the edge would be nice. -- Jeremy Fowler

AFC SOUTH

Houston Texans: Though Peyton Manning didn't play in the Broncos' first preseason game, the Texans are looking forward to their defense being challenged by facing Manning this weekend. "It is always a good challenge for us to see where you are at up against the pass, because he is one of the best to ever do it," cornerback Johnathan Joseph said. -- Tania Ganguli

Indianapolis Colts: The Colts return to the practice Tuesday after having Monday off. A point of emphasis in practice will be working on taking care of the football and avoiding penalties. Indy turned the ball over three times and committed eight penalties for 108 yards in Sunday's preseason loss to Philadelphia. "We have to be better there," coach Chuck Pagano said. "Two areas that a couple of years ago we were really good at." -- Mike Wells

Jacksonville Jaguars: The Jaguars got two players back on the field on Monday (DE Chris Clemons and S James Sample). TE Julius Thomas and S Johnathan Cyprien will work in noncontact situations as they deal with hand injuries. Both will miss the rest of the preseason. -- Mike DiRocco

Tennessee Titans: After a very good practice with multiple quality catches, Justin Hunter will look to pick it up and carry it Tuesday. Ken Whisenhunt says the third-year receiver is trending up. That could be big news for QB Marcus Mariota and the Titans. -- Paul Kuharsky

AFC WEST

Denver Broncos: Cody Latimer will get more work with the starters over the next two days. Latimer has worked in the starting offense more of late as Emmanuel Sanders tries to return from a hamstring injury. The Broncos worked Sanders out before Friday night's preseason opener in Seattle -- he did not play -- and Sanders experienced some soreness in the days that followed. So, the Broncos held him out of practice Monday and are expected to hold him out Tuesday and Wednesday unless he improves significantly. That means Latimer gets more time in the offense and more chances to show why the Broncos might indeed use more three-wide receiver sets. -- Jeff Legwold

Kansas City Chiefs: The Chiefs will look to energize their passing game in practice Tuesday. Quarterback Alex Smith and the first-team offense weren't productive in Saturday night's preseason opener and then had more trouble in practice on Monday. Getting more big pass plays has been a priority for the Chiefs since training camp started. -- Adam Teicher

Oakland Raiders: The Raiders work on special teams a lot daily. One of their main issues is finding a returner. Trindon Holliday has first crack, but Oakland might have difficulty keeping the specialist on the 53-man roster. Another return possibility is special-teams ace Taiwan Jones. If I had to guess, I think Jones will end up with the job. -- Bill Williamson

San Diego Chargers: After signing his new contract extension, Philip Rivers took the field on Monday with the rest of his teammates in preparation for San Diego's second exhibition game on the road against the Arizona Cardinals. The Chargers will hold their final practice open to the public on Tuesday, which begins at 9 a.m. local time. -- Eric D. Williams

NFC EAST

Dallas Cowboys: Tony Romo went through three straight practices for the first time since 2013 Monday, when the Cowboys practiced against the Rams, and coach Jason Garrett would not rule out Romo seeing action a fourth straight day Tuesday. In 2014, Romo never practiced more than two straight days as he rehabbed from major back surgery. After Tuesday, the Cowboys have only two more practices before they play San Francisco in the second preseason game. -- Todd Archer

New York Giants: The Giants are off Tuesday. When they return to practice Wednesday, they hope to have a couple of injured players back, including receiver Rueben Randle, who has been out all week with a knee injury, and cornerback Prince Amukamara, who has been out almost two weeks with a groin injury. -- Dan Graziano

Philadelphia Eagles: After a day off, the Eagles return to practice Tuesday. All eyes will be on Sam Bradford, who warmed up but did not play in Sunday's preseason opener. With his debut looming Saturday against Baltimore, Bradford needs a good week of practice to assert himself as the leader of the Eagles' offense. -- Phil Sheridan

Washington Redskins: It'll be big for the Redskins if corner DeAngelo Hall can practice Tuesday and then play Thursday. Hall showed definite rust early in camp, returning from his Achilles injury and could use as much work as possible. He also needs to play with two new safeties, who in turn must learn his game. -- John Keim

NFC NORTH

Chicago Bears: Tuesday is a travel day for the Bears. However, coach John Fox did schedule a two-hour practice at the team facility prior to departing for Indianapolis. The Bears return to work after a physical practice on Sunday that featured a heated exchange between defensive lineman Jeremiah Ratliff and center Will Montgomery. Monday's day off definitely came at the right time. The Bears needed to simmer down. Now the players and coaches hope the team can avoid any serious altercations during their joint practices against the Colts later in the week. -- Jeff Dickerson

Detroit Lions: The Lions have their final public practice of the year Tuesday in Allen Park. One thing to watch will be how offensive linemen Manny Ramirez and Laken Tomlinson continue to rotate throughout practice. That competition still seems to be very much alive. -- Michael Rothstein

Green Bay Packers: The Packers won't be back on the practice field until Wednesday because coach Mike McCarthy is giving the players the day off on Tuesday, just like he would during a typical regular-

season week. "Then we'll start our preparation for Pittsburgh on Wednesday," McCarthy said of Sunday's preseason game against the Steelers. -- Rob Demovsky

Minnesota Vikings: In their second day back at their facility in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, following the conclusion of training camp last week, the Vikings will practice on Tuesday afternoon. Coach Mike Zimmer is expected to rejoin the team after the funeral for his father, Bill, in Florida on Monday. -- Ben Goessling

NFC SOUTH

Atlanta Falcons: Having running backs Devonta Freeman and Tevin Coleman back in full pads off hamstring strains was a positive sign for the Falcons, but it doesn't necessarily mean they'll be ready for live action immediately. Falcons coach Dan Quinn said the next step will involve Freeman and Coleman participating in full-team drills after some light individual drills on Monday. Tuesday's practice might involve another day of limited participation for the duo. We'll see. -- Vaughn McClure

Carolina Panthers: Ron Rivera says there's no real concern over the health of left defensive end Charles Johnson, who was carted off the field Monday with soreness in the calf injury that kept him out of practice all of last week. But the goal was to have everybody healthy in time for Wednesday and Thursday practices against Miami. Stay tuned to see if Johnson is able to practice on Tuesday, and if right defensive end Frank Alexander is back working with the first and second teams after spending Monday with the third team following a poor outing against Buffalo. -- David Newton

New Orleans Saints: Rookie linebacker Davis Tull is expected to make his practice debut Tuesday after being sidelined all summer by pre-draft shoulder surgery. He'll likely be eased into the mix, but he adds to an intriguing group of young edge rushers fighting for significant roles on the defense, along with fellow rookie Hau'oli Kikaha and second-year pros Kasim Edebali and Ronald Powell. -- Mike Triplett

Tampa Bay Buccaneers: The Bucs will keep a close eye on newly acquired right tackle Gosder Cherilus during Tuesday's practice. It will be Cherilus' first day with the team. He was signed after starter Demar Dotson suffered a knee sprain in Saturday's preseason opener. Cherilus is likely to step right into the starting role because the Bucs don't have much depth at tackle. -- Pat Yasinkas

NFC WEST

Arizona Cardinals: Chris Johnson, who signed a one-year deal with the Cardinals on Monday, is expected to make his Arizona debut at practice Tuesday. With David Johnson slowly working his way back from a hamstring injury, Johnson could start getting significant reps as the Cards' second back behind starter Andre Ellington. -- Josh Weinfuss

St. Louis Rams: The Rams and Cowboys made it through their first joint practice Monday without any major incidents after getting plenty of warnings from their respective head coaches. But Rams cornerback Trumaine Johnson stirred it up with Cowboys running back Joseph Randle at one point, nearly leading to a bigger skirmish. Johnson has a habit of pushing the boundaries, so we'll see if they can get through their final practice Tuesday without incident. -- Nick Wagoner

San Francisco 49ers: After Saturday night's preseason opener at the Houston Texans and two straight days off, the Niners return to practice Tuesday with a better sense of who they are in a game situation.

The Niners emerged from the exhibition relatively healthy, but now they await an MRI and results on starting inside linebacker Michael Wilhoite's leg injury, as he has yet to practice in camp and his spot has been handled solidly by Nick Moody. -- Paul Gutierrez

Seattle Seahawks: The Seahawks' morning practice will be the second chance to evaluate the recent shakeup along the offensive line. On Monday, Seattle had starting right tackle Justin Britt playing left guard while former backup Garry Gilliam was at right tackle. Also of interest will be the health of a few cornerbacks. Richard Sherman and Will Blackmon didn't practice Monday, still nursing injuries that kept them out of Seattle's preseason opener. The Seahawks activated Tharold Simon from PUP, but he only took part in warm-ups Monday before watching the remainder of practice. -- Brady Henderson

Broncos host basketball coaches at training camp

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

August 17, 2015

Sometimes during the dog days of August, NFL training camp talk turns to hoops and hardwood.

That was the case in Denver on Monday when the Broncos welcomed several visitors to their sideline, including Colorado State basketball coach Larry Eustachy and new Denver Nuggets head coach Michael Malone and his staff.

Eustachy, who used to coach at Southern Miss and is friends with Archie Manning, chatted with Peyton Manning after practice.

"We exchanged a few Archie stories," Eustachy said. "That was kind of cool, a special day."

That's what Malone thought, too.

"Any time you can go to a different sport and learn from different guys like John Elway and Gary Kubiak and pick anything up, why wouldn't you?" Malone said. "So, great to be out here."

Malone, like Kubiak a first-year coach getting a second chance in Denver, said he asked his counterpart about delegating responsibility to his staff and they also talked about their respective comebacks.

Malone said they talked about "the coaching lifestyle and we talked about my getting fired in (Sacramento) and when he got fired in Houston and how it really does make you stronger and makes you a better coach the next opportunity you get."

Asked if he chuckled when the schedule came out and he saw the Nuggets open at Houston, where Ty Lawson was traded this summer after another drunken driving arrest, Malone said, "We wish Ty well. I mean that sincerely. That's not just coach talk. But it was a move that we felt was a good move for us and allows us to really hand the ball to Emmanuel (Mudiay) from Day 1."

Mudiay is the Broncos' first-round draft pick.

"But as far as Ty Lawson goes, I hope he's ready to get his life in order and if he does that, we all know he's a special player," Malone said.

Malone also was asked if he saw any athletes at the Broncos practice who could give the NBA a try.

"Yeah, the backup quarterback," he said of Brock Osweiler, who's 6-foot-8 and spurned a basketball scholarship at Gonzaga to focus on football in college.

"I know he played very well in that game at Seattle and I hope he can have a great season, but I heard he was a pretty good high school basketball player, so if he wants to come over here and help us out, he's more than welcome," Malone joked. "And I promise Coach Kubiak he won't get hurt."

In keeping with the hoops theme, linebacker Shaquil Barrett, one of the stars in Denver's preseason opener at Seattle last week, revealed that yes, he was indeed named for ex-NBA great Shaquille O'Neal.

"I didn't know that until probably four years ago," Barrett said. "I asked my dad and he told me I was."

Barrett, who's 6-foot-2 and weighs 250, said he can do an impression of his namesake.

"Yeah, I can dunk," Barrett said. "I can shoot free throws, too."

So, maybe not an exact impression.

NOTES: WR Emmanuel Sanders (hamstring) was held out Monday and will be sidelined until Thursday, Kubiak said. ... CB Chris Harris Jr. (hamstring) and RB C.J. Anderson (ankle) returned to action. ... Hurt at practice were: T Charles Sweeton (dislocated finger) and CB Tony Carter (tight hamstring).

Redskins president dismisses name change for new stadium

By Howard Fendrich
Associated Press
August 17, 2015

Washington Redskins President Bruce Allen made clear Monday the team would not reconsider whether to change the team's nickname if it became a political barrier to building a new stadium in the nation's capital or elsewhere.

The club currently plays at FedEx Field — which opened in Landover, Maryland, in 1997 — and has started exploring sites for a new facility, even though its lease there runs until 2026.

At a news conference before Washington's last practice of training camp Monday, Allen said the Redskins have spoken with representatives of Washington, Virginia and Maryland about a spot for a stadium.

"We've had great conversations with all the areas, and the design is something that we've started on," Allen said, "but really it is preliminary right now."

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell told Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser in April that the National Park Service — which owns the land where the team's former home, RFK Stadium, sits in the city — wouldn't grant a new lease because of objections to the team's name. Redskins owner Dan Snyder has said he will never change the nickname.

When asked Monday about the possibility of revisiting that policy if the name is a political barrier to a new location for the stadium, Allen quickly gave a one-word answer: "No."

In reaction to Allen's comment, the organization Change the Mascot released a statement criticizing the team .

"The team and its leaders are so obsessed with clinging to a dictionary-defined racial slur that they are willing to abandon their hometown and local fans in order to continue degrading Native Americans," said Joel Barkin, spokesman for the grassroots campaign. "Now that Bruce Allen has been relieved of day-to-day responsibilities as general manager he must have a lot of free time on his hands to double down on this racist moniker and try to figure out what to do about Native Americans returning donations from the team. Unfortunately, Bruce Allen, team owner Dan Snyder and the Washington team fail to understand that you cannot buy acceptance of continued racism.

"The NFL, Commissioner Roger Goodell, and the other owners should immediately step forward now that the Washington team is publicly declaring its willingness to abandon Washington in order to retain its racial slur mascot."

RFK Stadium sits on land owned by the National Park Service that is leased to the city. The lease expires in 22 years. The city would need an extension to build a new stadium there. Altering the lease would

require an act of Congress, and the city could seek Congressional support for a change in the lease without the Park Service's blessing.

On other topics:

— Allen said a drop in attendance in the team's third year of training camp in Richmond could be attributed to the novelty wearing off and, he added, "I think it has a little to do with our performance of 4-12 last year."

— Repeating a reporter's question, Allen said: "How far away are we from winning? Depends how we do today on the practice field. We have a lot of work to do and we have three more preseason games to properly evaluate all the players."

— New general manager Scot McCloughan is "doing exactly what we had hoped for," Allen said. "He is a very consistent person in his approach and I think the entire personnel department has done a good job."

— About signing outside linebacker Junior Galette despite off-field issues, Allen said: "We set out some very clear guidelines for him in what we expect out of Redskins players. He understands what he has done in the past and he'll be held responsible for that. But it's very clear what we expect of him. Is he a good football player? Yeah, he's proven to be a good football player. But we really discussed our locker room more than anything."

Football's future? QBs training with virtual reality

By David Brandt
Associated Press
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Mississippi quarterback Ryan Buchanan straps on a headset that covers his eyes, and instantly, he sees a scene that looks like a video game, all set from his perspective.

In about a minute, he runs through a handful of plays, checking his receivers, deciphering defensive coverages and making split-second decisions about where to throw the football.

And just like that, practice is over.

"I felt like I was in the future putting this thing on — something that you would see on TV shows," Buchanan said with a wide grin.

Getting a few "mental reps" has never been easier at Ole Miss: The Rebels are one of a growing number of football programs in the NCAA and NFL dabbling in virtual reality technology to help supplement work on the field.

Buchanan is one of three Ole Miss quarterbacks fighting for the starting job this fall. Part of their offseason regimen has been 10 tests on the simulator that include 20 plays each.

When it's time for the test, Buchanan can look around just like in real life, with a complete 360-degree field of vision. He hears the play call from a coach or another player and then checks the formation and reads the defense pre-snap. After the ball is snapped, he watches how the defense reacts and then turns his head to the player he wants to receive the ball.

If it's the right choice, the ball flies through the air and connects with the receiver. If not, the simulator informs the QB a wrong decision has been made.

The tests can even be loaded onto a smartphone app and then the phone can be placed into a portable headset. Quarterbacks could theoretically do the tests from home and then the results can be emailed to coaches.

"You do it over and over again, watching where guys go and seeing where windows open up on certain plays," Buchanan said. "It's pretty much what you see on the field."

Ole Miss is using a program developed by EON Sports, which is a subsidiary of EON Reality based in California. UCLA, Kansas, Syracuse, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and about 100 high schools are among EON's clients. Brendan Reilly — the company's 28-year-old CEO — says more potential clients are in the works and interest has been high.

Reilly said EON's software was partially developed from programs that do things like train fighter pilots and help doctors practice surgeries.

"Coaches already know how to make guys big and strong," Reilly said. "Now they want to figure out how to get them to make consistently better decisions on the field. We're figuring out ways to use data and technology to make that happen. And if you can game-ify the process to make it more enjoyable, players will hopefully embrace that."

Ole Miss graduate assistant Robert Ratliff spent several hours using the EON Sports software to install the team's offense into the system. He's also working on simulating defensive alignments for teams that the Rebels will face this season.

He said once the base system is installed, changing, adding or deleting plays isn't too difficult.

There is also a version of the simulator that uses real-life footage from the quarterback's perspective instead of a video game simulation. Ratliff said that version makes things more realistic, but once the video is taken, there is no way to change the play without filming another one.

EON Sports isn't the only company vying for clients in the world of virtual reality. A company called STRIVR also has a growing list of clients, including Auburn, Arkansas, Stanford, the Minnesota Vikings and the Dallas Cowboys.

"You're always looking for things to help you get better," Auburn coach Gus Malzahn said. "The quarterback is one position that you can actually get some mental reps. Even if it's mental, it can help you in the fall."

Not everything can be simulated of course: The weather is always perfect when staring through the headset, the pocket stays relatively clean for the quarterback and the receivers always run a perfect route.

"And, of course, there aren't guys out there trying to kill you," Buchanan said laughing.

But the general consensus is the technology is only going to get better. And with limited practice time during the preseason, giving quarterbacks extra time to learn the playbook probably isn't a bad thing.

It's also a way to avoid risking fatigue or injury on the field. Minnesota Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said second-year quarterback Teddy Bridgewater immediately embraced the new training.

"It's going to be very helpful from the learning curve, for not only me but for other guys in the room," Bridgewater said. "We have backups who won't get the same amount of reps that I will get throughout the course of game week, so for them to be able to go in and steal reps is going to be very helpful."

Will it actually help the Vikings win more football games?

Zimmer isn't sure, but it's worth a shot.

"The jury is still out, but I think with the age of guys that we have now and the video games and all the things that they have, Teddy really liked it when he saw it," Zimmer said. "People we've talked to, they really like it."

Vikings' Phil Loadholt done for year with Achilles tear

By Jon Krawczynski
Associated Press
August 17, 2015

When Phil Loadholt limped off the field in the first quarter on Saturday night, Minnesota Vikings fans started going through all the lists of available free agents and trades their team could make to fill the 6-foot-8, 345-pound hole at right tackle created by his injury.

A day after an MRI confirmed what the Vikings feared after walking out of the stadium, offensive coordinator Norv Turner indicated that no big changes were afoot.

Loadholt will miss the season with a torn left Achilles tendon, and Turner said rookie T.J. Clemmings would slide in to replace the veteran in the starting lineup.

Turner did not rule out other moves later in the preseason, but for now the Vikings appear to be moving forward with the fourth-round draft pick as their preferred option.

"He's a young player with a bright future and he's going to have to step it up," Turner said of Clemmings before practice on Monday.

Loadholt has been a steady presence on the Vikings offensive line for the past six seasons. He's been a starter since he entered the league as a second-round pick out of Oklahoma and was coming back this season after missing the final five games of last season with a torn pectoral muscle.

With Loadholt and left tackle Matt Kalil returning to full health after injury-filled seasons last year, the Vikings hoped the offensive line was in position to perform much better than the unit that struggled in 2014.

They moved right guard Brandon Fusco to left guard to replace the departed Charlie Johnson and slid right tackle Mike Harris to right guard in the revamped unit.

One of the speculative scenarios first introduced in the wake of Loadholt's injury was for the Vikings to bring in free agent Pro Bowl guard Evan Mathis and move Harris back out to right tackle.

But Turner said the team has been pleased with the way both Fusco and Harris have performed in their new positions through the first two preseason games, indicating a reluctance to do such major shuffling with the Week 1 opener at San Francisco three weeks away.

"I'm sure we're going to look at all the different options that are there, but if T.J. plays like he did Saturday night and like he did in that first game and keeps growing as a player and continues to play well out here, he should be able to be a very competitive player in this league," Turner said.

Clemmings, a 6-foot-5, 309-pound mauler in college at Pittsburgh, was considered by many scouts to be a first-round talent. He fell to the fourth round after concerns about a foot injury and has shown no ill effects while playing in training camp.

When asked if he feels like he's ready to step in and be the starter, Clemmings was careful to express confidence in himself while acknowledging the learning and improvement yet to come.

"I'd say I feel like I'm getting ready; I'm getting there," he said. "Every day is just about getting better and improving and not making the same mistakes twice."

The learning curve just got a whole lot steeper for Clemmings, who will be relied upon to help keep second-year quarterback Teddy Bridgewater from getting sacked as often as he did last season and open holes for Adrian Peterson, who is returning from almost one year away.

"I feel like my coaches are behind me," Clemmings said. "But it's really up to me as to what I do when I'm out there."

Von on J.J. Watt: 'I want it to be about me this season'

By Mike Klis

9news Sports

August 17, 2015

Let it be remembered that in the great NFL Draft of 2011, Von Miller whipped J.J. Watt for top defensive player honors.

Miller was selected No. 2 overall – the first defensive player chosen – out of Texas A&M by the Denver Broncos. Watt was drafted out of Wisconsin with the No. 11 overall selection by Gary Kubiak's Houston Texans.

Miller easily had the better first season, too, as he won NFL Rookie of the Year with 11.5 sacks while Watt had just 5.5.

But starting with Watt's back-to-back show-stopping performances in the 2011-season playoffs, Miller has been relegated to second-best. Which isn't bad because Watt has not only been considered the best from the class of 2011 the previous three years but the NFL's best defensive player, period.

Watt has 57 career sacks, 12 forced fumbles and incredible 37 pass deflections. Miller has 49 sacks and 12 forced fumbles.

Miller, though, believes he can again reign supreme. He stated this belief when, in advance of the Broncos' preseason game Saturday at Houston, he was asked if Watt was indeed the NFL's best defensive player.

"You all ask me this every year," Miller said Monday. "J.J., he's an awesome talent. He's incredible, a once in a lifetime player, but I'm a once in a lifetime player, too. I feel like I go out there and I can play with the best of them.

"It's a lot of talk before the season. Luckily, I have a season coming up and I get to lay it all out there and show everybody the type of Von that I can be. I want it to be about me this season. That's the way I'm going about it—me and the Broncos. That's where my mindset is at."

Then again, Richard Sherman might say the best defensive player hasn't been Watt or Miller but Richard Sherman. The cornerback was taken in the fifth round of the 2011 draft by Seattle.

Bare-handed Peyton Manning throwing better than ever

By Mike Klis
9news Sports
August 17, 2015

All this buzz about Brock Osweiler. Peyton Manning is taking his gloves off.

In his previous three years with the Broncos, Manning has mostly worn a glove on his right throwing hand to help him with the grip he partially lost with all those neck surgeries in 2011.

Hey, Tom Brady takes air out of the football . Manning legally wears a glove.

Seemingly overlooked is Manning has not been wearing a throwing glove during training camp. And he probably won't in the preseason game Saturday at Houston.

Yes, it's warm in Denver during training camp and insufferably hot in Houston half the year. But Manning wore a glove on his throwing hand during the offseason practices in June.

It's also worth noting that since he shed the glove, Manning at 39 has been throwing tight spirals on deep passes like he never did when he was 36, 37 and 38. He threw another deep beauty Monday to Andre "Bubba" Caldwell.

"He's been strong," said running back Montee Ball. "His balls have nice velocity. He looks healthy."

Has the nerve running from his neck to his right hand fully regenerated? Manning said that's not the case. He will still need the glove in cold weather.

He warmed up while wearing the glove on his right hand prior to the preseason game Friday in Seattle, where it was raining until game time.

Manning didn't play in that game. Osweiler did. And played well, completing 15 of 20 passes for 151 yards, including a 17-yard touchdown to Virgil Green to finish off a 2-minute drive near the end of the first half.

But Manning was back with the first team Monday and he's expected to play two to four series in the second preseason game Saturday in Houston.

So what's with the tight spirals on the deep passes?

"You mean after 18 years I've finally figured out how to throw it?" he said in his self-deprecating humor.

Broncos report: Sanders still gimpy, Fowler moves up

By Mike Klis

9news Sports

August 17, 2015

Sometimes those minor injuries stay minor for a long time.

Emmanuel Sanders, who had 101 catches as the Denver Broncos' second-best receiver last year, seemed to suffer little more than a cramp in his right hamstring as he was finishing off a deep post route during training camp practice Aug. 6.

After nearly coming back to play Friday at Seattle, Sanders still wasn't practicing Monday – 11 days after his injury.

"It was a little more than a cramp," Sanders said.

"The biggest thing with Emmanuel, he worked out before the game in Seattle," said Broncos head coach Gary Kubiak. "He worked out well but there continues to be some soreness after a workout so we're going to take a little bit of a different plan with him this week. We're going to give him a couple more days before we go back to work."

Although Sanders and fellow starters Demaryius Thomas, Owen Daniels and Peyton Manning didn't play at Seattle, they were all expected to play two or three series in the preseason game Saturday at Houston. Sanders' status is now in doubt.

Bennie makes his move

There were not major shifts in the depth chart this week, although receiver Bennie Fowler did move up to take second-team reps with quarterback Brock Osweiler. It's too early to tell but Fowler was perhaps the one player who may have won a roster spot from his preseason performance Friday.

"You guys see it just like me," Kubiak said. "It's interesting, young players see the light and say, 'I can do this. I can contribute.' It's fun to watch that light go on."

Slingin' Siemian

Trevor Siemian is a rookie quarterback, a seventh-round project at that, so right away he's supposed to be behind. He was also limited during the offseason practices because he was rehabbing from a torn ACL so that should have put him way, way behind.

He then goes out in his first NFL preseason game – at Seattle, no less – and starts the fourth quarter by completing 5 of 5 passes for 90 yards. What else you got for me?

"Surprised? I don't know," he said. "After the first rep I slowed things down in my head because the tendency is to go fast, fast, fast with the speed of the game. I just tried to stay within myself and trusted what I saw and reacted and played ball."

Siemian has got an impressive arm that delivers a unique ball. It spins well, has plenty of velocity, and yet reaches the receiver's hands as if he just tossed a pillow.

"I did play baseball growing up so I was always throwing something," he said. "I played in Chicago—that might help me. Had to figure how to spin it with the conditions."

On his sixth pass, Siemian started throwing the ball away because his intended target, tight end Dominique Jones, was well covered by a dropping linebacker in the end zone. But just as Siemian was about to heave, Jones broke open in the back of the end zone. Siemian slightly hitched but his pass fluttered out of the end zone.

"If I knew he was going to break that open I would have squeezed it and pump faked it," Siemian said. "But at the time I was just throwing it away."

Injury report

Defensive backs Chris Harris (hamstring), Omar Bolden (hamstring) and Kayvon Webster (ribs) all returned from their injuries to practice Monday.

"I could have played last week, but it's just being smart," Harris said. "I don't want to play the whole year with a nagging injury or setback."

Outside linebacker Larentee McCray and defensive tackle Marvin Austin are still out with groin strains.

During practice, offensive tackle Charles Sweeton suffered a dislocated finger and cornerback Tony Carter popped a hamstring.

Bronco bits

The Broncos spent a good portion of practice Monday on special teams. ...

This is the final week of training camp. For the fans, their final days of viewing are Tuesday and Thursday. The practices Wednesday and Friday are closed to the public.

Kubiak singled out outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett and Shane Ray for their performances at Seattle.

Raiders to San Antonio? City willing to host team on temporary basis

By John Breech
CBSSports.com
August 17, 2015

Los Angeles might not be the only option for the Raiders potential relocation in 2016.

Thanks to San Antonio, it looks like the Raiders now have a second option open to them that doesn't involve staying in Oakland.

The Mayor of San Antonio, Ivy Taylor, said over the weekend that her city would be willing to serve as the Raiders home if the team decides to move to LA, but needs a place to play until a new stadium is built.

"We would be open to that," Taylor told the San Antonio Express-News. "We are already making improvements over there for the (2018) Final Four, so we would be open to that."

The reason the Raiders might need a place to play is because the earliest an LA stadium would potentially open is 2018.

The Inglewood stadium plan, which is being pushed by Rams owner Stan Kroenke, could be open in time for the 2018 season. The Carson stadium plan, which involves the Raiders and Chargers, likely wouldn't be finished until 2019 at the earliest.

If two teams were to announce a move to LA, the city might not be able to handle both of them right away.

The Rose Bowl has already announced that it has no interest in hosting a temporary NFL team, meaning the LA Coliseum is the only stadium that has publicly stated it would be willing to host a temporary team.

So if two teams move, one of them might need a viable temporary location and that's where San Antonio would come in.

"I think it would give NFL fans here the experience of having a team here locally and it would further highlight the assets of San Antonio to the NFL," Taylor said. "Should there be any expansion or other moves, it lets the NFL know San Antonio is a viable option."

Wherever the Raiders end up, it's looking less and less like it's going to be Oakland.

After the NFL's relocation meeting on Aug. 11, NFL executive vice president Eric Grubman said that Oakland had "no viable proposal to keep the Raiders.

"The Oakland Raiders have great fans. The facts on the ground are there's been no viable proposal that's been made to the Raiders," Grubman said. "We've said one thing consistently to any of the markets and

it really rests on a couple of pillars. One of them the proposal has to be specific. The second is it has to be attractive to a team. And the third is it has to be actionable."

San Antonio might be a long shot to host the Raiders, but at this point, it seems like Oakland is too.

The Raiders one-year lease with Oakland expires at the end of the 2015 season. Teams are allowed to apply for relocation between January 1, 2016 and Feb. 15, 2016, although it's believed that the league will soon shrink that window.

First Down/Fourth Down: Bills QBs, Khalil Mack shine in preseason Week 1

By Chris Burke

SI.com

August 17, 2015

A quiet start to the preseason? Hardly. From Geno Smith being TKO'd by a teammate to Tim Tebow's setting the Twittersverse afire Sunday, the NFL yet again delivered a flood of talking points. The real games are still weeks away, but there was much to dissect from Week 1 of the exhibition slate.

Our winners (First Down) and losers (Fourth Down) from the first full weekend of preseason action:

First Down: The Bills' quarterback race

If a team lacks a true front-line starting quarterback, the best it can ask is for one of the guys it does have to go win the job. Settling on a subpar option is a recipe for disaster.

The Bills have to feel good about the preseason Week 1 developments to their quarterback race, even if they lost to Carolina on Friday. (Temporary) starter Matt Cassel and Tyrod Taylor each stated his case, while EJ Manuel overcame a series of dropped passes and botched snaps to throw a beautiful 51-yard touchdown pass to Deonte Thompson.

Coach Rex Ryan will hand Taylor the reins next week, when Buffalo visits Cleveland for the second of four preseason tilts. What happens the following game vs. Pittsburgh will be more telling—the third exhibition game tends to be when teams come closest to setting their regular-season rotations; Week 4 generally is reserved for those guys scrapping to secure roster spots.

Cassel finished 7-of-8 for 45 yards in his action vs. Carolina. Taylor, who never made a start while serving as Joe Flacco's backup in Baltimore the past four seasons, showed off the dual-threat capabilities that has him in the mix; he threw for 49 yards on 5-of-8 passing and rushed for 47 more yards.

Fourth Down: Injuries

Those in favor of shortening the preseason found additional ammunition, as several players suffered significant, season-ending injuries. Among the notable names now out for all of 2015: Buffalo's Jarius Wynn (torn ACL), Washington's Niles Paul (dislocated ankle) and Silas Redd (torn ACL and MCL) and Minnesota's Phil Loadholt (torn Achilles).

Unrelated to the opening set of games, Bears WR Kevin White revealed that he will require surgery on a stress fracture of his shin, which could cost him the entirety of his rookie season. St. Louis's E.J. Gaines (Lisfranc injury) reportedly has been lost for the year, too, after exiting practice earlier this month. The counterargument stemming from Gaines's and White's situations may be that these injuries are bound to occur whether or not there is preseason action. To that end, several college teams find themselves scrambling to replace key guys after a rash of camp injuries hit that level in the past week or two.

But if the NFL wants going to continue promoting its player safety agenda, the month-long preseason schedule has to be red flagged.

First Down: Khalil Mack (and more of the NFL's young pass-rushers)

Not that anyone was waiting for the Raiders' Mack to slip into a sophomore slump, but he served notice in an 18-3 win over St. Louis that his rise to stardom is on course. Despite recording just one tackle on 13 snaps, Mack wreaked havoc off the edge, dominating Rams tackle Greg Robinson in their head-to-head matchups.

Not credited in the stat book: On back-to-back plays in the first quarter, Mack set up sacks of Nick Foles by driving Robinson into the pocket. Robinson took a holding penalty on the first (that sack was negated by offsetting penalties), then Shelby Harris cleaned up for a 14-yard sack on the next play. Honorable mention here to Jacksonville's Nordly Capi. Undrafted out of Akron, Capi was impossible to ignore in a 23-21 win over Pittsburgh, notching two sacks, three quarterback hits and creating repeated pressure. He still has ground to cover if he's going to make the roster, but another game like that will earn him a chance somewhere.

Also shining over the weekend was Seattle rookie Frank Clark. The Seahawks came under a lot of heat this off-season for drafting Clark, who was dismissed off Michigan's roster following a domestic-violence incident. But on the field he was phenomenal in his first NFL action, posting a team-high nine tackles vs. Denver.

Fourth Down: The Jimmy Garoppolo-Josh Boyce, uh, "connection"

Garoppolo's stats when throwing to anyone other than Boyce in Thursday night's 22-11 loss to Green Bay: 18-of-21 for 140 yards. On attempts targeting Boyce: 2-of-9 for 19 yards and an interception. Boyce also came up empty on two looks from Tom Brady during New England's opening series. The fault was not his alone for all those incompletions, but the Patriots' passing attack was noticeably less coherent whenever it pointed Boyce's direction.

Brandon LaFell, Danny Amendola and Julian Edelman all sat out Thursday's game, leaving the door open for Boyce to see extra reps. He failed to take advantage, and the lack of rapport with Garoppolo could leave him out of the receiver rotation.

First Down: Ameer Abdullah

All you really need to know here is that Jets coach Todd Bowles said Abdullah is "about as quick as Barry Sanders." Perhaps that is hyperbole (hyper-Bowl-e?) but the Lions' rookie running back definitely made an impression in his first NFL outing. Abdullah broke off a Sanders-like 45-yard run to pace his 67-yard rushing day in Detroit's win.

The Lions did not target Abdullah on any passes, but he may be most dangerous this season as a receiver—the footwork and ability to hit the hole that Abdullah showed throughout his college career is still present. If projected starting RB Joique Bell does not get back in action soon, his job is going to be gone.

Fourth Down: Tennessee's supporting cast

Rookie QB Marcus Mariota endured a nightmare start against Atlanta before settling in a bit (more on his outing here). Likely of greater concern to the Titans' coaching staff is how overmatched its first-team offense and defense looked as a whole. Matt Ryan and Julio Jones shredded Tennessee's D on a game-opening touchdown drive, and the Falcons' defense followed suit. Mariota's protection was nonexistent on several plays, including an 11-yard sack that preceded his ugly interception.

Reading too deeply into any preseason results is a mistake. Still, this is a Tennessee team trying to rebuild from a 2–14 campaign. The first glimpse at its 2015 roster revealed a group still likely to be overmatched once the regular season begins.

Fellow QB Jameis Winston might face similar conditions in Tampa Bay, at least when it comes to his offensive line. That unit is a work in progress, so his flaws could be exposed behind a lack of protection.

First Down: Bennie Logan

No player this week produced a better showing than Logan did on his handful of snaps against the run. The Eagles' bulky nose tackle manhandled Indianapolis's interior blocking when the Colts tried to establish their run game. On its first three possessions, Indianapolis mustered just 15 yards on nine rushing attempts. The usual preseason caveats apply—the Colts kept their play calling extremely vanilla—but Logan was a man amongst boys.

Fourth Down: Chicago's first-team defense

Defensive coordinator Vic Fangio knew he had his work cut out for him this season trying to transition the Bears' 4–3 scheme pieces to his 3–4 attack. Just how much of a climb Fangio has left was on display early in a 27–10 win over Miami. (Chicago trailed 10–3 at halftime, then rallied behind its reserves.)

The Dolphins' opening drive spanned 14 plays, 85 yards and eight minutes. The biggest gash came courtesy of RB Lamar Miller, who cut back against the grain for a 27-yard pickup, exposing an out-of-position Pernell McPhee. The Bears' ability to set an edge vs. the run will be critical, but guys like McPhee, Jared Allen and Willie Young are learning how to do that as stand-up defenders. McPhee spoke to SI.com just a few days ago about the struggle of adding coverage responsibilities to his game.

GM Ryan Pace may need another year or two of tweaking the roster to find what Fangio needs.

Bonus First Down: Eric Kendricks

Kendricks played well enough against Tampa Bay to warrant a mention, even though this throws off our First Down/Fourth Down balance.

He had to wait his turn again, with Audie Cole continuing to start at MLB for Minnesota's first-team defense. The second half was the Kendricks Show, however—he posted six tackles, a sack, two tackles for loss and batted down a pass.

We had Kendricks ranked as the No. 29 player in this year's draft class. Minnesota took him at No. 45, and he is on an early pace to become a steal.

AFC preseason player grades, Week 1: Marcus Mariota

uneven

By Bucky Brooks

NFL.com

August 17, 2015

Wins and losses don't count in the NFL preseason -- but individual performances sure do. After each week's slate of preseason action, Bucky Brooks will shine the spotlight on one notable player from each team in the league, grading that player's performance and providing a snapshot of how he's doing in this critical dress-rehearsal phase of the 2015 campaign. The performance grading scale is as follows:

A: Masterful

B: Strong

C: Acceptable

D: Marginal

F: Unacceptable

EAST

Buffalo Bills: Tyrod Taylor, QB

GRADE: B

Strengths: Coach Rex Ryan's fascination with Taylor stems from the quarterback's athleticism and improvisational skills. He is a fantastic playmaker on the move, and his ability to escape pressure and also execute designed quarterback runs adds another dimension to the Bills' offense. With a strong running game behind him, Taylor's potential as a dual-threat is problematic for opponents.

Weaknesses: Taylor was electric executing movement-based concepts (bootlegs), but he missed a few deep shots down the field against the Panthers on Friday. Those failed connections are worrisome for an offense that should see a lot of one-on-one coverage on the outside, due to the attention running back LeSean McCoy commands in the backfield.

What he needs to work on: Though this will be his fifth NFL season, Taylor has limited game experience (35 career pass attempts in four years with the Ravens) and needs to show coaches he can handle the pressure of directing starters against the opponent's first-team defense. If he can thrive in that environment, the Bills will feel better about his chances of doing it when things get more intense in a few weeks.

Miami Dolphins: Zach Vigil, LB

GRADE: A-

Strengths: Active linebackers with instincts and rush skills always stand out on tape, and Vigil showed a knack for playmaking and a strong nose for the ball during his preseason debut against the Bears on Thursday, finishing with five tackles and a sack.

Weaknesses: It's hard to knock Vigil for his performance in Week 1, but the youngster has to work on his overall consistency. The splash plays masked some of Vigil's unrefined technique and false steps, but diligent work in the film room could help him play faster in Week 2.

What he needs to work on: Undrafted rookie free agents must make an immediate impression if they are to stick on the 53-man roster, and Vigil definitely opened eyes with his strong showing in Week 1. But he has to continue making plays, even with his on-field time likely to decrease as the starters get extended reps going forward. To sustain momentum, he must make a splash play on special teams or with the second- and third-stringers the next time out.

New England Patriots: Jimmy Garoppolo, QB

GRADE: C

Strengths: The quick-rhythm passer has a reputation for getting the ball out of his hands in a prompt manner. Garoppolo is a little streaky with his ball placement and touch, but he shows the ability to hit receivers within the strike zone when delivering the ball from a clean pocket.

Weaknesses: Although Garoppolo is known for quickly releasing the ball, on Thursday, he was hesitant and indecisive when the Packers' defense took away his first read. He repeatedly held onto the ball for extended periods, resulting in several sacks and negative plays for the Patriots' offense. New England's leaky offensive line certainly played a role in Garoppolo's struggles; still, he needs to play with better awareness within the pocket.

What he needs to work on: The second-year pro must become more decisive and efficient from the pocket to keep the offense humming while Tom Brady is sidelined. He played faster when the Patriots jumped into their no-huddle offense, and he needs to build on that momentum in Week 2.

New York Jets: Bryce Petty, QB

GRADE: D

Strengths: Petty is a talented passer with intriguing physical tools, but the rookie remains a work in progress as an NFL quarterback. The fourth-round draft pick is a quick-rhythm passer capable of delivering throws accurately and on time, but he is still transitioning from the spread offense he worked in at Baylor to a traditional system.

Weaknesses: Petty is an indecisive passer from the pocket. He struggled reading coverage against the Lions, and his uncertainty led to misfires or late throws. Petty's lack of awareness is problematic for an offense that's predicated on rhythm throws.

What he needs to work on: Petty simply needs more repetitions in game action. He is a developmental project and must learn how to orchestrate an offense under duress. Petty struggled against Detroit, but the experience should help him perform better in subsequent weeks.

NORTH

Baltimore Ravens: Maxx Williams, TE

GRADE: B

Strengths: Williams is a smooth pass-catching tight end with strong hands and sneaky movement skills. The rookie not only shows a knack for finding the open windows in zones, but he's crafty enough to work away from man-to-man coverage in space. In addition, the second-round pick is a talented runner with the ball in his hands, as evidenced by his remarkable hurdle at the end of a 22-yard catch-and-run Thursday night.

Weaknesses: Despite Williams' impressive ball skills and tracking ability, he can drop an easy ball due to a concentration lapse. Although he didn't suffer a blatant drop against New Orleans, he did fail to come up with a slightly off-target throw from Matt Schaub in the end zone that would've ranked as a spectacular catch on most highlight reels. Granted, it's nitpicking to call a missed 50-50 ball a drop, but Williams has shown the potential to make those kinds of plays in key moments.

What he needs to work on: Slated to play a big role in the Ravens' offense with Dennis Pitta still sidelined, Williams needs to continue to progress as a route runner and playmaker. Still, he's on track to develop into one of the Ravens' key playmakers this season.

Cincinnati Bengals: Tyler Eifert, TE

GRADE: B

Strengths: Eifert is finally healthy and playing like the ultra-athletic playmaker the Bengals envisioned when they selected him with the 21st overall pick in the 2013 NFL Draft, reeling in two catches for 30 yards against the Giants. He capably runs away from defenders down the seam, yet also displays the balance and body control to separate out of his breaks.

Weaknesses: Eifert is not a heavyweight blocker in the run game, but he is serviceable at the point of attack. He simply stays in front of his man and keeps him from making a play on the runner. It's not pretty, but it's enough to allow the Bengals to run the ball effectively on the perimeter.

What he needs to work on: Eifert must remain healthy and available during training camp. He has developed a strong rapport with quarterback Andy Dalton and appears to be the Bengals' second option in the passing game.

Cleveland Browns: Justin Gilbert, CB

GRADE: B

Strengths: Gilbert is a sticky bump-and-run corner with impressive athleticism and ball skills. When he is instructed to play aggressive press coverage at the line of scrimmage, the former first-round draft pick flashes the potential to develop into an elite playmaker.

Weaknesses: A lack of discipline and concentration leads to big-play chances for the opponent. Pierre Garcon's drop on a deep pass from Robert Griffin III was the only thing that prevented the Redskins from

cashing in on a mental mistake by the second-year pro on Thursday. Cleveland's coaches certainly will point out Gilbert's miscues when reviewing the tape with the team.

What he needs to work on: Gilbert has to build upon his impressive flashes with more consistent play throughout the game. While his ball skills and instincts lead to a few sizzle plays, the coaches need to see him continue to play disciplined football when he steps onto the field in Week 2.

Pittsburgh Steelers: Martavis Bryant, WR

GRADE: B+

Strengths: The second-year pro is already viewed as one of the NFL's most dangerous deep threats, but he continues to show scouts that he has a knack for getting behind the defense on vertical throws. Bryant's 44-yard touchdown catch against the Jaguars on Friday was the latest example of how he can blow past defenders on go routes.

Weaknesses: Bryant is still a work in progress as a route runner. The tall, rangy athlete is at his best executing speed cuts (routes that allow the receiver to stay on the move instead of breaking down and re-directing). But he needs to be able run the entire route tree to be a standout WR1 or WR2 as a pro.

What he needs to work on: Bryant is an intriguing player with an impressive set of skills. Already slated for a big role as a deep threat, he could crack the Steelers' starting lineup by demonstrating more attention to detail as a route runner.

SOUTH

Houston Texans: Alfred Blue, RB

GRADE: B

Strengths: Blue is a classic downhill runner capable of churning out big yards between the tackles. The second-year pro runs behind his pads and displays the physicality needed to routinely reach the second level on power plays. Most importantly, Blue flashed enough speed and quickness to blow through creases at the point of attack.

Weaknesses: Blue is in line to replace Arian Foster -- out for the foreseeable future after suffering a major groin injury earlier this month -- as the Texans' feature back to start the season. But Blue isn't nearly as polished as a receiver out of the backfield, and he wasn't intimately involved in the Texans' passing game against the Niners on Saturday. If Blue is to become more than a two-down player in the game plan, he needs to be a factor as a receiver.

What he needs to work on: The former sixth-round pick earned solid reviews for his play as a fill-in last year, but he needs to show coaches and scouts that he can anchor the offense as the team's RB1. If he can consistently pick up the hard yards against the opponent's starters, head coach Bill O'Brien will feel better about Blue serving as the workhorse until Foster returns.

Indianapolis Colts: Phillip Dorsett, WR

GRADE: B-

Strengths: Dorsett's speed and explosiveness jump off the screen. Not only is the rookie noticeably faster than his teammates, but he possesses the kind of stop-start quickness that makes him an intriguing weapon on catch-and-run plays (quick screens and crossing routes).

Weaknesses: His hands were the biggest concern during the pre-draft process, but the 29th overall pick caught the ball well against the Eagles on Sunday (four catches for 51 yards). However, he also fumbled after making a catch on a crossing route; the lack of ball security in traffic was surprising to see from a standout kick returner.

What he needs to work on: The rookie certainly looked like a dynamic weapon in his preseason debut. If he can continue to consistently catch the ball and become a more refined route runner, the budding star will emerge as a huge threat on the perimeter and alleviate some of the pressure on T.Y. Hilton to anchor the passing game.

Jacksonville Jaguars: Blake Bortles, QB

GRADE: B+

Strengths: Bortles is a big, athletic signal caller with outstanding arm talent, a decisive passer playing with improved footwork and mechanics from the pocket. Against the Steelers on Friday, Bortles had a strong performance, quickly working through his reads to hit the second or third option in the progression. He was decisive and accurate with the ball. He also showed better awareness and command by exhausting his options within a route before looking to flee the pocket. Most importantly, he didn't turn the ball over and looked like he was in complete command of the offense.

Weaknesses: The second-year pro continues to deal with growing pains as the Jaguars' starting quarterback. He fails to sync his feet with his eyes at times, leading to errant throws from the pocket. He's made significant strides in this area, but he needs to continue to hone his skills as a pocket passer.

What he needs to work on: With more repetitions against complex coverage on the horizon, Bortles needs to continue to show patience and composure as a playmaker from the pocket.

Tennessee Titans: Marcus Mariota, QB

GRADE: C+

Strengths: The second overall pick is an efficient playmaker from the pocket with outstanding physical tools (arm strength and athleticism) and awareness. Mariota makes good decisions with the ball when given ample time in the pocket; he flashes the ability to pick apart defenses with a "dink and dunk" approach.

Weaknesses: Mariota struggled with ball security at Oregon, putting the ball on the ground too frequently for an elite quarterback, and he didn't show awareness with rushers in close proximity. Those issues remain a concern after watching him fumble on a strip-sack early in Friday's matchup with the Falcons. Mariota also turned the ball over on an errant screen pass, although he is generally a judicious passer with a good feel for risk-taking.

What he needs to work on: The rookie showed outstanding composure and resilience bouncing back from his poor start against Atlanta. He needs to build upon the momentum created during his final series to get the Titans off to a faster start in Week 2 against the Rams. Most importantly, the coaches need to identify which routes and concepts will help the rookie passer find his rhythm early in games.

WEST

Denver Broncos: Brock Osweiler, QB

GRADE: A-

Strengths: Osweiler is an efficient passer with a good feel for coach Gary Kubiak's play-action passing game. The fourth-year pro delivered the ball on point and on target following strong run fakes; his overall efficiency allowed the Broncos to stay on schedule against a swarming Seahawks' defense on Friday. Most importantly, Osweiler (15 of 20 for 151 yards and a touchdown) showed impressive grit and toughness delivering accurate throws with rushers in close proximity.

Weaknesses: It's hard to knock Osweiler for his performance against Seattle. He patiently worked the underneath areas of coverage and showed the ability to get to his second or third read in the progression. Given the challenge Seattle's defense presents, the performance was quite impressive.

What he needs to work on: Osweiler simply needs more reps to increase his confidence as a potential starting quarterback. If he continues to stay within his boundaries, he can solidify his standing as the Broncos' quarterback of the future.

Kansas City Chiefs: Ramik Wilson, LB

GRADE: B-

Strengths: The fourth-round pick is an active linebacker with a strong nose for the ball. He quickly diagnoses plays and finds a way to get around the action. Although hustling isn't a skill, the extra effort Wilson displays on the field will ultimately lead to positive plays.

Weaknesses: Like most young linebackers, Wilson struggles to take on and disengage from blockers in the hole. He needs to continue to work on his combat skills and find a way to consistently slither through traffic to get to the ball.

What he needs to work on: Wilson made a positive impression in his preseason debut against the Cardinals, racking up six tackles and an interception. He can enhance his chances of making the squad by continuing to impress as a position player while also making a handful of plays on special teams. Wilson needs to be active and physical against the run while also showing discipline and awareness as a pass defender. If he continues to progress in those areas, he will make a strong push to earn a spot as a backup player on a team loaded with talent.

Oakland Raiders: Amari Cooper, WR

GRADE: B+

Strengths: Cooper was roundly touted as the most pro-ready receiver to enter the NFL in years ahead of the 2015 NFL Draft, and the fourth overall pick definitely lived up to the hype in his preseason debut against the Rams. Not only did he display outstanding polish as a route runner, but he is an electric WR1 with sneaky running skills on the perimeter.

Weaknesses: Defeating press coverage at the line will be Cooper's biggest challenge as a pro. Although he is a skilled route runner with an array of releases, he still needs to work on escaping the clutches of physical defenders in tight coverage.

What he needs to work on: As the Raiders' clear WR1, he must prepare for the double coverage that he'll inevitably face down the road. He won't see exotic coverage during the preseason, but he can work on his escape skills against press or rolled coverage. How well he fares during the preseason will give the Raiders' coaches an indication of how to build a game plan to get him loose against elite competition.

San Diego Chargers: Melvin Gordon, RB

GRADE: C-

Strengths: The 15th overall pick is an explosive runner with exceptional speed and quickness. He is at his best attacking the edges, but also shows the vision and burst to split creases between the tackles.

Weaknesses: The rookie looks unsure and hesitant at the line of scrimmage. Against the Cowboys on Thursday, he frequently stopped his feet or stutter-stepped immediately after taking the handoff, leading to minimal gains (11 yards on six carries) against a fast-flowing defense.

What he needs to work on: Gordon must be more aggressive and decisive with the ball in his hands. As quickly as holes close in the NFL, Gordon has to find a way to make his reads on the run to be a productive pro.

Broncos pass rushers feel “you can’t block us all”

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
August 17, 2015

The Broncos got a new defensive coordinator this offseason in Wade Phillips and the unit’s first action of the preseason showed that Phillips has found the right buttons to push when it comes to rushing the passer.

Seven different Broncos players accounted for seven sacks of Seahawks quarterbacks on Friday night and they also saw Von Miller, first-round pick Shane Ray and defensive end Kenny Anunike force fumbles during the contest. Anunike says that it’s a product of the system that Phillips has installed this offseason.

“I think [the Seahawks] really found out that they had some problems to answer,” Anunike said, via ESPN.com “... Because you can’t block us all. That’s a testament to Coach Wade’s defense in the 3-4. It gives you the ability to disguise, so you can disguise the pressure. You never know who’s coming.”

Denver’s pass rush fell short in the postseason last year against Andrew Luck and the Colts, so it’s easy to understand why improving it has been a priority this offseason. With good corners in Chris Harris and Aqib Talib, the Broncos can get creative up front to bring pressure and Friday night’s rehearsal for the regular season can be a foundation for the defense the team hopes to build in 2015.

Film Review: Seven sacks vs. Seahawks a product of inside-outside synergy

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
August 17, 2015

The Broncos' defensive dominance of the Seahawks on Friday all started with the pass rush, which was a perfect harmony between their outside linebackers and three-technique defensive ends.

"It's essential to the game plan," said DE Kenny Anunike.

Take the first of the Broncos' seven sacks, which came on the second play from scrimmage. The Broncos rushed five men, with the Seahawks keeping six in to block, which didn't include Robert Turbin waiting for a blitz to pick up. Malik Jackson worked inside from left defensive end, and drew two blockers, leaving Justin Britt on the outside against Von Miller. With no help and Turbin turned around, Miller simply had to beat Britt around the edge. Sprint, sack, strip.

The second sack saw the reverse: the outside linebacker setting up Jackson. It was Shane Ray who disrupted the pocket by working through Russell Okung; Jackson, working from the opposite side, was steered behind Russell Wilson but came back for the sack.

Sack No. 3 was all about Shaquil Barrett. On the previous play, Derek Wolfe drew two blockers, and Barrett used his acceleration to win his one-on-one matchup against Jesse Davis to force a Tarvaris Jackson incomplection. Barrett followed that by bursting around the edge and drilling the backup quarterback from behind for the sack, with Malik Jackson also closing in from the right side.

Barrett was quick to praise the defensive ends for helping set him up.

"They're really crafty and they have some speed," Barrett said. "Sometimes they can hit the B-gap pretty hard, hit the tackle off and go on a natural stunt-off or stuff like that.

"The craftiness helps the guards stay honest, so that they can't come chip on us and help out on us. The guys there on the inside do a great job of keeping us freed up with the one-on-ones."

The fourth sack didn't come until the third quarter, but when it happened, it was the same script: one position setting up another. Vance Walker's rush from the three-technique spot guided QB R.J. Archer to the right side, at which point Gerald Rivers chased him down for the sack and forced fumble.

Sack No. 5 belonged to Kenny Anunike, and even though he didn't work around the edge, it resembled Barrett's sack in that it was all about the individual quickness of the pass rusher. Once Anunike got his shoulder outside the left guard, he took off, using his speed advantage to sprint toward Archer for the sack.

Two more sacks -- one of which simply involved Josh Furman being in the area when Archer ran out of bounds -- wrapped up the Broncos' pass-rush production. Barrett also came close to another sack that

would have ended the game; the ensuing incomplection set up Darius Kilgo for the sack that brought the clock to triple zeroes.

The permutations of the Broncos' pass rush appear endless. Could they use Barrett, Ray, Miller and DeMarcus Ware together? What about pairing Jackson and Anunike? Or imagine a nickel package with the quickness those six players can provide. And that says nothing about the rush that Walker, Kilgo, Sylvester Williams and Antonio Smith can provide.

"When you have those guys like Von and Shaq, and all those guys coming off the edge -- and D. Ware -- the quarterback sees that," Anunike said. "He feels that pressure, so naturally he doesn't want to get hit by that. He's going to step up.

"When he steps up, who's going to be right there for him? Me, Vance, Kilgo, all of us [are] going to be right there."

A few more notes:

... Guard Shelley Smith led the Broncos by playing 49 snaps -- 69 percent of the offensive snaps during the game. Starting left guard Max Garcia followed with 41 snaps, with fellow first-teamers Ty Sambrailo and Matt Paradis and QB Brock Osweiler playing 40 snaps apiece.

... Connor Barth averaged 3.80 seconds of hang time on his two kickoffs; Brandon McManus averaged 4.25 seconds on five kickoffs. (4.0 seconds is roughly average.) Both were 3-for-3 on placekicks. Barth hit 23- and 28-yard field goals and an extra point; McManus drilled field goals from 23, 44 and 52 yards.

... The average drive start following McManus' kickoffs was 45 yards from the kickoff spot (which, barring a penalty, would translate to the Seattle 20-yard-line). Barth's numbers -- minus-11.5 yards from the kickoff spot, which translates to the Denver 23 -- were skewed by Tyler Lockett's 103-yard jaunt up the west sideline for a second-quarter touchdown.

... The Broncos averaged 4.14 yards per carry running to the left side, 2.36 yards per rush going to the right side and 5.5 yards on four runs up the middle for 22 yards.

Broncos sponsoring Habitat for Humanity's inaugural Women Build week

By DenverBroncos.com

DenverBroncos.com

August 17, 2015

The Denver Broncos are sponsoring Habitat for Humanity's inaugural Women Build Week beginning Wednesday at 9:30 a.m. in Englewood, Colo.

Broncos Cheerleaders, female business leaders, women's empowerment groups and many others will join together for a week-long build with more than 175 women to help construct two homes for two deserving families. Women Build Week marks the first event in a six-part 2015 Champions Build series, sponsored by the Denver Broncos.

"It's inspiring to see so many women join together for our first annual Women Build Week," CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver Heather Lafferty said. "These empowered women understand the importance of affordable housing in our community and are willing to roll up their sleeves and help by building good, affordable homes for hardworking, low-income families."

Throughout the five-day Women Build Week, diverse groups of women from across metro Denver will join together to frame all of the walls for a duplex. On the first day of construction, the homes will start with bare sub floors and by the end of the week all walls will be raised and roof trusses installed.

Habitat for Humanity has been a proud community partner of the Denver Broncos since 2012 as part of their "Be a Champion in the Community" campaign. The partnership is expanding in 2015 with a series of six-build events, beginning with Women Build Week.

Broncos Training Camp Quick Hits: Day 18

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
August 17, 2015

If the Broncos' trip to Seattle had come in the regular season, Chris Harris Jr. would have made it and played. But in the preseason, with training camp in full swing, there was no reason for him to test his injured hamstring. So he remained back home, watched on television and emerged giddy at how his teammates' pass rush helped carve up the Seahawks' pass protection.

"They played excellent," the Pro Bowl cornerback said. "I was like a fan watching on TV back here rehabbing, but just to see that effort that they played [with], it was amazing. It was something that we definitely have to keep up the rest of the year."

Harris was still limited Monday, but took part in individual drills for the first time since Aug. 7 as the Broncos reconvened for training camp following an off-day Sunday.

"I feel a lot better," Harris said. "I just had a little minor injury. I just didn't want any setbacks or to really have anything, going into the season with a nagging injury. I just wanted to be smart about it."

The Broncos and Harris will continue to exercise caution this week, although he hopes to play in Houston on Saturday.

"If I have a great week of practice, I expect to play," he said.

He still has some distance to traverse. Bradley Roby took the team repetitions at right cornerback Monday while Harris watched. But Harris is on the right track and appeared to have no setbacks Monday.

NOTES:

It was status quo along the offensive line as the Broncos returned to training-camp work Monday morning at the UHealth Training Center. The starting five, including rookies Ty Sambrailo and Max Garcia and first-year player Matt Paradis, remained intact.

... Head Coach Gary Kubiak liked the pace at which his team practiced Monday. "Coming off an off-day, sometimes you're going a little slow, but I thought we pushed each other," he said.

... One of the best defensive plays of training camp came when T.J. Ward intercepted a deep pass from Peyton Manning that was intended for Cody Latimer down the middle. Aqib Talib started the play by tipping the pass up as it came down, and Ward swooped in for the interception.

... WR Bennie Fowler struck again. He caught two deep passes up the left sideline, including one for a touchdown directly in front of the fans gathered on the west hillside. "He's had a good camp. The strength of his camp has probably been in the last two weeks," Kubiak said.

... Practice was filled with special visitors, including the U.S. Air Force Academy's football staff, the Denver Nuggets' coaching staff and general manager Tim Connelly and Colorado State head men's basketball coach Larry Eustachy.

... OLB Shane Ray showed off his speed during one-on-one drills, getting outside of the tackles on both sides to make plays. Von Miller also made an impression, beating opposing offensive linemen three plays in a row.

... OLB Shaquil Barrett and DE Kenny Anunike picked up where they left off at CenturyLink Field last Friday. Barrett looked quick around the edge and would have had a sack of Brock Osweiler in game conditions midway through practice. Anunike later batted down an Osweiler pass at the line of scrimmage.

... In a move-the-ball period near the end of practice, Manning drove the No. 1 offense into scoring range against the first-team defense by completing all four of his passes: two to WR Cody Latimer, one to WR Jordan Norwood and another to TE Virgil Green. Osweiler went 3-of-4 leading the No. 2 offense, with the deep pass to Fowler up the left sideline defining his work in that period. Osweiler led Fowler perfectly, and the receiver reached out to grab the pass just ahead of CB Curtis Marsh. That connection made up for an earlier missed deep opportunity to Andre Caldwell on a post route.

... WR Jordan Norwood used his quick hands and long arms to snatch a pass from QB Zac Dysert as it appeared ready to whip past him.

... Newly acquired punter Spencer Lanning joined Brandon McManus and Connor Barth in working on kickoffs. Special teams was a point of emphasis, with two separate periods: one on kickoff returns and the other divided between blocking at the line of scrimmage and kick-blocking from the edge. Lanning shanked his first kickoff, then averaged 4.17 seconds of hang time on his next three, all of which reached the end zone.

PARTICIPATION REPORT:

... WR Emmanuel Sanders was back on the sideline as he continues to recover from a hamstring injury. Sanders practiced last Wednesday but did not play in Friday's game at Seattle and will be held out "a couple of more days," Kubiak said. "He worked out before the game and worked out [well]. There continues to be some soreness after a workout, so we're going to take a little bit different plan with him this week."

... RB C.J. Anderson had a full practice of work three days after briefly receiving treatment for an ankle injury in Seattle. Anderson said after the game that he was fine, and that a bout with the flu caused him more trouble than the ankle. Anderson briefly left practice during warm-ups to return to the locker room, but quickly came back for practice.

... NT Marvin Austin Jr. and OLB Lerentee McCray remained sidelined because of groin injuries.

... CBs Kayvon Webster and Chris Harris Jr. returned to practice, but both saw limited work.

... TE Jeff Heurman, as usual, did not practice because of a torn ACL but cannot go onto injured reserve until the first cut Sept. 1.

INJURY REPORT:

... OT Charles Sweeton left practice via cart after suffering a dislocated finger. "He should be fine," Kubiak said.

... CB Tony Carter left early after cramping up in his hamstring, Kubiak said.

WEATHER REPORT: A day after the storm, a gorgeous morning greeted the Broncos at the UCHealth Training Center. Practice began in 72°F/22.2°C conditions, and the temperature climbed to 80°F/26.7°C when practice ended.

Nuggets' Coach Malone finds common ground with Gary Kubiak

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
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New Nuggets Head Coach Michael Malone liked what he saw of the Broncos' training camp practice on Monday, taking away good impressions of the team's energy and even a scouting opportunity on QB Brock Osweiler.

"I heard he was a great high school basketball player, so if he wants to come over and help us out, he's more than welcome," Malone joked.

Malone was joined by members of the Nuggets' coaching staff and front office as they took in practice from the sideline. Afterward, Malone met Broncos Head Coach Gary Kubiak and they bonded over their similar situations with each taking the reins as second-time head coaches in their first years at Denver NBA and NFL franchises.

"We talked about myself getting fired in Sac[ramento] and when he got fired in Houston and it really does make you stronger and makes you a better coach the next opportunity you get," Malone said. "And I talked to him about how he delegates to his staff and how he trusts his coaches to do their jobs and obviously he's able to kind of step in whenever he sees fit and so we talk about that, how you handle your coaching staff, and just really the coaching lifestyle."

From a coaching standpoint, Malone noted how motivated and energized the players were on Monday and their focus days after Friday's game against the Seahawks.

"I was impressed with how hard the players worked," Malone added. "I know they had a good game against Seattle and they came out here and spent some time on special teams, which I think was probably the one area they struggled in a little bit in the game. But seeing the effort and Coach Kubiak talked about the leadership they have and how important internal leadership is with your team. It's the same thing for us in the NBA."

After practice Malone and the Nuggets staff took a quick tour of the UCHealth Training Center and remarked that he'll have to add a new NFL allegiance.

"I've always been a Steelers fan but now I have to become a Broncos fan and spending the day here, they obviously have a lot of special people in the organization," Malone said, "and it's always good to talk to other pro coaches that live the life and understand what we go through, no matter what sport you're in."

Broncos Day 18 Training Camp Takeaways: Trevor Siemian, O-line, kickoffs, Bennie Fowler and more

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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Five takeaways from practice as the Broncos got back to work for the first time since their preseason-opening win over the Seattle Seahawks:

Trevor Siemian

1. PLENTY OF WORK FOR TREVOR SIEMIAN.

As was the case throughout most of training camp, Trevor Siemian split the third-team repetitions with Zac Dysert Monday.

But it's hard to ignore his Friday performance: 5-of-6 passing for 90 yards with his only incompleting coming on a throwaway and a calm demeanor -- although he felt otherwise about the latter.

"Then I did a good job faking it, I guess," he said with a smile. "I just execute, stay in the moment. It's easy when you're around a ton of other guys that know what they're doing. Just play one play at a time, and have fun. Just play ball."

Siemian enjoyed another solid day Monday. His passes were strong and usually on target -- as they were in Seattle. But he was focused on a to-do list of self-improvement that started with his eyes, believe it or not.

"Putting my eyes in the right spot and on time," he said. "When you get out there the first time, everything's buzzing around pretty quick. But you want to stay disciplined with your eyes and let your feet follow and just trust what you see. As the game went along, I thought I got better, but it's something I've got to work on."

So much of his offseason has focused on his footwork and how it sets up the rest of his delivery. By Friday, he wasn't thinking about his feet; he was dropping, setting and throwing.

"It was definitely a situation where you could play ball a little bit," Siemian said. "I felt like that's kind of what I got into, and it was good. It was kind of one of the things I took out here from the practice field: not to over-think things, but take what you've learned and keep your discipline, but just play ball."

2. MATT PARADIS IN CONTROL.

The next step for Paradis will be working with Peyton Manning during game conditions, but his repetitions with the 18-year veteran quarterback helped set him up for his array of pre-snap checks and calls in Seattle. Monday, Paradis picked up where he left off.

"The first thing that impressed me with our first group was Matt Paradis running the group," Head Coach Gary Kubiak said. "He's got to be a quarterback, and I know he's been here, but let's remember, he's really a rookie in a lot of ways, too. But I liked the way he ran the group. We played extremely hard. We'd make mistakes and then we'd come back and make the next play. I just like our effort and I think if Matt can hold the group together and we can continue to grow, which is going to be the key."

In contrast, Kubiak said he was "a little disappointed" in the No. 2 offensive line, which featured three veterans who have started in the regular season in recent years: left tackle Chris Clark, center Gino Gradkowski and right guard Shelley Smith.

"They played hard, but there are some guys in there that have played some football. Our communication did not look good with that group, and we've got to bounce back and play better," Kubiak said. "But I like the way the first group played."

3. BENNIE FOWLER STILL MAKING PLAYS.

Fowler has shown a predilection for big grabs on which he's used his speed to get out in front, his size to get in position for the reception and body control to adjust to the pass in flight and get down in-bounds with the football. He had two of the biggest receptions of Monday's practice on go routes up the left sideline, including a touchdown from Brock Osweiler.

"It's interesting -- young players that all of a sudden see the light and say, 'I can do this and I can contribute,'" Kubiak said. "It's fun to watch that light go on. He's doing a good job right now. He needs to keep coming. He's doing very well."

"I think Bennie's having a heck of a camp," added Siemian, who found him for the 41-yard connection in Seattle last Friday. "It's my first time seeing him, and I've been really impressed with him the whole way through. Just getting more throws with him is helping me and him, but he's been doing it with everybody, regardless of who's throwing."

4. SPENCER LANNING GETS A LOOK ON KICKOFFS.

Kubiak mentioned at his postgame press conference last Friday that Lanning would be in the mix on kickoffs in addition to his punting responsibilities, and he took turns working there with Brandon McManus and Connor Barth during two special-teams periods Monday. After a shank on his first kickoff, he settled down, averaging 4.17 seconds (unofficial) of hang time on his next three kickoffs with good distance on each.

Lanning's work on kickoffs with Cleveland last year was limited; he kicked off six times in Weeks 15-17. Three of the kickoffs went into the end zone, with one ending in a touchback. He averaged 64.5 yards per kickoff, with an unofficial average hang time of 3.86 seconds.

5. BIG PLAYS ON BOTH SIDES.

Peyton Manning had some outstanding passes, particularly in the red zone. He found Andre Caldwell deep on a post route in seven-on-seven work. But his day wasn't perfect, and included a deep attempt for Cody Latimer that was tipped by Aqib Talib to T.J. Ward in one of the best defensive moments of training camp.

This has been the norm after an up-and-down start to training camp. More and more, the offense and defense push each other. It's important to remember that based on the recent performance of the team and the quality of the roster, each unit gets a challenge more difficult than it will receive in most regular-season games on a daily basis.