

QBs have NFL in their pocket

By Troy Renck
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The NFL continues to search for balance when it comes to violence.

It has adopted rules forbidding spear tackles, helmet-to-helmet strikes and clotheslines. It has partnered with youth football organizations to teach proper tackling techniques, with Seattle coach Pete Carroll among those emphasizing shoulder strikes similar to those used in rugby.

But you can't legislate out all of the nasty hits. The sport, at its core, remains a physical, brutish activity.

Which leads me to today's unsolicited advice: Get over it, Sam Bradford.

In case you missed it — not watching every preseason snap is actually a sign of sanity — Baltimore's Terrell Suggs hit the Eagles quarterback at his knees after a handoff to running back Darren Sproles. It was, on first glance, a read-option. Suggs read it as a signal to smash the quarterback. An official flagged Suggs for a late hit. The NFL ruled, on review, that it was not a foul. The Eagles cried foul.

The league determined that Bradford had the option to run and hadn't established himself as a passer, giving Suggs clearance to hit him. Eagles coach Chip Kelly insisted it was not a zone read, but a simple handoff.

By rule, it should not have been a penalty. For Bradford, it touched a raw nerve because he had blown out the anterior cruciate ligament in his knee in consecutive seasons.

He doesn't have to like the hit. Nor should he. He can see it as a cheap shot. Suggs' reputation makes him an easy villain. But the defenders must be allowed to play the game. The NFL does everything to remove the quarterback from harm's way. They can't be tackled in practice, they can't be tackled in a game if they slide, they can't be hit late and they can't be hit high. Unless, of course, it's Washington's Robert Griffin III, whose coach, Jay Gruden, prefers jailbreak line protection that turns the former Heisman Trophy winner into a tackling dummy.

Quarterbacks rule the NFL. They draw the crowds, boost the TV ratings, win games. They need protection. They don't need a force field surrounding them. Watch the game from the sideline, and the contact is staggering. Each play an intersection collision.

Rules must be enforced to keep quarterbacks upright. Quarterbacks, though, can't have it every which way. It's not up to them to decide how a defender should interpret intentions in real time between a read-option and a traditional handoff. If they want to prevent confusion, just tell 'em what's coming.

Ludicrous? Yes. But no sillier than asking defenders to make impossible choices in a split second.

"Nobody plays the game like Suggs," Broncos linebacker Von Miller said. "He plays the game aggressively, and that's the type of guy that you want on your team. If you're going against him, it'll be tough. I agree with whatever Suggs did."

Suggs hit Bradford low in a meaningless game at a time when too many teams have lost stars to serious injuries. That's never going to go over well. But again, the most controversial hit of the preseason was deemed legal.

Quarterbacks receive concessions. Up and until bubblewrap is allowed, they can't get everything.

Denver's defense could be the best in the NFL

By Nicki Jhabvala

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The Broncos' defense was sold on Wade Phillips before he installed his 3-4 alignment.

Phillips' track record said enough. Having veteran pass rusher DeMarcus Ware as one of his biggest proponents didn't hurt either.

Three games into the preseason, Denver's defense is showing signs that it could be the best in the NFL. The first-team defense hasn't allowed a touchdown, and the unit as a whole leads the league with 15 sacks that are spread among 12 players.

Rookie pass rusher Shane Ray was credited for half a sack in the Broncos' victory at Houston, and he notched his first solo sack against the 49ers on Saturday.

"It was really special to get that first sack because it's like the one thing I've been looking for to get me started," the former Missouri star said. "And I got it."

Ray has spent the offseason and training camp learning from Ware and Von Miller. The prospect of using all three in Phillips' system has been tantalizing from the start, but Saturday's victory offered a glimpse at just how good it could be.

"The energy that those two bring just shows why they're such great pros," Ray said. "As a young guy, I see that and instantly it tells me that I need to raise my energy level."

Ray's learning extends to even the celebrations, something Miller has become known for.

"I don't have any names for dances," Ray admitted. "When you get a sack, it's a lot of hard work that goes into it, so it's always fun to just go up there and turn up a little bit."

Emmanuel Sanders to be used on punt returns?

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Emmanuel Sanders is still recovering from a hamstring injury that he sustained Aug. 6. When he returns, likely this week, he could add another title to his already lengthy resume: punt returner.

Sanders was in the conversation to return punts when training camp opened, but the idea seemed to fade after a couple days practices.

Omar Bolden was named the team's leading returner on both kickoffs and punts, but his experience is more with the former. And after three preseason games, the Broncos are averaging a league-worst 1.7 yards per punt return and are tied for a league-leading three fumbles.

"I'm concerned the way we're handling the ball. That's the biggest thing," coach Gary Kubiak said after Saturday's win over the 49ers. "Omar can make some big plays, but we haven't handled the ball very well. We've put the ball on the ground the first punt return, if I'm correct, and fumbled another one. Obviously, we've got to settle down there. Emmanuel's very capable and could be a great, great punt returner. We have to get him back. Obviously, protecting the ball is of the utmost importance."

Sanders ran routes at full speed before Saturday's game, a positive sign after missing more than three weeks. He isn't expected to play in the final preseason game, at home against the Cardinals on Thursday, but the team hopes to have him back on the field this week.

"Had it have been a regular season game, I think Emmanuel would have been very close to playing or pushed to play," Kubiak said. "But we're right on schedule to where we want to be."

Whether Sanders is on pace to return punts, too, remains to be seen.

Broncos wore helmet cameras long before GoPro was born

By Nicki Jhabvala
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This image of former Broncos quarterback Jacky Lee wearing a HelmetCam during practice in 1965 recently resurfaced (thanks, SportsGrid!) after Uni-Watch reported it in 2008.

This is the GoPro before the GoPro, a camera device developed by General Dynamics, an aerospace and defense company now based in Virginia.

As Uni-Watch pointed out, on the side of the camera helmet is the “GD” logo and full “General Dynamics Astronautics” name.

In the 1950s, General Dynamics acquired Convair-Astronautics, a now-defunct rocket- and aircraft-building company. General Dynamics is now the product of many acquisitions and is one of the world’s largest defense contractors.

Lee, if you’ll recall, arrived in Denver by way of Houston after the American Football League’s Oilers selected him in the first round of the draft in 1960. He backed up George Blanda in the Oilers’ two championship seasons, in 1960 and 1961, before they traded him to Denver for defensive lineman Bud McFadin in 1964, a deal that made Lee known as the “lend-lease quarterback”:

As he told The Post’s Irv Moss in 2012:

“I had been working behind George Blanda, but thought I was about to get my chance. But Bud Adams told me I had to go to Denver for two years and then would come back to Houston. I think that’s the only deal that ever has been made that way.”

Lee completed 133 of 265 pass attempts for 1,611 yards and 11 touchdowns that season, but he also threw 20 interceptions and the Broncos wound up 2-11-1.

In 1965, Lee was a backup and completed 44 of 80 attempts for 692 yards and five touchdowns. The Broncos finished 4-10.

Lee retired in 1969 after 10 seasons in the AFL. He remains one of only 20 guys who played all 10 seasons of the league’s existence before it merged with the National Football League.

Montee Ball losing grip on job while sliding down Broncos depth chart

By Cameron Wolfe
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Montee Ball doesn't see the fire yet, but he sure smells the smoke. Despite being listed as the No. 2 tailback on the Broncos' depth chart, Ball didn't get a carry until the fourth quarter of their 19-12 preseason victory over the 49ers on Saturday.

That didn't sit well with the former Wisconsin star, a second-round pick in the 2013 draft.

"I was really surprised by that. I barely got any touches," Ball said. "I guess that's the way they wanted to do it."

The third preseason game usually is the one that best models the regular season, and Ball was stuck without a significant role in it.

Broncos coach Gary Kubiak, who has built a career out of getting the most out of running backs, defended his decision to not play Ball much by saying it's difficult to give carries to four running backs during a game.

"Special teams is a big factor with him and Juwan (Thompson)," Kubiak said. "We'll see. I'm fine with Montee."

Ball doesn't think everything is fine. He was emotional in expressing his confusion with his true place on the depth chart as well as with his lack of snaps.

C.J. Anderson, the Broncos' starting tailback, controlled most of the carries in the first half Saturday with Ronnie Hillman spelling him occasionally. Hillman and Thompson were the go-to backs to start the second half.

It wasn't until after third-team players began to enter the game that Ball made his first appearance.

Ball was at a loss for words when asked to guess the reason he was stuck on the pine.

Kubiak said the roster cut to 75 players probably would happen Monday morning and it's unlikely to expect any of the four running backs — Anderson, Hillman, Thompson or Ball — would be among them. But when the 53-man roster is decided by Saturday, Ball could be in the conversation, depending on his performance in the final preseason game Thursday.

"I heard I was going to get a lot of snaps, but it just didn't work out like that," Ball said. "Right now it's C.J., Ronnie, then Juwan, then me. So I guess just what it is."

Through three preseason games, Ball has 16 carries for 41 yards and no touchdowns. And as Kubiak mentioned, he isn't a factor on special teams.

Back in June, there was more talk about Ball catching Anderson on the depth chart than him not being on it at all. He was finally healthy. He looked faster and slimmer, and appeared to be an overall better back. Also, he was fully aware of his spot on the depth chart.

"As of right now I'm second; I'm behind C.J.," Ball said after a June practice. "But I'm sure it's going to be a 1-A, 1-B style."

Not only is it not a 1-A, 1-B style, or even a 1-2 style, it's a 1-4 style.

And there aren't many fourth-string running backs that stick with NFL teams without making outstanding contributions on special teams.

Ball might be holding on by the merits of his draft status. Kubiak inherited Ball from the John Fox era, and it's common for coaches to fall in and out of love with players on their roster in a transition year.

Ball made three starts last year before bowing out because of a groin injury that nagged him all season. He ended the year with 55 carries for 172 yards (an average of 3.1 yards per carry) and one touchdown in five games.

"Obviously they need to see something else out of me," said Ball, who rushed for 559 yards in 2013 as a rookie. "I'm going to go out there and give it all I got."

In the most telling moment Saturday, the Broncos chose Thompson over Ball at the goal line in the fourth quarter — and the undrafted tailback punched it in.

"It's a trust factor. I've been working hard, and it's good that they believe in me," Thompson said.

Kubiak could be sending Ball a message, as he did with young wide receiver Cody Latimer earlier this summer. And the Broncos could very well keep all four running backs, as they did last season. But the team's final preseason game, against the Arizona Cardinals, figures to be intriguing, just to see who gets the snaps.

"I promise you there will probably be plenty to go around on Thursday," Kubiak said.

Ball, meanwhile, keeps slipping down the depth chart. If the Broncos decide to cut a running back this week, it looks like it will be Ball before Thompson.

"I think I deserve to be on this team, but we'll see how it goes," Ball said.

Real take: Two weeks until opener, Broncos hunting for more touchdowns

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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The Denver Broncos' starting offense, the one loaded with Pro Bowl players at skill positions and a future Hall of Famer at quarterback, is done for the preseason.

The regulars, like quarterback Peyton Manning, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, running back C.J. Anderson and guard Louis Vasquez -- all have appeared in the Pro Bowl over the past two seasons -- will not play in Thursday night's preseason finale. Overall, the Broncos have taken a safety-first approach with the group and limited their snaps -- Manning played just 63 in two games -- while wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders did not appear in any of the first three preseason games because he was recovering from a hamstring injury.

In the end, though, the Broncos' starting offense did not construct a touchdown drive in any of the first three preseason games. Yes, Brock Osweiler threw a scoring pass to tight end Virgil Green late in the first half of the preseason opener in Seattle, but that wasn't the starting offense on the field. Saturday night against the San Francisco 49ers, the starters' work resulted in two punts, two field goals and a Manning interception.

"We wanted more points than we scored," tight end Owen Daniels said. "... We've got to clean some things up, down in the red zone, obviously, but we feel good about moving the ball. So we'll continue to work these next two weeks and get everything ready to go."

And one thing the Broncos have done with Manning at quarterback over the past three seasons is score points. They were second in the league in scoring in both 2012 (481 points) and 2014 (482 points) to go with the NFL's single-season scoring record in 2013 with 606 points, also the first time any NFL team crossed the 600-point barrier.

In all, the Broncos have averaged 32.7 points per game in Manning's three regular seasons with the team, 34.0 points per game over the past two seasons. So, the preseason drought has raised eyebrows on the heels of the arrival of a new playbook.

Executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway has called the offense "a work in progress" and after Saturday night's game Manning said: "We're still very much figuring out who we are and what we're going to be."

Saturday night the Broncos had a 13-play drive to go with a 14-play drive in the starters' half of work. Both of those drives ended in field goals.

"[It's] super frustrating, you go out there and you put a good drive together and you move the ball well, and we're just not finishing. ... We'll definitely be finishing Week 1, I can promise you that."

The Broncos also followed a safety by its defense -- DeMarcus Ware tackled 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick in the end zone early in the second quarter -- with a mistake of its own. In just the kind of situation the Broncos have said they want to thrive in this season, when the defense forces the issue and gives the offense a short field, the Broncos didn't cash in. On a drive that started on the 49ers' 48-yard line following the return of the free kick, the Broncos moved to the 49ers' 19 before Manning threw an interception in the end zone on an underthrown ball to Thomas.

Also, on the Broncos' second field goal drive of the first half, they were unable to convert after having a first-and-goal from the 49ers' 5-yard line. On third-and-goal from the 3, Manning didn't see a wide-open Daniels in the end zone as the 49ers sent a heavy blitz at him and couldn't squeeze the ball in to Cody Latimer.

"They brought everybody on the play, matter of fact nobody was even covering Owen on the play," Manning said. "I wish I would have looked there, but I was kind of keyed in on going to Cody, giving him a chance to make a play."

The Broncos have changed their personality at least some with a defense that is expected to be one of the most aggressive in the league to go with a pumped-up run game. That hasn't been the team's formula over three high-scoring seasons that have each ended in playoff disappointment.

Still, the opener is two weeks away and the Broncos are on the hunt for some more touchdowns. That's because, in short, they're going to need them.

"I feel pretty confident from a coaching standpoint we can go fix those things," coach Gary Kubiak said. "We're going to continue to do a lot of things offensively and we just have to do some of them a lot better than we did [Saturday]."

Despite sacks Broncos still want Peyton Manning taking snaps directly under center

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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Despite the fact Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning was sacked three times in Saturday's preseason game against the San Francisco 49ers -- and with all three coming with Manning taking the snap under center -- coach Gary Kubiak said they will still line up that way plenty in the season.

In short Kubiak believes the problems that resulted in rushers coming clean three times -- two times by 49ers linebacker NaVorro Bowman in a four-play span -- can be fixed. Kubiak also believes a team that lines up the quarterback in the shotgun can tip its intentions in the run game more often.

On Bowman's two sacks, running back Ronnie Hillman couldn't finish the block on the first and Anderson couldn't get to him on the second as the 49ers linebacker cleared the offensive line untouched.

"Obviously, I think I've said this to you guys before, when you're back there all the time, there are some tendencies from a run game standpoint," Kubiak said following Saturday's game. "What you do and obviously when you're under center, some of those tendencies go away. Like I said, we're going to continue to do both. I think we're going to run the ball well. I don't have anything in front of me, but I think we continue to run the ball pretty effectively. We have to make some big plays off of that. If you're going to do that, you're usually going to do that under center, selling the run and doing those type of things."

It is a departure given the Broncos lined up in the shotgun on 75.3 percent of their snaps last season, a total that included five games when they ran plays out of the shotgun on at least 65 plays. They ran the ball on just 25.4 percent of those shotgun snaps. In his two preseason games, Manning has been in the shotgun on 24 of his 63 snaps (penalty snaps not included) -- or 38.1 percent.

"I've confidence in the people doing it and the guys coaching it," Kubiak said. "That's on us as coaches, start with me to make sure we're out of that situation or give us a chance to get out of that situation. I look at myself with things like that ... I feel confident from coaching standpoint we can go fix those things."

For starters the Broncos signed Evan Mathis, a two-time Pro Bowl selection, last week to play left guard and are hopeful his addition settles things down in a front where two starters -- rookie left tackle Ty Sambrailo and center Matt Paradis -- have not played in an NFL regular-season game.

Mathis was held out of Saturday's game given he had just signed his deal Wednesday morning, but is expected to work with the starters this week and be in the lineup for the regular-season opener.

Following Saturday's game, Kubiak said Mathis is "ready to go."

For his part, Manning said while he has lined up in the shotgun far more in recent years, he believes he can be productive in the offense under center as well.

"I'm pretty comfortable doing that, I've been doing that for a long time," Manning said. " ... I feel pretty comfortable doing that."

Montee Ball's long, hot summer has resulted in slide down Broncos' depth chart

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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It was just a couple calendar pages ago – June – when Denver Broncos running back Montee Ball was talking about an offseason filled with focus, of hard work, to get back what was once his.

And that was the starting running back job.

“As of right now I’m second; I’m behind C.J. [Anderson],” Ball said in June. “But I’m sure it’s going to be a 1-A, 1-B style and we’re looking forward to it. ... The only thing I can do is work and fight back to get the No. 1 spot. But let’s say I do fight back and get the No. 1 spot, they can’t keep C.J. on the bench based off what he did. They most definitely have to use both of us.”

This time last year, Ball was at the front of the line. Saturday night, as the Broncos closed out their third preseason game, Ball was the fourth running back into the game. The Broncos may indeed have a 1-A, 1-B look, but Ball is no longer in position to be the second back in line.

Anderson has remained the starter, but in the weeks and months since the Broncos' work in June, Ronnie Hillman has moved into the No. 2 spot, and Juwan Thompson was the third back into the game Saturday night. Thompson is a multi-tasker, a coveted skill set among the roster-builders, in that he can play running back and fullback to go with a full allotment of special-teams duties.

As a result Ball is the team’s fourth-leading rusher of the preseason with 41 yards on his 16 carries (a 2.5-yards per carry average). He played just 10 snaps against the Houston Texans in the second preseason game and 11 snaps Saturday night against the 49ers.

With roster cuts looming over the next week -- rosters go to 75 by Tuesday, 53 by Saturday -- Broncos coach Gary Kubiak was asked following Saturday’s game about Ball’s slide down the depth chart.

“I think [Thompson] ... got all of the late carries in the game,” Kubiak said. “There’s nothing Montee’s done. It’s hard to get four guys carries in a game. He continues to work hard. Special teams is a big factor with him and Juwan as far as playing on a regular basis. We’ll see. I’m fine with Montee. I wish there would be more [total carries]. I promise you they’ll probably be plenty to go around on Thursday.”

The Broncos close out the preseason Thursday night against the Arizona Cardinals. With the Broncos' regulars not expected to play, the game does present itself as an opportunity for Ball to show the Broncos, or anyone else in the league, what he can do.

There are several teams around the league who need help at running back, led by the Cleveland Browns, who have not publicly ruled out bringing in former Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice.

At this point Ball would still project to be one of four running backs the Broncos would keep at the cut to 53 players. But because of Thompson's full slate of special-teams work, Ball would also face the real possibility of being a game day inactive if the team's other backs were healthy.

Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway has consistently said running back is a position "where we have a lot of tough decisions to make, but that's good because that means you got some depth." Elway has also lauded Hillman's jump in the preseason as well.

"He's looked great throughout camp and even OTAs," Elway said. "I think this offense fits him very well. ... He adds that added juice, the change-of-pace kind of guy that we need."

Ball played in just five games last year because of a groin injury he suffered in Week 5 against the Arizona Cardinals. Ball tried to play six games later (Nov. 9 against the St. Louis Rams), but was not ready to play and finished the season on injured reserve. He was the Broncos' second-round pick in the 2013 draft and averaged 4.7 yards per carry as a rookie.

"We have a lot of good football players and this is always the hardest time of the year because we have to cut down to eventually 53," Elway said of the coming roster reductions. " ... This is tough time of year, but we're fortunate in the fact that we've got a lot of tough decisions. Hopefully we can make the right ones."

Broncos to cut 15 players

By Mike Klis
9news Sports
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At the UCHealth Training Center, the Turk dresses in orange and blue.

There is almost always a surprise among the first 15 players who are cut from the Denver Broncos' roster.

The Broncos will trim their roster from 90 players to 75 before the start of practice at 11:30 Monday morning. Some may see the Turk on Sunday. Healthy players who didn't play in the Broncos' third preseason game Saturday night against San Francisco: Running backs Jeremy Stewart and Kapri Bibbs, cornerback Teverin Brandon, linebacker Chase Vaughn, safety Russ Madison, guard Andre Davis, offensive tackles Kyle Roberts and Charles Sweeton, defensive end Josh Watson, tight ends Marcel Jensen and Jake Murphy and defensive tackle Chuka Ndulue.

Quarterbacks Zac Dysert and Trevor Siemian also didn't play Saturday but there weren't any snaps available with Peyton Manning playing the first half and Brock Osweiler the second half.

With Manning not playing Thursday against Arizona, the Broncos figure to use their other three quarterbacks.

Not playing because of injury Saturday: Chris Harris Jr., Emmanuel Sanders, Kenny Anunike, Lerentee McCray, Tony Carter and Jeff Heurman, who will be transferred to season-ending injured reserve.

Not playing because they just signed with the Broncos last week: Left guard Evan Mathis and tight end Dan Light.

Broncos notebook: Peyton needs the Pistol Formation

By Mike Klis

9news Sports

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Put Peyton in the Pistol.

It's a simple answer. The Denver Broncos' first-team offense has sputtered as if it's caught in between. The Pistol is the in-between formation.

The Broncos' preseason is finished for quarterback Peyton Manning and the first-team offense. He got 9 possessions (we'll spare him the 1-second possession to finish the first half Saturday against the San Francisco 49ers) and generated two field goals. Zero touchdowns.

Yes, it's only the preseason. But it's also the only preseason of Manning's four with the Broncos that he didn't engineer a touchdown. (There were three, first-team touchdown drives in 2012; two in 2013; four in 2014).

Which might be dismissed except it was just two years ago that the Broncos had the greatest offense in the history of the NFL.

No wonder Manning doesn't like comparisons.

"I think people are used to seeing a lot more points on this offense," said tight end Owen Daniels. "But I don't think there's need to hit the panic button."

We're not panicking. We're problem-solving.

Step one: Identify the problem.

The problem isn't head coach Gary Kubiak. He's proven to be a highly successful offensive coordinator in this league whether employed by the Broncos from 1995-2005, the Baltimore Ravens in 2014 or with the job title of head coach with the Houston Texans from 2006-13.

The problem isn't Manning. He's in the discussion for greatest quarterback of all-time.

The problem is Kubiak's offense has yet to mesh with Manning the quarterback.

Kubiak prefers his quarterback to take the ball from under center. Getting the quarterback up in there helps the running backs back there. They get forward momentum and better vision of the blocks and running lanes developing – critical necessities in the zone scheme.

As a side benefit, the quarterback under center helps set up the play-action pass. Every play looks the same, run and pass.

"I'm pretty comfortable doing that," Manning said of taking the snap from under center. "I've been doing that for a long time. I've been in the shotgun a little bit more as of late, but I've definitely played under center for a lot of my career, so I feel pretty good doing that."

With all due respect, it doesn't always look that way. When Manning took the snap from under center, the San Francisco 49ers frequently blitzed the A gap, which are the lanes between the center and guards. Twice 49ers linebacker NaVorro Bowman was virtually untouched as he blitzed up the middle to sack Manning.

The shotgun is where Manning has done his best work over the years. From back there, he has better vision of the defensive coverage. It also puts him in passing position quicker because he doesn't have to take the time to drop back three, five, seven steps from center.

Against the 49ers, Manning played the first quarter from under center. When the Broncos couldn't finish off drives, he moved back into the shotgun for the second quarter and used a hurry-up tempo.

That was working until Manning underthrew Demaryius Thomas in the end zone and was intercepted. They used the shotgun, fast tempo again on their next drive, but failed to convert a first-and-goal from the 5 opportunity.

"We moved the ball well out of both scenarios, just didn't score touchdowns," Manning said. "Some good things out of it, but we obviously have to do a better job in the red zone and better throwing by me. I've underthrown Demaryius, really, twice. Once on the interception and I missed him another time and it would have been a touchdown. So some plays that we would like to have made, but some good things that I think we can build on."

What the Broncos haven't shown this preseason is the Pistol formation, where Manning would receive the snap halfway between the center and shotgun positions. In the Pistol, running backs C.J. Anderson and Ronnie Hillman would still have the momentum advantage of lining up behind Manning, and Manning would have a couple steps head start back to the pocket.

Maybe that is Kubiak's plan for the regular season but he purposely didn't want to show it in the preseason.

It will help when the Broncos insert two key players into their offense. Veteran left guard Evan Mathis will aid the communication in combating those A gap blitzes. And wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders has the speed to open up the field.

The regular season opens in two weeks.

Emmanuel to return punts?

Omar Bolden fumbled the game-opening kickoff, although teammate Joe Don Duncan recovered. Isaiah Burse muffed his first punt.

Coupled with the muff and fumble in returning punts during the Broncos' preseason opener at Seattle, Kubiak seemed exasperated Saturday night. Maybe even desperate.

"I'm concerned the way we're handling the ball," Kubiak said. "That's the biggest thing. I like our ability to make plays back there. I think Omar can make some big plays, but we haven't handled the ball very well. ...

"Obviously, we've got to settle down there. Emmanuel's very capable and could be a great, great punt returner. We have to get him back. Obviously, protecting the ball is of the utmost importance."

Ideally, Bolden handles both kickoff and punt returns. The problem is he sometimes looks like he's never returned punts before. Which he hadn't, at least not in the NFL, until this preseason. Bolden will continue to be the kickoff returner but he may mix with Sanders, depending on field position, on punt returns.

It's curious that Jordan Norwood hasn't been returning punts. He muffed one in Seattle but he has more experience than Bolden and, to put it bluntly, is less valuable than Sanders, who needs to stay healthy.

Norwood also led all Broncos receivers with four catches for 38 yards against the 49ers – all in the first half with Manning at quarterback.

Say what?

I know there's more time behind me than in front but I could live 50 more years and not understand what Broncos inside linebacker Danny Trevathan said about defensive coordinator Wade Phillips.

"He's just an old-school coach and he kicked it to us real," Trevathan said.

On Air Pressure, Head Trauma and the Preseason

By Peter King

MMQB

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Lots of football stories in the NFL this morning, 10 days from the opener. The Eagles, and Sam Bradford, are out of control—in a good way. (Composite first-quarter preseason score: Philadelphia 52, Foes 3.)

More: Burgeoning weirdness in Washington with Robert Griffin III ... Julio Jones gets his money, while Cleveland gets reminded of another blown chance to franchise-build ... The Bills evidently have Unitas, Montana and Fouts on the roster ... NaVorro Bowman plays like J.J. Watt will have competition for Defensive Player of the Year ... Bill Belichick will coach at least eight more years—his words, not mine ... Jeremy Maclin's a game-changer ... Drew Brees walks two miles home from practice, lugging his helmet and shoulder pads, through the adopted city he loves, at a time the adopted city really needs it.

I'm no Fandango or Rotten Tomatoes, and certainly no Hollywood Reporter, but I'll get involved in some movie business today. Here, we'll debut the trailer for a movie the NFL is not going to like. (I don't mean *The Curious Case of Thomas Brady* either.) "Concussion," a film starring Will Smith, about the man who began sounding the alarm for change in how the NFL treats head trauma, will hit theaters on Christmas.

We start, though, with the Nightmare That Will Not Go Away, coming for the third time to a New York courtroom, forcing Super Bowl MVP quarterback Tom Brady to miss a third Patriots practice while he fights to avoid a four-game suspension, forcing Roger Goodell to put off governance of a distracted league for another day, forcing America to start the 2015 season with endless Deflategate news after ending the 2014 season with endless Deflategate news and having every month of the offseason sullied by endless Deflategate news, while a federal judge decides the fate of Brady's season and the fate of Goodell's authority. While we all decide whether to throw our shoes through our TV screens.

Personally, I think Brady should skate. For now.

But it's complicated.

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I'll start at the end: If I were U.S. District Judge Richard Berman, I'd begin today's proceedings with a question for both sides about a potential compromise:

Seeing as though the pressure in footballs has never been measured at halftime and after games before, and seeing as though no one is exactly certain how much pressure in footballs would be lost over two to four hours on cold days, and seeing as though the Patriots footballs from the AFC Championship Game lost—by the measure of one gauge—a fairly predictable amount of air pressure according to the Ted Wells Report ... why can't both sides agree to table the Brady suspension until the end of the 2015 season? If the pressure in the footballs on a similarly cold days drops at the same level the pressure in the Patriots' footballs did, then Brady will not be suspended. If the pressure in the football on similarly cold days drops much less, then Brady—who wants to play several more years—will be suspended for the first four games of 2016.

Then, if I'm Berman, I'd direct this point to the NFL side:

Of course you're not going to like putting this off. But if Brady is suspended for four games now, and then, after the footballs are measured throughout the 2015 season, what happens if the balls on days with a similar temperature as the AFC title game—in the forties—show a similar drop in pressure as they did in Foxboro on Jan. 18? We have significant circumstantial evidence that sullies Brady's case, to be sure. But we have no smoking gun, no proof he directed the footballs to be deflated below the league-prescribed level. And I believe it's in the best interest of both sides that you agree to test footballs in all 267 games this season, then re-convene in my courtroom on Feb. 15, 2016. Agreed?

I don't expect that to happen. I expect Berman to push both sides anew today, trying to force two sides that don't want to compromise to somehow find a deal. The NFL clearly wants Brady to admit fault and to accept some sort of punishment. Brady doesn't want to admit fault on anything to do with deflating footballs below 12.5 psi. He will, reportedly, accept some sanction—with an eye-roll—for not cooperating fully with the investigation or obstructing the investigation with his diversionary cell-phone escapade. But I keep hearing that's not good enough for the league.

So what will Berman do if the two sides can't agree on anything? I spoke to an attorney who has argued two cases in front of Berman in his district courtroom in lower Manhattan, and asked him. This attorney is a big football fan. He's been following the case closely. He thinks Berman will be "offended"—the attorney's words—by Goodell's moving the ball way down the field from the Wells Report to the NFL's 15-page brief to Berman before this process started a month ago. In the Wells Report, Brady was found to be "at least generally aware" of the scheme to deflate footballs below the 12.5-psi minimum. The NFL ruled against Brady without a smoking gun, believing the preponderance of evidence in the case justified the sanction against Brady and the Patriots.

But the NFL wrote in the brief to Berman: "The commissioner suspended Brady for having 'approved of, consented to, and provided inducements in support of' a scheme to tamper with the game balls. And for having 'willfully obstructed the subsequent investigation.'" This attorney found that to be level-jumping, as do I.

Remember: Berman can suggest, and cajole, and threaten with a you're-not-going-to-like-what-I-decide wag of the finger to both sides. But he cannot order the two sides to compromise. He has been asked to decide whether to uphold or vacate Brady's four-game ban by Friday, so the Patriots can know who's going to play quarterback for them six days later—Brady or neophyte Jimmy Garoppolo.

I agree that there's significant reason to doubt Brady's innocence, led by him getting rid of a cell phone knowing it could have evidence important to this case. But the NFL's hands are too dirty here for me to buy its case, starting with league officials warning referee Walt Anderson to keep a close eye on the footballs on game day Jan. 18 and Anderson losing sight of them for at least eight minutes before the game; the letter the day after the game with false charges from NFL executive David Gardi about the level of pressure in the Patriots' and Colts' footballs; never correcting (to this day) false information in the media the league knew to be false about pressure levels in Patriots' balls; the "independent" Wells investigation though his report was read by the NFL legal department before it came out; and the huge jump in charges, from Brady being generally aware of malfeasance regarding the Wells Report to him being the ringleader in the letter to Berman.

"Significant reason" to doubt Brady is not enough to throw the book at him. I hope both sides find a reasonable compromise this week, whether it takes Brady off the field for a game or more. But if no

compromise is found, the league is at risk again of having a higher legal authority tell Roger Goodell he's made another disciplinary mistake. And how many more of those can his battered office take? Regardless what Berman rules this week—and no one truly knows how it will go—each side could appeal to the United State Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, also in New York. There, a three-judge panel would hear an appeal (an expedited one, most likely, if Brady playing in the opener is at stake) and rule.

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The debut of the trailer for “Concussion”

Seen here on The MMQB for the first time, here's the trailer for “Concussion,” the Sony movie starring Will Smith due out on Christmas Day:

I watched “Concussion” with several staff members of The MMQB recently. It's the story of Dr. Bennet Omalu, the Nigerian-born neuropathologist and veteran of scores of difficult autopsies. Omalu was the first doctor to ferret out the existence of specific brain trauma in football players after he did the autopsy of several deceased Steelers, among them Mike Webster. The film follows Omalu (played by Smith, with a quite good accent) as he tries to convince the football establishment that the game is hazardous to the brain. The football establishment, as we learned in “League of Denial,” has little interest in listening to Omalu. It's a story of how Omalu learned what he learned, and the frustration of convincing people who love football that the game is particularly dangerous to the human brain.

The movie was written and directed by Peter Landesman. He and I met in New York to discuss the film.

MMQB: Why did you make this movie?

Landesman: I gravitate towards stories of David versus Goliath, the small man versus the machine. Whether it is Bennet Omalu or Gary Webb, a reporter who discovered the cocaine trafficking with the CIA and was destroyed by the Washington Post and the CIA and others. In my writing career as a journalist, it was little man against the machine so I think I am just hard-wired for that narrative. When I heard about Bennet Omalu, I recognized that the story operated on a number of levels that made it completely unique. As an immigrant coming to America, who discovers a dangerous detail about the most American of things, America's sacred cow, who then is forced to tell America about itself as a disaffected Nigerian, it was an extraordinary opportunity to explore what it is to be an American. And it was a gorgeous way to understand what it is to be a citizen of this nation. And then there was the sports element. I played football for two years in college, I love the game, I am an athlete, I love sports and I watch football. I went to Brown, the powerhouse. I thought this was another way to un-peel the layers away from the theater of it and the pageantry of it to get to the humanity of it.

MMQB: In seeing all the scenes of Pittsburgh in the film, a city that just loves football as much as any city in America, I thought, “Maybe it took a person not from America to examine this. Maybe no one else would have looked at Mike Webster's brain.”

Landesman: It's the dynamic of, ‘Respect the person or respect the truth.’ Bennett has a savant-like relationship to the dead. His obsession is to tell the story of death. As he says in the movie, I think more about the way people die and reasons they die than the way they live. He was completely focused on the science. He didn't know football, he didn't know who Mike Webster was; to him, Webster was just another body on a slab. He didn't have a reverence for the game because he wasn't brought up in this

country. So in some ways, his purity and his innocence was a requirement for him to drill down into this and tell us a very uncomfortable and inconvenient truth.

MMQB: Do you think people should love football? Should there be football?

Landesman: I have no position on whether or not people should play football or whether they should have their kids play football. To me, this is a story about making adult choices. Once you have the information—and the information has been obscured for a long time, it's been buried and covered up by people who don't want to damage the sport—the information is now out there and I hope this movie brings together the information in a way that the general public can metabolize and now make their own decisions. So now that you know that concussions can kill you and playing the sport can kill you, it's on every parent and it's on every college player, it's on every high school player and professional player on whether you are going to let your child play. It's the same with smoking, drinking and doing drugs. I like to think in some ways that life is an occupational hazard. Something we do in our life is going to kill us; maybe now, maybe fifty years from now. You have to choose what those things are. We love to drink and be merry and be happy, we know it's not good for us, but we do it. It's about making adult choices.

MMQB: Are you sure you're not making this movie to drive people away from football?

Landesman: I was very focused on this story. I don't feel responsible or connected to the consequences. Storytellers can't be. Otherwise you get hamstrung by your own conscience. You just have to tell the truth with the most integrity that you can.

MMQB: What was your reaction to Chris Borland's early retirement? And Borland screened the movie. How was that?

Landesman: I had a feeling of tremendous sobriety. I understood the heaviness of his decision to walk away from the money and the fame and the joy and the camaraderie. But there's a high school team in Texas that just closed its doors. There are colleges that are considering closing their programs. I did reach out to Chris because I wanted him to know that he's not alone and I wanted him to understand his own decision in a way he might not be able to yet. So we brought him down to Los Angeles, and at the end of it, he was literally, physically shaking. Shaken and shaking. I think that he wasn't able to really understand the physical consequences of his own decision yet.

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The only preseason weekend that matters

I watched 16 first halves over the weekend, to see how 32 teams are faring entering cut-down time. My game-by-game observations:

DENVER 19, SAN FRANCISCO 12

The headline: NaVorro Bowman is playing out of his mind. Last week: three plays in his first action in 19 months, three tackles, two of them for losses. Saturday night: 42 snaps, nine tackles, two sacks. On the first two series of the game, Bowman tormented the Broncos. He forced a fumble on DeMaryius Thomas (later overturned) over the middle on the first series. In a five-play sequence on Denver's next series, Bowman beat Ronnie Hillman for an up-the-middle sack of Peyton Manning, stoned wideout Jordan

Norwood after a four-yard gain over the middle, beat Hillman again on the same up-the-middle rush for a second Manning sack, and stopped C.J. Anderson after a short gain up the middle. I don't know what we expected out of Bowman exactly, but his first two appearances show he looks as good as ever—incredibly, after such a major knee injury 19 months ago.

Notes: The Kubiak offense is struggling. "I'd be crazy to not do what Peyton Manning does well," coach Gary Kubiak told me in training camp. In other words, Kubiak probably won't call many sprint-outs for his 39-year-old quarterback. But Manning has to play better. He threw a wobbler that Niners safety Eric Reid deflected on the first series, and missed Thomas in the end zone in the second quarter, getting picked by safety Kenneth Acker ... Reid is really an impressive player—around the ball a lot and a ball hawk ... the Denver pass rush is going to be great. Not good—great ... Colin Kaepernick never had much time, but he didn't throw it well either ... C.J. Anderson is a legit number one back. His 49 hard-earned first-half yards included about 10 to 12 yards he shouldn't have gotten but instinctively found space.

Stat of the day: The Niners had three first-half first downs. Protection is a definite worry, particularly right tackle Erik Pears.

Injuries: Emmanuel Sanders (hamstring) was the most encouraging news of the night. He didn't play, but Manning's second-most important receiver, who has been plagued by a hammy all through camp and hasn't played, ran routes at full speed before the game and was pronounced ready for the Broncos' opener in 13 days against Baltimore.

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BUFFALO 36, PITTSBURGH 19

The headline: Need closure on the quarterback competition? Not today. In the first eight Buffalo drives of the game, Bills quarterbacks were 22 of 24 for 284 yards—and, in particular, E.J. Manuel pushed himself back into the competition with Matt Cassel and Tyrod Taylor. Manuel, who started six of six for 166 yards, looked sure of himself and absolutely on target, as well as looking over his options consistently well. And Tyrod Taylor was maybe more impressive: 12 of 13 for 122 yards.

Notes: Ugly game ... The Steelers are really going to miss Martavis Bryant (four-game substance-abuse ban), particularly early in the season, before rookie wideout Sammie Coates has bonded with Ben Roethlisberger. Bryant, a touchdown machine last year, had 63-yard and 36-yard and 39-yard catches early against the Bills ... Mike Vick is wearing No. 2. He was No. 7 in Atlanta, No. 7 in Philadelphia and No. 1 with the Jets ... The way he was firing the ball around Ralph Wilson Stadium, Rex Ryan must have wished he'd signed Vick (5 of 6, 106 yards) in the off-season. Vick is a security blanket for the Steelers—if Ben Roethlisberger ever went down, the season wouldn't be over. "By the grace of God I was able to find a job," Vick said post-game ... The hip malady sidelining Percy Harvin has to concern Buffalo ... Lord, how do Bills' fans stand that constant horn that sounds like a semi-truck's airhorn?

Stat of the day: Couldn't have been a very nice Sunday for new Pittsburgh defensive coordinator Keith Butler, analyzing the tape from the first half especially: 269 Buffalo yards, and 15 of 17 passing by quarterbacks who couldn't start anywhere else.

Injuries: I asked two Bills coaches in the summer about the surprising player in camp. Both said strong safety Aaron Williams. He walked off limping after looking like he tweaked a knee—or worse. The Bills are incredibly beat up. Their top four receivers and two top backs missed this game with various nicks ...

The Steelers lost kicker Shaun Suisham in the first preseason game for the season with a knee injury. They may have lost his heir, Garrett Hartley, who came up lame, grabbing his hammy, in the second quarter.

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DETROIT 22, JACKSONVILLE 17

The headline: Blake Bortles looks ready for prime time. You may remember a play I wrote about when I visited Jaguar camp, wideout Tony Washington one-on-one against cornerback Davon House, and Bortles firing the ball before he's out of his cut toward a skinny post and Washington turning his head and the ball hitting him perfectly in the chest. Big gain. "That throw reminded me of a throw Aaron [Rodgers] would make," said House, the former Packer. More of that Friday night in Jacksonville. Bortles drove the Jags 92, 83 and 63 yards to scores against a 2014 playoff team, completing 20 of 29 throws and looking totally in command. His most impressive play, I thought, was a play-action, sprint-out 15-yard dart to tight end Nic Jacobs that encapsulates everything a quarterback with movement skills can do well.

Notes: Rookie free agent Zach Zenner, a 5-11, 223-pound truck, is either going to med school this fall or playing for the Lions. He continued his quest for the latter, with an eight-carry, 85-yard night in Jacksonville ... Allen Hurns, who came out of nowhere last year from Miami (Fla.), continues to look like Bortles' favorite target. Four targets, four receptions in this game ... Golden Tate is going to be Matthew Stafford's best friend if he keeps it up. With Calvin Johnson resting, Tate caught a perfect 62-yard strike from Stafford to open Detroit's scoring ... The Jags want T.J. Yeldon to win a prominent role in the running game, but he's going to have to be better than he was in this game: eight carries, 10 yards, mostly stone walls.

Stat of the day: Zenner, an undrafted free agent from South Dakota State, rushed for 2,044, 2,015 and 2,019 yards in his last three college seasons.

Injuries: Jacksonville tight end Clay Harbor rolled his ankle and could miss some time. He's had a good camp but that's a position of strength for the Jags—assuming Julius Thomas (fractured hand) plays Week 1, which is how Jacksonville is thinking right now.

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NEW ENGLAND 17, CAROLINA 16.

The headline: No one's running much on these teams. In the first 25 minutes of the game, with ones versus ones throughout, both teams' running backs combined to rush 19 times for 45 yards, a 2.4-yard average. Chandler Jones, Dominique Easley, Jabaal Sheard and Malcolm Brown filled holes for New England, and Jerod Mayo, back to health, could be the playmaker the middle of the defense needs. "Good team defensive plays," Bill Belichick said. The key for New England is depth, and versatility with that depth—so many of the defensive linemen who will make the team will be able to play inside and outside. Easley, for instance, the first-round pick from a year ago. For Carolina, tackles Dwan Edwards and Colin Cole played big, and will have to, for Carolina. Both secondaries let receivers loose.

Notes: Garoppolo wasn't as sharp in Carolina as in the previous two games. He had two interceptions dropped by Panthers. But he threw a lovely 40-yard stutter-and-go down the right side to Aaron Dobson. I was surprised Belichick went all through the first half with Tom Brady, seeing as no one has any idea if he'll play in 10 days against Pittsburgh ... Carolina's got a major problem with a receiver Ron Rivera really wants to make to make the team, undrafted Corey Brown. He dropped one sure touchdown, and another ball popped off his chest inside the New England 10-yard line with no one pressuring him. Clearly, Brown's confidence is shot. It's a godsend Carolina re-signed Ted Ginn Jr., in the off-season ... Extremely impressive game for Carolina rookie linebacker Shaq Thompson, credited with only two tackles. Terrific sideline-to-sideline speed ... Stephen Gostkowski kicked a 53-yard field goal, the winner, off a ground-ball snap—and the kick would have been good from 65 ... Not a good night for either starting quarterback. Meh ... Reggie Wayne played regularly in the first half and dropped the only pass thrown to him by Tom Brady.

Stat of the day: Garoppolo, who may have to play opening night for New England, has completed 76.3 percent of his throws this preseason, for 554 yards, two touchdowns and two picks, for a rating of 92.4.

Injuries: A potentially significant one for New England. One of the best fullbacks in football, and a Bill Belichick favorite, James Develin, suffered a right leg injury that looked bad in the fourth quarter. Develin had to be carted off, with trainers placing his leg gingerly on the cart. Belichick doesn't come on the field and talk to players too often when they're in agony, but he did it with the self-made Develin.

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PHILADELPHIA 39, GREEN BAY 26

The headline: Sam Bradford has quieted the Philly nut jobs. It's not just Bradford's sick numbers from the game at Green Bay—10 of 10, 121 yards, three touchdowns, no interceptions—but that he seems so at ease with piloting Chip Kelly's breakneck offense. Three series, three touchdown passes, 18 plays, the final of which was run with 2:15 left in the first quarter. I clocked how fast Bradford ran the offense on the second series. After the first play, a run, he took successive snaps with 24, 22, 23, 24, 14 and 22 seconds left on the play clock. That is precisely how Chip Kelly wants to play, and for Bradford to be able to have picked that up this fast, coming off ACL tears in two straight seasons, is damn impressive.

Notes: Just a guess, but Tim Tebow probably hasn't done enough to beat out Matt Barkley for the third quarterback job with the Eagles ... Aaron Rodgers didn't play. No surprise, really, given that his front line was missing three starters and Nelson was out ... It was 25-0 after a quarter. In Green Bay ... Not a great decision by Packers third-string quarterback Brett Hundley, who got the start, in throwing a pick-six to Walter Thurmond of the Eagles. His receiver slipped, but the coverage was too good by Thurmond for Hundley to have taken such a risk ... Very nice touch on two of Bradford's three touchdowns, including a rainbow over Packers linebacker Sam Barrington that nestled perfectly in Darren Sproles' arms.

Stat of the day: Bradford played three series—13 minutes in all. If you pro-rated his stats over a 60-minute game, he'd have been 46 of 46 for 558 yards, with 14 touchdowns and no interceptions.

Injuries: Green Bay wide receiver Randall Cobb went out in the first quarter with a sprained right shoulder. The state of Wisconsin was in a cold sweat until late Sunday afternoon, when it was learned there was no structural damage and Cobb may be ready to play in the Sept. 13 season opener at Chicago. Sort of crucial, of course, given that Jordy Nelson won't play until September of 2016.

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MIAMI 13, ATLANTA 9

The headline: Ndamukong Suh is not the only impressive Miami defensive tackle. Earl Mitchell was a monster Saturday night. He's the unrestricted free agent signed away from line-rich Houston last season. At 6-3 and 310, you might think he's only fit to play one down next to Suh. But not only did Mitchell stone rookie back Tevin Coleman on the first series against the Falcons; he followed it by pushing center James Stone—no match for Mitchell strength-wise—back into Matt Ryan and sacking Ryan. On another play in the first quarter, Suh terrorized Ryan, and it happened because Mitchell again was able to push Stone into an escape path Ryan would have used. Key thing: Teams are going to over-protect on Suh's side this fall, and that could leave Mitchell single-blocked by lesser players, as happened with the Falcons.

Notes: With Julio Jones signing a five-year extension Saturday, the Falcons have the best receiver (probably in their history, if he continues playing as well as he did in his 104-catch 2014 season) through 2020. Smart signing by the team ... Devin Hester showed toughness in his expanded role as a receiver against Miami ... Ryan's going to have a tough time finding his receivers if his line protects as poorly as it did here ... Olivier Vernon, the former third-round pick, had two good pocket-disrupting plays for Miami ... Lamar Miller's an underrated back on a team that's going to use him a lot ... If it's possible to go 15 of 19 and have a "meh" day, Ryan Tannehill did.

Stat of the day: Josh Freeman sighting! He hit four of five for 35 yards in relief for Miami.

Injuries: Left tackle Branden Albert (knee) will likely miss a couple of games in the regular season, which makes the knee-caving that happened to center Mike Pouncey especially worrisome. Pouncey said after the game he wouldn't miss any time, but an MRI on his knee will tell that tale.

- JOE PHILBIN TALKS FOOTBALL: The Dolphins coach, a one-time prison guard, is known as a buttoned-up disciplinarian. But part of making his team more focused means he's starting to cut loose. Just look at him gyrate in that white tuxedo

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WASHINGTON 31, BALTIMORE 13

The headline: Kirk Cousins is who he is. A fantastic guy, and a great teammate, and he can fool you in an impressive camp practice. (Fans in Richmond love the guy.) But on his first throw Saturday night against Baltimore, he threw into a scrum of three people—and I mean a scrum. Tackle Morgan Moses, wideout Pierre Garcon, Baltimore rusher Terrell Suggs. Why he would make that throw, when he couldn't even see Garcon—I'm serious; find the replay and watch it—is beyond logic. Suggs reached up and grabbed it, picking off an embarrassing attempt. Cousins finished 20 of 27, and he played well. But there's a reason his trade value has plummeted around the league. I'm not sold by one impressive preseason show.

Notes: Feisty game. Coach versus coach (after a set-to on the field between the players), Steve Smith getting thrown out, and then coach versus TV guy, when John Harbaugh didn't like the line of questioning by the Ravens' sideline reporter ... Not all that worrisome a day offensively for Baltimore, which started touchdown-field goal-field goal-missed field goal before napping ... But Baltimore's sack-

less pass rush needs to awaken ... For Washington, some impressive runs by rookie third-round back Matt Jones from Florida. He finished seven for 57, an 8.1-yard average.

Stat of the Day: Linebacker Jackson Jeffcoat has a last name Washington fans who hate Dallas will never love. (Remember Dallas' Jim Jeffcoat? This is his son.) Jackson Jeffcoat: one sack, one interception, one intense run at a roster spot.

Injuries: The status of Robert Griffin III is ... no one knows. He said he felt fine last week, but an independent neurologist held him out of the game. Then ESPN reported the team had decided already to play Cousins in the first game of the regular season, against Miami, which the team denied. Stay tuned this week. Griffin could be groomed to play if he's cleared. Or he could be traded. Or he could be fired. I understand the sideshow aspect of all this, but I also understand how much Washington traded to get Griffin, and also that he's 25 years old. Not so fast on lancing this boil.

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NEW YORK JETS 28, NEW YORK GIANTS 18

The headline: Ryan Fitzpatrick looks competent enough to beat the NFL's huddled masses. The Giants are not good. At least not now, not with Eli Manning struggling for consistency and for time to throw. Fitzpatrick looked in unison with Eric Decker and Brandon Marshall and showed when he's not under pressure he can make the throws he needs to make to win. He was just nine of 14 for 127 yards, with two touchdowns and no picks, but don't let the small volume say much. The Jets are going to be a running team first and second this year, and Zac Stacy and Chris Ivory combined for 98 yards on the ground.

Notes: A superb night for the Jets' offensive line, while so many offensive fronts struggled this weekend. The line kept Fitzpatrick clean (zero sacks) while clearing the way for the runners to gain 4.5 yards per carry ... Why'd the Giants sign Shane Vereen? Perfect example: On a third-and-three in the middle of the second quarter, with the Giants struggling to get anything going on offense, Vereen wheeled out of the backfield to the left, caught a flip from Eli Manning, and slithered for 19 ... Henry Hynoski, classic fullback, waylaid a very good linebacker, David Harris, on the Giants' first-half touchdown run ... Darrelle Revis-Odell Beckham Jr. was fun to watch for 20 or so snaps. It'll be more fun when they meet for real Dec. 6.

Stat of the day: Fresno State free agent punter Robert Malone (two punts, 59.5-yard average) has a shot of beating out 32-year-old incumbent Steve Weatherford.

Injuries: The lingering calf issue that has prevented Victor Cruz from playing in preseason games isn't going away. Asked Sunday if Cruz will practice this week, coach Tom Coughlin said, "Not as far as I know."

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ARIZONA 30, OAKLAND 23

The headline: Watch your back, Carson Palmer. And your front. Palmer (eight for 22 for 103 yards, with three sacks and two picks) was under duress all through the first half. Bruce Arians had to be having second thoughts about playing him for two full quarters after seeing the harassment Palmer was taking, though even Palmer said last week, "Part of coming back [from his ACL tear] is getting hit again, and

feeling it, and recovering from it during the week.” All well and good. But the Cards are 13-2 in Palmer’s last 15 starts, and not nearly as good when he’s missing, so the one thing Arians knows is he’s got to find a way to keep him upright. Palmer’s drives traveled 11, 5, 44, 0, 45, minus-5, minus-4, zero and 19 yards Sunday night.

Notes: Derek Carr had a so-so day and lost right tackle Menelik Watson for the season with a torn Achilles. Big loss. Watson was a cornerstone lineman for the Del Rios ... Strange to see an NFL head coach in a team-logoed T-shirt for coaching attire during a game. But Jack Del Rio wore the black T with the silver Raider shield, and he wore it well ... Good call by Cris Collinsworth on the NBC telecast, pointing out that the Cards had a five-safety alignment in the game on one pass-coverage snap. That’s the kind of alignment 2014 defensive coordinator Todd Bowles often used because he didn’t have enough good inside linebackers, bringing one or two safeties down as box linebackers. Same thing Sunday night under new defensive coordinator James Bettcher ... Raiders quarterbacks threw 54 pass attempts to 16 different receivers. That’s a lot ... Khalil Mack is one scary penetrator. And Malcolm Smith, the former Super Bowl MVP, had a good first half in coverage and holding the point of attack on running plays.

Stat of the day: In three games, here's the preseason rushing line for Oakland running back Trent Richardson: 15 carries, 42 yards, 2.8-yard average. Sound familiar, Browns/Colts fans?

Injuries: Arizona running back Chris Johnson (hamstring) missed his second straight game since signing, and Arians hopes he’ll be ready to be a change-of-pace reliever for the running game by the opener Sept. 13 against New Orleans.

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INDIANAPOLIS 24, ST. LOUIS 14

The headline: A good day for Andrew Luck—and you won’t see it reflected in his numbers. Nick Foles was 10 of 11 at St. Louis, better-looking than Luck’s 12 of 21. And Luck fumbled on the first snap of the second half, leading to a Rams’ score. But Luck wasn’t sacked, and by my count, he was pressured significantly only three times in his two quarters and a play. Now, that doesn’t mean the line—which has been a question mark almost from the day Luck was drafted—is in great shape; Indy ran for just 2.0 yards per attempt. But keeping the franchise clean is where it starts and ends for that group.

Notes: The Rams will have to bring far more pressure with the first unit on defense to justify all the off-season medals they’ve been awarded ... Rookie Henry Anderson from Stanford was all over NFL draft boards last spring, and the Colts finally got the versatile defensive lineman with the 93rd pick. He can play inside at tackle and rush a little from the edge too, and showed both skills here ... Adam Vinatieri, 42, will be kicking field goals when he’s 72. He booted a 55-yarder ... Jeff Fisher is ticked off at the Rams’ 29 penalties in three preseason games. Well he should be.

Stat of the day: Since opening day of last regular season, Vinatieri has made 35 of 36 field-goal tries.

Injuries: With first-round pick Todd Gurley not expected to be ready to start the season because he’s still rehabbing his wounded knee, Tre Mason was being counted on to carry the load for the first couple of weeks, at least. Not so fast. He strained a hammy against the Colts. Questionable for the opener against Seattle ... Colts defensive lineman Arthur Jones missed seven games due to injury in his first year with the Colts in 2014. He left the Ed Jones Dome in a walking boot Saturday, and he could have a high ankle sprain. If so, cross off September for him.

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HOUSTON 27, NEW ORLEANS 13

The headline: He who is first shall be first. Wake Forest cornerback Kevin Johnson, the Texans' first-round pick, had the kind of day mature players should. Playing gunner on the punt team in the second quarter, Johnson downed a Houston punt at the New Orleans' 2-yard line. Not all first-round picks would be fired up about covering punts, but Johnson seemed to be. At the end of that drive, New Orleans had the ball at the Houston two on fourth down and went for it. Luke McCown threw for Josh Morgan in the end zone and Johnson, lunging, knocked it away. One long series, two great plays.

Notes: The star of Cleveland's camp last year, wideout Willie Snead from Ball State, is making a strong bid to stick with the Saints. He had four more catches for 56 yards and drew a pass-interference flag ... Rookie linebackers Stephone Anthony from Clemson and Hau'oli Kikaha from Washington—6-3, 245-pound bookends—both play confident and fast. Anthony sheds blocks exceedingly well ... Brian Hoyer, now that the quarterback competition is over, can settle down and just play. He had a good deep connection for 29 yards with DeAndre Hopkins ... I wonder if the Texans will listen to offers for "Hard Knocks" co-star Chris Polk, the pugnacious running back. He was only 11 for 22 against the Saints.

Stat of the day: Drew Brees has thrown 16 passes this preseason. I don't expect him to throw a 17th.

Injuries: Houston left tackle Duane Brown (left hand injury) didn't play, but the Texans believe he'll be ready to start the season against the Chiefs in 13 days.

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CLEVELAND 31, TAMPA BAY 7

The headline: The Ray Rice Watch is officially on in Cleveland. The fit's a good one. Rice is desperate for one more NFL chance. His former position coach in Baltimore, Wilbert Montgomery, is the Browns' running backs coach and a mentor to Rice. You can be pretty darn sure Rice wouldn't screw up this opportunity. If I'm Cleveland, I'm taking the week's worth of bad publicity and bringing in a player who will show a strangely entitled back, Terrance West, what football hunger is like. The talk surfaced again over the weekend, after draftee Duke Johnson was lost with a concussion in the game at Tampa. "If we do come to the decision that we need to add a back," coach Mike Pettine said cryptically, "we'll look at the list of backs that are available." Rice, I'm told, is high on that list.

Notes: Cleveland's Terrelle Pryor and his achy hamstring sat again. He probably needs to play Thursday against the Bears to have a chance to make the team as a wideout ... Tough night for Jameis Winston and his young offensive line. Winston was six of 15 with four sacks and one interception. He struggled picking up blitzes, but anyone would have with all the leaks in the Bucs line ... Josh McCown, booed out of Tampa after a bad 2014, had to feel good about his 80-yard and 78-yard touchdown drives.

Stat of the day: Jameis Winston: 48.9 percent completions, no touchdowns, two picks in three games. Work very much in progress.

Injuries: Johnny Manziel (elbow) is likely to sit out the preseason finale, and his status for the early season is unknown. But McCown's play has made it easy for the Browns not to rush Johnny Football.

* * *

KANSAS CITY 34, TENNESSEE 10

The headline: Hey, the Chiefs might be able to throw it deep. Alex Smith is always going to be efficient, and so it was no surprise that his final passing line was 16 of 18. But it wasn't 16 of 18 for 112 yards, a chain-moving exercise and with no explosion. He had 171 yards passing, with completions of 34 and 29 yards ... and wasn't sacked. He and \$11-million-a-year free-agent Jeremy Maclin are trying to get more explosive plays in the passing game—that wouldn't be hard, considering the Chiefs had zero TD passes to wideouts last year—and he completed seven of eight targeted throws to Maclin on Friday night. A designed rollout to the left and throw across his body to Maclin resulted in a 29-yard touchdown four minutes into the game.

Notes: Amazing to see the highest paid guard in the game just two years ago, Andy Levitre, being phased out by Tennessee. Byron Bell moved from right tackle to left guard to replace Levitre, while rookie third-rounder Jeremiah Poutasi moved outside to right tackle and played mostly well against the Chiefs' excellent edge rush ... Aaron Murray played some with the ones, but Andy Reid said the Georgia kid's still number three behind Chase Daniel ... Marcus Mariota has four scoring drives in 10 possessions so far.

Stat of the day: Alex Smith's 6.4-yards-per-attempt would still be abysmal if this were the regular season. Only Oakland and Jacksonville were worse in the regular season last year.

Injuries: Tennessee cornerback Jason McCourty (groin surgery) is still iffy for the opener at Tampa Bay. The Titans have Andrew Luck in Week 3, but no other star quarterbacks until mid-October, so the schedule will be forgiving if McCourty isn't ready in 13 days.

* * *

MINNESOTA 28, DALLAS 14

The headline: Scrap those Cordarrelle Patterson-is-expendable stories. After Tony Romo threw a touchdown pass early in the second quarter, the Cowboys kicked off, seemingly for a touchback. But Patterson caught it seven yards deep in the end zone and took it out. Amazing thing was, the return didn't look all that hard. I mean, he ran it back 107 yards for a touchdown, and it was a fairly ho-hum return. That just shows the precocious athleticism of a player the Vikings were disappointed in last season: Patterson had just one touchdown, only 11.6 yards per reception and no long kick returns. That changed in an instant in the House That Jerry Built on Saturday night.

Notes: Don't imagine defensive boss Rod Marinelli would have been a very happy breaking down the tape from this game. The Vikings completed 24 of 27 passes, with just one pick and two sacks ... Mike Zimmer, correctly, was excited about Teddy Bridgewater's seven-of-seven night, and not just because of the numbers. You can see Bridgewater processing his progressions with patience ... Encouraging night for Darren McFadden (four rushes, 37 yards), who will be part of the Cowboys' running back by committee approach ... Dallas' backups struggled mightily. One first down in the second half.

Stat of the day: In three games, Bridgewater's been sacked once, and completed 83 percent of his throws. Imagine when Adrian Peterson starts playing two weeks from tonight.

Injuries: Dallas is still reeling after the loss of Orlando Scandrick, its best defensive back, for the season with a torn ACL. Tyler Patmon or Corey White is likely to replace one of the best three slot corners in the league.

* * *

CINCINNATI 21, CHICAGO 10

The headline: A.J. McCarron raises a couple of eyebrows with his play. After Andy Dalton (sore neck) left the game after one series, McCarron got his chance to play with the ones, against the ones. He completed his first seven passes, and had 66-yard and 54-yard touchdown drives in the first half. "We brought him here for a reason," said coach Marvin Lewis. That reason, in time, will be to be the most popular man in Cincinnati—if Dalton doesn't play markedly better late in the season and in the playoffs. You know what they say about backup quarterbacks and popularity.

- CINCY CAMP REPORT: The Bengals are hungrier than ever after four-straight one-and-dones. Can a now-healthy Geno Atkins and Tyler Eifert lift Cincinnati over its playoff hump?

Notes: The Bears got blown out when it was ones against ones. It was 21-3 at the half, and that's with McCarron, not Dalton, playing the majority of the half ... Shea McClellin, transitioning to the center of the defense at linebacker, had six first-half tackles. He's not the strongest guy and gets pushed around, but he was in the right place throughout the first half ... Two sacks for Lamarr Houston, trying to be the edge rusher the Bears need.

Stat of the day: In three preseason games, the Bears have one touchdown pass—and it's not by Jay Cutler. It's Jimmy Clausen's.

Injuries: Chicago defensive tackle Eddie Goldman, the 39th overall pick in the draft, left with a concussion. He was due to be the starter at nose tackle while Jeremiah Ratliff served a three-game suspension in September. Now Goldman enters the concussion protocol, and it's unknown when he'll be healthy enough to play.

* * *

SEATTLE 16, SAN DIEGO 15

The headline: Repeat after me, Seahawks: Preseason doesn't count ... Preseason doesn't count. Russell Wilson has led 12 offensive drives in three practice games. Zero touchdowns. Good for Pete Carroll for admitting Saturday night: "We're all a little frustrated with it." Six catches, 75 yards for Jimmy Graham—that could be better. But I'll make this point in defense of the Seahawks for now: They've faced three of the best pass-rush teams in football (Denver, KC, San Diego) so far. You have to remember that over the last 11 seasons, heading into this one, New England has the best record in football in the regular season and was only 20-24 in the preseason. It just doesn't matter ... but I'm sure Carroll won't feel great about going to a place where the team never plays well, St. Louis, on opening day, if the first-unit offense hasn't scored a touchdown all summer.

Notes: Melvin Gordon got stone-walled, mostly, in his NFL debut: 14 carries, 34 yards. He showed a couple of bursts and almost broke one run for a decent gain, but the Seattle front-seven speed contained him ... Second-round Seattle defensive end Frank Clark, the controversial pick after being kicked off his Michigan team under a cloud of domestic violence, ticked off the Chargers with what two of their linemen said was extra physicality against Philip Rivers at the bottom of a pile in the first half of the game ... Tyler Lockett looks like the receiving threat/return man Seattle thought it dealt for two years ago in Percy Harvin. His 67-yard punt return was Seattle's only touchdown.

Stat of the day: A 60-yard field goal by Steven Hauschka of the Seahawks won the game. He'd never made a 60-yarder in his career.

Injuries: Philip Rivers suffered a right hand injury which didn't appear serious—but that's his throwing hand, of course, so anything that happens there bears watching ... Seattle linebacker K.J. Wright left with a shoulder injury. Neither man is likely to miss the opener.

- THE CHANCELLOR HOLDOUT: In the spring of 2013 Pro Bowl safety Kam Chancellor and the Seahawks agreed to a deal that made both sides happy. A little more than two years later, a changing market and Seattle's willingness to spend money elsewhere on the roster has led to the summer's most bitter contract dispute

* * *

An important story ... about gloves

Kudos to Sam Farmer of the Los Angeles Times for his story on how the gloves worn by quarterbacks and wide receivers are affecting the game. From Hall of Fame receiver Tim Brown saying Odell Beckham Jr., couldn't have made his miracle catch last year without the tackified gloves, to NFL Competition Committee chairman Rich McKay saying it's time to look at the gloves' effect on the game, look for this to become a topic next spring at the annual NFL meetings. Think of Peyton Manning, who never was a glove man until his neck surgeries, telling me he has no feeling in the fingertips of his throwing hand; clearly, wearing gloves in inclement weather is really important to his performance. As Cris Collinsworth told Farmer: "I think if they took the gloves completely away from the guys, including the quarterbacks at this point, it would have a major impact on what the game looked like on the field. And not for the better." Really good story on a topic the league should examine.

* * *

The Voice of the Fan

In July, looking for candidates for the fan network that The MMQB is launching this season, I asked readers to send in a short essay on why you love the team you do. We were overwhelmed by the number of responses—and by the nature of the submissions. Your stories were poignant, powerful, pained and funny. We heard from fans all over the country and all over the world, men and women of all ages, who told us about their passion for the team they grew up with, or adopted, or came to love in some crazy way. Because of the quantity and quality of responses, we've rethought our approach to the project.

Originally we planned to select a single representative for each of the 32 NFL teams. Having read through hundreds of submissions—and still counting!—we realized that approach would close off opportunities to too many talented fans with great stories to tell.

The new plan: We're organizing the submissions we've received and grouping them by team allegiances.

As we plan stories throughout the 2015 season and beyond, we'll draw from that pool based on our contributors' backgrounds.

Oddities from the SI Archives

We might ask a single contributor to write a story on a particular topic; we might call on a group of fans of one team to participate in a roundtable, or fans of various teams to debate league issues.

Contributors might be asked to share photos or videos from their NFL experiences. We might pit two fans of rival teams in a debate before a big game. And at certain points in the season we might call for more submissions based on a story we're considering. The opportunities are endless, and we want to draw upon the knowledge and passion of as wide a range of fans as possible.

We will debut the fan network, under the Voice of the Fan column, the week of the season-opener—beginning by sharing a sampling from the essays we received for each team based on our original request. Each week we'll build upon that foundation to cover the NFL in a way that no else is doing: through your eyes.

This project has taken us some time to work through, and we thank you for your patience. We're a small staff and training-camp duties pulled us in many different directions. But everyone who wrote to us will get a response, via email, about the new goals for the fan network. Whether we end up using you during the season or not, we are overwhelmingly appreciative of your interest in this project. It shows how much you love football and we're so lucky to have you as readers of The MMQB.

You can always reach us at talkback@themmqb.com. Thanks for being a part of our future.

* * *

Quotes of the Week

I

"I'll be like Marv Levy and coaching when I'm in my seventies. You don't have to worry about that."

—Bill Belichick, in the upcoming NFL Films/NFL Network show, "Do Your Job: Bill Belichick and the 2014 Patriots," which debuts Sept. 9 on NFL Network.

Levy coached until he was 72, in the 1997 season with the Buffalo Bills.

Belichick is 63. That means he must coach eight more seasons to coach into his seventies. That also means he will likely be coaching after Tom Brady leaves or retires—and I can tell that lots of people around the league have thought that when Brady goes, Belichick will not be far behind. Maybe. Maybe not. But he sounds like a man who will outlast Brady in this program.

II

“I have nothing to say about that.”

—Baltimore coach John Harbaugh, after he had a fierce-looking exchange with Washington coach Jay Gruden as halftime of their game Saturday

III

“Your job leads you to attempt to kill yourself on multiple occasions. Your self-perceived social inadequacy dominates your every waking moment and thought.”

—Miami bullying scandal victim Jonathan Martin, the former Dolphins and 49ers tackle, now retired, admitting (seemingly) that he tried to kill himself because of issues relating to his job as a football player.

IV

“He went to a doctor because he felt like he had ADD. He didn’t think his brain was functioning properly. Our daughter played basketball and volleyball every Tuesday. That was her day—every Tuesday. But Reggie would always forget. And it was like he’d ask me a question, then ask the same question again two hours later. Our son only played flag football, and that was a relief to Reggie. Reggie would have headaches all the time. All. The. Time. He took a lot of Tylenol, but he was aware the game wasn’t great for your health. He didn’t want his son to go through that.”

—Sara White, widow of the late and great Reggie White, to Jeff Pearlman. Sara White seems now to regret not allowing Reggie White’s brain to be examined for CTE after his death.

V

“Mathis was the second-ranked NFL offensive guard in 2014 according to ProFootballFocus.com after posting the top grade among his position group from 2011-13.”

—Press release from the Denver Broncos on the signing of guard Evan Mathis.

I believe this is the first press release—at least the first one I’ve seen—that uses Pro Football Focus metrics as a reason why a player was signed by that team.

I use this occasion to announce that The MMQB will have a regular Wednesday analytics/advance-stats column on the site from Week 1 (Sept. 9) to the week after the Super Bowl (Feb. 10, 2016) by Pro Football Focus founder and president of football operations Neil Hornsby. We’re excited about it, and look forward to sharing his consistently strong and important knowledge with you this season.

VI

“Leave Tom Brady alone! He is a champion and a winner. Leave him alone.”

—Donald Trump, a fund-raiser in Norwood, Mass., Friday night, according to the Boston Globe.

Stats of the Week

I

If this is the end of Robert Griffin III in Washington—and by no means am I advocating that a man lose his job because of a concussion and its related effects—let the record show this most damning statistic contributed to it:

In Griffin's last 54 offensive possessions, stretching over seven Washington games (including two this preseason), he has thrown two touchdown passes.

II

With Bill Belichick, 63, saying he is going to coach into his seventies—he tells NFL Films that for the “Do Your Job” NFL Network documentary on the 2014 Patriots that airs Sept. 9—he'll have a chance to climb the all-time coaching victory ladder, of course.

Including regular- and post-season games, Belichick has 233 wins in 20 seasons as a head coach. That is 11.65 wins per season, on average. He needs 115 wins to pass Don Shula for the winningest coach ever. That means he'd have to coach 10 more years, and win games at that dizzying pace, to pass Shula. Or, obviously, coach longer. Now, there's never been any indication by Belichick that he cares about the all-time coaching list. But he is a fervent student of football, so who knows? Maybe in his Nantucket Julys, he thinks about such things.

The top four NFL coaches in wins, in history:

- Don Shula (33 years as coach in Baltimore, Miami): 347-173-6, .666
- George Halas (40 years as coach in Chicago): 324-151-31, .682
- Tom Landry (29 years as coach in Dallas): 270-178-6, .603
- Bill Belichick (20 years as coach in Cleveland, New England): 233-118-0, .664

Halas coached the Bears starting in the twenties, and the schedule was inconsistent. The Bears played 11 games in 1924 and 17 in '25. So it's hard to compare coaching wins per season with teams from the early years, particular because a playoff team now could play four post-season games, and teams in the twenties didn't play playoff games.

Factoid of the Week That May Interest Only Me

I

This is low-hanging fruit, and I do not mean to bum out fans of the Browns this morning. But it is stunning how little the Browns got out of a trade that should have set up the franchise with a treasure trove of talent four years ago.

In April 2011—two coaches and two general managers ago—the Browns traded the sixth pick in the draft to Atlanta for two first-round picks, a second-round pick and two fourth-round picks. Atlanta

picked wide receiver Julio Jones, who caught 104 passes for 1,593 yards last year, and earned a five-year, \$72-million contract extension Saturday with the Falcons.

From the five picks in that trade, there is one player left on the Browns: backup defensive tackle Phil Taylor (who played 11 snaps as a backup Saturday night in Tampa). Cleveland drafted Danny Shelton in the first round this year, and Shelton has made Taylor, riddled by injury and unimpactful play as a Brown, obsolete. Already gone:

- Quarterback Brandon Weeden (first round, 2012), who lasted two seasons. He was 5-15 as a starter, and now backs up Tony Romo in Dallas.
- Wide receiver Greg Little (second round, 2011), released in May 2014 after being a marginal starter and catching 155 balls in three seasons.
- Fullback Owen Marecic (fourth round, 2011), released in 2013. He had four carries in two seasons for the Browns. The 2012 fourth-round pick was used in a package of three picks in 2012 to move up one spot in the first round, so the Browns could take running back Trent Richardson with the third overall pick in 2012. Richardson lasted 17 starless games in Cleveland before being traded to Indianapolis, and now is fighting for a roster spot in Oakland.

But there is a Paul Harvey rest-of-the-story here.

In order to draft Taylor, the Browns had to move up from 27 to 21 in the first round of the 2011 draft.

GM Tom Heckert traded the 27th and 70th picks to Kansas City for the 21st overall pick.

With the 70th pick in the 2011 draft, Chiefs GM Scott Pioli chose Georgia linebacker Justin Houston.

Houston led the NFL with 22 sacks last year.

Heckert begat Mike Lombardi/Joe Banner, who begat Ray Farmer. Coach Pat Shurmur begat Rob Chudzinski, who begat Mike Pettine.

And the beat goes on.

II

Vin Scully announced Friday he will return in 2016 for his 67th season as a baseball announcer for the Dodgers.

Jon Miller, like Scully a winner of the Ford C. Frick Award for major contributions to baseball as a broadcaster and included in the Baseball Hall of Fame, is 63 years old. Pretty famous baseball broadcaster, a long-time prime-time ESPN play-by-play man and now a fixture with the San Francisco Giants.

Vin Scully was at the end of his second season as a Dodgers' voice when Miller was born. Miller was born eight days after the Shot Heard 'Round The World, Bobby Thomson's home run off the Dodgers' Ralph Branca to win the National League pennant on Oct. 3, 1951.

Scully's been doing games longer than legends have been alive.

* * *

To personify the impact of Scully's career, I asked The MMQB editor Dom Bonvissuto, a Long Beach, Calif., resident and long-time Dodgers fan, to share his thoughts on the 2016 return announcement. Two years ago, my wife, then 3-year-old son and I sweated it out in the September sun at a Dodgers Fan Appreciation game. They gave away prizes every inning and most people had their fingers crossed for autographed jerseys or season tickets. And while we certainly wouldn't have turned either of those down, we had our eyes on the best prize of all: The chance to have Vin Scully leave our outgoing voicemail message.

That voice. It's the soundtrack to our lives.

When all the Time Warner stuff happened at the beginning of the 2014 season, we didn't just lose the chance to flip on the TV and see the Boys in Blue do their thing; we missed out on all those fantastic Vinisms that make the game an experience.

Now that we've figured out a (relatively legal) work-around, Scully's voice is back—and as much a part of our household as unfolded laundry. He tells us stories while we eat dinner, picnic-style in our living room. When the late games keep us up past bedtime, we brush our teeth during the commercial break.

My son's bobblehead collection, three dozen strong and pushing the limits of his Ikea bookcase, will crowd in a little tighter to make room for the man and his mic—Vin Scully Bobblehead Night is Sept. 23. Here in Los Angeles County, they've taken away Los Doyers, but Scully's return means all is not lost. My dad turns 67 in 2016, which means three generations of Bonvissutos have been born while Scully's been calling the Dodgers. That's not just a career; that's a legacy.

Mr. Starwood Preferred Member Travel Note of the Week

One more reason why living in Manhattan, and exercising there occasionally, is so good.

On Saturday morning about 7:50, I entered Central Park to run the perimeter, which I do many weekends. I usually do a circuit of the park, and on this day, about three-quarters of a mile up, on the east side of the park, was a huge crowd preparing for the 8K France Run, honoring the culture of France.

(Often, countries and consulates and overseas businesses sponsor runs in the park.) So as the runners prepared to start, a voice on the loud speaker welcomed the runners to Central Park and asked them before starting to run to please honor France and stand at attention for the singing by a French choir of La Marsellaise, the French National Anthem. So hundreds of registered runners stopped their stretching and squatting and stood while a lovely, deep-throated rendition of the French anthem boomed throughout the east side of the park.

Now that was really cool.

One other note to depress you weekend runners (and me too): As I passed the marker for mile one on the road through Central Park, the first group of runners was just passing. The electronic time read

"4:42." And six or eight guys to my left sprinted past, not even breathing hard.

NFL Roster Cuts Tracker

By NFL.com

NFL.com

August 30, 2015

Cut day is looming with NFL teams required to trim the roster to 75 players by Tuesday, Sept. 1, and down to 53 by Saturday, Sept. 5. Here are the players who were released before the deadline:

Atlanta Falcons

Cuts: LB Boris Anyama, WR Marquez Clark, RB Michael Ford, WR John Harris, DT Warren Herring, NT Derrick Hopkins, OT Matt Huffer, CB Michael Lee, G Eric Lefeld, LB Terrell Manning, DE Sam Meredith, C Valerian Ume-Ezeoke

Carolina Panthers

Cuts: OT Tony Hills, WR Paul Browning, WR Avius Capers, DE Steve Miller, LB Kevin Reddick, TE Dallas Walker, FB Lee Ward, P Matt Wile

Chicago Bears

Cuts: CB Tim Jennings, DB Malcolm Bronson, TE Kevin Greene, T Cameron Jefferson, WR Jeremy Kelley, CB Al Louis-Jean, LS Rick Lovato, WR Levi Norwood, DE Olsen Pierre, TE Chris Pantale, WR John Chiles

Kansas City Chiefs

Cuts: WR Kenny Cook, OT Anthony Dima, LS Andrew East, CB Aaron Hester, DE Vaughn Martin, CB Kenneth Penny, OG Marcus Reed, TE Adam Schiltz, WR Jeret Smith, OL Charles Tuaau, WR L'Damian Washington

Jacksonville Jaguars

Cuts: WR Greg Jenkins, LB Mister Alexander, DE Camaron Beard, OL Cody Booth, CB Tommie Campbell, S Desmond Cooper, DT Eric Crume, WR Tandon Doss, LB Khairi Fortt, TE Connor Hamlett, K/P Kasey Redfern, OL Jack Rummells, QB Jeff Tuel

Miami Dolphins

Cuts: DT Calvin Barnett, G Bryant Browning, WR LaRon Byrd, WR Kevin Cone, DE Ray Drew, WR Tyler McDonald, DE Kendall Montgomery, TE Gerell Robinson, CB Sammy Seamster, S Phillip Thomas, C/G J.D. Walton

Minnesota Vikings

Cuts: RB Joe Banyard, TE Brandon Bostick, CB Jalil Carter, CB Justin Coleman, WR DaVaris Daniels, T Stephen Goodin, LB Josh Kaddu, WR Jordan Leslie, DE Caesar Rayford, DT Chrishon Rose, CB DeMarcus Van Dyke

New York Jets

Cuts: CB Javier Arenas, OL James Brewer, CB Curtis Brown, C Dalton Freeman, WR T.J. Graham, WR Saalim Hakim, WR Austin Hill, LB Bryan Johnson, TE Matt LaCosse, CB Keith Lewis, WR DeVier Posey, WR Jonathon Rumph

Philadelphia Eagles

Cuts: CB Marc Anthony, S Brandan Bishop, OL Mike Coccia, OL Kevin Graf, DE Alfy Hill, WR Mike Johnson, WR G.J. Kinne, LB Dasman McCullum, WR Josh Reese, DE Jeremy Towns, TE Justin Tukes, OL Jared Wheeler

San Diego Chargers

Cuts: CB Manny Asprilla, DL Cameron Botticelli, WR Titus Davis, RB Jahwan Edwards, LB Curtis Grant, LB Brock Hekking, T Forrestal Hickman, TE David Paulson, QB Chase Rettig, DL Luther Robinson, TE Logan Stokes

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Cuts: RB Dominique Brown, DT Quayshawne Buckley, OL Antoine Everett, LS Brandon Hartson, FB Joey Iosefa, S Kimario McFadden, P Karl Schmitz, CB Al-Hajj Shabazz, DE George Uko, DE Jamal Young

Tennessee Titans

Cuts: LB Nate Askew, CB Will Brown, LB Dezmond Johnson, WR Tebucky Jones, WR Deon Long, DE Derrick Lott, G Justin McCray, K Mike Meyer, LB Chaz Sutton, C Fernando Velasco

Peyton: Broncos' offense still developing its identity

By Kevin Patra

NFL.com

August 30, 2015

In two preseason appearances Peyton Manning doesn't yet look comfortable in the Denver Broncos' new offense.

In Saturday night's 19-12 win over the San Francisco 49ers, Manning finished with 14-of-21 passing for 124 yards, an interception and couldn't lead the Broncos into the end zone.

"Would we like to be a finely tuned machine going into Week 1? Sure," Manning said, via ESPN.com. "With some newness, some different players and some different things that we're doing, that's what we're working toward. ... Not to make excuses you can still win games as you're kind of finding your identity.

"We're still very much figuring out who we are and what we're going to be as far as things we can really hang our hat on," Manning added. "I still think we can win games as we're developing kind of that identity."

Manning looks like he's still trying to fully grasp the harness on the Broncos offense, especially taking snaps from under center. All three of his sacks taken Saturday came from under center.

"The biggest thing offensively is we don't have a lot to show for some of the good things that are going on," coach Gary Kubiak said. "We hold the ball for 20 minutes in first half (Saturday night), you're over 50 percent on third down, you think you'd be scoring some points, that's the thing that's discouraging. ... I had us in a couple tough situations that I've got to do a better job with our quarterback. There are things we can fix. There needs to be a sense of urgency to get some things cleaned up."

Through two appearances, running a new offense hasn't been the only trouble for Manning. The quarterback's arm hasn't looked good, either. While he hasn't thrown a beautiful ball since neck surgery, his preseason passes have been particularly limp. The Broncos have yet to stretch the field with the starter and Manning has been off target an unusual number of times.

Luckily for Denver, it boasts a dominate-looking defense, and the C.J. Anderson-Ronnie Hillman running back duo appears dynamic. As much as we are used to seeing Manning carry the Broncos, it might be the other way around to start the 2015 season.

Gloves in NFL have gained popularity but use is largely unregulated

By Sam Farmer
Los Angeles Times
August 30, 2015

Odell Beckham Jr. was a rookie when he leaped, a superstar when he landed.

The New York Giants receiver made one of the signature plays of the 2014 NFL season with his 43-yard touchdown catch against Dallas, jumping and bending his body Matrix-style, then somehow securing the football with just three fingers.

In the aftermath of what some people called the most athletic catch in league history, Beckham acknowledged he had a small assist on the play — the red-and-white XXL Nike Vapor Jet 3.0 gloves he was wearing. But he wasn't the only one to give some love to the gloves.

"You have to be careful about the way you analyze that play because you don't want people calling you a hater or whatever," said Tim Brown, a Hall of Fame receiver. "But you can't make that play without those kind of gloves. It's just impossible.

"The guy's a freak of nature, no doubt about it, I'll give you that. He has the big hands and all that. But those gloves are so 'tackified' these days that that's part of the reason you see guys making those kinds of catches."

Said former NFL receiver Cris Collinsworth, now color analyst on NBC's "Sunday Night Football": "I think if they took the gloves completely away from the guys, including the quarterbacks at this point, it would have a major impact on what the game looked like on the field. And not for the better."

While the topic of slightly deflated footballs has sparked countless debates in recent months, the growing popularity of gloves that almost adhere to the ball has largely gone unnoticed — and unregulated.

"No one looks at those gloves," John Madden said. "I saw them when I was at a meeting in Indy. They passed them around and somebody made the comment that, 'Pretty soon, these gloves are going to be able to catch a ball without a hand in them.'"

Atlanta Falcons President Rich McKay, chairman of the league's competition committee, said the group has talked extensively in recent years about whether the NFL should come up with new regulations for gloves. Although no decisions are imminent, he said, it's a subject expected to come up again.

Various companies make the gloves — Nike, Adidas, Under Armour and Cutters among them — and the products have similar qualities, namely special surfaces (sometimes leather, sometimes rubber) on the palms, fingers and thumbs that allow a lock-down grip on the ball.

"I think it's time to go back and look at the gloves and see if, with what's going on here with sports science in the past 10 years, if there isn't too much of an advantage being gained," McKay said.

Gloves essentially have become part of the uniform, even forming the team logo when positioning the palms together. It isn't just receivers who are wearing gloves these days. Virtually everyone wears them, including quarterbacks.

"You know something's up when guys like Tom Brady and Kurt Warner and Peyton Manning are wearing gloves to throw a football," former NFL quarterback Rich Gannon said. "You're starting to go, 'Wait a second here...!' Guys for years dreaded bad weather, cold weather, and they didn't want to have anything that would take their hands off the football. Now guys are like, 'These gloves are better than the human skin.'"

But not everyone whose job depends on hanging on to the football thinks the cutting-edge gloves provide an unfair advantage.

"You don't catch the ball with your hands, you catch it with your eyes," Philadelphia tight end Zach Ertz said. "So to say that anybody can go out there and catch a football with a million guys running around, it's different."

Coby Fleener, tight end for the Indianapolis Colts, said there are pros and cons to the gloves, which he began to wear at Stanford, where he was a teammate of Ertz.

"There are some aspects where they really help you, but some aspects where they hinder you," he said. "To be able to feel the ball when it hits your hands, it makes it more difficult when the gloves are on. I wear them as much for blocking as I do for receiving, because it gives you that extra layer of protection."

NFL players used to slather their hands with Stickum, a gooey adhesive that also came in a spray form, reasoning that would give them a better grip on the ball. That substance was outlawed in 1981.

Soon after, some players — receivers, mostly — began trying different types of gloves. The styles ranged from thin leather versions not unlike the ones golfers wear, to neoprene scuba gloves, which kept hands warm but took away any feel of the football.

Quarterback Doug Flutie, who spent part of his career in Canada, used rubberized glass-cutter gloves, which were ill-fitting by today's standards but gave him a grip in all weather conditions.

By the mid-1980s, Neumann began selling gloves with "tackified" fingers and palms that gained wide popularity. Some barehanded quarterbacks said those transferred a slight residue onto the ball that was actually beneficial.

"I remember playing catch with guys who would wear them," Gannon said. "The ball would come back and it would be kind of easier to throw."

The NFL made changes to address that. The league's uniform code says that "adhesive or slippery substances on the body, equipment, or uniform of any player" are prohibited. Tackified gloves are allowed, though, provided "such tacky substance does not adhere to the football or otherwise cause handling problems for players."

Although the NFL doesn't have more specific standards for gloves, such regulations do exist and were developed by governing bodies of high school and college football. The Sports & Fitness Industry Assn. oversees the third-party testing of gloves to make sure the products meet but do not exceed specifications for adhesiveness and other qualities.

Some gloves are personalized, with a player's name or number stitched in. The look is important too. Arizona Cardinals cornerback Patrick Peterson, for instance, has multiple pairs with eye-catching designs in black, white, red, gold and orange fatigue versions.

"I'm a big fashion guy," Peterson said. "I love to match."

While Peterson goes through a pair of gloves per game, other players use two and sometimes three pairs in the same game.

"We've heard from equipment managers that guys will try a pair on and say, 'It just didn't feel right, so I had to get a different one,'" said Gary Bethea, general manager of Cutters and Team Sports. "But then the equipment guy will just repackage that pair and bring it out another time and it will be fine."

Ted Walsh, who was the assistant equipment manager for the San Francisco 49ers for 18 years, remembers receiver Jerry Rice using gloves when they first began gaining popularity. He liked to wear his so skintight that the palms would frequently tear during games when the football smacked them.

"Jerry was bare hand, bare hand, then he started trying gloves," recalled Walsh, now visiting clubhouse manager for the Seattle Mariners. "But if he would drop a ball in a game, off would come the gloves."

Denver's Manning wears gloves on occasion, usually for cold-weather games, but he also appreciates the beauty of going without.

"I like Dallas Clark," he said of his former star tight end in Indianapolis. "He used to go natural; commando if you will. There's something to that. Look, I think a guy can catch or he can't, gloves or no gloves. So true hands catchers can catch no matter what."

The difference now, Madden said, is receivers can confidently go up for a ball with one hand and inconspicuously bend the rules with the other hand.

"I've been watching preseason games and I see this," he said. "When you can catch the ball with one hand, or even start to catch the ball with one hand, that frees up your other hand to push off. You can get real subtle about that."

Collinsworth said the use of gloves has forever changed the game.

"Before these gloves, I'd never seen anybody make an overhand catch — when their fingers point toward the ground — below the waist, but now I see guys make those catches below the knees," he said.

"They're brilliant catches, and brilliant players, I don't want to take anything away from them. But if you played before gloves, you had to slide or dive to make that catch. Maybe somebody could make the ball stick in their hands like that, but I had never seen it."

Collinsworth, in the broadcast booth for Beckham's catch, rubbed his eyes in disbelief at that incredible play.

"Odell Beckham is probably in another class; he's got Spider-Man hands," he said. "But some of the catches you see now would be different catches. Not that they wouldn't make them, but they would be different kinds of catches."

Then again ...

"Every Sunday we say, 'Oh, my goodness! Look at that!'" Collinsworth said. "That's a good thing. It's an entertainment business. Why not make it as entertaining as possible?"

Relentless drive makes UB's Leipold a master builder

By Mark Gaughan

Buffalo News

August 30, 2015

Lance Leipold had just led Wisconsin-Whitewater to the NCAA Division III national championship in his first season as a head football coach.

The year was 2007. He was 43 years old. He had reached a pinnacle of his profession after 21 years in coaching. He was on the team bus in the parking lot of the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl stadium in Roanoke, Va.

His mind was not on the team bus.

"I can remember we were on the bus pulling out of the stadium, and all I'm thinking about is how far behind we are in recruiting," Leipold said. "Everyone else who was done playing, they had turned the page to the next season. They had been recruiting for a month. We had a lot of catching up to do."

How in the world does a head coach get to 109-6?

This is one of the ways. Leipold has a relentless drive to succeed, a constant fear of failure, an aversion to self-satisfaction.

"I don't know if I've ever really stopped to think about what we did," Leipold said. "That's the nature of the business we live in. We have to keep going. It's what have you done for me lately."

What Leipold did over the past eight years as head coach at Whitewater is make college football history. He won six D-III championships in eight years. En route to his 109-6 record, his team had a 46-game win streak, the fourth longest in college football history. It took him just 106 games to get to 100 wins, the fastest in college football history, faster than the likes of Knute Rockne, Bud Wilkinson and Urban Meyer.

Now Leipold brings his coaching acumen to the University at Buffalo, where he aims to prove himself at the Division I level. Whether he can win big at UB is uncertain. This much is guaranteed: The man can coach.

Feet on the ground

How do you get to 109-6? Start with a heaping dose of humility to keep from getting overconfident along the way.

Leipold, 50, has spent 36 years of his life in Wisconsin and the other 14 in Nebraska. He's as Midwest as "A Prairie Home Companion." He's no live-wire, super-salesman coach in the mold of Lou Holtz or Lee Corso. He's not a self-promoter.

He's as low-key and unassuming as Jefferson, Wis., the town of 8,000 an hour east of Milwaukee in which he was born and raised. When Leipold was a kid, Jefferson had a furniture plant and a meat plant, surrounded by dairy farms and not much else.

Leipold's father, Ken, was a high school basketball coach and an assistant principal who made sure his athletically gifted son played the games the way they ought to be played.

"He was probably old-school," Leipold said. "It was about discipline. I look back when I was playing, and like a lot of guys, I was worried about the uniform and my shoes and my socks. He emphasized to me it's about how you play."

"Being a coach's kid, I had a sense that people will know what you do and how it reflects on the family," Leipold said. "So it's the same thing with my players. It's not just about what you want to do. You're a reflection of the whole team. I had a sense of that early on."

Leipold grew into a 6-foot-2, lead-by-example, three-sport high-school star. He was the quarterback, the shortstop on the baseball team and the leading scorer on the basketball team.

He went on to star at quarterback for Wisconsin-Whitewater, a college of 10,000 students just 12 miles down the road from Jefferson.

"He was the quarterback and he was the unquestioned leader of the team," said Denver Broncos running backs coach Eric Studesville, a former Bills aide who was a teammate of Leipold's at Whitewater. "He had a presence and a calm about him. He was a tall, skinny kid. But you knew he was in charge. He related to everybody. He was great with his teammates. And the thing about him is, Lanny was always comfortable in his own skin. He was never trying too hard to be liked or be the leader. Moving forward 25 years, he's the exact same way now."

Given his athleticism and his father's influence, Leipold probably was destined for the coaching profession. He wasn't sure of that when he graduated from Whitewater.

"I worked in a group home for delinquent boys out of college," Leipold said. "There was a three-month stretch where I worked 3 to 11 at the group home, and then I worked midnight to 8 Sunday through Thursday as a police officer. I rode in a squad car. I did that about seven months. I was the only person in this small town with a college degree, and I thought to myself: I went to college not to work third shift. Where am I going?"

THE APPRENTICE

No one wins multiple national championships without learning from some great coaches along the way.

Leipold's first big break came when he moved from an assistant coach at Whitewater to a graduate assistant job at the University of Wisconsin in 1991.

The Badgers' head coach was Barry Alvarez, who was in the process of turning Wisconsin into a Big Ten powerhouse and on the way to becoming a College Football Hall of Famer. The offensive coordinator was Brad Childress, a future Minnesota Vikings head coach. The defensive coordinator was Dan McCarney, disciple of Iowa legend Hayden Fry. In Leipold's first year he worked with receivers coach Jay

Norvell, who went to the NFL and now is at Texas. His second was with backs coach Jim Hueber, later with the Vikings and now at Pitt. His third was with O-line coach Bill Callahan, who went on to coach the Oakland Raiders to the Super Bowl.

This was the football equivalent of going to Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship.

“You find out you really don’t know that much about football,” Leipold said.

“I still have some of Bill’s notes from staff meetings,” Leipold said of Callahan, a disciple of NFL O-line guru Jim McNally. “His attention to detail is by far the most I saw. He wanted the one-on-one sequence in practice, who was going against who at receiver and DB. For the O-linemen, he’d talk about hitting 2 inches off the breast plate. He studied McNally to the nth degree.”

Leipold then learned more about raising a program from Ground Zero in a seven-year stint at Division II Nebraska-Omaha, where he watched Pat Behrns build a winner. That led to a job as a recruiting chief for Frank Solich at Nebraska.

But after three years at Nebraska, Leipold got off the big-time treadmill, for two reasons. Solich got fired, despite a 58-19 record, which gave Leipold pause. And Callahan took over but did not have an on-field opening for Leipold, who wanted to be a position coach.

“I watched Frank get let go after winning nine ballgames,” Leipold said. “There was nothing major off the field. Guys were graduating. He was still leading the country in Academic All-Americans. The stadium was sold out. Yeah, there were some losses that the program wasn’t used to score-wise. But you win nine games with a chance to win 10 and he’s let go. That moment I was like: Maybe it’s more back where my roots are. Maybe I need to look back at the Division II, Division III level.”

Finally, after three more years at Nebraska-Omaha, Leipold got his chance to become a head coach, at his alma mater.

A WINNING HAND

Leipold stepped into a great situation at Whitewater in 2007, taking over for his former coach, Bob Berezowitz, who retired after 22 seasons. Each of the previous two seasons, Whitewater had gone 14-1 and lost to Ohio’s Mount Union in the D-III title game. Whitewater was loaded with talent.

Whitewater’s program has some built-in advantages. It’s in the southeastern part of Wisconsin, within a two-hour drive of Chicago, Milwaukee and Madison. There are a lot of good players in its backyard. What’s more, the University of Wisconsin is the only school in the state that offers football scholarships.

Whitewater’s facilities were exceptional for Division III. It had a football office building attached to a 12,500-seat stadium. The Warhawks had just installed a \$500,000 video board, and there was a 10,000-square-foot weight room.

Nevertheless, the competition in the Wisconsin D-III conference is intense.

“That league is a great football league, not a good one,” says Northern Illinois coach Rod Carey, who formerly coached at Wisconsin-Stout. “Yes, location-wise they have some things going for them. But

Oskosh and LaCrosse have a good population base. Eau Claire does. River Falls is by the Twin Cities. Whitewater was a winner, but they were not like that every year. We were right there in the early 2000s with them at Stout.”

“The thing is,” Carey said, “he made the most of it and he took them to a level they haven’t been.”

Leipold’s biggest immediate challenge was he was a surprise choice. Many expected the job to go to Stan Zweifel, who had served for 17 years as offensive chief and assistant head coach to Berezowitz. But Leipold had blown away then-athletic director Paul Plinske in the interview process.

Leipold attacked the job and the perception over his hiring.

“For the first three months of the job, I hardly saw Lance,” said Plinske, now the AD at Nebraska-Kearney. “He made the goal to go to every high school in the state of Wisconsin and meet with every high school coach.

“He addressed head-on the issue of people feeling like he shouldn’t have got the job,” Plinske said. “In his first press conference, he said that his wife told him he wasn’t her first choice, either.”

Leipold lost his second game to a Division II school and was losing to La Crosse in his fourth game, 28-10, in the fourth quarter.

“I was thinking, ‘I’m glad I’m renting,’ ” Leipold says.

The Warhawks rallied to win, 35-28.

“He walked into a really tough situation,” said Jim Zebrowski, Leipold’s first offensive coordinator and now a Minnesota aide. “We talked about how we had to win the whole dang thing in order to be OK.”

Whitewater players say Leipold was more demanding of them than any coach they’d had before.

“The thing we noticed right away was how meticulous and focused he was on all the details,” said A.J. Raebel, a senior defensive star in 2007. “We kind of pushed back, but he held us more accountable on and off the field. He asked us to go above and beyond the X’s and O’s, in the class, off the field, doing things like volunteering. A lot of those things you don’t really think go into winning football games, but they do.”

“He didn’t treat anybody differently,” said Jeff Donovan, a Warhawk QB from 2006 to ’09. “I’ve played on teams where some of the better players were exempt from ridicule or coaching or discipline. That never was a question. Everyone was treated equally, no matter if you were the starting quarterback or the seventh receiver on the depth chart.”

Mount Union had won the Division III national title eight of 11 years through 2006 but Leipold’s Warhawks beat them in the ’07 final, 31-21.

“I’ll never forget the embrace we had after the national championship game,” Zebrowski said. “It was like we did it man! ... Oh my gosh, we actually did do it!”

Leipold relived that feeling five more times, in '09, '10, '11, '13 and '14.

"We didn't spend much time looking in the rearview, patting ourselves on the back," Leipold said. "It kind of helped create an attitude of staying in the moment. Our guys embraced that."

"He certainly didn't allow anybody to get too big," said Matt Blanchard, the QB in '10 and '11 and now a Packers backup. "I don't think I ever felt an ounce of complacency at Whitewater. When you get too much internal validation, you allow yourself to get too big a head."

THE BIG PICTURE

A lot of the qualities that make a coach great at coordinating – scheming the X's and O's – are not the key skills required of a head coach. Leipold spent his entire career as an assistant on the offensive side, but he's not in the Chip Kelly, Andy Reid mold of tactical-wizard-slash-head coach.

"I enjoy the big picture more than I enjoy scheming a new play," Leipold said. "So that part of the adjustment to head coach was easy for me."

"What I love about Lance," Zebrowski said, "is that he let us do our job. He very rarely if ever came in and said, 'Do this or do that.' He'd say go for it or don't go for it. But he let us coach."

Plinkse says Leipold's drive to improve all aspects of the program is what led to six titles in eight years.

One example: Plinske wanted to install modern artificial turf at the stadium. Whitewater's most influential donor at the time, the late David L. Kachel, was resistant because he liked the tradition of natural grass, akin to the "frozen tundra" history at Green Bay's Lambeau Field.

"Dave did not want to put in the carpet," Plinske said. "It took Lance to seal the deal."

Another example: "Our practice fields were nothing but bone dry, natural grass," Plinske said. "Lance wanted to build great practice fields. He went out and worked with donors and was able to put in over an acre worth of irrigation system for our practice fields."

"And he really helped me to see the branding effect," Plinske said. "His biggest asset to me was pushing Whitewater into an agreement with Nike. That set us apart from the rest of the schools in our conference. That allowed us to bring in probably the best uniform and shoe apparel deal in Division III. I attribute that all to Lance and his vision of taking us from one level to the next in so many different ways."

Says Stetson head coach Roger Hughes, a long-time friend: "Lance always had an outside-the-box way of addressing problems. OK, it looks bad right now. But what if we get another person involved? Or find another way to get funding? Or do something else to get this recruit? He always had an alternative. That's what I always admired about him."

Leipold does not have a magic formula for making UB a perennial winner. There may be shortcuts to success on Wall Street or on some Internet bubble, but not on the football field and not in his Midwestern world view.

Like a lot of famous teaching coaches, he doesn't preach the end result. John Wooden said: "Do what you're supposed to do, and success will follow."

Kevin Bullis, who succeeded Leipold as Whitewater head coach, recalls a scene in the locker room early in the 2012 season after Whitewater lost to Buffalo State, 7-6, snapping the Warhawks' 46-game winning streak.

"I can't tell you the admiration I had for him over the way he walked in that locker room and addressed the team," Bullis said. "He said, 'Hey what do we focus on here as a team? We focus on getting a little bit better every day. We don't focus on the wins and losses. We don't focus on the national championships. We don't focus on the conference championships. It ain't about the loss today. It's about coming in Monday and let's continue to improve. We have faith in our systems and faith in each other.'"

Leipold knows he must prove he can recruit scholarship players, something he did not do at Whitewater. To help with recruiting, he hired Rob Ianello, a former recruiting chief at Notre Dame and Kansas.

But whether it's recruiting, practicing or organizing, Leipold's focus is the same.

"Win the day, stay in the moment," Leipold said. "Everybody's got their own slant on it. We encourage the players to try to get better at one thing today, or get 1 percent better today. If 105 guys got better at one thing, you'd be a lot better."

How do you get to 109-6? One win at a time.

"It's a constant reinforcement of taking care of what's right in front of you," said UB defensive coordinator Brian Borland, who came with Leipold from Whitewater. "It's about never being satisfied, always looking to get better, never resting on your laurels. That's what Lance is about all the time."

Playing time notes vs. San Francisco: Shaquil Barrett carries the load

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
August 30, 2015

The last time Shaquil Barrett saw as much game-time work as he did Saturday, he wore gold horns on a green helmet and was the Mountain West Conference's Defensive Player of the Year.

The former Colorado State standout played 58 total snaps -- 43 on defense and 15 on special teams -- in the Broncos' 19-12 win over San Francisco on Saturday. Those totals include plays run but wiped out because of penalties.

Right behind Barrett were CB Kayvon Webster (57 snaps -- 45 on defense, 12 on special teams) and safety David Bruton Jr. (53 snaps -- 33 on defense, 18 on special teams).

Other playing-time notes:

... OLB Shane Ray received the most defensive snaps Saturday, playing 46 of 55 snaps (84 percent). Ray and Barrett received heavy workloads because Head Coach Gary Kubiak and Defensive Coordinator Wade Phillips opted to remove starting OLBs DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller after nine snaps apiece. Given that they each had a sack in their brief stints, they did enough to show their readiness for the regular season.

... Webster worked 82 percent of the snaps because he saw nickel and dime work with the first team because of Chris Harris Jr.'s hamstring injury.

... DE Vance Walker and NT Darius Kilgo led all Broncos defensive linemen by playing 32 of 55 snaps (58 percent).

... QB Peyton Manning and the first-team offensive line of Ryan Harris, Louis Vasquez, Matt Paradis, Ty Sambrailo and Max Garcia led the way with 42 snaps apiece as they took every first-half repetition. (The total includes one snap negated by a San Francisco penalty.) That total represents 54 percent of the offense's work for the game.

Just behind those six players was TE Owen Daniels, who played 39 of 42 first-team snaps. WRs Demaryius Thomas and Cody Latimer played 38 and 37 snaps, respectively.

... QB Brock Osweiler and the No. 2 offensive line of Chris Clark, Shelley Smith, Gino Gradkowski, Ben Garland and Michael Schofield played all 36 offensive snaps in the second half.

... C.J. Anderson led all running backs with 31 snaps, all on offense. Juwan Thompson saw 27 snaps (15 on offense, 12 on special teams), followed by Ronnie Hillman (24 snaps, including 19 on offense) and Montee Ball (11 snaps, all on offense).

... Bruton played a team-leading 18 of 28 special-teams snaps, followed by ILB Corey Nelson (16 of 28). Barrett (15 of 28), and ILBs Todd Davis (15 of 28) and Steven Johnson (14 of 28) were the only other Broncos to work at least half of the special-teams plays.

... In addition to the kicking specialists and long snapper Aaron Brewer, 10 Broncos played only on special teams: ILBs Lamin Barrow, Reggie Walker and Zaire Anderson, OLB Danny Mason, CBs Taurean Nixon and Teverin Brandon, RBs Kapri Bibbs and Jeremy Stewart, TE Marcel Jensen and center Dillon Day.

... Eleven Broncos did not play a single snap Saturday: QBs Trevor Siemian and Zac Dysert, safety Ross Madison, OLB Chase Vaughn, OLs Andre Davis, Kyle Roberts, Charles Sweeton and Evan Mathis, TEs Jake Murphy and Dan Light and DL Chuka Ndulue. Mathis and Light were added to the roster in the previous four days and are still being brought up to speed. Mathis did not dress, but Light, a Friday waiver claim, was in uniform and warmed up for the game.

... Six injured players also sat out: CBs Chris Harris Jr. (hamstring) and Tony Carter (hamstring), WR Emmanuel Sanders (hamstring), OLB Lerentee McCray (groin), DE Kenny Anunike (knee scope) and TE Jeff Heurman (torn ACL).

Next-Day Notebook: Norwood making his mark in the slot

By DenverBroncos.com

DenverBroncos.com

August 30, 2015

Wes Welker is not with an NFL club right now, but the former Bronco's presence is still felt with his former team -- never moreso than when Jordan Norwood runs a route with the first team out of the slot.

Norwood's cuts are crisp. His ability to find space underneath and on intermediate routes improves with every opportunity. And with Emmanuel Sanders nursing a hamstring injury, Norwood has become a constant presence in the first team's three-wide receiver package, which the Broncos used to good effect in their 19-12 preseason win over the San Francisco 49ers on Saturday.

Ever the coach's son -- his father, Brian, is the associate head coach at Tulsa -- Norwood studied Welker last summer before he succumbed to a torn anterior cruciate ligament during a joint practice with the Houston Texans. But his search for ideas from the standard-bearer of slot receivers in recent times goes back years.

"I have a lot of Wes Welker film on my iPad right now that, if I'm looking for something to watch, I'll just watch 2007 Wes Welker film, literally," Norwood said. "He's somebody that I look up to."

The results are obvious. His back-to-back receptions nine minutes into the third quarter turned second-and-17 into a first down, and he led all Broncos with 38 yards on four receptions.

His extensive work on the first team has allowed him to build cohesion with QB Peyton Manning -- perhaps the most crucial aspect to success in this offense for a wide receiver.

"I think it's repetition," Norwood said. "It takes a little bit for a quarterback and a receiver to get some chemistry. Hopefully we're building that."

- Andrew Mason

Offense builds rhythm in fourth quarter

The biggest play of the Broncos' game-winning drive was an incomplete pass.

On third down needing two yards from the 28-yard line, Brock Osweiler took the snap out of the shotgun and chucked a pass deep to the left corner of the end zone. 49ers cornerback Mylan Hicks had turned and could not sense when the ball would arrive. Wide receiver Jordan Taylor tracked the ball well and though he couldn't come down with the ball, he drew a pass interference penalty. The flag would set the Broncos up with a first down on the 1-yard line and on the ensuing play, Juwan Thompson plowed ahead for the score.

"I think the difference between the third and fourth quarter is just getting into a rhythm," Brock Oswweiler said. "Coming in cold, in the third quarter, it takes a little bit to get your juices flowing and what not. Once we did that, I think we did some good things."

Though Taylor didn't set out looking to draw a penalty on his defender, it was welcome all the same for keeping the drive alive.

"The No. 1 thing regardless, is I'm thinking, Go get the ball, make a play," he said. "I know that when a DB doesn't look back when you jump back into him and [if you] try to make a good play on him, the refs usually throw a [pass interference] call on that. So I wasn't thinking that. I was thinking, Go get the ball and get a touchdown. It just happened to work out like that. That's what it is."

And with the culmination of the drive on Thompson's touchdown run, and then a two-point conversion, the Broncos took a seven-point lead that would end up giving the Broncos the victory.

"Any time offensively you can get into the end zone, it's big," Oswweiler said. "That's what we're coming out here to do is score as many points as possible. To finish a drive in the end zone, that's our goal every time."

- Ben Swanson

Dancing lessons

After an offseason and training camp spent learning from his two Pro Bowl mentors, Shane Ray joined their ranks on Saturday when he got his first solo sack on the same night Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware had one apiece of their own.

After getting his sack on Blaine Gabbert, Ray took a page out of Miller's book and showcased a dance to celebrate the moment.

That specific dance, however, did not impress his proud teachers, though it did make them laugh. With a chuckle, Ware told reporters that he gave the dance a zero while Miller graded it a bit higher with a five out of 10.

"I don't have any names for my dances," Ray said. "It's all fun. It's football. I learned from my big bro Von and DeMarcus and their celebrations, and when you get a sack, it's a lot of hard work that goes into it, so it's often fun just to go out there and just turn up a little bit, just have a little fun."

Miller, a maestro of post-sack moves, tried to teach Ray. Relax, Miller said he told him.

"When we first got in, I told him I had to give him an example," Miller said. "You have to relax a little bit. You've got to relax and make sure everybody's watching. Then you do the sack dance. You do it too quick and nobody sees it, you know?"

Though Miller thought a little bit more of Ray's dance than Ware, he still said the rookie has much to learn. Rookie humbling takes no breaks.

"He beat me to the punch," Miller admitted. "I had that one so I'll give him a five for that. I would have made it look better but I did have that in the arsenal. He already beat me to it."

- Ben Swanson

Also, with Saturday's win over the 49ers, the following promotions are available:

Papa John's: Because the Broncos beat the 49ers, all Colorado locations of Papa John's will offer 50% off all orders Sunday, Aug. 30.

McDonald's: The day after any Broncos game, get \$1 Big Mac sandwiches or \$1 Sausage Egg McMuffins at McDonald's, in addition to 30% off any jersey in the Broncos Team Store if you bring your McDonald's receipt.

Sundays with Sacco: Cut-down days

By Jim Saccomano
DenverBroncos.com
August 30, 2015

For over nearly four decades in the National Football League, one theme that is universal through the years is that no coach enjoys cut-down days.

No one enjoys telling a young man who has become part of the family bond that he now has to leave.

With the Denver Broncos' Saturday-night win over the San Francisco 49ers in the first home game of the 2015 season, we are inching closer to that time when the rosters are pared.

All NFL teams must reduce their rosters to 75 players by 4:00 p.m. EDT on Sept. 1 and to the regular season 53-player roster limit by 4:00 p.m. EDT on Sept. 5.

Some teams will choose to make cuts on Sunday before the Sept. 1 deadline, so that they can begin with a "clean" week as they have Monday practices.

Either way, it is a tough process, and it is not a game.

It is part of the business, and as such, it is accepted by the young players and coaches involved, but it is not like losing a space on a board game, resurrected as easily as with one more roll of the dice.

Unlike baseball, hockey and basketball, there is no minor league system or structure in pro football.

Rather than players being developed in the minors as in baseball and hockey, players come to the NFL from the training ground of college football, where they have had the benefit of working toward a valuable college degree while honing their playing skills.

If and when a player does not make the MLB or NHL team, he is sent down to the minors, where he can continue to play and earn at least some money while waiting for that much anticipated call up.

In basketball, many young players who do not make it in the NBA choose to play in the NBA's developmental league, and many others opt to play in Europe or elsewhere overseas.

But not so in the NFL.

Bronco alum Wade Manning, who had his choice of the NFL or major league baseball when drafted by both sports out of Ohio State many years ago, once said that he "liked the idea that when you make it in the NFL, you are already in the majors--no bus rides, no years of improving your talents in the minor leagues. You are already here."

On the other hand, however, those who do not make it have a hard time playing football at all. Both the Canadian Football League and the Arena Football League are stand-alone leagues that are not designed to work as developmental programs for the NFL.

So very often, these young players who will leave NFL teams this week--around 500 players over the entire league--have few options besides heading to the gym to lift while staying in daily contact with their agents to see if any teams are calling for tryouts.

It is a tough part of the game little recognized by the multitudes of fans who watch weekly.

Not much focus is given to those who just miss the final rosters.

So these final preseason games--all of them, in fact--are huge to the multitudes of young players hoping for their first opportunity, but also to veteran players who for whatever reasons--injury, age, or a talent level that is borderline--every play is a chance to impress coaches both in person and on tape.

Many times fans and the press drop their attention level when the presumed starters leave the game.

But sometimes that means people stop paying attention just when they should pay the greatest attention.

These players are putting their bodies and hearts on the line to fulfill their dreams, whether the roster spot represents that first moment or a chance to hang on for one more year, and there is a huge dignity to the process either way.

A week ago on the game telecast from Houston, former world champion Broncos defensive end Alfred Williams, in his role as color commentator, noted that "A lot of folks are leaving the stadium just when they should be watching most closely. These are the young guys fighting for jobs."

And indeed they are, in every game.

A common error is that of presumed awareness. Fans or media sometimes assume that due to their great interest in the game they know the levels of all the players, and if they have not heard of someone, it suggests something negative about the player. Actually, it says less about the player than it does about the observer.

No one is famous until they become so.

And it happens on the field, when the young man desperately gives everything he has to take an available job, which of course also means taking someone else's job--someone else who is trying just as hard, just as desperately.

Denver Broncos Hall of Fame candidate safety John Lynch put it well when he said, "These games don't count, but they sure do matter."

Yes, they matter a great deal to the coaches and personnel people who are putting rosters together, and to the players who are trying so hard to make those rosters.

I am sad for every player whose dreams do not come true this week, and I hope that for many of them, they get another chance down the road.

But every single player, whether he makes it or not, wears the crown of effort, and of the nobility of effort.

No one can ever take that away.