

Broncos reach agreements with two new assistant coaches

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
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The Broncos on Thursday reached agreements with Mike Sullivan as their quarterbacks coach and Curtis Modkins as their running backs coach, an NFL source confirmed.

Sullivan, formerly the New York Giants' offensive coordinator, had interviewed with Broncos head coach Vance Joseph earlier in the day.

In his second coaching stint with the Giants, Sullivan worked with quarterback Eli Manning in New York for the last three seasons and has coached in the NFL for 16 years.

Sullivan started in Jacksonville, alongside Musgrave, as the Jaguars' defensive quality control coordinator in 2002 and then as offensive assistant in 2003. He joined the Giants in 2004 and coached their receivers for six seasons before becoming their quarterbacks coach for two years, helping them to victories in Super Bowls XLII and XLVI. After a two-year stint as Tampa Bay's offensive coordinator (2012-13) and a year as a consultant for the team, he returned to New York as a quarterbacks coach for a season and then coordinator for the last two.

The Giants fired Ben McAdoo in early December after a 2-10 start that included the benching of Manning. Steve Spagnuolo was promoted to interim head coach but as the team began its search for a full-time replacement, it informed their assistants they could seek employment elsewhere.

Modkins, along with Raiders running backs coach Bernie Parmalee, interviewed with the Broncos on Wednesday for the job left open by Eric Stutesville. Modkins has been an NFL running backs coach or offensive coordinator since 2008 and has worked with six different teams, most recently the Chicago Bears as part of John Fox's staff. The Bears parted with Fox after three seasons and a 5-11 finish.

Sullivan and Modkins are the second and third pieces to a new offensive staff under coordinator Bill Musgrave. The team on Wednesday added Sean Kugler to coach the offensive line

Stutesville, who was one of six Broncos assistants to be fired Monday, is expected to interview for the Giants' head-coaching vacancy.

Broncos reach agreements with QB coach Sullivan, RB coach Modkins

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Steadily, but quickly, Vance Joseph is filling out the offensive side of his coaching staff.

The Denver Broncos have reached agreements with Mike Sullivan to be their new quarterbacks coach and Curtis Modkins as their new running backs coach, sources told 9NEWS.

Sullivan was the New York Giants' offensive coordinator the previous two seasons. He had worked previously with Broncos' offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave in Jacksonville during the 2003 season.

The Broncos also considered Ben McAdoo and Ken Zampese for the position, but both were holding out for offensive coordinator positions.

Klint Kubiak, who had served as the Broncos' interim quarterbacks coach, is expected to remain on the team's staff in another capacity.

The Broncos have another Mike Sullivan. He is in charge of overseeing the Broncos' salary cap and contracts.

Modkins has been an NFL running backs for 10 years. He most recently served on John Fox's staff with the Chicago Bears, where Jordan Howard rushed for 1,122 yards and Tarik Cohen was one of the NFL's most exciting rookies.

The Broncos had already hired former UTEP head coach Sean Kugler to coach their offensive line. Joseph, the Broncos' second-year head coach, has four other assistant coaching positions to fill: Receivers, outside linebacker, special teams coordinator and assistant defensive backs.

'Change the culture' a tough exit strategy for Broncos

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 5, 2018

The week that was has once again revealed one of the harsh truths of a lost pro football season.

People are going to get fired, and for the Denver Broncos, not only were six assistant coaches shown the door, they were publicly described as part of the problem. Such is life at 5-11 after some with the team had scoffed at preseason predictions that had the Broncos winning "only" 10 games.

And often head coaches have to fire assistant coaches to remain the head coach. But that difficult and often awkward process, for coaches and their families, got a little more awkward this week as coach Vance Joseph said this about firing six assistants (Jeff Davidson, Brock Olivo, Fred Pagac, Johnnie Lynn, Eric Stutesville and Tyke Tolbert):

"When you go 5-11, it wasn't good this year. As far as our football team, you have to make some changes. In my opinion, it was time to move on to change the culture in certain rooms. Obviously Eric and Tyke and Jeff Davidson are all good people and football coaches. They've been here through a lot of winning years. In my opinion, it was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best that they can be and getting our best players to play at their best all the time."

That verbal parting gift has been noticed by many assistant coaches around the league, all of whom have been fired at some point, including some the Broncos will interview in the coming days and weeks. When a head coach drops "change the culture" in a sentence, that isn't exactly thanks for the effort.

Everybody in the league gets the deal -- that teams lose and people get fired -- and everybody in coaching knows what they're signing up to do. But Joseph used "culture" and "change" more than once.

"It was more about the overall confidence of the offense and getting back to being a dominant unit versus [being] personal about the coaches," Joseph said. "I'm looking forward to bringing in guys who can change the culture and get our offense back to playing good football. It's as simple as that."

Joseph already has replaced Davidson with Sean Kugler, a longtime offensive line coach in the NFL with stints with the Pittsburgh Steelers, Buffalo Bills and Detroit Lions before he became a college head coach (UTEP). And the Broncos' offensive line has been a source of turnover and a question mark overall for much of the past four seasons, so Kugler now gets his chance at the repairs.

But in the big picture, it also hasn't gone unnoticed in the league that all six of the assistant coaches Joseph and/or president of football operations and general manager John Elway fired were the direct supervisors of rookie draft picks who had some difficulties on the field and may not have progressed as fast as the Broncos would have liked. Davidson with left tackle Garrett Bolles, Tolbert and Olivo with wide receiver/punt returner Isaiah McKenzie, Pagac with DeMarcus Walker when Walker was moved to outside linebacker to start the season, Lynn with cornerback Brendan Langley and Stutesville with De'Angelo Henderson.

McKenzie, Walker and Langley were all benched during the season -- and were made game-day inactives. Bolles was among the most penalized linemen in the league, having been flagged 15 times, 10 for holding, and struggled to control his emotions at times. Henderson didn't play until late in the season, other than one carry on a fake punt attempt in the season's first month.

But the rookies' struggles were a common narrative throughout the season, as was the Broncos' veteran players consistently offering that they'd hoped the team's younger players would pick up the pace. Defensive end Derek Wolfe bluntly addressed the Broncos' rookie class earlier this week during an appearance on 104.3-FM The Fan when he called it "this entitlement problem around the entire league" and added "you could feel it with the rookies -- every year they get more and more entitled."

Joseph has vowed to repair that divide as well, offering, "I'll do a better job of assigning guys to rookies, pushing guys to spend more time with rookies and define those roles for those rookies so they know what we expect."

In the end, people remember things. Folks still toss out "there's no Plan B" to Elway, and he said it in 2012.

The Broncos certainly have their share of football problems to fix, but "change the culture" now may be one of those things that comes back around from time to time to Joseph as he tries to repair the rest.

Denver Broncos' 2017 total attendance slips again

By Ben Miller
Denver Business Journal
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Home attendance for the Denver Broncos in 2017 slipped again.

The Broncos' eight home games attracted a total of 610,846 fans this past season, ranking the team No. 5 overall in the National Football League for attendance.

The Dallas Cowboys again led the league in attendance, with 741,775 fans, followed by the Green Bay Packers (624,742), the New York Jets (620,496) and the New York Giants (617,434).

The Los Angeles Chargers trailed the league in attendance in 2017, attracting 202,687 fans.

It's the fourth-straight year Bronco home-game attendance has dropped. In 2016, the team attracted 614,193 fans; in 2015 it attracted 615,381 fans; and in 2014, attendance was 615,517 fans.

Yesterday, it was announced that the Sports Authority signs at the team's stadium will be removed. Sports Authority filed for bankruptcy in March 2016.

Season finale provided Broncos with a closer look at young players

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
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Heading into Sunday's season finale, one part of Head Coach Vance Joseph's plan was to get a better look at the younger players on the roster, and the Broncos certainly achieved that.

"It was good to see the young guys play some," Joseph said after the game. "That was the goal tonight, to win a game and see our young guys play."

As the Broncos prepare for the offseason, the ability to better gauge the talent they have is invaluable for the coaching staff and front office.

On Sunday, Joseph highlighted the play of running back De'Angelo Henderson and the group's youngest defensive backs, who played significantly more snaps than usual.

"Henderson, obviously, [stood out] with a touchdown on a screen play," Joseph said. "He is explosive. It's what we saw in preseason."

And for Henderson, what he saw from the backfield was exactly what he saw in the preseason.

"It doesn't feel any different to me," Henderson said after the game. "I feel like every week I'm well prepared, regardless if I'm up or I'm down. I'm learning from C.J. [Anderson], [Devontae] 'Book' [Booker] and Jamaal [Charles]. So every week I'm prepared. When I do [scout] team, I'm going against the best defense in the league. So any other team I'm going against, there's no comparison to those guys."

Henderson played 15 of the offense's 65 plays, including the one screen play that went for 29 yards and a touchdown. But he averaged just 3 yards per carry on five rushes. Still, he said the ability to gain that kind of regular-season experience can provide a great foundation for future success.

"I think it lays down a solid one," Henderson said. "I've learned from some good guys this year and hopefully it can translate what I learned this year to next year, and I'm pretty sure it will. But what they laid down, the standard that they set for me, going forward, should be very exciting coming up."

Meanwhile, on the defensive side of the football, the Broncos relied heavily upon their youngest defensive backs.

"It was our plan coming into the game to play our young guys in the back end, especially [CB Marcus] Rios, [S Dymonte] Thomas and [S Jamal] Carter to get them a bunch of game reps," Joseph said. "That was the plan coming in."

Thomas received a particularly heavy workload, playing 46 of the 70 total defensive snaps. He also recorded five total tackles, which was tied for the most on the team.

"[He showed] toughness, man," second-year safety Will Parks said. "He stuck his nose in there a lot. And him, for his size and for that type of attitude, he kind of looked like a little [Cardinals safety] Tyrann Mathieu, but he's probably a little bigger than him. I've seen a lot from him. He's got a good range, too, made a lot of good, solid tackles. ... Obviously there's a lot of room for growth for everybody, but he did a pretty good job."

Joseph has also been impressed with Thomas, of whom he spoke highly during the week before the game.

"[Thomas is] a mature guy," Joseph said on Dec. 28. "He walked in and played like a veteran for us. He knows what he's doing. That's half the battle for young guys in the secondary. Can they make calls on the move? He can."

Being able to make those kinds of observations may have been accompanied by weaker points in the young players' skill sets, but the opportunity may pay dividends next year and beyond.

Important dates to know leading to the 2018 NFL Draft

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

January 5, 2018

Jan. 15: Deadline for college players who are underclassmen to apply for special eligibility. A list of players who are accepted into the NFL Draft will be sent to clubs on January 19.

Jan. 20: East-West Shrine Game, Tropicana Field, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Jan. 20: NFLPA Collegiate Bowl, Rose Bowl, Pasadena, California.

Jan. 23-25: Senior Bowl practices led by Head Coach Vance Joseph, Mobile, Alabama.

Jan. 27: Senior Bowl, Ladd-Peebles Stadium, Mobile, Alabama.

Jan. 31: Deadline for NFL clubs to try out and negotiate with CFL players whose 2017 contracts are due to expire at 12 noon, New York time, on February 13.

Feb. 5: Waiver system begins for 2018.

Feb. 13: Beginning at 12 noon, New York time, NFL clubs may begin to sign players whose 2017 CFL contracts have expired. Players under contract to a CFL club for the 2018 season or who have an option for the 2018 season are not eligible to be signed.

Feb. 20: First day for clubs to designate Franchise or Transition Players.

Feb. 27-March 5: Prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time, deadline for clubs to designate Franchise or Transition Players.

March 12-14: Clubs are permitted to contact, and enter into contract negotiations with, the certified agents of players who will become Unrestricted Free Agents upon the expiration of their 2017 player contracts at 4:00 p.m., New York time, on March 14. However, a contract cannot be executed with a new club until 4:00 p.m., New York time, on March 14.

March 14: Prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time, clubs must exercise options for 2018 on all players who have option clauses in their 2017 contracts.

March 14: Prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time, clubs must submit qualifying offers to their Restricted Free Agents with expiring contracts to retain a Right of First Refusal/Compensation.

March 14: Prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time, clubs must submit a minimum salary tender to retain exclusive negotiating rights to their players with expiring 2017 contracts who have fewer than three accrued seasons of free agency credit.

March 14: Top 51 begins. All clubs must be under the 2018 salary cap prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time.

March 14: All 2017 player contracts will expire at 4:00 p.m., New York time.

March 14: The 2018 league year and free agency period begin at 4:00 p.m., New York time.

March 14: The first day of the 2018 league year will end at 11:59:59 p.m., New York time, on March 14. Clubs will receive a personnel notice that will include all transactions submitted to the league office during the period between 4:00 p.m., New York time, and 11:59:59 p.m., New York time, on March 14.

March 14: The first day of the 2018 league year will end at 11:59:59 p.m., New York time, on March 14. Clubs will receive a personnel notice that will include all transactions submitted to the league office during the period between 4:00 p.m., New York time, and 11:59:59 p.m., New York time, on March 14.

March 14: Trading period for 2018 begins at 4:00 p.m., New York time, after expiration of all 2017 contracts.

March 25-28: Annual League Meeting, Orlando, Florida.

April 16: Clubs with returning head coaches may begin offseason workout programs.

April 20: Deadline for Restricted Free Agents to sign offer sheets.

April 26-28: 2018 NFL Draft, AT&T Stadium, Arlington, TX.

It's time to revisit Rooney Rule and empower black coaches to take advantage of it

By Mike Jones
USA Today
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We're all thinking it as we watch the Oakland Raiders' courtship of Jon Gruden and their perceived disregard for the Rooney Rule, the NFL's policy requiring teams to hold an interview with at least one minority candidate when filling a head coach or senior football operations job.

But consider the words of Amy Trask, who offers unique perspective as former CEO of the Raiders and now a football analyst for CBS.

"Be honest with your fans. Be honest with the public. Don't insult our collective intelligence," she said in a telephone conversation with USA TODAY Sports on Thursday. "Irrespective of if one thinks there should be a rule or whether the rule needs to be doctored or treated, there is the rule. So either comply with it in good faith, or state that you are not going to comply with it and are willing to accept whatever fine is levied on you for failing to comply. In other words, be honest, forthright and direct."

We get it. In the eyes of Raiders ownership, Gruden is the best fit to be the next coach. His familiarity with the franchise, strong track record with quarterbacks, Super Bowl ring and charisma all make him extremely attractive.

But the Raiders went about this all wrong.

They zeroed in on Gruden with a full-court press and started hammering out details before even firing Jack Del Rio — or before even considering any people of color for the position.

As of Thursday, USA TODAY Sports learned the Raiders had yet to request an interview with a single person of color, according to a person with knowledge of the situation. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the matter. It remains to be seen if the Raiders plan to do so at all, or will simply pay a fine for violating the Rooney Rule.

Owner Mark Davis seems to have ignored the fact that his father, Al Davis, was a trailblazer on the diversity front. In 1979, Al Davis hired Tom Flores and eventually saw him become the first Hispanic head coach to win the Super Bowl (twice). In 1983, Davis hired Trask, who went on to become CEO from 1997 to 2013. In 1989, Al Davis made Art Shell the first African-American head coach in the NFL's modern era. In 2012, the Raiders made Reggie McKenzie one of the few black general managers.

Still, the apparent decision to disregard the Rooney Rule in pursuit of Gruden is frustrating. It serves another reminder — possibly the strongest yet — that the rule has become a sham badly in need of an overhaul.

It's well documented. The Rooney Rule has not had the anticipated long-term impact since its implementation in 2003. The number of minorities holding head coach and coordinator positions hovers around the same figure every year.

Owners often throw in a token minority interview to comply with the rule, avoiding punishment from the league, and then hire their top guy.

And the current deterrent for violating the Rooney Rule isn't significant enough.

In 2003, former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue fined then-Lions president Matt Millen \$200,000 for failing to interview a minority candidate before hiring Steve Mariucci as coach. Owners were told that further violations would draw a \$500,000 fine.

But, c'mon. These guys are billionaires, so \$500,000 is chump change.

Two people familiar with the situation told USA TODAY Sports that the Raiders' lack of compliance upset multiple ownership groups. They requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation.

It's expected that owners will discuss intensifying the penalty in the offseason to include the loss of a significant draft pick.

That would be a step in the right direction. Without accountability, there's no hope for improvement. The mindset of those responsible for hiring executives and coaches must change.

Opportunities for minority head coaches and even coordinators must increase.

Many teams want a hot-shot, offensive-minded head coach. However, only two employ black offensive coordinators after the Packers fired Edgar Bennett. And only two clubs have black quarterback coaches.

Also damaging: the fact that coaches get stereotyped.

Why are former running backs and wide receivers — two position that feature the largest number of African-Americans — only good for coaching their positional groups? Why is it so rare for these men, who are just as knowledgeable and detail-oriented, to become offensive coordinators?

"Just like quarterback, OC and QB coach are considered 'thinking man' positions," a former African-American player and current assistant told USA TODAY Sports. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions.

Blacks just aren't typically trusted with those "thinking man" gigs. How crazy is this? Sounds like I'm writing back in 1968 or '78, or even '88. Not 2018.

Head coaches have to do a better job of developing position coaches into coordinators. One idea: Give those running back and wide receiver coaches a chance to call plays during portions of preseason games.

It all comes back to opportunity.

But let me make this clear: I don't believe in token interviews or hires. Don't hire me because I'm black. Hire me because I'm good at what I do. And that's exactly how minority coaches see it. But they have to have a chance to sell themselves.

Multiple people with intimate knowledge of NFL hiring practices have told USA TODAY Sports there's a dilemma among assistant coaches, who have received requests to interview for head coaching positions when it's obvious they have no legitimate shot at landing the job. Those insiders spoke on condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the situation.

Black candidates wrestle with whether to go through potential sham interviews for the experience or to decline them all together.

Owners can eliminate that dilemma by committing to truly making their organizations places of equal opportunity.

Inside the Thursday Night Football Turnaround

By Robert Klemko

MMQB

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On second-and-17, with three minutes left in the third quarter, Broncos linebacker Todd Davis backs into a deep hook-curl zone, only to reverse field in pursuit of a dump-off pass from Jets quarterback Josh McCown to Matt Forte. Davis, Forte and Broncos safety Will Parks meet at once, and somewhere in the collision Davis's ankle turns too far.

He's already missed two games due to that ankle. In a 21-0 loss to the Chargers, offensive tackle Russell Okung (an ex-teammate) dove to clip Davis from behind as he surged into the backfield to make a fourth-quarter stop. ("It was actually a dirty play," Davis says. "I was going to make the play and he was definitely behind me, and he just decided to take me out.") The ankle has bothered him since, requiring roughly a half-pound of tape on game days to secure it in place.

On this Sunday, Davis hops to his feet, stomps the ground and ultimately misses just one play. But a little more than 10 minutes (in real time) later, Davis is down again. He scraped across the field and caught Forte on an off tackle run, wrapped up the runner and together with teammate Brandon Marshall dragged him to the ground. Only Davis's head hit the ground just as hard as Forte's, sending pain shooting down the back of his neck. He tore his helmet off and writhed on the ground, shaking his head as his dreadlocks flopped across the grass. He'll be asked where he is, what quarter they're in, who the Broncos played last week, if they won, the score of the game and finally, what happened on the last play.

He passes the concussion protocol, and he continues to play what looks like a meaningless game in a lost season for the Broncos. But this is his job, and these games make up a résumé. He's an unrestricted free agent after this season, but his contract status won't determine whether he sues up for Denver's next game, in four days. It's a pride thing.

"We still want to be great," Davis says. "I don't think our record defines us. We still want to be dominant. We're all grown men; we can't quit on our jobs."

Part of the job is playing on Thursday, so after 13 games—nine of them losses—the Broncos will travel to Indianapolis for what will be the least-watched Thursday Night Football Game of the season. It's the 2017 finale of a series of games that has drawn the ire of players and fans alike. The week prior to the Denver-Indianapolis matchup, Saints quarterback Drew Brees added his voice to the chorus of players calling for an end to the games, or at least a reduction.

"Do you understand what guys' bodies go through in a game?" Brees asked rhetorically after a 20-17 loss to the Falcons. "And then to have to turn around four days later and to play? . . . Is this smart as it pertains to guys' health and safety? No, absolutely not. When you see guys go down, when you lose guys for what you think is unnecessary just because you put them at a much higher risk in such a quick turnaround, that gets you upset."

The NFL has demonstrated through statistics that Thursday Night Games don't produce a higher rate of injuries than Sunday or Monday games, but the NFL doesn't account for players like Davis, who will go

into Thursday Night Football hurt. Davis has injuries to his ankle, both shoulders and stiffness in his neck, but has every intention to stay off the injury report. Davis took The MMQB through each day of Thursday Night Football Week to find out what exactly what goes into the Sunday-Thursday turnaround.

“It kind of feels like getting in a car accident, trying to recover, and then all of a sudden you get in another one.”

It’s Monday afternoon, and Davis is in front of a scrum of reporters, explaining what it means to play two games in five days. It’s a familiar refrain from players since the NFL expanded the package to include every team making at least one appearance per season beginning in 2012. What Davis doesn’t say is that, after Sunday’s car wreck he went home and was so tired he went straight to bed, forgoing the NormaTec Pulse Recovery System—a cold body sleeve provided to each player by the team for home use—and paid for it in the morning.

“You definitely feel all the sores, the aches, all the stiffness starts to set in when you get up on Monday morning,” Davis says. “Normally, we come in early Monday and lift, get all the lactic acid out. But they gave us the morning off.”

Davis says in these weeks since the ankle injury, getting out of bed is a feat unto itself. He sleeps on his back now, rather than his stomach, to keep the foot in a normal resting position, and he wakes up long before he actually gets up.

“It’s like, if you ever have an injury during the game it stiffens up overnight,” Davis says. “It takes some time to wake itself up and get going. By the time I get in the car I’ve laid around for a couple hours before I get up and do anything.”

The Broncos this season, under first-year head Vance Joseph introduced a compulsory “Restoration Friday,” when players are required to go to the training room and address what ails them, whether they’re on the injury report or not. The training staff brings in between nine and 11 medical specialists—stretch and massage therapists, three different types of chiropractors, dry needling experts, etc.—to address every need within an hour window. Over time, the window extended to two hours and the trainers stopped taking attendance for Restoration Friday because players were consistently showing up without prodding.

“This year coach Joseph came up with a great idea, which we’ve taken to the next level,” says Broncos Director of Sports Medicine Steve “Greek” Antonopoulos, who has been a part of the team in some capacity for more than 40 years. “It’s always been about restoration, but in the past three or four years it’s really been about restoration, doing everything we can possibly do to get the guys ready for Sunday. I think all the staffs go into Thursday games different.”

Restoration Friday was meant to be the decisive blow in the fight to get players back to 100%—or as close to it as possible—before the weekend. Thursday games accelerate that process. “It takes a normal guy until Wednesday or Thursday before feeling completely normal, and an older guy around Friday or Saturday,” Antonopoulos says. “If you go into these Thursday night games with the mental part that you’re going to get hurt, you’re more likely to have an injury. Any coach I’ve ever been around stresses the positive. The mind helps with some of that stuff, without question.”

The Broncos won't hit this week in practice; most of the NFL has conceded that contact during the two or three days of practice prior to a Thursday game hurts more than it helps. Before and after practice, Davis is on a steady diet of ice and stimulation. Electric currents are sent through his ankle via sticky electrode gel pads. He goes through Hivamat deep oscillation therapy, which creates an electrostatic field that provides pain relief and muscle relaxation, among other benefits. "They stick one pad on you and one pad on their hand, and once they touch you the current goes through," Davis says.

On Monday night he goes home to his wife and their infant child, and gets a visit from his personal body guru who puts him through a massage therapy regimen. The session will include extra attention on his shoulders, which have bothered him since injuring one in the preseason. Since separating it the first time, doctors told him if it keeps happening it might require surgery. "Thank God it didn't," Davis says.

Davis is asked for the guru's identity. "Can't tell you; it's confidential," he says. "That's my man. If I tell you, then he won't be my man no more. Everybody will want to use him and then he won't have time for me."

It's Tuesday morning, and Davis takes Naproxen, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, with breakfast. He's taken it every day with breakfast and dinner since injuring the ankle. It's another uptempo walk-through day for the team, with the focus on recovery. Five players are listed with ankle injuries, while six others have injuries including an Achilles strain, a lower back injury, shoulder trouble and wrist injuries.

Outside linebacker Shane Ray, who required surgery on an injured wrist in training camp and played this season with the wrist heavily taped, says the defense was fortunate to have dominated the Jets offense the Sunday prior. The Broncos allowed just 100 total yards—41 passing and 59 rushing—and six first downs in a 23-0 win. If Sunday had been more of a slugfest, more players would be struggling to play Thursday, Ray says.

"How long guys are out there on the field makes a huge difference, so we're just lucky Sunday went the way it did," he says. "At the end of the day, if it's really all about player safety for the league, they need to do something about [Thursday Night Football]."

Davis will undergo much of the same treatment he did on Monday—massage and electronic stimulation to the ankle meant to relieve pain and break up scar tissue. At night he applies Voltarin, a diclofenac sodium topical gel (another nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug) to his right ankle. On Wednesday, Joseph lets the team sleep in prior to its 1 p.m. flight to Indianapolis. Davis goes through the same routine upon arrival—ice and stimulation—in addition to the team walkthrough. Away games are tough on the injured, because the flights often put pressure on the injuries and create more swelling that needs to be addressed by training staffs.

They get a late wakeup time on Thursday morning—11 a.m.—and Davis spends the morning watching the movie *The Hitman's Bodyguard* in his hotel room. He arrives at the stadium in time to have his ankle taped as heavily as anyone on the field. First, a layer of pre-wrap, then athletic tape, then socks, then cleats, then another layer of tape around the shoes and ankle to secure it all in place. Davis says you can't play less aggressively with injuries—that's how you get hurt—but you can make minor tweaks to your game to protect your body.

Since separating his left shoulder and “tweaking” his right shoulder, he tries to avoid coming into contact with full arm extension. He says he comes off blocks tighter, driving through and around blockers in ways that allow him to keep his elbows close to his core, and he tackles with less wingspan at the point of attack.

Before the game he takes an oral dose of Toradol, a pain-relieving drug that until recently had been administered via injection and was being taken prophylactically, against the advice of a 2012 study by the NFL Physicians Society. The group recommended Toradol not be “used prophylactically as a means of reducing anticipated pain either during or after participation in NFL games or practices and should be limited to those players diagnosed with an injury or condition and listed on the teams’ injury report.” But it left discretion up to team staffs. A 2015 lawsuit by more than 1,800 former players put the spotlight on the drug and forced teams to curtail what had been known in some cities as the “T Train,” the line of players standing outside a gameday training room waiting for the pain-numbing dosage.

“There will be anywhere from 25-30 guys taking it on game day,” Davis says. “I know there’s a lot of people on the list. You sign a waiver for it. I think they give it to us in moderation, only once a week.”



Kickoff arrives. Davis and the Broncos take the field for the first time after a Trevor Siemian interception four minutes into the game. On the Colts’ first play from scrimmage, Davis makes the first tackle, shedding tight end Jack Doyle and taking down Frank Gore after a three-yard gain. After the first drive, Davis finds the stationary bikes on the sideline and rides for a few hundred yards just to get the kinks out. “I was sore, first coming out,” he says. “I had to hop on the bike a couple times just to wake my body up a little bit.”

He’ll collect just two more tackles over 28 snaps in a 25-13 win—once Denver opens up a nine-point lead late in the third quarter they spend most of the rest of the game in dime personnel, meaning less work for Davis.

He avoids injury on Thursday, but a handful of Colts aren’t nearly as fortunate. Tight end Brandon Williams is put on a stretcher and carted off the field after a frightening collision during a special teams play. He’s immediately hospitalized, and revealed to have suffered a concussion but not a spine or neck injury. In total, five Colts found their way onto the injury report: linebacker Jeremiah George (neck), offensive lineman Denzelle Good (knee), defensive tackle Johnathan Hankins (shoulder), tight end Jason Vander Laan (concussion) and Williams. The only Broncos player added to the list is wide receiver Cody Latimer, who is questionable the next week with a thigh injury.

Davis says if he entered last week’s game against the Jets at 90% health, he was about 85% for Thursday Night Football. That speaks to the concern many fans have beyond increased injury risk, that because players are at less than full health, TNF games seem sloppier than the ones played on Sunday.

Davis cherishes the opportunity to play in primetime: “Anytime we can play in front of the whole country, under the lights is a blessing,” he says. “It’s tough but I like it. I think we struggle with it, but they [Indianapolis] do too. Everybody’s slower. It’s an even playing field.

"I think it's obvious that guys are more banged up during Thursday Night Football. The body just doesn't have that time to recover that you would normally have. It's tough getting on the field but once you're on the field you gotta play."

I ask Davis where a change to the Thursday Night Football schedule would rank on a list of things needing to be addressed by the NFLPA in labor negotiations with the NFL. A teammate interjects: "Fortieth! First we need guaranteed contracts, health care for life, a private jet, \$200 million dollars . . ."

Davis smiles: "We've got a couple things ahead of it on the list."

Broncos reportedly have interest in Kirk Cousins, but not Eli Manning

By Jared Dubin
CBS Sports
January 5, 2018

The Denver Broncos had one of the NFL's worst quarterback situations in 2017. The Broncos at different times started Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch, and Brock Osweiler, and combined that trio ranked 27th in the league in yards-per-attempt and 31st in passer rating. They completed less than 59 percent of their passes and had a negative touchdown-to-interception ratio.

None of them particularly distinguished themselves as viable quarterbacks of the future, and so it should come as no surprise that John Elway and company will be in the market for a new quarterback this offseason. One of their targets, according to ABC7's Troy Renck, will be Washington quarterback Kirk Cousins.

@TroyRenck

Been asked. Yes I believe #Broncos will pursue Cousins. But there will be a Plan B and C this time around. Won't be like chase for Manning. But yes they will pursue him

6:56 PM - Jan 3, 2018

9 Replies 31 Retweets 77 likes

However, they apparently do not have interest in Cousins' NFC East rival, Eli Manning.

@TroyRenck

They don't have interest in Eli <https://twitter.com/nickstratton/status/948737273176174594> ...

7:06 PM - Jan 3, 2018

3 Replies Retweets 6 likes

Cousins is eight years younger than Manning and thus likely to last several more years in the NFL. He's also played far better than Manning of late. Over the course of the three seasons Cousins has been Washington's full-time starter, 36 quarterbacks have attempted at least 500 total passes. Cousins ranks third among that group in completion percentage, 12th in touchdown rate, 19th in interception rate, fourth in yards per attempt, and sixth in passer rating. Each of those rankings is better than Manning's in the same category.

STAT	COUSINS	MANNING
COMP %	3	21
TD %	12	19
INT %	19	22
YPA	4	33
RTG	6	26

Denver still has one of the NFL's best defenses, and merely competent quarterback play could elevate the team back to the playoffs. Cousins makes a ton of sense as a target, given that he's still in the prime of his career. The Broncos chased a Manning the last time he became available in free agency, so it would be a nice story if they did the same now, but Peyton was playing at a much higher level the last time he was on the field (prior to his injury) before he hit the market than his brother has recently.

Six NFL teams are eligible for 'Hard Knocks,' but two of them don't seem interested

By John Breech
CBS Sports
January 5, 2018

The NFL's annual search to put a team on Hard Knocks might get slightly more difficult this year, and that's mainly because two of the teams that are eligible to be on the show don't seem to have any interest in being on the show.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the Hard Knocks formula, a team doesn't have to be on the show if any of the three rules below applies to them:

1. They have a first-year head coach in place
2. They have a playoff berth in the past two seasons
3. They have appeared on Hard Knocks in the past 10 years

For instance, the Colts don't have to be on the show in 2018 because they'll have a new head coach. The Packers won't have to be on the show because they've made the playoffs in the past two seasons and the Bengals won't have to be on the show because they've appeared on Hard Knocks in the past 10 years.

When we factor in those three rules and apply them to every team, we're left with just six teams that the NFL can force to be on Hard Knocks this year: The 49ers, Broncos, Browns, Chargers, Ravens and Redskins.

If you looked at that list and said, "Wow, a Hard Knocks with the 49ers would be fun after the way they ended their season," go ahead and eliminate that thought from your head right now because they want no part of the show, something that general manager John Lynch made clear on Tuesday.

"It's not something we would be really excited about," Lynch said, via NBC Bay Area. "I love the show, but I think some things are best left behind closed doors. I fundamentally have a problem with cutting players and things of that nature [on camera]. It's not something we'd be thrilled about."

Apparently, the Ravens also want to stay as far away from Hard Knocks as possible. The team actually used an excuse to get out of the show last year.

@jeffzrebiecsun

Ravens told league last year that their ongoing facility renovations would prevent them from being able to hold all the necessary HBO manpower and equipment for show. Plus, no fans were at practices, which would've hurt the entertainment value of show.

10:40 AM - Jan 2, 2018

6 Replies 8 Retweets 25 likes

According to the Baltimore Sun, the Ravens again want no part of the show and will do it only if they're absolutely forced to be on it.

So that leaves us with the Broncos, Browns, Chargers and Redskins.

My personal vote would go to the Browns because everyone loves trainwreck television and coming off an 0-16 season, that's kind of what Browns are now. The Broncos would also be interesting because they still need a quarterback and watching John Elway complain about quarterback play for five consecutive weeks would be a fascinating case study into human emotion.

If they picked the Chargers, at least one entire episode would have to be devoted to Philip Rivers. Not only does he have eight kids who could probably entertain us with hours of television, but we could also get an inside look at his 90-minute daily commute from North San Diego to Los Angeles for practice.

Finally, there's Washington. If the Redskins get picked, NFL Films would need to get the cameras rolling as soon as possible so they can document every second of the Kirk Cousins' negotiation, which will probably go somewhat like a hostage negotiation if the past few years are any indication.

Report: Broncos add Mike Sullivan, Curtis Modkins to offensive staff

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
January 5, 2018

The Broncos parted ways with several assistant coaches at the end of the regular season and they've reportedly reached agreements with a couple of new additions to Vance Joseph's staff.

Mike Klis of KUSA reports that Mike Sullivan will be the new quarterbacks coach while Curtis Modkins will be overseeing the running backs.

Sullivan was the Giants' offensive coordinator for the last two years and took over playcalling duties from former head coach Ben McAdoo, who was also reportedly a candidate for the position, during the 2017 season. Sullivan, who was also the offensive coordinator in Tampa in 2012 and 2013, worked for Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave when Musgrave held the same position with the Jaguars.

One of Sullivan's first duties with the Broncos will be working the Senior Bowl, where he and the rest of the staff will get a good look at Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield and other quarterback prospects at a moment when they need one in Denver.

Modkins joined the Bears as running backs coach last year after spending the 2016 season as Chip Kelly's offensive coordinator with the 49ers. Modkins also had a stint as the offensive coordinator of the Bills from 2010-12, so the Broncos have added a pair of experienced offensive assistants as they try to build a more effective unit than the one they fielded this season.

Reports: Broncos hire Sean Kugler as offensive line coach

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
January 5, 2018

The Denver Broncos have hired Sean Kugler as their new offensive line coach, according to multiple reports.

Kugler replaced Jeff Davidson as Denver's offensive line coach. Davidson was one of six coaches let go by the Broncos on Monday.

Kugler has spent time with three previous teams in the NFL. He served as tight ends and offensive line coach of the Detroit Lions from 2001-04, an offensive line coach with the Buffalo Bills from 2007-09 and joined the Pittsburgh Steelers in 2010.

He left the Steelers to take the head coaching job at UTEP, his alma mater, in Dec. 2013. He resigned from that job in October after an 0-5 start this season.

New York snow storm delays Giants interview with Eric Stutesville

By Curtis Crabtree

Pro Football Talk

January 5, 2018

The winter storms that have afflicted the Eastern Seaboard have now impacted the New York Giants' search for a new head coach.

According to Tom Canavan of the Associated Press, the Giants were set to interview former Denver Broncos running backs coach Eric Stutesville for their head coaching vacancy on Thursday. That meeting has been pushed to next week due to the winter storms.

General manager Dave Gettleman will be in Massachusetts for interviews with New England Patriots coordinators Josh McDaniels and Matt Patricia. Interviews with Minnesota Vikings offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur, Philadelphia Eagles defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz and Carolina Panthers defensive coordinator Steve Wilks are expected as well.

Stutesville was let go by the Broncos staff on Monday. He had previously served as interim head coach of the Broncos when McDaniels was fired in 2010 before returning to New England.