

Broncos Mailbag: What are the odds Denver lands Tony Romo?

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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What are the odds we get Tony Romo?

— Wyatt Borkert, Sacramento, Calif.

Wyatt: If Romo is released, the Broncos are expected to pursue him — as are other teams. Cowboys owner Jerry Jones told reporters at the NFL combine in Indianapolis that they “will work in the best way we can for the mutual interest” of Romo and the team.

That was just implied,” Jones said. “That’s important here. Now we’ve got to abide by every league rule. We can’t have agreements without it being within the boundaries of the NFL. But when you’ve got a situation like we got, we’ll do the do-right rule. That’s it. Very important. We do the do-right rule. We have that kind of relationship.”

Romo has three years left on his contract with cap charges of \$24.7 million, \$25.2 million and \$23.7 million, respectively. Holding onto him doesn’t seem realistic for Dallas given the cost and given Dak Prescott’s success as a starter last year. And trading him, at his age (he’ll be 37 next season) and with his injury history won’t afford the Cowboys much.

If the Cowboys decide to release him, they take a \$19.6 million hit in dead money that will either go on their books this season or spread over the next two seasons if they designate him a post-June 1 cut. No small chunk of change.

Last week at the combine, Broncos general manager John Elway and coach Vance Joseph reiterated their faith in quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, but the reality is this: The Broncos’ defense won’t stay intact forever, and in Mike McCoy’s new offense that is expected to resemble the system he used in 2012 when Peyton Manning, the passing game will be emphasized. When Romo was last healthy, in 2014, he led the league in completion percentage (69.9 percent), yards per attempt (8.52) and passer rating (113.2).

But his health is key: Romo has endured a string of major injuries and has started only four games over the last two seasons as a result, all while playing behind one of the league’s finest offensive lines.

Now, if Romo does become available, it’s quite possible for the Broncos to take advantage of escalators and incentives to lower his cap hit while keeping his pay close to what he would have received in his current deal, which calls for \$14 million in salary for 2017.

It’s been reported that Denver would be Romo’s top choice, and it seems unrealistic for the Cowboys to try to trade him to a divisional rival (despite an earlier NFL Network report). And the Texans, who shelled out big money for Brock Osweiler, now need improvement at the position and are expected to come calling.

A lot has to be considered and worked through for Romo to land in Denver, but if the Cowboys part ways with him, the Broncos might offer the best situation for him.

“I expect Romo to be a Bronco,” former agent and current CBS Sports salary expert Joel Corry told me. “Houston may actually be his more favored destination because it’s in the state of Texas and it’s an easy transition. He wouldn’t be uprooting his family in the same way as he would with Denver. But Denver, (recent) Super Bowl champions, just a quarterback away, it makes sense. It’s just a question of whether Elway wants to spend the money that he needs to spend to get Tony Romo. Because if he’s going to pull the same stuff he did with Colin Kaepernick next year, odds are Tony Romo is not going to be a Denver Bronco.”

With this talk of acquiring injury-prone Tony Romo, and with starting-caliber offensive line help in short supply from both the free-agent market and the draft, could it be realistic to think the Broncos will ultimately have to go with moderate updates to the O-line and feature Paxton Lynch as a large, mobile QB — and imaginative play calling from Mike McCoy — to take some pressure off the line and keep a Broncos’ QB upright for an entire season?

— Dan, St. Louis

Dan: Sticking with Siemian and Lynch is a very real possibility, but the Broncos must upgrade their offensive line significantly no matter the quarterback. Siemian endured three injuries and missed two games behind the Broncos’ current line. Pass protection was poor and the run game was non-existent for much of the season. Romo couldn’t stay healthy behind one of the NFL’s best lines, and it’s foolish to believe he could do so behind the Broncos’ current front five. But it’s also foolish to believe a second-year quarterback like Lynch would fare better. The offense will sputter if there’s not more cohesion and help up front. May 2016 serve as proof.

But depending on Dallas’ plans for Romo and myriad other factors that will dictate where he plays next season, it’s very possible that the Broncos stick with their two young quarterbacks and focus on their development while upgrading other areas on the roster. With more than \$40 million in cap space and 10 draft picks this year, as lot is possible for the Broncos right now.

I’ve been hearing that Calais Campbell is the Broncos’ top defensive free-agent target. Wouldn’t it be better to sign run-stuffing (and younger) nose tackles like Brandon Williams/Dontari Poe, thereby freeing up Adam Gotsis to develop at defensive end instead of seeing only spot duty behind Campbell in the years to come?

— Evan Lukassen, Gunnison

Evan: Campbell will be a top target for many teams, and will land a contract to match. The Broncos need improvement across the board on offense, but sealing the leak in their run defense is also a priority. Campbell, it’s believed, could do that. According to Pro Football Focus, Campbell ranked as the 11th-best 3-4 defensive end against the run last year.

But there are others on the market could provide that boost as well, Williams being one. The Ravens’ defensive tackle, who is about two years younger than Campbell and coming off his first contract, totaled 51 tackles and one sack last season, helping the Ravens’ defense rank No. 5 against the run (89.4 yards allowed per game). It’s believed that \$11 million in average annual salary might be the floor for Williams’ next deal, but with the Broncos’ cap cushion, they have the means to get him if they want to spend there.

As for Gotsis, defensive line coach Bill Kollar has put the onus on the second-year player to make a leap in 2017 and earn his spot on the line, regardless of who the Broncos bring on to help. The transition can be difficult for first-year players, and Gotsis arrived with limited experience in American football compared to most draft picks. Last year he was also recovering from knee surgery when the Broncos selected him.

The Broncos need help on the line and are on the hunt for a starter. But depth was lacking last year, especially with Vance Walker's loss in training camp. There is a place for Gotsis, and he will be needed.

Broncos ready to explore Romo if quarterback released

By Mike Klis

9News

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If it matters, and apparently it does, a deal between Tony Romo and the Denver Broncos would satisfy the “Do-Right Rule” that has been stated, along with a wink-wink, by Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

Multiple NFL sources tell 9News Broncos general manager John Elway and the team are ready to pursue Romo if and when the quarterback is released by Jones and the Dallas Cowboys.

One agent source also told 9News that Romo’s preferred choice is the Broncos. Denver is not the only team expected to pursue Romo, though. There was buzz at the NFL Combine the Houston Texans would also be interested, but would they give up on Brock Osweiler after paying him \$21 million in 2016, his first year with the team, and another \$16 million guaranteed this season?

And would Houston be in violation of Jones’ “Do-Right Rule” as the Cowboy and Texans’ franchises wade in some of the same State of Texas revenue streams?

Other teams in the quarterback market would be San Francisco, Chicago, Cleveland, the New York Jets and possibly Buffalo. None of those teams, though, have been nearly as competitive as the Broncos in recent years. The assumption is Romo at this late stage in his career would not want to be part of a rebuilding project.

Jones told the Dallas media Saturday at the NFL Combine in Indianapolis that he and Romo have an implied agreement. The implication behind the agreement is Romo won’t sign with a team that could directly damage the Cowboys’ chances of reaching the Super Bowl.

The Broncos, as an AFC team that doesn’t play in the Cowboys’ National Football Conference, much less its division, presumably would meet with Jones’ approval.

“It is implied that we will work in the best way we can for the mutual interest of Tony and the Cowboys,” Jones said during a press gathering inside the Cowboys’ bus. “That was just implied. That’s important here. Now we’ve got to abide by every league rule. We can’t have agreements without it being within the boundaries of the NFL. But when you’ve got a situation like we got, we’ll do the do-right rule. That’s it. Very important. We do the do-right rule. We have that kind of relationship.”

If the “Do Right Rule” is reciprocal, Jones will maximize Romo’s ability to get a favorable deal and team before free agency officially opens at 2 p.m. Thursday.

There is not expected to be a trade market for Romo because of the hefty, \$44 million in base salaries remaining on the final three years of his current deal and his contract’s even steeper salary cap ramifications.

The Broncos willingness to visit with Romo would not necessarily mean an agreement despite their mutual interest. Any Broncos’ deal with Romo would figure to include conditions that would protect the team against injury.

For instance, the Broncos could offer Romo a multiyear deal worth between \$8 million to 10 million a year, but incentives and escalators based on playing time, performance and team success could move his earnings beyond a \$15 million annual average.

Romo's 11-year stint as the Dallas starting quarterback has been curtailed by three left collarbone breaks and three back injuries. He has played in just four games, plus one series in the past two seasons, and he turns 37 years old in six weeks.

Dak Prescott and Tony Romo (Photo: Tim Heitman, USA TODAY Sports)

When the Broncos signed Peyton Manning to a five-year, \$96 million contract in 2012 as the quarterback was 36 years old and coming off a neck injury, only the first year and \$18 million was guaranteed. The next two years at \$20 million each became guaranteed only after Manning passed a neck exam.

It's possible Romo could receive similar contract provisions with his collarbone and back.

The Broncos want to at least explore whether the risk is worth taking because when healthy, Romo has been considered one of the league's top 10 quarterbacks. In fact, his 97.1 career passer rating ranks third all-time – behind only Aaron Rodgers and Tom Brady -- among quarterbacks who have played in at least 100 games.

Romo led the Cowboys to regular-season records of 13-3 in 2007, 11-5 in 2009 and 12-3 in 2014. However, he has been part of just two playoff wins in his career, none past the first round.

Perhaps, the most surprising element of the Broncos' pursuit of Romo is it would come one year after the team traded up in the first round to select quarterback Paxton Lynch. But after mostly backing up Trevor Siemian in his rookie year, it appears the Broncos' brain trust believe that while Lynch can eventually become a franchise-type quarterback, he is a project who could benefit from another year or two of development.

Siemian, meanwhile, was one of the league's most pleasant surprises in 2016. A seventh-round pick in the 2015 draft out of Northwestern, Siemian started 7-2 last season before he was part of four losses in his last five games. He threw for 3,401 yards and 18 touchdowns against 10 interceptions.

If the Broncos were to acquire Romo, Elway figures to almost instantly receive trade requests for Siemian, starting with the San Francisco 49ers. New 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan communicated during his head coach interview with the Broncos he was impressed with Siemian, who is scheduled to make a ridiculously affordable \$615,000 this season and \$705,000 in 2018 as part of his rookie contract.

There is little question Romo would impede the progress of the Broncos' two young quarterbacks. But it would also be a case of Elway's desire to go full-out, every single year, to give the Broncos the best chance to win the Super Bowl.

Denver already has what many would consider a Super Bowl-caliber defense, but the window on its excellence may be closing. The team is trying to re-sign pass rusher DeMarcus Ware, who turns 35 on July 31, but he is expected to first test the free-agent market. Star cornerback Aqib Talib is 31, missed

three games last season with a back injury and is awaiting word as to whether he will be disciplined by the league in the form of a suspension because of an accidental self-inflicted shooting incident last summer. And strong safety T.J. Ward is in the final year of his contract.

The Broncos are expected to add a defensive tackle (possibly by re-signing Sylvester Williams) and a 5-technique defensive end in free agency.

As for the team's offense, Elway will attempt to add a left tackle (possibly by re-signing Russell Okung) and right guard through free agency regardless of whether Romo becomes available this week.

As for running back, tight end and receiver, the Broncos will likely wait for the draft that is considered deep at those positions, although they could consider a free agent whose market falls.

Romo or no Romo, Elway plans on making the Broncos Super Bowl contenders again after his team missed the playoffs with a 9-7 record for the first time in his six years as the team's general manager.

Broncos interested in Chris Baker as negotiating period set to begin

By Mike Klis

9News

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Back when Chris Baker was considered a bad boy too risky for a draft pick, the Denver Broncos gave the defensive tackle his first chance.

Perhaps, the 6-foot-2, 320-pounder can return to where his story of redemption began when the NFL free-agent period begins with a negotiating period that runs from 10 a.m. Tuesday until the signing period commences at 2 p.m. Thursday.

Baker, a 3-4 defensive end who just played out his three-year, \$12 million contract with Washington, is drawing strong interest from the Broncos and Tampa Bay Bucs, according to an NFL source. The Broncos are also expected to express interest in Calais Campbell, a 3-4 defensive end for Arizona who played his high school ball at Denver South.

Besides Baker or Campbell, the Broncos also hope to land a right guard and left tackle in free agency. Right guard candidates could include Detroit's Larry Warford, Jacksonville's Patrick Omameh and Minnesota's Brandon Fusco.

Left tackle candidates could include Andrew Whitworth, the Broncos' own Russell Okung, and Minnesota's Matt Kalil and Andre Smith.

Baker, 29, was kicked off Joe Paterno's Penn State team in 2008, along with Phil Taylor, for off-field brawls. Baker regrouped to play one season at Division I-AA Hampton, then signed with the Broncos as an undrafted free agent.

He made the Broncos' 53-man roster, but was inactive for all but one game as rookie in 2009. Among Denver's final cuts prior to the 2010 season, Baker bounced to practice squads in Miami and Washington before his talent began to emerge in 2013.

He got his \$4 million a year contract prior to the 2014 season and settled down off the field by marrying highly regarded ESPN talent producer Jamila Phillips in 2015 – a wedding in which former Bronco and childhood friend Terrance Knighton served as best man.

Baker has been a left defensive end who can stop the run and rush the passer (9.5 sacks combined the past two seasons). He would be an ideal complement to Broncos' right defensive end Derek Wolfe.

'Value' free-agent signings have meant most to Broncos

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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John Elway, Denver Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager, believes free agency is "a piece of what we do, but not everything." And the Broncos' approach has reflected that in the past three seasons, as the Broncos ranked 12th in the league in total contract value.

Here's a look at how those signings have panned out on the field:

Total signings: 27* (tied for 19th in NFL)

Total contract value: \$236,687,236 (17th in NFL)

Three-season W-L: 33-15

Biggest hit: It's hard to make one overall selection in the last three seasons. The four major signings -- cornerback Aqib Talib, safety T.J. Ward, outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware and wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders -- have each been named to at least one Pro Bowl since they joined the Broncos, and all four started the team's Super Bowl 50 victory. But in terms of the big picture of consistency and elite level of play, most personnel executives in the league would say Talib has played the best game in and game out during that three-season stretch for the Broncos.

Biggest miss: Offensive tackles Russell Okung and Donald Stephenson were paired as the main targets in free agency for the Broncos in 2016. Neither performed to the level of their contracts -- they tied for the team lead in penalties -- and the Broncos had season-long struggles on the offensive line. The Broncos have already elected to not pay Okung's option bonus, so he will be a free agent. The Broncos could bring him back at a greatly reduced rate. The Broncos will discuss this week whether or not they want Stephenson on the roster on March 13, when his \$4 million base salary is guaranteed.

Sneaky-good move: Defensive end Jared Crick was a quality signing in 2016 as he finished with 939 snaps on defense, tops among the Broncos' defensive linemen. But safety Darian Stewart's signing didn't get much attention in 2015, and Stewart already has been signed to an extension by the Broncos. He also was named as an injury replacement in the Pro Bowl. Stewart was one of two players on the Broncos' defense -- cornerback Chris Harris Jr. was the other -- to top 1,000 snaps this past season. Stewart tied for the team lead in interceptions.

Verdict: The 2016 free agency bobble aside, Elway consistently talks about getting "value" in free agency, which means he's willing to spend big for big return. And the team has not been as active most years as it was in 2014. But with Peyton Manning's mega-signing in 2012, some quality work in the draft and the 2014 haul in free agency, the Broncos went from a 4-12 finish in 2010 to six winning seasons, five AFC West titles and two Super Bowl trips. They've been disciplined for the most part and reaped the rewards.

*Signings made during free-agency period beginning in March.

Jalen Myrick leads defensive backs with sub-4.3 40

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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As they did in 2016, the defensive backs closed out this year's NFL scouting combine with a double-take-worthy presentation of speed.

Of the 49 defensive backs who chose to run inside Lucas Oil Stadium on Monday, 22 blistered to at least one 40-yard dash clocked under 4.5 seconds. Minnesota cornerback Jalen Myrick led the way at 4.28, followed by UCLA cornerback Fabian Moreau (4.35) and Ohio State cornerback Marshon Lattimore (4.36).

"There's a ton of fast guys in this group," LSU safety Jamal Adams said late Sunday afternoon as he looked ahead to the 40. "I think they're going to show it."

Myrick's time tied the fastest by a defensive back since 2006. Thanks to Myrick and new 40-yard record-holder John Ross, this was the first time in the past 12 combines that two players broke 4.3, according to ESPN Stats & Information.

Monday's results also kept the players who will be asked to cover wide receivers in an increasingly pass-happy league slightly ahead of the rookie pass-catchers, at least in terms of timed speed.

However, it should be noted that this year's crop of receivers invited to the scouting combine ran far better than their 2016 peers. Ross, who set a combine record with an official 4.22 in his only 40 on Saturday, led a group of 18 wide receivers who ran at least one 40-yard dash under 4.5. That was 35.3 percent of the 51 receivers who ran at the combine this year; 58 receivers were invited overall.

A year ago, just 10 of the 37 receivers (27 percent) who ran in Indy went sub-4.5 in at least one 40-yard dash.

Tony Romo's past, present, future dominate conversations at combine

By Todd Archer
ESPN.com
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The question was everywhere during the NFL scouting combine: What's going to happen to Tony Romo?

Romo could be in his final few days with the Dallas Cowboys with the league year opening Thursday, but the Cowboys don't need to make a quick decision on the veteran quarterback. They are under the \$167 million salary cap. While not in a position currently to make big additions, they can carry Romo's \$24.7 million cap figure as long as they want.

They hope they can work out a potential trade, but there are a few stumbling blocks. A potential trade partner would want to rework Romo's contract, and Romo wants to pick his new destination.

Over a five-day span in Indianapolis -- in the early morning hours at a Starbucks, or in the wee hours of the night turning into morning at Prime 47, a downtown steakhouse that becomes the unofficial home of all things NFL -- thoughts ranged far and wide on Romo.

One offensive coordinator on a team looking for a quarterback hoped his team would go after Romo, though he didn't expect it to happen.

"He's the best guy out there," the coordinator said. "That's not a question."

One general manager of a team already with a starting quarterback acknowledged Romo's injury history does not help. Romo has played in parts of five games over the past two years because of collarbone and back injuries. He played seven snaps in 2016, throwing a touchdown pass to Terrance Williams on his one drive in the Cowboys' regular-season finale against the Philadelphia Eagles.

"But if you're talking one, two years, absolutely you look at it," he said.

Two former Cowboys assistant coaches on teams that could be looking for quarterback help were asked about Romo going to their teams.

"Been there, done that," said one of an NFC team.

"No, no, don't think we'll be doing that," said one of an AFC team.

Romo and Cowboys owner and general manager Jerry Jones have had one postseason meeting in which they discussed every scenario: release, trade, retirement and remaining with the Cowboys. The Cowboys have not allowed Romo's agents a chance to seek a deal, although that could be a step to what appears to be an inevitable separation.

One prominent agent said getting the Cowboys, Romo and a new team to agree is not an easy task.

“The Cowboys hold the cards,” the agent said. “Do they want to win and get something ludicrous for him? But then it’s what does Tony want because he’s Tony Romo and you want to do right by him. I think it could take a matter of hours, not a weeklong process.”

In private discussions with executives and coaches from teams across the league, Romo’s future destination kept coming back to two teams: the Denver Broncos and Houston Texans.

Others mentioned the Kansas City Chiefs, San Francisco 49ers and even the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Elway’s history with Peyton Manning makes the addition of Romo seem possible even with young quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch.

“We’re open to anything,” said Elway, the Broncos general manager. “We’ll always look at it. This is the time of year that you look at everything. You try to discuss everything and every possibility; what might be available and what might not be available, talk about that and see how it affects us. We talk about all of those types of things. We’ll see what happens.”

The subpar play of the Texans’ Brock Osweiler, last year’s big free-agent pickup, makes Houston, with a top defense, a contender.

“In our organization, I think every single day we’re looking to do something to improve,” coach Bill O’Brien said. “Those ideas sometimes change based on the landscape. So, to say, ‘Am I looking to add?’ or, ‘Are we looking to add a quarterback in free agency?’ my experience in this league is we don’t even know who’s out there in free agency yet because some of these guys sign back with their teams.”

What’s often lost in the talk of Romo’s future is what he wants to do. While he wants to play, he will not go to a team that cannot contend. If the Cowboys could work a trade with a team that Romo wouldn’t want to play, then he could simply retire. It is unofficial veto power.

If Romo is released, Jones is confident he would not go to an NFC East rival like the Washington Redskins, who could be looking for a quarterback if they trade or remove the franchise tag from Kirk Cousins.

“We can’t have agreements without it being within the boundaries of the NFL, but when you’ve got a situation like we got, we’ll do the do-right rule,” Jones said. “That’s it. That is it. Very important. We do the do-right rule. We have that kind of relationship.”

Broncos' free agent plan remains fluid, but includes pursuit of Olinemen, Dlinemen

By Troy Renck
KMGH
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The Broncos continue to travel down parallel tracks as free agency prepares to open Tuesday.

When they chased Peyton Manning, they had no Plan B. As they mull pursuit of Tony Romo, they have multiple potential paths. Romo isn't yet Plan A. The Broncos need him to be released and discuss contract parameters to make sure it works in the puzzle they are piecing together.

Romo, who turns 37 in April, boasts four starts in two seasons, and his resume includes multiple broken collarbones and a fractured L1 vertebra in his back. The Broncos can't wait forever on Romo given their multiple needs on the offensive and defensive line.

The tackle market, in case you haven't noticed, is thin. Cincinnati's Andrew Whitworth is 35, making it hard to justify a longterm deal. It sets up for the Broncos to pursue a right guard aggressively. The Bengals' Kevin Zeitler, perhaps? It seems unlikely if his market settles between \$10 and \$12 million. That is tackle money. Remember in 2013 the Broncos needed a guard and many figured they would pursue Andy Levitre. They shopped from the second tier, hitting a bonanza with the signing of Louis Vasquez. Following a similar path makes sense this week with Ronald Leary and T.J. Lang expected to be available at a lower price than Zeitler.

As for the defensive line, the splash signing would be former local prep star Calais Campbell. He is a leader, and an impact player. However, he will be in demand, sending his price to more than \$10 million per season, and possibly in the \$12 million range. Same goes for Ravens stalwart tackle Brandon Williams.

The Broncos showed they are willing to pursue mid-range options. They missed on Earl Mitchell, who signed with the 49ers for \$5.5 million in guaranteed first-year money. Chris Baker fits the mold, and he rates above Mitchell. A former undrafted free agent with the Broncos in 2009, Baker is a seven-year veteran who has continued to improve. An NFL analyst described him Tuesday night to Denver7 as someone who "plays hard. Is a run stuffer." Baker projects to receive \$8 million per season. His agents are expected to talk to Washington Tuesday. If he doesn't receive the offer he wants, the Broncos could move quickly.

The Broncos allowed 130.3 yards per game last season on the ground, ranking 28th in the NFL. New defensive coordinator Joe Woods has identified improving the rush defense as a "top priority."

Footnote

Coach Vance Joseph praised linebacker Todd Davis at the combine. The Broncos are expected to play a second-round tender on Davis and kicker Brandon McManus. Both are restricted free agents. The second-round tender makes it less likely another team will sign either player to an offer sheet.

Broncos' Vance Joseph says there 'will be race' for offensive linemen in free agency

By Troy Renck

KMGH

March 7, 2017

The conflict emerges from the hyper competitiveness.

Broncos general manager John Elway wants to win from now on. But winning now remains so damn appealing. Vance Joseph took over as coach, charged with returning the team to glory. It makes the opening of free agency Tuesday fascinating. Teams can begin discussing contract numbers with agents of players due to become restricted free agents. No player can officially sign until Thursday at 2 p.m. Pressing pause on the quarterback situation for a moment, the Broncos are seeking upgrades upfront.

In an exclusive interview with Denver7, Joseph discussed a tentative road map.

"We need O-line help and D-line help, also. Offensive line being a priority in my opinion because that's the hardest spot to acquire," Joseph said. "Defense linemen -- we are going to have a chance to acquire some players early and maybe later in the process. Offensive line is a position everyone one wants and that's going to be a race for get the right guys in free agency."

The Broncos, according to NFL sources, are prepared to be aggressive in adding a right guard, while exercising more patience at tackle. The Broncos are prepared to give Max Garcia another chance to retain his spot at left guard. The right guard market boasts intriguing options. Cincinnati's Kevin Zeitler ranks as the top player, but could command \$10 to \$12 million annually -- that's tackle money -- given the anticipated suitors. If the Broncos determine the price is too steep given the desire to address multiple needs, they will eye Dallas' Ronald Leary, Green Bay's T.J. Lang and Detroit's Larry Warford. Leary dealt with a back issue last season that forced him to miss time. If deemed healthy, he could be the No. 1 target. Lang's name has been connected to the Broncos for weeks.

At tackle, Andrew Whitworth is the best available. He continues playing at a high level, but is 35. Those ranked behind Whitworth include Kelvin Beachum and Russell Okung. The Broncos have not ruled out bringing Okung back, but he is attracting interest from the Panthers and Giants according to multiple reports. At 27, Beachum provides potentially a higher upside and longer shelf life.

The draft bursts with defensive talent. Unlike when the Broncos chased Peyton Manning, there is a Plan B if the Broncos don't land Romo. They are comfortable with young quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, a jarring juxtaposition to when Manning took over for Tim Tebow. If the Broncos land Romo, the Bills and 49ers could be among the teams to inquire about Siemian. If the Broncos don't land Romo, they could turn their attention to a big splash signing like defensive end Calais Campbell.

Joseph praised his quarterbacks, but left open the possibility for change.

"I would say this: we have got two young guys who won a combined nine games last year. But any player who becomes available in free agency we are going to look at," Joseph said.

The addition of Romo would illustrate the Broncos' growing belief they aren't far away from prominence. They missed the playoffs by one game, and no AFC West team won a postseason game last season.

"Well the defense is still going to be a top 10 defense," explained Joseph. "The same players are in the building. Everybody is excited about this upcoming season. Obviously, last year was a disappointment. To win nine games and it felt like we only won three, that's a good sign. Everyone is motivated. Watching the offense (on film), it wasn't as bad as everyone thinks it was. A couple of tweaks here and there and we can get back to where we belong."

Free agents Kayvon Webster, Sylvester Williams wait to hear offer from Broncos

By Troy Renck
KMGH
March 7, 2017

The Broncos' season concluded with star-crossed cheers, coach Gary Kubiak walking off the field with only a hint of the uncertainty his exit provided.

The Broncos hired a new boss, Vance Joseph, reshaped the offensive coaching staff under coordinator Mike McCoy and developed a plan to return to the playoffs. It starts, by all accounts, with a dominant defense. Joseph told Denver7 it remains a "top 10" group. That speaks to the statistics. It doesn't address the closeness of the teammates.

The camaraderie explains why unrestricted free agent defensive back Kayvon Webster and nose tackle Sylvester Williams hope they can return. Beginning Tuesday, teams can talk to their agents regarding potential contracts. They will have suitors. But they aren't looking for the exit door.

"Waiting to see what Denver got to offer me," Webster told Denver7 on Monday.

Added Williams, who is pictured above, "I am just waiting to see what happens right now. Obviously, I love Denver but I am up for anything that is in the best interest for me and my future."

Williams delivered his best year in the Broncos' Super Bowl championship season, posting 25 tackles and three sacks. He had 29 tackles with one sack last season. The Broncos must improve their rush defense to force teams to pass, creating more rush opportunities for Von Miller and plays for the No Fly Zone. Because of the obvious need, it leaves the possibility the Broncos will reach out to Williams.

Webster brings valuable depth and experience. He can play multiple positions in the secondary and is a special teams ace. He wants a larger role, but it doesn't exist on a team with arguably the best cornerback tandem (Aqib Talib and Chris Harris), a strong nickelback (Bradley Roby) and safeties with Pro Bowls on their resumes (T.J. Ward and Darian Stewart).

Multiple teams need secondary help, among them New Orleans, Tennessee and Green Bay. That's why it will be more difficult for the Broncos to keep Webster.

Anderson Devotes 'Time, Passion' To The Sport Of Bowling

By Staff

CBS 4

March 7, 2017

When he was a boy, Denver Broncos running back C.J. Anderson didn't think bowling was cool.

"My grandma did it. She (was) in a lot of leagues, a lot of tournaments. She did it when I was younger. When I used to watch her in the alley I used to be in the arcade all day having fun. I didn't want to watch old people bowl," he told CBS4.

That was then. This is now.

Anderson eventually changed his mind about the game. And this weekend CBS4 caught up with Anderson while he was hosting the PBA Southwest Super Regional Open, a pro bowling event in Lakewood at Holiday Lanes.

"C.J. Anderson is cool. A great running back for the Denver Broncos that scores touchdowns in the Super Bowl is cool. And the thing about bowling is, all of us that are involved with bowling know it's cool, but a lot of people have a perception that tells them it's not. So when you have a guy like C.J. devote this much time and passion to the sport, it really elevates the cool factor in our game," said Pro Bowling Association Commissioner Tom Clark.

Anderson, who has played on the pro PBA tour during the NFL's offseason, said he is hopeful that bowling can rise to the level of popularity that would allow for more people to make a living doing it. He is also hoping that more young people will pursue scholarships in bowling.

"The bigger picture is to get other sponsors and to get a bunch of people into bowling and get the PBA back to what it was when I was younger and when I watched my grandma bowl," Anderson said.

Broncos reportedly ready to pursue Tony Romo, Romo reportedly wants to play for Denver

By Frank Schwab

Yahoo.com

March 7, 2017

Throughout the whole Tony Romo offseason “Where will he go?” drama, the team that always made the most sense was the Denver Broncos.

And after spending the offseason telling everyone how satisfied they were with young quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, the Broncos are apparently ready to move on Romo.

Longtime Broncos beat writer Mike Klis of 9News in Denver said that the Broncos are ready to pursue Romo if and when he’s released by the Dallas Cowboys. That was according to multiple NFL sources. In the same story, Klis reports that an agent source said Denver is Romo’s preferred next stop. Keep in mind that the report said if Romo is released.

The Broncos have never seemed to be interested in a trade, and there’s still time for the Cowboys to make one. But if no trade happens and Dallas cuts Romo, which has been the expected outcome from many recent reports, it appears Romo and the Broncos are a perfect marriage.

That doesn’t mean the deal is done because other teams could have interest in Romo if he’s a free agent. The Houston Texans have been rumored as another destination, and they’d be attractive to Romo too. Perhaps Houston is ready to offer much more money than Denver will. Romo’s story could take more twists and turns before a deal is done.

But right now, let’s guess Romo does land in Denver. It would satisfy Romo’s presumed desire to be with a contender. The Broncos have been down this path before too. They signed Peyton Manning to a four-year deal when nobody knew how much he had left, then rode that to four division titles, two AFC championships and a Super Bowl ring. Romo isn’t Manning, but he’s a high-level quarterback who could still have a good season or two left.

The Broncos need a boost on offense. Last year Denver had a fantastic defense and still missed the playoffs. Siemian was a decent starter for a year, Lynch has a first-round pedigree but struggled when given the chance to start, and Denver’s offense simply wasn’t good enough last season. Romo, assuming he stays healthy at age 37 and his skills haven’t slipped much – it’s fair to note Romo has started and finished two games since the 2014 season, so we can’t be sure if he’s still the same quarterback – then it’s hard to argue that move won’t make the Broncos better in 2017.

On paper, it’s the perfect match for Romo. We’ll see soon if it comes together that easily.

Las Vegas Raiders back on? Team reportedly secures financing for new stadium

By Frank Schwab

Yahoo.com

March 7, 2017

Perhaps the Oakland Raiders have figured out their new stadium situation after all.

The plan for the Raiders to move to Las Vegas seemed to be in danger once casino mogul Sheldon Adelson walked back his \$650 million pledge. But Vincent Bonsignore of the Los Angeles Daily News said that the Raiders informed the NFL that Bank of America will complete the financing for the stadium plan. Ian Rapoport of NFL Network confirmed that report.

Assuming the NFL is satisfied with the Bank of America financing plan, that's huge news for the Raiders. The Raiders already had \$750 million in public money lined up for the new stadium, which will cost an estimated \$1.9 billion. The Raiders don't have a great fallback plan or any other obvious options if Las Vegas falls through. If the team has the money to make the Las Vegas move happen, it seems like the NFL would vote yes on the team's relocation, which it has already applied for. It's a much easier path than starting all over, turning down \$750 million in public money for a new stadium, and figuring out a better solution to the Raiders' long-term stadium issues.

The Raiders will still have to get the votes necessary to relocate. But a potentially deal-killing hurdle appears to have been crossed.

Top 10 NFL combine stars: Deshaun Watson, Myles Garrett stand out from pack

By Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz

USA Today

March 7, 2017

The NFL scouting combine always plays host to some breakout names, and several prospects once again used the stage to showcase the best of their athletic ability.

This year's showing in Indianapolis played host to an intriguing group of quarterbacks, a deep set of pass rushers and a record-setting performance in the 40-yard dash.

Here's a look back at the 10 biggest standouts of the 2017 NFL scouting combine:

10. Jabrill Peppers, LB/S, Michigan

The versatile defender said in Indianapolis that he envisions his future at safety, a stance he pushed by working out with the position group Monday after a first go on Sunday with the linebackers. His 4.46-second 40-yard dash especially stood out among the linebackers, but it also would have been a favorable mark for a defensive back. Projecting Peppers as a safety is still somewhat of a leap of faith given his relative lack of experience at the position, but he eased some concerns with his performance.

9. Zay Jones, WR, East Carolina

After catching 158 passes last season, Jones followed up on an impressive Senior Bowl week with a stellar showing in Indianapolis. Jones was pinned as an underneath threat, but his 4.45-second 40-yard dash could aid his case as a player who can attack a defense at multiple levels. At 6-2, 202 pounds, he also could have the ability to hold up on the outside.

8. Christian McCaffrey, RB, Stanford

McCaffrey said before the combine that he said his skill set was being overlooked. That shouldn't be the case after a strong combine performance in which he ran a 4.48 40-yard dash and 6.57-second three-cone drill, which was easily the fastest of any running back. His mark of 10 bench press reps was somewhat disappointing, but McCaffrey highlighted his value as a utility threat deserving of first-round consideration.

7. Evan Engram, TE, Ole Miss

Alabama's O.J. Howard would also be a candidate at this position, but Engram helped himself stand out in one of the draft's deepest groups. With a blazing 4.42-second 40-yard dash and 36-inch vertical leap, he looms as a nightmare matchup in the passing game. Despite lingering questions about his blocking, Engram showed smooth pass-catching ability in drills and could fill a role similar to Jordan Reed of the Washington Redskins.

6. Jordan Willis, DE, Kansas State

The Big 12 defensive player of the year looks like a steady riser in the draft, and an impressive all-around combine performance may have given him an additional boost. A 4.53-second 40-yard dash and 39.5-inch vertical leap, second among all defensive linemen, highlighted his athletic ability. Even more important, though, may have been an astonishingly quick 6.85-second mark in the three-cone drill, as questions linger about his on-field ability to bend and change directions.

5. Haason Reddick, DE/LB, Temple

A former high-school running back and safety who started at Temple as a walk-on, Reddick is the kind of player built to capitalize on this stage. His 4.52-second 40-yard dash and 11-foot-1 broad jump set him apart in testing for defensive linemen, even though his future is likely at linebacker. Reddick moved well in drills and showed he can be a dangerous playmaker if he can consistently slip blocks in the NFL.

4. Obi Melifonwu, S, UConn

The 6-4, 224-pound safety might look like a linebacker, but he runs like a cornerback with an astonishing 4.40-second 40-yard dash. After his 44-inch vertical and 11-foot-9 broad jump topped all marks at the combine, Melifonwu might be the biggest athletic marvel of this draft class. With the combine serving as the launching pad for former UConn safety Byron Jones to become a first-round selection in 2015, it's fair to ponder whether Melifonwu will enjoy a similar rise.

3. Deshaun Watson, QB, Clemson

The combine isn't always the easiest setting for a quarterback to stand out, yet Watson put on quite the showcase. The Clemson standout set himself apart from North Carolina's Mitchell Trubisky and Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer with on-point passes with plenty of zip, as well as his clean footwork. Already championed for a winning demeanor exhibited during last year's national championship run, Watson showed he won't shrink from a challenge.

2. John Ross, WR, Washington

What's left to say about a player who set the NFL scouting combine record with a 4.22-second 40-yard dash? Ross didn't go through on-field workouts after he experienced a calf cramp, but he also posted explosive marks with a 37.5-inch vertical leap and 11-foot-1 broad jump. Ross was a known deep threat, but he gave scouts even more reason to like a player who led the power five conferences with 17 receiving touchdowns.

1. Myles Garrett, DE, Texas A&M

With plenty of people tracking his every move, Garrett delivered the kind of performance expected of a No. 1 pick. In testing, the edge rusher showed a remarkable blend of speed (4.64-second 40-yard dash), power (33 bench press reps) and explosiveness (41-inch vertical leap, tied for fourth-best at the combine). Garrett already could point to an established track record of production at Texas A&M, but the event served as a reminder of just how well-rounded and promising he can be on the next level.

Agent's Take: Target prices for five franchise tagged players and 10 free agents

By Joel Corry
CBSSports.com
March 7, 2017

Ask and you shall receive. When free agency works in this manner, it is music to an agent's ears. The process isn't so smooth for many free agents.

Free agency is a fluid process where there is a risk of an agent pricing a client out of the market if adaptations aren't made to changing market conditions. Some players are disappointed in free agency's outcome because their market never develops for a variety of reasons (age, poor contract year performance, injury, supply at playing position, etc.).

Agent and NFL teams have already gotten a sense of the 2017 free agent market. Meetings between agents of impending free agents and teams routinely occur at the NFL combine, which ends on March 6, although these types of discussions are prohibited by NFL rules. Teams are rarely penalized for tampering with players from other teams when those players are scheduled to become free agents.

The exclusive negotiating rights teams have had with their impending free agents ends on March 7. That's when NFL teams are allowed to negotiate with the agents of prospective unrestricted free agents during a two-day period ending at 3:59:59 p.m. ET on March 9. Players can't sign deals with new clubs until the 2017 league year and free agency officially begin at 4 p.m. ET. A player's ability to re-sign with his current club is allowed during this period.

The 2017 salary cap came in at \$167 million. The 7.55 percent cap increase and several teams having in excess of \$50 million of cap space should result in a robust market during the first wave of free agency, which typically is over after the initial days of the signing period.

One of my duties at the firm where I worked while I represented players was to create target or asking prices for our clients headed toward free agency. In that vein, I have set target prices with total contract value, overall guarantees, amount fully guaranteed at signing and first three years compensation (when applicable) for five players given a franchise designation and 10 intriguing unrestricted free agents.

Remember the target or asking prices for these players may be on the high side and aren't necessarily what their actual deals will be.

Tagged players

Kirk Cousins QB / Washington

Contract package: \$100 million / 4 years

Overall guarantees: \$80 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$55 million

Cousins won his bet on himself in which he played the 2016 season on a \$19.953 million franchise tag. An improved Cousins shattered the single-season Redskins franchise record for passing yards he set in 2015. He threw for 4,917 yards in 2016.

Cousins has been one of the NFL's most productive quarterbacks statistically over the last two seasons. He has completed 68.9 percent of his passes for 9,083 yards with 54 touchdowns and 23 interceptions to post a 99.3 passer rating. Cousins has the NFL's third best completion percentage, is fourth in the NFL in passing yards, sixth in passer rating and 12th in touchdown passes since the start of the 2015 season. Surprisingly, Cousins and Tom Brady are the only two quarterbacks to win player of the month honors in each of the last two seasons.

The Redskins designated Cousins as a franchise player for a second straight year at \$23,943,600, while a collective bargaining agreement mandated a 20 percent increase over last year's amount. Unlike in 2016, Cousins was given an exclusive franchise tag to prevent him from soliciting offer sheets from other teams.

The Redskins reportedly have reopened contract talks with Cousins' agent, Mike McCartney. According to the Washington Post's Master Tesfatsion, the Redskins made a long-term offer averaging \$20 million per year. The offer is below the average of 2016's top 15 quarterback deals. Those contracts were for approximately \$21.225 million per year, contained almost \$53.75 million in guarantees where slightly under \$33.225 million was fully guaranteed at signing. The average length was 3.6 years.

Cousins is in an enviable position because there are more NFL teams than good quarterbacks and a third franchise tag in 2018 for \$34,478,784 is impractical. He has the leverage to demand a contract in the same ballpark as the five-year extension Andrew Luck received from the Colts last offseason, which reset the NFL pay scale. Luck's contract averages \$24.594 million per year and contains \$87 million in guarantees, of which \$47 million was fully guaranteed at signing.

A trade to the 49ers, which is Cousins' rumored preferred destination because of new head coach Kyle Shanahan, isn't out of the question if Washington ultimately decides his contract demands are too excessive. Shanahan was Cousins' offensive coordinator with the Redskins during his first two NFL seasons.

A fair approximation of Cousins' trade value could be the first-round pick (15th overall) and two third-round picks in the 2008 draft the Chiefs received from the Vikings for defensive end Jared Allen in 2008, even though quarterbacks are generally more valuable than pass rushers. A swap of 2008 sixth-round picks was also a part of the trade.

Cousins could soon have company if he becomes the NFL's first \$25 million per year player. Derek Carr, Matt Ryan and Matthew Stafford are in line for offseason extensions from the Raiders, Falcons and Lions, respectively, that should also eclipse that mark.

Le'Veon Bell RB / Pittsburgh

Contract package: \$60 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$17.5 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$17.5 million

First three years: \$37.5 million

Bell solidified himself as the NFL's best dual threat running back in 2016. He became the first player in NFL history to average at least 100 rushing yards per game (105.7) and 50 receiving yards per game (51.3) in the regular season. The 2013 second-round pick also elevated his play in the postseason. He rushed for 337 yards in Pittsburgh's three playoff games but was limited to 11 plays in the AFC Championship Game with a groin injury.

Bell was given an exclusive franchise tag, usually reserved for Pro Bowl caliber quarterbacks, worth \$12.12 million because the cost is the same as the non-exclusive version. The tag raises Bell's salary floor in a terrible financial climate for running backs. The top of the market is now \$8 million after the Vikings declined to pick up Adrian Peterson's \$18 million option for the 2017 season. Peterson had been playing under a contract averaging approximately \$14 million per year since 2011.

Pittsburgh's vanilla contract structure will limit Bell's overall guarantees.

Wide receiver Antonio Brown's recent \$17 million per year extension only has \$19 million guaranteed. With the exception of franchise quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, the only true guaranteed money in Pittsburgh contracts is a signing bonus.

Chandler Jones DE / Arizona

Contract package: \$91.25 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$55 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$43 million

First three years: \$57.25 million

The Cardinals thought they were getting the franchise's best edge rusher since Simeon Rice when Jones was acquired from the Patriots in a March 2016 trade. His pass rushing ability didn't suffer while adapting to a different defensive scheme. Jones tied for eighth in the NFL with 11 sacks.

Jones filing a grievance over his franchise tag position should be explored since the linebacker number is \$14.55 million while the defensive end figure is \$16.934 million. Franchise tags are determined by the position where the player participated in the most plays during the prior season.

Terrell Suggs challenged his franchise player designation from the Ravens in 2008 as a linebacker by contending he had more playing time as a defensive end. The Ravens and Suggs settled the dispute without establishing a precedent by agreeing to use the average of the defensive end and linebacker franchise tags.

A similar result would increase Jones' tag by \$1.192 million to \$15.472 million. Regardless of any decision about pursuing a grievance, the five-year, \$85 million contract with \$52.5 million in guarantees that Olivier Vernon received from the Giants as a free agent last offseason is probably important salary data for Jones.

Kawann Short DT / Carolina

Contract package: \$105 million /6 years

Overall guarantees: \$63.5 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$37.5 million

First three years: \$56 million

Short played out his rookie contract because general manager Dave Gettleman was uncomfortable paying the going rate for pass rushing interior defensive lineman established by Fletcher Cox and Muhammad Wilkerson. Cox received a six-year, \$102 million extension with \$63.299 million of guarantees from the Eagles last offseason.

Short's 2016 performance wasn't quite up to par as his 2015 breakout campaign when he tied for the NFL lead among interior defensive linemen with 11 sacks. According to Pro Football Focus (PFF), Short had 49 quarterback pressures (combined sacks, quarterback hurries and quarterback hits) last season. He pressured quarterbacks 68 times in 2015.

Trumaine Johnson CB / L.A. Rams

Contract package: \$71.25 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$45 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$32 million

First three years: \$45 million

Johnson and the Rams didn't make much progress on a long-term deal after he was given a \$13.952 million franchise tag over fellow Rams cornerback Janoris Jenkins last year. Jenkins got a five-year, \$62.5 million contract with \$28.8 million fully guaranteed from the Giants in free agency.

He can still sign a long-term deal despite accepting his tender. Strong cornerback play being vital to new Rams defensive coordinator Wade Phillips probably factored into Johnson getting franchised for a second time at \$16,742,400 .

Josh Norman raised the salary bar for cornerbacks last April. The Redskins made Norman the NFL's highest paid cover man on an extremely front loaded five-year, \$75 million deal containing \$50 million in guarantees a couple of days after the Panthers rescinded the franchise player designation they had placed on him.

Unrestricted Free Agents

Dont'a Hightower LB / New England

Contract package: \$67.5 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$35 million (last \$5 million injury only)

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$30 million

First three years: \$42 million

The Patriots are letting Hightower test the open market instead of putting a \$14.55 million franchise tag on him. Hightower enters free agency after a strong Super Bowl LI performance in which his strip sack of Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan was a catalyst for the Patriots' come-from-behind victory.

Developments since dealing linebacker Jamie Collins to the Browns as last season's trade deadline approached are problematic for New England. Collins gave up his shot at free agency in late January by signing a four-year deal averaging \$12.5 million per year with \$26.4 million fully guaranteed to remain in Cleveland. It's going to be hard for the Patriots to justify to Hightower that he should take less than the linebacker they traded away. As the top available inside linebacker, Hightower should be in high demand.

Alshon Jeffery WR / Chicago

Contract package: \$75 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$48 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$35 million

First three years: \$48 million

Jeffery had a contract year to forget in 2016. He served a four-game suspension without pay for violating the NFL's performance enhancing drugs policy. During the 12 games Jeffery played, he seemed like an afterthought in Chicago's passing game at times because he never quite got in sync with the rotating cast of quarterbacks that were a necessity due to injury.

Jeffery played the 2016 season on his \$14.599 million franchise tag because the Bears were unwilling to give him a contract comparable to Dez Bryant, Demaryius Thomas, Julio Jones and A.J. Green's. These

deals, which were signed in 2015, average between \$14 million and \$15 million per year. With the exception of Green, the players received between \$43.5 million and \$47 million of guarantees in their contracts. Jeffery was one of the game's best wide receivers in 2015 when he wasn't plagued by nagging leg injuries that limited him to nine games.

The down year is unlikely to affect Jeffery because he is the only available primary wide receiver. He demonstrated he could thrive as a No. 1 wide receiver that is the focal point of defenses when healthy in 2015. The Bears are open to Jeffery returning. The 49ers are rumored to have serious interest in Jeffery. He is also reportedly on Eagles and Titans' radar screen.

Calais Campbell DT / Arizona

Contract package: \$52 million / 4 years

Overall guarantees: \$27.5 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$27.5 million

The Cardinals seem resigned to losing Campbell, who has spent his entire nine-year NFL career with the franchise. Campbell is coming off a five-year, \$55 million deal containing \$31 million in guarantees he signed in 2012 as Arizona's franchise player. He ended the 2016 season on a high note with four sacks in the final three games. Campbell is on the Broncos' wish list according to KUSA's Mike Klis. The Buccaneers are also expected to have interest. Campbell would be a great fit in the Redskins' 3-4 scheme.

Kevin Zeitler G / Cincinnati

Contract package: \$60 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$32.5 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$26 million

First three years: \$37.5 million

The Bengals are successful in keeping their own players even after they explore the open market. It may not be the case with Zeitler. He may price himself of Cincinnati.

Zeitler is going to reap the benefit of Kelechi Osemele changing the salary landscape for offensive guards in free agency last year. The Raiders gave Osemele a five-year, \$58.5 million contract (worth a maximum of \$60 million through incentives) with \$25.4 million fully guaranteed in free agency, which is good left tackle money. Zeitler is expected to be a top free agency target of the Jaguars.

Coach Mike Zimmer has pushed for the Vikings to sign players he is familiar with from his days as the Bengals' defensive coordinator. Zeitler fits that bill. The 49ers, Dolphins and Broncos also are in need of an upgrade at guard.

A.J. Bouye DB / Houston

Contract package: \$65 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$35 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$30 million

First three years: \$41.5 million

Bouye came out of nowhere to develop into one of the NFL's top cover men in 2016. Opposing quarterbacks completed 51.1 percent of passes when targeting him for a 59.5 passer rating according to Pro Football Focus. The Texans would like to re-sign Bouye but opted not to ensure his services for 2017 with a \$14.212 million franchise tag.

The five-year, \$62.5 million contract with \$28.8 million fully guaranteed Janoris Jenkins received from the Giants as a free agent has likely caught Bouye's attention. The Bears, 49ers, and Jets are among the cornerback needy teams that could be interested in Bouye.

Brandon Williams DT / Baltimore

Contract package: \$62.5 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$32.5 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$27 million

First three years: \$40 million

Williams is the premier run stuffing interior defensive lineman with an expiring contract. He should be the biggest beneficiary of defensive tackle Damon Harrison, a 2016 free agent signee, transforming the Giants' run defense last season. Harrison joined a defense that gave up 121.4 yards per game (24th in the NFL) on the ground in 2015. With Harrison anchoring the defense, the Giants limited the opposition to 88.6 rushing yards per game last season to tie for third best in the NFL.

The three year extension averaging \$11,083,333 per year with slightly over \$24 million in guarantees Michael Brockers received from the Rams early last season is probably a salary benchmark for Williams. Teams looking for Williams to make a similar impact on their run defense as Harrison did could include the 49ers, Broncos, Colts, Lions and Redskins.

Martellus Bennett TE / New England

Contract package: \$36 million / 4 years

Overall guarantees: \$20 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$17.5 million

Bennett, who was acquired by the Patriots last March in a trade with the Bears, was invaluable to New England while quarterback Tom Brady started the season serving his four-game suspension relating to Deflategate and Rob Gronkowski was recovering from a hamstring injury. He was a top priority in the passing game.

With a Super Bowl ring in tow, Bennett is looking for a huge payday. 2013 draftees Zach Ertz, Travis Kelce and Jordan Reed helped define the tight end market last offseason by signing extensions with the Eagles, Chiefs and Redskins averaging between \$8.5 million and \$9.35 million per year with in excess of \$20 million in guarantees.

Bennett is clearly the best tight end available in free agency. Tight end becomes an area of need for the Jaguars with Julius Thomas going to Miami when the trading period begins on March 9. Bennett played for new executive vice president of football operations Tom Coughlin in 2012 when he was the Giants coach. The Raiders are also reportedly interested in Bennett.

Terrelle Pryor WR / Cleveland

Contract package: \$60 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$33 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$27.5 million

First three years: \$38.25 million

Pryor successfully made a difficult transition from quarterback to legitimate starting wide receiver. He emerged as Cleveland's best and most reliable receiving option due to 2016 first-round pick Corey Coleman missing several games with a broken hand and Josh Gordon's indefinite suspension for repeated violations of the NFL's Substance Abuse Policy. Pryor led the Browns with 77 receptions, 1,007 receiving yards and four touchdown catches.

Retaining the 6-foot-4, 223-pound speedster is a priority for the Browns. The preseason four-year extension the Rams inexplicably gave Tavon Austin averaging approximately \$10.5 million per year with \$28.5 million of guarantees is a headache for the Browns and the rest of the NFL. There are also \$14 million of incentives and base salary escalators in the contract.

Austin, who has only topped the 500 receiving yard mark once in his four NFL seasons, could realistically make a minimum of \$1 million annually under these clauses if he performed like a good wide receiver. It's the favorite deal of the agents representing more accomplished free agent wide receivers (DeSean Jackson, Kenny Stills, etc.) because of Austin' lack of productivity.

Mary Kay Cabot of the Cleveland Plain Dealer is reporting interest from the 49ers, Eagles, Giants, Steelers and Titans.

Ricky Wagner T / Baltimore

Contract package: \$42.5 million / 5 years

Overall guarantees: \$21 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$18.5 million

First three years: \$27 million

Wagner is the best available right tackle with Marcus Cannon and Ryan Schraeder signing late season extensions between \$6.25 million and \$6.5 million per year with the Patriots and Falcons. Lane Johnson's five-year, \$56.25 million extension (worth up to \$60 million through salary escalators) with the Eagles containing \$35.5 million of guarantees in January 2016 didn't change the salary equation for right tackles.

Mitchell Schwartz got a five-year, \$33 million contract from the Chiefs in free agency last year. This may be because Johnson is expected to eventually switch to the left side of the offensive line. There isn't a pure right tackle in the NFL making \$7 million per year. The Bears, Giants and Vikings are teams that could try to wrest Wagner away from the Ravens.

Mike Glennon QB / Tampa Bay

Contract package: \$45 million / 3 years (worth up to \$60 million with escalators/incentives)

Overall guarantees: \$30 million

Fully guaranteed at signing: \$22.5 million

Glennon should benefit from NFL teams willingness to throw logic out the window in the ever elusive search for good quarterback play when Brock Osweiler ought to be a cautionary tale. The Texans gave Brock Osweiler a four-year, \$72 million contract containing \$37 million fully guaranteed at the start of free agency last year after just seven career starts.

Osweiler was supposed to be a significant upgrade at quarterback over the much maligned Brian Hoyer. Instead, the Texans defended their AFC South title last season on the strength of the NFL's top ranked defense and in spite of the big money free agent. Osweiler ranked near the bottom in a majority of major statistical categories in 2016 before losing his starting job to Tom Savage when he was pulled from Week 15's contest against the Jaguars. Savage suffering a concussion paved the way for Osweiler to return to the lineup in time for the playoffs.

Glennon has thrown only 11 passes in the last two seasons because the Buccaneers took Jameis Winston with the first overall pick in the 2015 draft. The Bucs reportedly have offered to make Glennon the NFL's highest paid backup quarterback, presumably in the \$8 million per year range. The 49ers, Bears and Jets could be in play for Glennon.

Eight trends that will impact free agency market

By Gregg Rosenthal

NFL.com

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NFL teams reveal what they value in free agency before it even starts.

If a player can win on third down, he probably won't make it to the market. Pass rushers who can wreak havoc are protected like endangered wildlife. Offensive tackles who start and avoid comparisons to turnstiles get re-signed.

With just a few days left before free agency kicks off, a few other trends have emerged. Teams with a need at running back, cornerback or wide receiver will have options. Teams searching for a quarterback or needing someone to fly off the edge may have to wait for the draft.

After listening to coaches and general managers all week at the NFL Scouting Combine, here's a look at some of the big-picture developments to expect in the 2017 free-agent market:

Cornerbacks will get paid

No position has a greater supply and demand than cornerback this year. It's a premium position, which is why the Los Angeles Rams felt compelled to spend \$16.7 million on a franchise tag for Trumaine Johnson, a mid-level starter. According to Cardinals general manager Steve Keim, cornerback is one of three positions that he believes traditionally are difficult to address in free agency.

"The ones that are hard to find: Left tackle, cornerback, quarterback," Keim said. "Those positions are so hard to find that when you are allocating your money and looking at the big picture, how are you going to divide that money up? If you are going to spend excess money, to me, you spend it on the guys that are hard to find."

Keim needs cornerbacks and has a solid crop of players to choose from. Top-shelf talent, such as Stephon Gilmore and A.J. Bouye will get huge bucks, but there is a healthy second tier of starters, too, including Dre Kirkpatrick, Logan Ryan, Prince Amukamura and Morris Claiborne, among others. Arizona Coach Bruce Arians indicated that Cardinals cornerback Marcus Cooper was set for a big payday, a sign that even lesser names will get money. Keim noted that versatility in today's NFL, where you need hybrid players to match up inside and outside, gives players extra value. That's one reason why we ranked Packers jack-of-all-trades defensive back Micah Hyde so high in our Top 101 Free Agents list.

Teams feel more comfortable paying cornerbacks, in part, because they transcend scheme easily. Arians believes that running backs and defensive backs face the smoothest transition from college to the pros because their roles are similar at both levels. The quick success of young running backs certainly won't help this year's older runners get paid in the open market.

Veteran running backs could be disappointed

The decline in salary for veteran running backs is hardly a new trend, but market forces are dramatically working against running backs this year.

As noted in Thursday's winners and losers edition of the Debrief, the release of Adrian Peterson and Jamaal Charles adds to an already deep group of free-agent running backs. The Vikings can hold the line on paying Peterson like a superstar because they know the draft can supplement the depth chart.

"It's one of the best running back classes in a long time," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said.

Bengals Personnel Chief Duke Tobin agreed: "It's an exciting year for that position. Not only at the top of the draft [but] in every round."

Ezekiel Elliott's fast success is a reminder that premium running backs can make a huge impact and are worth first-round selections. However, all of that talent arriving in April will keep prices low for big-name veterans in March.

Few edge rushers

Carolina's early contract extension for little known defensive end Mario Addison was a bellwether move. Addison would have been one of the most compelling young pass rushers in free agency, so the Panthers showed foresight by preventing him from making it to free agency.

Franchise tags for Jason Pierre-Paul and Melvin Ingram highlighted the paucity of options available. The best edge rushers on our Top 101 list include Nick Perry, Jabaal Sheard and Andre Branch. Teams desperate for help can take a chance on older one-year solutions, such as DeMarcus Ware, Julius Peppers and Dwight Freeney.

On the plus side, general managers routinely praised the depth and top-end talent of this rookie class of quarterback hunters. Tobin said it's one of the hardest positions to evaluate, but also one of the positions his team needs to focus on the most. It appears the draft will be the route most teams take to beef up their edge rusher positions.

Wide receivers available in all shapes and sizes

Chiefs general manager John Dorsey praised the depth of this rookie receiver class, a common sentiment throughout the week. The depth and variety of the free-agent crop is also better than it is at most positions. There are young players just hitting their prime (Alshon Jeffery and Terrelle Pryor), proven deep threats (DeSean Jackson and Kenny Stills) and trusty veteran chain-movers (Brandon Marshall and Pierre Garcon). There are also intriguing young players with red flags, such as Kendall Wright and Michael Floyd, who will get second chances. Similar to the pass rushers, there is good depth at wideout in free agency and the draft.

QB market could take time to shake out

Hurry up and wait. That could be the attitude for teams in need of a veteran quarterback this offseason. While players such as Mike Glennon should be signed quickly, the situations surrounding Tyrod Taylor, Kirk Cousins, Tony Romo, AJ McCarron, Jay Cutler and Jimmy Garoppolo could take more time to shake out. Remember that Peyton Manning didn't sign with the Broncos for a full week after free agency started.

NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport's Friday bombshell that Kirk Cousins could wind up in San Francisco while Tony Romo headed to Washington will only add gas to the fire in the coming days. So many big names and possible landing spots are at play!

The conventional wisdom is that Garoppolo and McCarron won't be dealt because their price tags are too high, but the Cousins trade talk shows how quickly things can change. Once one big-name quarterback changes teams, there's no telling how the other dominoes could crash into one another.

Watch the Patriots and Packers

Green Bay is going to be busy over the next month, whether Packers GM Ted Thompson likes it or not. So will the Patriots, who combined with the Packers, account for 11 of our top 35 players available overall. Green Bay has nine players in our Top 101 free agents list, while New England has eight. No other team has more than five.

As Patriots tight end (and impending free agent) Martellus Bennett put it, teams love to "overpay" for championship experience. That could create an incredible amount of turnover in Foxborough, something coach Bill Belichick embraces. It will make it easier for him to convince the 2017 Patriots they are starting from scratch again.

Similarly, Thompson didn't seem to be sweating all of the uncertainty in Green Bay.

"You guys have watched the guys we've signed," Thompson said. "Over the years, we've probably signed several right at the start of free agency. My guess is that's what's going to happen."

There is optimism that guard T.J. Lang could return to Green Bay, with coach Mike McCarthy blanching at the idea that Lang could be an ex-Packer. Center J.C. Tretter sounds less likely to be back, according to the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel.

A league-wide offensive tackle problem

There is an offensive tackle epidemic plaguing the NFL. Practically half of the teams in the league are looking for help, and there are precious few quality options available in this year's draft.

"The last three years it was pretty strong. Not so strong this year," Panthers GM Dave Gettleman said about this year's tackle prospects.

That lack of talent is exacerbated by the struggle to develop tackles in the NFL. Plenty of ink has been spilled about the difficulty in converting spread quarterbacks to pro-style offenses, but it is just as jarring a transition for offensive tackles. Bruce Arians explained the dilemma well this week.

"I go with D.J. Humphries," Arians said of his 2015 first-round draft pick. "I loved him coming out (of Florida). We knew what we were getting, a very young guy who had very little skill set and a lot of athleticism. It took him a year to get the skill set. We knew he had the heart. To take these guys and teach them how to play, to hear a play in the huddle and decipher the information, to go up and get down in a stance, to run block that way, to get off on a hard count. It's very hard for these guys. They struggle all spring and a lot of times, they really struggle in training camp because that's the first time they've put on pads and actually hit anybody (in the NFL). That's a problem with our game, we just don't get to practice enough in pads with these young kids."

This is a weak group of college tackles that will mostly need time to transition to the NFL. That should drive up prices for free agent tackles, but who can teams even spend on? Average starters, such as Riley

Reiff and Rick Wagner, could be paid like superstars. Veterans like Russell Okung, Ryan Clady, Kelvin Beachum and Matt Kalil won't come at a discount despite injury risks and shaky play.

Arians said that he would change his approach by allowing more contact and tackling in minicamp and training camp, in part to get players ready faster. But that won't solve the offensive tackle problem on its own. In the meantime, some questionable players will be paid a lot of money because teams don't have any other options. They have to spend that cap room somewhere ...

Uncharted territory with cap room

The most common question I heard in Indianapolis from executives: What will teams do with all of this cap space?

One theory: All of the cap space will encourage more trading. There aren't great free agents available, but teams should have more salary flexibility to take on big contracts in trades, or deal for players wanting new contracts.

According to OvertheCap.com, 12 teams have more than \$40 million in cap space. Even after applying franchise tags, just nine teams have less than \$20 million to spend. In short: the salary cap shouldn't get in the way of teams accomplishing their goals this offseason. This is a dramatic change from where the league was just a few years ago. But will teams be willing to rewrite the pay scales on these players?

There are fewer quality players about to hit free agency than ever before because teams have done a better job re-signing their own talent. All this cap space with so few top-level players available will test the discipline of general managers. That's an explosive recipe for megadeals that will have agents and players smiling wide.

Jerry Jones and Tony Romo have gone over “all scenarios”

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
March 7, 2017

One of the biggest stories of the 2017 offseason centers on the future of Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo. On Monday's PFT Live, Clarence E. Hill, Jr. of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram provided some excellent information and insight about the future of the team's former franchise quarterback.

Here are the highlights.

First, Hill said that Romo won't be traded to or sign with Washington. "That's not happening," Hill said.

Second, Hill reinforced the notion that Jones and Romo will have a wink-nod deal as to where he will or won't go, if Romo eventually is cut.

Third, Hill said the Cowboys at least for now are waiting for a trade offer to materialize, possibly from the Broncos or Texans, in the hopes that Romo would accept the deal.

Fourth, Hill said Jones told reporters recently that he already has spoken to Romo, and that Jones said he has gone over all scenarios with Romo, which would allow a decision to be made quickly if necessary.

Fifth, Hill believes Romo would be inclined to take a Greg Hardy-type contract that pays Romo based on the number of games he eventually plays. That could make it easier for a team like the Broncos or Texans to justify adding Romo. If he plays, he gets paid. If he doesn't play, he doesn't get paid.

For everything Clarence Hill had to say, check out the video. It's fairly short but it is packed with quality content. If you ignore the parts where I was talking.

Women in Sports Industry Symposium coming to CSU

By Tony Phifer
ColoradoState.edu
March 7, 2017

The common perception of American professional sports is that it is an industry reserved for men.

CSU and the Denver Broncos Sports Institute of Sports Management will put an end to that myth at the first Women in Sports Industry Symposium, set for 7 p.m. March 27 in the Lory Student Center's North Ballroom.

Distinguished panel

The symposium includes a panel discussion featuring several female executives from the Denver Broncos, including Cindy Kellogg, vice president of community development for the franchise. Kellogg will be joined by four additional panelists – three from the Broncos management team and Christine Susemihl, senior associate director of athletics at CSU.

Kim Austin, a former Rams basketball player working in the CSU athletics department, will serve as moderator.

The Women in Sports Industry Symposium will provide first-hand knowledge and testimony to the opportunities that exist in professional and athletic sport organizations for women in today's society, with advice and information on how to enter and advance in the industry. The symposium advances the mission of the Denver Broncos Institute of Sport Management at CSU by continuing to provide students in the institute and the University community at-large real-world experiences available through the program.

The event is free and open to the public. For information contact Gary Ozzello at 970-222-3361.

About the Denver Broncos Institute of Sports Management

CSU and the Denver Broncos formed this unique partnership in spring 2015. Courses in turf management, marketing and promotions, sports communications, hospitality and facility event management are offered on campus and online in a minor in sports management. Four of CSU's eight colleges – Business, Liberal Arts, Health and Human Sciences and Agricultural Sciences – are involved in the project.

Broncos still waiting on Tony Romo, if he's released

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
March 7, 2017

Since January, the dots have connected Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo with the Broncos, as long as Rome was released and not someone they'd have to trade for.

That apparently still applies.

According to Mike Klis of KUSA, Broncos executive John Elway is "ready to pursue" Romo if the Cowboys can't find a trade partner.

That would satisfy the Cowboys' end of the "do-right rule" which would keep Romo from biting them for another team they'd run into on a regular basis. And Denver has always been near the top of Romo's reported wish list.

Of course, then it becomes a question of how far Jerry Jones is willing to go to do right by Romo. Houston has been mentioned as a possible trade partner, and it seems clear that the Broncos aren't prepared to give up any assets beyond the cash it would take to pay Romo (or at least that's what Elway wants us to think).

And because Elway has developed a reputation for being a tough negotiator, it would also imply that Romo would have to come off the \$14 million he'd make if his current deal was traded, with lower base salaries and incentives for games played a reasonable expectation.

Report: Broncos, Buccaneers interested in Chris Baker

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
March 7, 2017

When teams are free to start calling free agents from other clubs on Tuesday afternoon, it sounds like defensive end Chris Baker can expect a call from the Broncos.

Mike Klis of KUSA in Denver reports that the Broncos have “strong interest” in adding Baker to their defensive line. The Buccaneers are also mentioned as a suitor for Baker’s services.

Baker got his first break in the NFL with the Broncos, who signed him as an undrafted free agent in 2009. He played one game for Denver that year and one for Miami in 2010 before finally landing a regular role in Washington. He’s been a starter the last three years and had 47 tackles, 3.5 sacks and two forced fumbles for the Redskins last year.

Defensive line appears to be a focus for the Broncos this offseason. They signed former Saints end Bobby Richardson and visited with Earl Mitchell before Mitchell signed with the 49ers. They may also be in the mix for Calais Campbell as free agency unfolds in the next few days.

AFC West Roundup: Where Denver's rivals sit after Combine

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
March 7, 2017

Kansas City Chiefs (2016 record: 12-4)

NFL.com's top position needs: CB, LB, RB

The release of Jamaal Charles and Derrick Johnson's second Achilles injury of his career require addressing and they could add another great corner to complement Marcus Peters. On the flip side, the Chiefs wrapped up a few big moves before free agency, signing safety Eric Berry and guard Laurent Duvernay-Tardif to long-term contracts.

What they said at the Combine:

On re-signing Eric Berry and Duvernay-Tardif: "[Eric Berry is] a very special person. Not only as a football player, but as an individual. I think that when you do a deal of this magnitude, it symbolizes what he is, what he means to the organization and what kind of leader he is within the building. He is a very beloved figure in Kansas City and will be here for a long time." – general manager John Dorsey

"It's great for your locker room, I'm stating the obvious because he's one of our team leaders and really the heartbeat of that defense and so and we've got some great leaders on our team but Eric's a special guy that way, really he makes people around him better so he's just one of those guys so all of that's a positive so you're getting a great football player and you've got him for a few years which is a positive." – head coach Andy Reid

"[Duvernay-Tardif] is incredibly disciplined and he is very smart to grasp concepts and the football components of it. I think [Chiefs offensive line coach] Andy Heck has done a great job of kind of showing him how to grow and nurture into the position and then when you combine that, he really is an explosive athlete. I know it's probably hard for you to imagine a 320-pound guy being an athlete, but he's pretty good at it." - Dorsey

On releasing Jamaal Charles: "Jamaal's one of my favorite guys that I've had a chance to coach. You know he did everything for us from running inside, you know he's not a very big guy but he's fearless, he ran inside, had the speed outside, world class speed to turn the corner. Had great hands and on top of that he's a great kid and just dirty tough so you hate that situation that whether he decides to play or not, he doesn't need to, he's got a great legacy and he could leave if he stopped playing today. But we all do get older and that's the way the National Football League is so I wish him the best in everything he does, a future Hall of Famer too." - Reid

Oakland Raiders (12-4)

NFL.com's top position needs: LB, CB, RB

The Raiders could invest heavily in their defense this offseason to improve a group that ranked last in yards per play allowed.

What they said at the Combine:

"I think, [general manager] Reggie [McKenzie] and I look at it, look at our roster, know our roster best, know that first and then decide how we want to piece it together — what we can get done in the draft, what we can get done in free agency and put together a plan. That's how we've done in the last couple of years and I imagine we'll do it exactly the same way this year.

"We made a couple changes to the staff this year. We were able to elevate from within on offense and Todd Downing is our new offensive coordinator. Really excited about what Todd brings. The system will remain the same. Some minor tweaks of course, which occur every year. But really feel like he's a great young talent and he's done a great job with our quarterbacks." – head coach Jack Del Rio

Los Angeles Chargers (5-11)

NFL.com's top position needs: OL, DL, DB

On defense, the Chargers could improve around their pass-rushing duo of Melvin Ingram (who just received the franchise tag) and Joey Bosa, shoring up the rushing and passing defense. On offensive line, injuries have often derailed the unit's production over the past few seasons. With new head coach Anthony Lynn, the road-graders up front could get some more help.

What they said at the Combine:

On Ingram receiving the tag and his future: "We'll keep working with his representatives on it [a long-term contract]. We know Melvin was a priority with us this offseason — him as a player, the position he plays, what he's done for us. Pass rushers are very important in this league. If we didn't have Melvin Ingram, we'd have a pretty big hole as a pass rusher. It was important to get him back with us. We put the franchise tag on him right now, and we'll continue to talk with him. We still have time until July 15 to work on a long-term deal." – general manager Tom Telesco

"He's a big piece of the puzzle. He's an outstanding pass rusher, but he plays the run well. His stats — I think he had 8.5 sacks or something like that — but when you look at his impact on the game, his quarterback hits, hit pressures, he just did an outstanding job. I love the way he plays the game." – head coach Anthony Lynn

On what the Chargers' offensive philosophy will be: "We're going to take whatever they give us. I want to be balanced. In personnel, in run, in pass, I want to be balanced. If you want to stack the box, we definitely have a quarterback that can throw it. If you want to play coverage, we definitely have a running game. ... I want to be balanced. You never know. If I have to throw it 50 times to win, I'll do it. If you have to run it 50 times to win, I'll do that too." - Lynn