

# Kiszla: Could it be the QB who attracted NFL free agents to Denver was Peyton Manning, not John Elway?

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
March 10, 2017

John Elway does not blink, even when he gets kicked in the teeth.

This is not to suggest the first day of NFL free agency went badly for Elway, but instead of quarterback Tony Romo, all the Broncos got from Dallas was an overpriced guard and the run-around from Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who's so full of braunschweiger he should run for president.

OK, let's be honest. While Elway is worshipped as a football god in Colorado, NFL movers and shakers treated him like a fool Thursday, when the annual free-agent frenzy began. Yes, it was only one day on the NFL calendar. But it was a humbling day for the Broncos, who made no major strides to championship contention.

Calais Campbell, a talented defensive end with family ties to Denver, told Elway to take his contract offer with a hometown discount and shove it where the sun doesn't shine. Campbell instead agreed to sign with hapless Jacksonville for \$15 million per year, a richer deal than the Broncos were willing to put on the table. Winning is nice, but nothing beats money in pro sports.

And don't get me started on Romo. I understand and appreciate Elway's reluctance to pay full retail on any player, especially a 36-year-old quarterback whose clavicle is softer than a month-old avocado.

The problem? By making goo-goo eyes at Romo, the Denver front office has tacitly admitted it's far from certain either Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch can lead the Broncos back to the Super Bowl. This is weakness that can be smelled from 800 miles away, where down in Big D, Jones reneged on what only naive fools believed was a promise to set Romo free by cutting him.

Rather than releasing Romo, the Cowboys are making a final push to trade him, and all it takes is for one NFL fool to drool over a quarterback. That can't be regarded as great news for anybody in Denver who wanted to see Romo throwing touchdown passes to Demaryius Thomas, because we've already established the Houston Texans are fools, as witnessed by the \$72 million contract they gave Brock Osweiler as a free agent in 2016.

Well, exactly one year later, those same Texans bribed Cleveland to haul the hot mess that is Osweiler to Lake Erie, so those NFL geniuses down in Houston could put themselves in position to overpay for Romo. (Good luck with that.)

I like it that Elway establishes his own price for talent, rather than reacting to the madness of the NFL market. Neither warm nor fuzzy, he treats players as if they're as disposable as printer cartridges. This coldhearted approach to roster-building is Belichickian. Bill Belichick, however, gets away with the strategy in New England because he has the best quarterback of this generation, and Tom Brady can hide a whole lot of holes in the Patriots' roster.

I'm also worried Elway might discover the quarterback who attracted marquee free agents such as DeMarcus Ware, Aqib Talib and T.J. Ward to Denver was named Peyton Manning, not Elway.

Elway has teased everybody, including Emmanuel Sanders and Chris Harris, with the idea this team's championship chances might be bolstered with Romo or Campbell. In signing 320-pound guard Ronald Leary, Elway is off to a slow start delivering on everybody's lofty expectations.

Elway might be advised to dig a little deeper into the wallet for talent. Maybe playing for the Broncos isn't quite the privilege he imagines it to be. Right now, the best thing Denver could trot out at left tackle for the season opener would be a life-size cardboard cutout of Gary Zimmerman.

Cheap doesn't cut it in Broncos Country.

# Broncos sign guard Ronald Leary to bolster offensive line

By Cameron Wolfe  
Denver Post  
March 10, 2017

The Broncos made fixing their offensive line priority number one this off-season. They took the first step toward doing so Thursday by agreeing to terms with former Cowboys guard Ronald Leary. The Broncos announced the four-year deal shortly after the free agency period opened at 2 p.m.

Leary, 27, is scheduled to make \$35 million over four seasons with \$20 million guaranteed, a NFL source confirmed.

The Broncos badly needed to sign at least one starting-caliber offensive lineman in free agency to help patch up their porous line.

“Ronald is a big, physical and athletic guard who plays with an attitude,” Broncos general manager John Elway told the team website. “Upgrading the offensive line was a priority for us and we’re excited to add Ronald to our team.”

Leary is expected to replace Michael Schofield as a starter at guard opposite Max Garcia. It’s not clear yet whether Leary would play at right guard or assume his normal left guard position, which is where Garcia has played.

Leary, 6-foot-3, 320 pounds, didn’t allow a sack in 13 games (12 starts) last season, per StatsPass.

The Broncos targeted Leary as a top choice early in free agency. He wasn’t at the top of the price range like guard Kevin Zeitler, who reportedly will sign a 5-year, \$60 million deal with Cleveland, but he still presented the opportunity to sign a quality player at a reasonable market rate.

“Having the chance to sign a talented and physical guard like Ronald was very important to us,” Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said in a release. “He played on one of the best offensive lines in football in Dallas and adds toughness to our line.”

Denver is still in the market for another starting-caliber offensive tackle, preferably a left tackle. The Broncos would like to retain Russell Okung at the right price though they declined his option last month, but because of the low supply, high demand left tackle market he’s likely to cash out once free agency opens.

Joseph said at the scouting combine last week that he would prefer a true left tackle rather because of the importance of that position. Left tackle Andrew Whitworth reportedly agreed to terms with the Rams Thursday, leaving Okung as the top left tackle on the market with Kelvin Beachum and former Bronco Ryan Clady. A trade or the draft are other options.

For now, the Broncos have their guard problem solved. The interior of the offensive line, with Leary as a key cog, should be expected to be much better in pass protection and run blocking next season.

Leary, a former undrafted lineman out of Memphis, worked his way up from primarily a practice squad player as a rookie to the Cowboys' starting left guard for the better part of the past four seasons. He made 47 starts with Dallas.

Dallas' offensive line, with Leary at left guard, paved the way for two different running backs to win the rushing title – DeMarco Murray in 2014 and Ezekiel Elliott in 2016.

Leary's best trait is his ability to run block, which is a good fit working with new offensive line coach Jeff Davidson as Denver attempts to add more power blocking to its offense. He was seen as a luxury for Dallas due to the emergence of La'el Collins at guard at a time when Leary was battling a groin injury. Leary was also limited at the end of this past season with a back injury.

Denver had \$36.7 million in cap space prior to the Leary transaction.

ESPN's Adam Schefter was the first to report the deal.

# Calais Campbell picks Jaguars over Broncos; Cowboys trying to trade Tony Romo

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

March 10, 2017

Tony Romo said farewell to Cowboys Nation. But he doesn't know where he's going.

"Hey, everyone. I just wanted to tell you it's been a crazy 48 hours here," he said in an Instagram video Thursday. "Me and my family have felt the outpouring of support and love from all of you. It's been overwhelming and it doesn't go unnoticed. I want to say thank you. We have a lot to think about here going forward, but we'll see what happens. 'Til then I'm just going to keep listening to Bob Dylan."

Crazy fails to describe Romo's past two days with the Cowboys.

It was reported Wednesday that the team planned to release him Thursday afternoon. But the fluidity of free agency took the plan off course as the new NFL season approached. Instead of cutting their longtime quarterback, the Cowboys were reported to be searching for a trading partner.

And then the Texans, in a stunning move, traded quarterback Brock Osweiler to Cleveland along with a 2018 second-round draft pick and a 2017 sixth-round pick in exchange for a 2017 fourth-rounder. The transaction rid the Texans of Osweiler's \$16 million salary for 2017 and cleared more than \$10 million in cap space. It also gave the Browns a quarterback and a second-round draft pick to shop around.

The race for Romo suddenly took a bizarre turn, with Denver's position unclear.

For now, the Broncos' quarterbacks are Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, two players who have a combined cap charge of about \$2.8 million in 2017.

"We got two young ones that we're happy with that we think can be very good football players in this league," Broncos general manager John Elway said at the NFL combine last week. "So I think when you start talking about another veteran quarterback, you don't just talk about next year. Everyone thinks we just talk about next year, but we don't. We talk about the impact that that has in two, three, four years down the line and how does that affect us now."

The now and the later was partially addressed Thursday, in spite of the Romo rollercoaster. The Broncos entered free agency with \$36.3 million in cap room and plenty of spending money to get at least a couple of big-name players to bolster their lines. Their first move was landing former Cowboys guard Ronald Leary, who signed a four-year, \$35 million deal to boost an offensive line that struggled for much of the past two seasons.

Defensive end Calais Campbell was on the verge of being the second big signing, and he would have checked off another priority for Elway.

“As we’ve talked about, I don’t want to back up on defense,” Elway said. “I want to continue to be as good as we can be on defense. I don’t want to back up there because we’ve been so good. I just know that what we’ve got to do is we’ve got to get better on the offensive side.”

In the wake of losing Malik Jackson to free agency and Vance Walker to an injury in training camp last year, the Broncos’ third-best run defense of 2015 plummeted to 28th in 2016.

“Last year was a little bit different for us in terms of how teams attacked us, so right now we’re in the process of going through and looking at what we did last year and the areas that we can improve, and obviously run (defense) is one of those areas,” Broncos defensive coordinator Joe Woods said recently. “We didn’t play that well defensively against the run. But when you look at those things at this time during the year, it really comes down to defensive scheme, the execution of the scheme and the coaching of the scheme. What you find out, it’s really one or more of those things in those areas that you have to address and fix, and that’s what we’re currently working through to improve.”

Less than 24 hours after it was reported that Campbell, the Denver South High graduate and former Cardinals star, was headed to Jacksonville, Elway attempted to convince him to return to his hometown instead of taking more money to play for Jacksonville.

The move would have been a bit of a coup, not unlike others Elway orchestrated in the past.

But money talks.

After mulling his offers, Campbell opted for tax-free Florida, agreeing to a four-year, \$60 million contract with the Jaguars that includes \$30 million in guarantees, according to ESPN.

Defensive tackle Chris Baker, another target of the Broncos, also chose Florida over Colorado, agreeing to a multi-year deal with the Buccaneers.

The Broncos search for defensive help continues. Their hunt for an offensive tackle is still on, as Russell Okung left for the Chargers on a four-year deal. And the free-agency whirlwind for Romo will extend to at least 72 hours, leaving Elway with the same plan he spelled out a week ago.

“We’re going to look at all the options,” he said then. “Once they become available, we’re going to look at all the options.”

# Russell Okung to Chargers; Broncos still searching for a left tackle

By Cameron Wolfe  
Denver Post  
March 10, 2017

It turns out Russell Okung knew his value after all.

The former Broncos left tackle signed a four-year, \$53 million deal with the division rival Los Angeles Chargers Thursday, which includes \$25 million guaranteed, per an NFL source.

It's a big win for Okung, who represented himself without an agent. He will make more per year and more guaranteed money than he would have if the Broncos picked up his four-year, \$48 million option after the 2016 season. Okung's contract includes a \$10 million signing bonus.

Denver had interest in retaining Okung and made an offer to do so last week, but their offer did not come close to what the Chargers paid. The Broncos' offer was more in line with what they felt his play was worth based on production, but the market for left tackles became inflated due to the dearth of options on the free-agent market.

Okung had an up-and-down 2016 season, his lone one with the Broncos. He earned \$8 million in what turned out to be a one-year deal. His blocking was solid, and at times he was the best offensive lineman on the team, but he also committed nine penalties, several in key situations.

"It comes down to money, too. It's not a bottomless pit," Broncos general manager John Elway said at the scouting combine last week. "Even though we didn't exercise the option on Russell, that's not saying he's not going to be back. He may find another opportunity then, it is what it is."

Okung immediately became the best left-tackle option on the free-agent market after Andrew Whitworth, Matt Kalil and Riley Reiff all agreed to contracts earlier in the day. The Broncos' search for a left tackle continues.

Former Bronco Ryan Clady and Kelvin Beachum are two of the best available left tackles left on the free-agent market. Making a trade, or drafting a tackle, are other options.

Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said at the scouting combine last week that he would prefer to sign a true left tackle rather than someone who is converted into a left tackle because of the importance of that position.

Denver's offensive line got better Thursday when they signed guard Ronald Leary, who should be expected to be an immediate improvement over Michael Schofield. There's still steps to be made at the tackle position. There are currently two tackles who played for Denver in 2016 on the Broncos roster — Donald Stephenson and Ty Sambrailo. Both are right tackles and neither played well enough to solidify a starting role going in 2017.

The Broncos still have a good bit of cap space remaining, as well as 10 draft picks to make improvements.

ESPN's Josina Anderson was the first to report Okung to the Chargers.



# Good news for those at the front of the Broncos' nearly 75,000 season tickets wait list

By Danika Worthington

Denver Post

March 10, 2017

Broncos season ticket holders better hang tight to their seats. A shake-up is coming.

Season-ticket holders who didn't attend any games during the 2016 season are getting the boot, opening up seats for people at the front of the nearly 75,000 deep waiting list — roughly the capacity of the Broncos' home stadium — for the first time in six years, Broncos spokesman Patrick Smyth said in an e-mail.

Beyond giving people patiently waiting on the list a chance at a seat, the idea is to reward loyal season-ticket holders who have helped the Broncos set the longest home sellout streak in the NFL (47 years) with a chance to upgrade their seats, he said.

He did not say how the Broncos know which ticket holders didn't attend any games last season. He also did not say how many season-ticket licenses will not be renewed. There are nearly 22,000 season-ticket holders.

Earlier this year, the Broncos announced that for the first time since 2011, ticket prices will not increase. An average price will be about \$101 — lower than the 10 most expensive tickets in the NFL. Prior to the ho-hum 2016 season, Broncos tickets sold on the secondary market for two to three times their face value at an average of \$454, according to TicketIQ.

# Broncos free agency: Leary the new guard, lose out on Calais Campbell, await Romo

By Mike Klis

9News

March 10, 2017

Sure, the Denver Broncos have money. They also have common sense.

With the opening of NFL free agency Tuesday, the Broncos' strategy was clearly to spend money to improve portions of their roster, but not to overspend to the point they hurt the overall composition of their team.

The result was the Broncos had a four-year deal in place, at a little more than \$8.5 million per year, to sign Dallas Cowboys' guard Ronald Leary. In doing so, the Broncos passed on Cincinnati guard Kevin Zeitler, who is to receive a five-year deal at \$12 million a year from the Cleveland Browns.

The Broncos were also awaiting the Cowboys to release quarterback Tony Romo. The Houston Texans, however, were making an aggressive play for Romo, going so far as to make budget room by trading away quarterback Brock Osweiler and a second-round draft pick to the Cleveland Browns in exchange for Cleveland taking the remaining three years and \$51 million remaining on Osweiler's contract, including \$16 million fully guaranteed in 2017.

Houston outbid the Broncos for Osweiler last year. It turns out the Texans lost for winning as Osweiler played poorly. Now the two teams are competing again, this time for Romo.

The Texans are now in position to at least keep up with the Broncos in the bidding for Romo. If the Broncos sign Romo, there were reports they would turn around and trade Trevor Siemian to the New York Jets. However, a Broncos source told 9NEWS the team was not trading Siemian. Then again, if they acquire Romo...

Leary mostly played left guard for the Cowboys, who had what was generally considered the league's best offensive line in two of the past three years. The Broncos had a need at right guard as they have Max Garcia starting at left guard.

The Broncos haven't decided which one to flip to the right side, but bet on Garcia, a third-year pro who had played more right guard prior to last season.

Michael Schofield, the Broncos' starting right guard last season, for now is a backup guard who will compete for the starting right tackle position with Donald Stephenson and Ty Sambrailo.

However, the Broncos were still hoping to sign a left tackle and possibly a right tackle in free agency. The team was also needing a 5-technique defensive end after they were unable to secure Calais Campbell, who signed with Jacksonville, or Chris Baker, who is signing with Tampa Bay.

The Broncos' toughest bidding war defeat was for Campbell, a hometown hero and 3-4 defensive end. He will sign a four-year contract worth \$15 million a year with \$30 million in guarantees with the Jaguars, who had twice the salary cap room than did the Broncos.

Denver didn't make an offer to Campbell until Wednesday night – after he was close to an agreement with Jacksonville. Denver's offer to Campbell was around \$13 million per year, per a source, with about \$6 million less in guarantees. Campbell and his wife took a few hours to consider playing in Denver, where he was a three-sport star at Denver South High School. But playing at home can be a distraction, too.

Campbell also benefits from Florida having no state income tax, a savings of about \$1 million over the next three years.

# Broncos audit gives fans on season ticket waiting list a chance

By Mike Klis

9News

March 10, 2017

Even before NFL free agency officially opens for business at 2 p.m. Thursday, it's already been a solid offseason for Denver Broncos' season ticket holders.

First, the team did not raise ticket prices for the first time since 2011.

And now, for the first time in six years, the Broncos are making a substantial number of season tickets available to fans who have been patiently hanging in for years on their waiting list.

The team conducted an audit of its season ticket base to determine patterns of use. The audit revealed a number of season ticket holders did not use their tickets for a single game during the 2016 season. This could include ticket brokers who had no intention of going to a game but rather sold their entire package on the secondary market, which consistently yields one of the highest resale values in the league.

The result of the audit is several hundred season tickets were not renewed and will become available to those who have been on the Broncos' waiting list that is long enough to fill another stadium. The team is going on its 48th consecutive season of home sellouts, which marks the longest streak in pro sports in one city. (The Washington Redskins are excluded because they tarp their upper deck).

In their ticket agreement, Broncos season tickets are revocable licenses granted on a yearly basis at the sole discretion of the team.

"After careful review and consideration of our nearly 22,000 season ticket accounts, we are informing a number of season ticket holders that their licenses will not be renewed for the 2017 season based on their tickets not being used by them for any game in 2016," the Broncos said in a statement. "These decisions were made to reward our loyal season ticket holders, who have helped us to the longest home sellout streak in the NFL, and the many dedicated Broncos fans on our season ticket waiting list of nearly 75,000 people."

In addition, current season ticket holders will have the opportunity to upgrade their seat location for the first time in several years.

The Broncos are also planning to increase the number of single-game tickets that are made available each year in July – and usually sell out in a matter of minutes.

These periodic checks also help keep ticket prices as affordable as possible for the average fan.

The Chicago Cubs conducted a similar audit after their World Series run last fall. They tracked season ticket holders who sold their seats to a high-percentage of games. The license agreement the Cubs have

with their fans states tickets can be canceled if they're bought with the intent of re-selling them to the secondary market.

While the Cubs did not renew agreements to those who resold tickets to a high percentage of games, the Broncos drew the line on only those who attended zero games in 2016.

Why should people who don't attend games take the place of Broncos fans who want to bring their spouse and kids to the games?

# Broncos stick to their free-agency plan in opening hours

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

March 10, 2017

Denver Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway has used words and phrases that include “value,” “good decisions” or “has to make sense” when he’s discussed free agency in recent weeks.

With the salary cap at \$167 million and mega-contracts about to get negotiated, Elway attempted to quell some of the rumors about what the Broncos might be willing to do.

“It’s not a bottomless pit, there’s only so many things we can do,” Elway said. “... You keep all your options open, and then you make decisions that are in the best interest of the Broncos.”

Don't say you weren't warned. As the whirlwind that is free agency’s first day has passed, the Broncos dove in a little but didn’t dive in on Tony Romo. What they did was what Elway said they would do for a team he believes is still close to being a Super Bowl contender.

Elway believes free agency -- not the draft -- is where a team should fill its biggest needs. Because the best way to avoid the biggest reaches in the draft is to avoid selecting a player too far above his draft grade because you feel compelled to fill a need.

The Broncos' first signing in free agency was a Dallas Cowboy, but it was guard Ronald Leary. The Broncos were also in on negotiations with defensive lineman Calais Campbell before he took a \$60 million deal with the Jacksonville Jaguars in the final minutes.

The Broncos also traded proposals with defensive tackle Chris Baker, who would have been a candidate to be a nose tackle in their defense had he not taken more money with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. And that unglamorous spot of nose tackle has been a priority in the free-agency plan given the first player the Broncos met with, long before the market was open, was Earl Mitchell.

Mitchell took a bigger offer to sign with the San Francisco 49ers, but it all shows where the Broncos’ real priorities are -- when Romo's status followed them through their day -- offensive line and defensive line.

In short, they stuck to their plan in free agency’s opening hours. Like it, hate it, don't give it a thought, but it was their plan. They won one, a major one, with Leary’s agreement and lost one, a major one, with Campbell’s decision to sign with the Jaguars.

That’s not a bad day, but maybe it was unexpected as it included far more discussion about Romo outside of their building than inside of it. The Broncos still have some cap room to do some work and still have 10 draft picks in April.

But this is why Elway has said the word “value” so many times when he’s talked about who, and why, the Broncos will sign. Elway has also talked of the multiple stages of free agency, that it doesn’t end on the first weekend.

“We think free agency isn’t just that first couple days,” is how he has put it. “You can sign players throughout that can come in and help you. But the money, the value has to make sense, because we’re trying to build a roster that can compete for world championships over the long haul.”

The Broncos’ first day of free agency may not be what some folks expected, but it was exactly what they planned.

# Broncos to fortify offensive line by adding guard Ronald Leary

By Jeff Legwold  
ESPN.com  
March 10, 2017

Former Dallas Cowboys guard Ronald Leary plans to sign a four-year, \$35 million deal with the Denver Broncos, assuming there are no last-minute negotiating snags, sources told ESPN's Adam Schefter.

Playing alongside All-Pro offensive linemen Tyron Smith, Travis Frederick and Zack Martin with the Cowboys, Leary received little notice and lost his job -- through no fault of his own -- in 2015 to La'el Collins, who received a fully guaranteed deal as an undrafted free agent after a heavy recruiting process by owner and general manager Jerry Jones.

In 2012, the Cowboys signed Leary as an undrafted free agent to a deal that included more than \$200,000 guaranteed. He fell off the draft boards because of a knee condition that never proved to be an issue with the Cowboys.

After spending the 2012 season on the Cowboys' practice squad, Leary started 31 of 32 games at left guard over the next two seasons. He helped DeMarco Murray to a franchise-record 1,845 rushing yards in 2014 and opened the 2015 season as the starter but suffered a groin injury and eventually lost the job to Collins.

The Cowboys gave him a second-round tender as a restricted free agent in 2016 and had some trade discussions during the draft and in training camp, but they opted to keep him. When Collins suffered a season-ending toe injury in Week 3, Leary stepped in and helped Ezekiel Elliott to the NFL rushing crown with 1,631 yards.

Leary, who turns 28 on April 29, has started 47 games in his career, as well as three playoff games.



# Broncos keep promise to beef up O-line, sign Cowboys' Ronald Leary

By Jeff Legwold  
ESPN.com  
March 10, 2017

Even with an almost constant swirl of speculation about quarterback Tony Romo's future around them at all times these days, the Denver Broncos' decision-makers, including general manager John Elway and coach Vance Joseph, have made no secret their biggest need in free agency is to upgrade their offensive line.

And their opening move in free agency did reel in a former Dallas Cowboys player -- it just wasn't Romo. They began fixing their biggest problem area by agreeing to terms with guard Ronald Leary, who goes from odd man out on Dallas' offensive line to a key addition for the Broncos.

Terms: Four years, \$35 million.

ESPN Top 150 ranking: No. 51.

Grade: A -- It sticks to the profile of success for the Broncos in free agency. They have agreed to terms on an ascending player who will turn 28 next month, and he helps fill their biggest offseason need as a walk-in starter. Personnel executives around the league lauded Leary's play in his time as a starter for the Cowboys, and he gives the Broncos the kind of edge, especially in the run game, they need to help kick-start their offense. He started at least 13 games in three of his four seasons in Dallas and was considered one of the top interior offensive linemen available in free agency. Leary lost his job as a starter in the Cowboys' offense in 2015 only because owner Jerry Jones had given La'el Collins a fully guaranteed deal as an undrafted rookie that year.

What it means: The Broncos have started an offensive line makeover that could include three or four new starters. Leary played left guard this past season after Collins suffered a season-ending knee injury, and at least initially, that figures to be where the Broncos would slot him. Leary helped Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott to the NFL rushing title with 1,631 yards.

What's the risk: Leary went undrafted in 2012 because some teams believed he had a knee condition that could impact his ability to stay on the field. However, he has not had those issues with the Cowboys -- he was on the team's practice squad in 2012 -- and was only displaced from the lineup in 2015 because the Cowboys had invested so much in Collins. He started 31 of 32 regular-season games in 2013 and 2014 combined in addition to his 13 started this past season.

# Russell Okung's price too high as Broncos work to re-sign their own

By Jeff Legwold  
ESPN.com  
March 10, 2017

As the opening hours of free agency featured the usual allotment of big-ticket deals around the league, the Denver Broncos spent at least some of that time on their own unrestricted free agents as those players got a glimpse of what is, or isn't, out in the market for them.

The Broncos did agree to terms with guard Ronald Leary, who started 13 games for the Dallas Cowboys last season, and the Broncos took a swing at Calais Campbell and Chris Baker before those two free agents signed with the Jacksonville Jaguars and Tampa Bay Buccaneers, respectively.

But the Broncos also have spent plenty of time trading proposals and ideas with tackle Russell Okung, defensive end Vance Walker, nose tackle Sylvester Williams and cornerback Kayvon Webster.

Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway said at the scouting combine last week that he would entertain the idea of bringing those players back if the sides could make the numbers work.

They didn't work in Okung's case as the Los Angeles Chargers wheeled out a \$53 million deal for the now former Broncos left tackle. The Broncos didn't pay Okung an option bonus that would have kicked in the final four years of the deal that included \$21 million guaranteed.

They spoke to Okung in recent days to see if they could find a common ground. But as the deal he agreed to showed Okung's price was consistently too high for the Broncos to close out a deal.

As Elway put it at the combine: "That's not saying he's not going to be back, now he may find another opportunity, it is what it is, but Russell is somebody we'd like to continue to talk to. ... We have to see where everything comes in and where it fits in our puzzle."

And while the Broncos have already tried to sign two nose tackles in free agency – Earl Mitchell and Chris Baker – the Broncos have stayed in contact with Williams as well. Since Mitchell signed with the San Francisco 49ers and Baker signed with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Williams is still a consideration for the Broncos as well.

Walker, too, is somebody the Broncos would re-sign after the initial wave of free agency. Webster, however, faces a difficult depth chart with the Broncos with Aqib Talib, Chris Harris Jr. and Bradley Roby firmly in front of him.

A return to the Broncos doesn't improve that and every talent evaluator in the league just watched a deep and fast group of defensive backs work out at the scouting combine.

It was Leary who was the headline for the Broncos on the first day of free agency, but the Broncos still could reel in one or two of their own free agents.

# Calais Campbell to join Jags despite push by Broncos to change mind

By Staff

ESPN.com

March 10, 2017

Calais Campbell will sign with the Jacksonville Jaguars, as previously reported, despite a late push by the Denver Broncos to sign the defensive tackle.

"Chose Jags because Tom Coughlin is a winner, they brought in two other big free agents and they also have been drafting well the last few years," Campbell told ESPN's Josina Anderson. "They are a young and hungry defense that I want to lead."

Campbell will sign a four-year, \$60 million deal with the Jaguars that includes \$30 million guaranteed, a source told ESPN's Adam Schefter.

The Jaguars are expected to sign safety Barry Church. They are also in negotiations with cornerback A.J. Bouye.

Campbell, 30, flourished in 2016 with the addition of Chandler Jones to the Cardinals' front seven, putting together one of the best all-around seasons of his career during a contract year. He had 53 tackles, 8 sacks, 3 fumble recoveries, 2 forced fumbles and 1 interception that he returned for a touchdown.

After making the Pro Bowl in consecutive seasons, Campbell, whose eight sacks tied for the second-most of his career and were the most since the nine he had in 2013, was chosen as an alternate.

Campbell's early career was spent mostly as a run-stopper, but his versatility became even more important as the 6-foot-8, 300-pounder showed he could generate inside pressure as well as push the pocket or get off blocks to help against the run.

Also Thursday, the Jaguars released defensive tackle Sen'Derrick Marks.

The 30-year-old Marks had 16 sacks and five fumble recoveries in four seasons with the Jaguars. He was entering the final year of a four-year extension signed late in the 2013 season and was due to make \$3.45 million in 2017.

Marks suffered a torn right ACL in the 2014 finale and missed the first five games of the 2015 season. He played in the next four games but suffered a torn right triceps muscle and missed the final seven games of the season.

The Jaguars signed free agent Malik Jackson to the richest contract in team history last March (\$86.1 million over six years with \$46 million guaranteed) and he became the starter at three-technique tackle. Marks played in every game as a reserve last but was unhappy with his role, telling ESPN that he didn't like being a "damn backup" but that he eventually became at peace with his new role.

The Jaguars like what they've seen from 2016 fourth-round pick Sheldon Day and also have 2015 sixth-round pick Michael Bennett on the roster. Both play the same position as Jackson and Marks, which made the older Marks expendable.

# Broncos agree in principle on four-year deal with right guard Ronald Leary

By Troy Renck

KMGH

March 10, 2017

Coach Vance Joseph identified the Broncos' top priority in free agency last week.

"It's going to be a race to get offensive linemen," Joseph told Denver7.

The Broncos made their first bold move Thursday, agreeing in principle on a four-year deal with Dallas Cowboys right guard Ronald Leary, according to an NFL source. The deal cannot become official until 2 p.m. Thursday.

NFL Network reported the deal as a four years, \$35 million with \$20 million guaranteed.

Leary performed as a solid starter last season for Dallas, replacing the injured La'el Collins. Pro Football Focus graded Leary as the 24th best guard in the NFL a year ago, showing slightly more aplomb in run blocking. Leary has started 47 games over the last four seasons. He dealt with a back issue last season, but nothing that affected his performance.

Leary, who will be 28 in April, would move into a starting role in a position held by Michael Schofield last season. The Broncos hinted at the NFL combine that they were prepared to give Max Garcia a chance to keep the left guard spot after he struggled with maddening inconsistency in the zone blocking scheme.

The Broncos continue chasing free agents. They have expressed strong interest in defensive end Calais Campbell. According to an ESPN report, Campbell is considering whether to take less from Denver to stay home or elect for a bigger payday in Jacksonville. As I wrote last night, the Broncos had zeroed in on offensive linemen in free agency, seeing it as their greatest need.

# Broncos defensive back Kayvon Webster receives interest from Rams, Dolphins, Eagles

By Troy Renck

KMGH

March 10, 2017

Kayvon Webster's preference continues to be to hear the Broncos out.

But the free agent defensive back told Denver7 Thursday afternoon he has not yet received an offer from Denver, while receiving strong interest from the Rams, Eagles and Dolphins.

Webster evolved into a special teams ace over the past two seasons. He excelled at pinning opponents on kick and punt returns. Webster has said on multiple occasions, he would love to stay with the Broncos. However, he is seeking more playing time, which, on the surface, is not available in Denver.

Webster owns 83 tackles and two starts in four seasons with the Broncos. The Rams represent an interesting spot. They are looking for secondary depth, and Webster knows defensive coordinator Wade Phillips well. He played for Phillips the past two seasons. Miami coach Adam Gase also worked in Denver and is well-versed in Webster's versatility.

# Tony Romo drama continues to swirl with Cowboys mulling options

By Troy Renck  
KMGH  
March 10, 2017

Give it to Brock Osweiler. He has absolutely owned the first day of the NFL league year.

On the same day he signed with the Houston Texans a year ago, Osweiler was traded to the Cleveland Browns.

His destination could again impact the Broncos' quarterback situation. The Texans shipped Osweiler and a second-round pick to Cleveland and exchanged a sixth-round pick this year for the Browns' fourth-round pick.

It creates \$10 million in cap space for Houston to pursue a veteran quarterback. Perhaps you've heard the Dallas Cowboys have a player available. Goes by the name Tony Romo. Turns 37 in April. Owns 78 career wins, but has made only four starts the past two seasons. Wednesday, the Cowboys sent signals to the NFL world that they would release Romo on Thursday. Instead, they are attempting to deal him.

If Romo becomes a free agent, the Broncos are expected to express interest. They would like to talk to him and see what it would take regarding a contract with injury protection. However, Romo has never been the Broncos' top priority. They moved ahead in free agency, landing Dallas Cowboys right guard Ronald Leary. He agreed in principle on a four-year, \$35 million deal with \$20 million guaranteed. They continue to seek offensive linemen, and nearly landed defensive end Calais Campbell before he agreed with Jacksonville for more money.

Romo speculation sent Twitter into a frenzy when news broke that the Cowboys would not waive him. They have no deadline with salary bonuses or incentive clauses. The Broncos have never been interested in getting into a bidding war for Romo. If the Broncos were once the favorites, the pendulum swung in Houston's direction following the Osweiler move.

Even as Dallas appears prepared to slow-play Romo's situation, Romo issued a thank you to fans on Instagram, hinting that his future remains in flux.

This could become a game of chicken with neither team willing to swing a trade right now. A similar staredown played out a year ago with the Broncos and Colin Kaepernick. Broncos general manager John Elway met with him multiple times, but the Broncos could not come to terms on a contract solution at a reduced rate.

Denver walked away from the deal, drafting Paxton Lynch in the first round. The Broncos' comfort level with Trevor Siemian and Lynch explains why they will not overreact. Siemian spent the morning isolated from trade rumors, telling Denver7 he had a good workout at the Broncos' facility as he continues to progress with his left shoulder recovery.

# Calais Campbell considers Broncos, chooses Jaguars' lucrative offer

By Troy Renck  
KMGH  
March 10, 2017

Late Wednesday night, it appeared the Jacksonville Jaguars would land defensive end Calais Campbell, pairing him with Malik Jackson. The story began to shift before contracts could become official Thursday at 2 p.m.

While Jacksonville offered the most money, Denver is home to Campbell. He starred at Denver South, once holding the state sack record. The gravitational pull to remain in the Mile High City was strong. Campbell pushed the pause button, weighing a free agent offer from the Broncos.

But according to ESPN, after mulling over his choices, Campbell chose the Jaguars' more lucrative offer. The deal was reported at four years, \$60 million with \$30 million guaranteed. The amount guaranteed upon at signing was critical to closing the deal with Campbell.

The Jaguars offered Campbell \$15 million per season, a huge pay day for a strong defender who has comparable pressures to J.J. Watt and Geno Atkins over the last several years. The Broncos wanted him, but as is always the case under shrewd general manager John Elway, they set a number and exercised discipline. Campbell would have had to take less to stay home. In the end, he accepted roughly \$2 million more per season.

To put in perspective, the Broncos signed defensive end Derek Wolfe during the 2015 playoff run to a four-year, \$36 million deal with \$17.5 million guaranteed. It speaks to the importance of locking up core players before they reach free agency.

The Broncos continue looking for offensive linemen in free agency. That remains their top priority, not quarterback Tony Romo. Rumors have circulating Thursday that the Cowboys now will hold onto Romo and attempt to trade him. It is, as they say, a developing story.



# Russell Okung one and done with Broncos, signs free agent deal with Chargers

By Troy Renck

KMGH

March 10, 2017

Russell Okung bet on himself, receiving criticism for negotiating a contract without an agent.

In the end, the left tackle looks like he made the right decision. After earning \$8 million in his one-and-done season with the Broncos, Okung agreed to a four-year, \$53 million contract with \$25 million guaranteed from the Los Angeles Chargers, according to reports.

The Broncos declined Okung's four-year, \$48 million option that included \$20.5 million in guaranteed money. They wanted him back on a smaller contract, and Okung remained open to the idea. However, the market greeted Okung kindly. He had multiple suitors, including the Panthers, Giants and Chargers. In the end, Okung elected to remain in the AFC West where he will face elite pass rushers Von Miller, Khalil Mack and Justin Houston.

The Broncos continue to search for a left tackle. As it stands, they have no starter. Michael Schofield and Ty Sambrailo have experience at the position, but both have struggled at differing times. Denver must make a decision on right tackle Donald Stephenson's deal. His \$4 million salary guarantees on March 13, and cutting him would create \$2 million in dead money.

Denver's priority in free agency is to bolster the offensive line. The Broncos signed guard Ronald Leary. They also hold the 20th pick in the draft that could be used for help.

# Oswelier deal a stunner; Cutler's release no surprise

By Barry Wilner  
Associated Press  
March 10, 2017

Everyone expected a free agency flurry when the NFL's year began on Thursday. Predicting what happened with Brock Oswelier was beyond anyone's projections.

One year after signing a four-year deal with Houston, then losing the starting job to Tom Savage late in the season before returning and winning a playoff game, Oswelier is headed to Cleveland. The Texans basically took whatever deal they could get to rid themselves of a \$16 million payout to the quarterback in 2017. The Browns and Texans are also swapping fourth- and sixth-round picks in 2017, and Cleveland gets a 2018 second-rounder.

Far more predictable was Chicago releasing Jay Cutler, who had no guaranteed money left on his contract. Cutler led the Bears to the 2010 NFC championship game, but otherwise struggled in Chicago.

"His ability, toughness, and intelligence were on daily display at Halas Hall and Soldier Field. He had an extraordinary impact off the field, doing things for people, especially kids, without expecting or wanting any recognition," Chairman George McCaskey said. "I was and am a big fan of his."

Yet another QB soon to be on the move, the Cowboys' Tony Romo teasingly told fans in a tweeted video: "Hey everyone. I just wanted to come to tell you it's been a crazy 48 hours here. Me and my family felt the outpouring of support and love from all of you. It's been overwhelming and it doesn't go unnoticed. I want to say thank you and we have a lot of think about going forward but we'll see what happens. Until then I'm just going to keep listening to Bob Dylan."

Romo could be headed to Houston to replace Oswelier now that the Texans have room to pay him. Whether Dallas releases its longtime quarterback or works out a trade will soon be known.

As for the Texans-Browns stunner, it's possible Cleveland, which owns the top pick in April's draft, will be moving Oswelier, too. But the Browns had plenty of cap room to absorb the financial hit and load up with more draft picks.

"We're really excited to acquire a second-round draft choice in this trade," said Sashi Brown, Cleveland's executive vice president of football operations. "Draft picks are extremely important to our approach in building a championship caliber football team. We are intent on adding competition to every position on our roster and look forward to having Brock come in and compete."

Cleveland added to the offensive line guard Kevin Zeitler, late of division rival Cincinnati, and center J.C. Tretter from Green Bay. Joel Bitonio got a five-year extension — so much for the Browns' needs at guard.

Among the busiest teams were the Buccaneers and Eagles, each getting a dangerous receiver for its young passer.

Tampa Bay brought in DeSean Jackson to team with Mike Evans as targets for Jameis Winston.

Jackson is one of five players since the 1970 merger with 26 or more career touchdowns of 50-plus yards. Only Hall of Famer Jerry Rice (23) has more than Jackson's 22 touchdowns of 60-plus yards.

"DeSean is exactly the type of dynamic playmaker we have been targeting for our offense," said Buccaneers coach Dirk Koetter. "DeSean brings a veteran presence and a big-play mentality that fits in perfectly with our offensive philosophy. He is a tough-minded competitor who has the game-breaking speed and pass-catching ability that stretches the defense and creates matchup problems."

The Buccaneers also added defensive tackle Chris Baker, late of Washington.

Philadelphia got perhaps the most covered wideout available in Alshon Jeffery, who left Chicago, and also agreed to terms with Torrey Smith, who was cut by San Francisco. Carson Wentz now has two more downfield threats than he did in his rookie season.

Philly also grabbed guard Chance Warmack and released DE Connor Barwin.

Elsewhere:

—Baltimore agreed to terms with perhaps the best defensive tackle available, Brandon Williams, who returns after four solid seasons with the Ravens. A third-rounder in the 2013 draft, he has 158 tackles (97 solo), 4 1-2 sacks, three passes defensed, three forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries. He's started 36 straight games.

—Miami finalized a trade of guard Branden Albert to Jacksonville for tight end Julius Thomas, then added TE Anthony Fasano. The Dolphins kept outstanding safety Reshad Jones, who got a \$60 million, five-year contract extension.

—Jacksonville bolstered its defense when it agreed to terms with Houston cornerback A.J. Bouye , Arizona defensive end Calais Campbell and Dallas safety Barry Church on deals totaling more than \$150 million.

The 25-year-old Bouye agreed to a five-year deal worth \$67.5 million, with \$26 million guaranteed. Bouye was considered the top cornerback on the market and will start opposite budding star Jalen Ramsey.

The 30-year-old Campbell had 501 tackles, eight forced fumbles and three interceptions in nine seasons with the Cardinals. He also missed just six games.

Also, they re-signed WR Bryan Walters and released DT Sen'Derrick Marks.

—The Jets made cornerback Darrelle Revis' release official. Revis, 31, had been scheduled to make \$15 million, including a \$2 million roster bonus, this season. The Jets still owe him \$6 million as part of the \$39 million in guarantees in the five-year, \$70 million deal he signed in 2015.

He's now free to sign elsewhere — but he'll have to find a team willing to bring him in despite being a shell of his former shutdown self. Revis is also facing four felony counts, including aggravated assault

and other charges alleging he was in a fight with two men on Feb. 12 in Pittsburgh. A pre-trial hearing will be held on March 15.

—Buffalo released veteran safety Aaron Williams, who's plagued by neck problems, and agreed to terms with fullback Patrick DiMarco, kicker Stephen Hauschka, safeties Micah Hyde and Jordan Poyer, and guard Vladimir Ducasse. Hyde can play anywhere in the secondary and also return punts. Hauschka was Seattle's placekicker for two Super Bowls.

—San Francisco was as busy as anyone, agreeing to deals with receivers Pierre Garçon and Marquise Goodwin, QB Brian Hoyer, TE Logan Paulsen, kicker Robbie Gould, linebacker Malcolm Smith — the MVP of the 2014 Super Bowl — and FB Kyle Juszczyk.

—The Panthers broke from their traditionally conservative free agency spending and gave left tackle Matt Kalil a five-year deal worth \$55.5 million. It's the largest ever given out by the Panthers to an incoming free agent, and he joins his older brother Ryan Kalil, Carolina's two-time All-Pro center.

# Hundreds of fans on Broncos season ticket waiting list could get tickets for 2017

By Staff

KDVR

March 10, 2017

Hundreds of people on the Denver Broncos waiting list for season tickets will get a chance to buy those tickets for this upcoming season, the team said Thursday.

It will be the first time in six years the team has made a significant number of season tickets available to fans. This is great news for some lucky people who have waited years for the chance to buy Broncos season tickets.

The Broncos said they did an audit of who is using their season tickets. It revealed that a number of season ticket holders didn't go to any home games during the 2016 season.

The reason could be that the season tickets were held by ticket brokers who sold those tickets on the secondary market.

The team said as a result, several hundred season ticket accounts were not renewed for the 2017 season. The Broncos told FOX31 they estimate it could be about 1,000 tickets that are available, since many season ticket accounts include more than one ticket.

The Broncos said the waiting list for season tickets has about 75,000 names on it.

The team also said current season ticket holders would have a chance to upgrade their seat location for the first time in several years. And on top of that, season ticket prices did not go up for 2017.

# **Brock Osweiler, unloved and rejected, remains a legit NFL starting quarterback**

By David Ramsey  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
March 10, 2017

We all agree John Elway is a superb judge of football talent, right?

So, let's also all remember that a year ago Elway offered Brock Osweiler \$30 million to remain the Broncos quarterback.

Yes, Osweiler has fallen on supremely hard times. He was traded Thursday from the Texans to the Browns, the NFL's version of Siberia. The Texans wanted to dump Osweiler's gargantuan contract, and the Browns made the trade primarily to obtain a second-round draft selection.

The Browns have little interest in giving Osweiler a chance to start at quarterback. They want to trade him. That's right; even the Browns don't want Osweiler.

But it's not as if Osweiler's talent and potential suddenly vanished. He remains 6-foot-8. He remains the quarterback who carried the Broncos to dramatic and vital 2015 victories over the Patriots and Bengals with clutch, strong-armed fourth quarter performances. He remains the QB who Elway wanted to carry the Broncos into the future.

He still can – and I realize I'm swimming against the tide here – become one of the NFL's top 15 quarterbacks. He's not destined to remind us of Elway or Peyton Manning in their primes.

He has the tools to become a legit NFL starter.

With diligence and proper training, Osweiler can kick his interception habit, or at least greatly reduce his career-threatening tendency to place passes in the hands of enemy defensive backs.

Let's look at history: In Elway's third season, 1985, he threw 23 interceptions and 22 touchdowns. He never again threw more than 20 interceptions, and in his final six seasons he averaged only 11.5 interceptions, or half of what he threw in 1985.

In 1999, Jake Plummer threw 24 interceptions, with only nine touchdowns, for the Cardinals. In 2005, the final year he spent a full season as starter, Plummer threw only seven interceptions in 456 attempts while leading the Broncos to the AFC Title Game.

Elway and Plummer matured and outgrew their generosity to the other teams. Osweiler can follow their lead. I believe he will follow their lead.

Listen, I realize Osweiler is hugely unpopular in Colorado. I would say he's divisive, but almost nobody stands on his side of the divide. On March 9, 2016, Osweiler signed a four-season, \$72 million contract with the Texans. Soon, I heard him described as "selfish" "arrogant" "ungrateful" and "stupid," along with several long descriptive nouns that my mother would not want me repeating.

No doubt, Osweiler is stumbling right now. The Texans had to bribe the Browns to take him. A year ago, he was the savior of Houston football.

Today, he resides in the NFL junk heap.

He won't stay there. Elway offered him \$30 million guaranteed a year ago to remain a Bronco.

And Elway is, as we all know, no football dummy.

# 2017 NFL Free Agency: Browns scheming winners, Redskins look like lunatic losers

By Will Brinson  
CBSSports.com  
March 10, 2017

It is very easy to get suckered into teams making splashy moves on the first day of free agency and thinking that “winning” in March will equate to winning in January. There is very often an inverse correlation between spending money in free agency and earning wins in the postseason. The Browns probably won’t be hosting any playoff games this year -- “definitely” would work, really -- but it’s hard not to like what they’re doing this offseason, one day in.

For starters, the Browns went out and did exactly what their reputation said they’d do: play Moneyball. And Moneyball is not about finding fat guys who can get on base. It’s about exploiting market inefficiencies; it’s an economics game, not a baseball game.

The Browns identified a trend in the NFL: the inability of most teams to draft and develop offensive lineman. There are certainly linemen who succeed and there are teams (hello, Dallas) that do a great job of finding stud linemen (the Cowboys themselves were playing a bit of Moneyball with that too, but that’s another topic for another day). But for the most part, there is a dearth of quality line play in the NFL and it’s really difficult to find young guys who can step in and make an impact.

Offensive linemen used to be the safest possible pick, now they’re the riskiest. So the Browns went in a different direction, paying up for some quality linemen (more on that below).

And then they did the most beautiful thing of all : trading for Brock Osweiler.

I can’t believe it either, but it’s true. The Browns are soaking up \$16 million in cap space by taking on Osweiler and they picked up a second-round pick from the Texans for their troubles. In theory they’re just a tax shelter for a bad investment by Houston; it will be curious to see what happens from the league if the Browns cut Osweiler. This could theoretically qualify as paying for picks, which is illegal at Bushwood.

The Osweiler trade really is smart, though. The Browns aren’t contending this year, and they just added an incredibly valuable asset (a top-65 pick in the 2018 draft) to build out a roster in need of talent.

So after locking up three young offensive linemen, the Browns are staring down five picks in the top 65 this year and four picks in the first two rounds next year. Whether or not the plan to deal some of these picks for Jimmy Garoppolo comes to fruition is irrelevant. If they pull it off, great. If not, they’re set up to get tons of young talent.

The Browns have a great chance to come out of free agency and the draft with a haul of talent that will get them moving in the right direction.



## Winners

**Cleveland Browns:** Again, spending big early isn't always effective, and the Browns probably won't win in 2017. But getting Joel Bitonio locked down on an extension, bringing in Kevin Zeitler (a double whammy because it hurts the Bengals) and locking down JC Tretter solidifies this line for the upcoming season when you factor in stalwart left tackle Joe Thomas. Imagine if they'd kept Alex Mack and Mitchell Schwartz. Cleveland can add a quality running back in this draft and whoever runs behind that line should see plenty of holes. Whatever young quarterback comes in has Kenny Britt and Corey Coleman to throw to and should get plenty of protection behind this line. Baby steps, kids.

**Tom Coughlin:** A year after he was unceremoniously run off by the Giants only to see New York finally do the one thing it never did when he was around (spend huge money in free agency), Coughlin got to bust out the checkbook himself. And the early reports are pretty astonishing, although not too different from Jaguars offseasons of the past. The Jags threw huge money at Calais Campbell to pair him with Malik Jackson (last year's big name signing). Campbell is a stud against the run, a guy capable of getting after the passer (eight sacks last year, 20 in the last three) and a versatile, underrated option who just cashed in big. Jacksonville also locked down cornerback A.J. Bouye, stealing him from the Texans and paying him handsomely for a breakout season in 2016. The Jaguars defense has zero reason not to be outstanding this year.

**Mike Glennon:** No one's been hosed more than Glennon in his football career when it comes to being put on the backburner as a backup. He was a five-star recruit out of high school and got stuck behind Russell Wilson at NC State. Then Glennon was poised to be the Buccaneers starter before being bumped by Jameis Winston when the Seminoles quarterback was taken No. 1 overall. Glennon has been incredible as a teammate in both situations and taken the honorable path by not complaining about playing time. He hasn't been happy sitting in either situation (no one would be), but he took it all in stride. Now he gets a chance to start on his own team, taking over the Bears. The situation isn't ideal, with Chicago losing Alshon Jeffery and not looking like a contender. But he's got a chance to prove he deserves to start and he's getting paid handsomely -- \$14.5 million per year with \$18.5 million in guarantees -- to do it.

**Jameis Winston:** The Buccaneers went out and spent big on a deep threat for Winston, adding DeSean Jackson to put alongside Mike Evans and create a formidable duo in the receiving game. Evans morphed into an elite wide receiver in his third year with the Buccaneers and should take another step as he and Winston continue to grow. Jameis is known for some scattershot accuracy and loving to take chances down the field -- Jackson is going to be a big plus in helping him improve both. The Buccaneers were a dangerous offense last year; now they should downright explosive.

**Carson Wentz:** The Eagles aren't messing around when it comes to putting some weapons around their quarterback. They went out and signed Alshon Jeffery to a one-year deal worth \$14 million. Jeffery turned down more money elsewhere according to reports because he liked what the Eagles are building. Couple Jeffery with Torrey Smith (three years, \$15 million), add in Zach Ertz and Jordan Matthews and the Eagles are starting to put some nice versatile weapons around Wentz. We'd love to see them pick up

Jamaal Charles too and really establish the running game, but Howie Roseman did good work for his young quarterback on the first day of free agency.

Losers

Washington Redskins: Thursday marked the first day of free agency around the NFL and the Redskins ... fired their general manager ! It's not a bold move because it's an insane move, canning a highly-talented individual in Scot McCloughan and then pointing to his personal problems as a reason for doing so.

If you think that the firing of McCloughan and the Redskins' statement on this matter is the end of things, you are sorely mistaken. The Redskins are consistently surrounded in drama, except for the last two years under McCloughan, and the franchise appears ready to shift right back into hyperdrive as they make their way along the road to dysfunction. Again: the Redskins fired their GM on the first day of free agency. This is, as far as we can remember, pretty unprecedented. The guy in charge of identifying, retaining and bringing in talent just got kicked out of the building on the most important day of talent evaluation.

Carolina Panthers: The idea of going out in free agency and trying to find some cheap, young tackle talent that was a disappointment for another team, inking them to a low-cost deal and hoping to hit a home run, was a great one for the Panthers. Matt Kalil, brother of Panthers center Ryan Kalil, is a great potential example. And the Panthers signed him. Except then a funny thing happened: they gave him a huge pile of money. \$55 million over five years to be exact, with \$25 million guaranteed. Maybe the contract ends up better than it looks like, but off the bat, this feels like a bizarre way to try and solve the offensive line issues the Panthers face, by throwing money at a guy who was good coming out of school but struggled with and let go by the line-needy Vikings.

Jay Cutler: It stinks to get fired from your job (even if you have sweet, tear-soaked odes penned in your name when it happens) and this is not me trying to rub it in on Cutler, who gets a raw deal as a locker room guy. But he's been in Chicago for eight years and the Bears let him go in order to sign Mike Glennon to a big contract. The rumors and reports out there indicate that Cutler's only option is to head to the Jets, where there is mutual interest. The Jets are rebuilding right now and not any good. Which means that Cutler will have to leave a bad team for a worse team, and when he gets there he's going to play in an intense media market for a team without a ton of weapons and probably with a highly-drafted quarterback backing him up. It's not a great situation for Cutler.

Chargers: Russell Okung's agent, who is actually Okung himself, did a heck of a job negotiating his last two contracts. The first deal with Denver looked like a loser because the Broncos declined his option and sent him back onto the market after just one year, which was not a good year. The second deal looks freaking great, with Okung inking a monster deal with the Chargers and about to earn \$23.5 million guaranteed on a five-year, \$53 million deal . Unfortunately, a lot of people in the NFL believe Okung may have tampered in this situation by talking to the Chargers before he was allowed to negotiate (he couldn't discuss a contract during the legal tampering window because he's not a registered agent). If that's the case, might he have to fire himself if the NFL finds out he tampered with himself? It's very confusing.

# 10 VETERAN FREE AGENTS WORTH A ONE-YEAR CONTRACT

By Sam Monson  
Pro Football Focus  
March 10, 2017

Free agency isn't just about the big splash signing that sets your team up for the future. Sometimes it can be about the player that comes in and patches a hole on the roster in the short-term. The league is full of quality players nearing the end of their careers that are still very capable of playing the game at a high level, but because of their advancing years, no team wants to commit too much money to them and be stuck still paying when the inevitable decline happens.

These players typically exist on rolling one- or two-year contracts for reasonable money, but can make some of the biggest, immediate impacts because of their proven quality. Here is a look at some of the best "band-aid" free agents that could be excellent acquisitions on one-year deals, with the caveat that, even at 35 years old, I think Cincinnati left tackle Andrew Whitworth has more left in the tank than a one-year deal—otherwise he would be the prize of this list.

## 1. DeMarcus Ware, Edge, Denver Broncos

In his prime, DeMarcus Ware was arguably the best pass-rusher in the NFL. He can still bring heat in the twilight of his career, at least, as long as he is healthy, which has become more and more of a caveat as the years have gone on. In 2016, Ware only played 315 snaps for Denver, but he generated 26 total QB pressures to go with the 43 he recorded in 2015. Ware should be used as a situational rusher at this point in his career, and could give some team a significant boost to its pass rush.

## 2. Dwight Freeney, Edge, Atlanta Falcons

Dwight Freeney is further along the retirement path than DeMarcus Ware, at least in terms of having long since transitioned to being a situational pass-rusher, but his spin move still has juice, and likely will as long as he can still move around. Freeney only played 265 snaps for the Cardinals in 2015, but was arguably their best pass-rusher, notching eight sacks and 36 total QB pressures. This past season for the Falcons, he saw 416 snaps of action and notched 46 total QB pressures in the regular season, adding 17 more in Atlanta's three playoff games. Freeney can still bring the heat and is used to being a situational pass-rushing gun for hire.

## 3. Terence Newman, CB, Minnesota Vikings

The things Terence Newman is doing at his age are scarcely believable. At 38 years old last season, he posted some of the best coverage numbers we have seen in the past decade of grading. He wasn't beaten for a pass longer than 24 yards all season, gave up just 8.4 yards per reception, 31 total yards after the catch all year, and a league-leading 0.57 yards per snap spent in coverage. Newman may not want to play outside of Mike Zimmer's Vikings defense, but if a team could convince him to sign a short-term deal, he is still balling and could easily form part of a cornerback stable.

## 4. Nick Mangold, C, New York Jets

Nick Mangold's decline is definitely underway, but he is coming down from a point of being the unquestioned best center in the league, so even now, he should still be able to start and perform well for a team for at least a season as a stopgap at center. Mangold isn't the run blocker he once was, but

he hasn't allowed a sack in his last 33 games, and has surrendered just one in the past four seasons. A strong, experienced center can anchor and transform an offensive line, so Mangold could provide some short-term stability to a unit in need of an interior presence.

#### 5. John Sullivan, C, Washington Redskins

John Sullivan has only played 98 snaps in the last two seasons, and will be 32 when the season begins, but only one of those seasons was lost due to injury, the other was a result of simply not finding a new starting spot after that injury and spending 2016 on the bench in Washington. Sullivan, though, was playing at a high level before knee surgery sidelined him, and has now had extensive time to heal and recover. If given a shot, Sullivan could likely do a very solid job for a team at center for a season.

#### 6. Leon Hall, CB, New York Giants

In today's NFL, you need to be at least three deep at cornerback, and probably four to buy you some kind of contingency. Leon Hall may not be capable of starting anymore, but he remains a good sub-package player that has never had a poor coverage grade in his career over a season. A solid tackler, Hall is good at making stops short of the sticks and helping his team get off the field on defense.

#### 7. Alan Branch, DI, New England Patriots

Alan Branch had arguably the best season of his career in 2016 on his way to a Super Bowl with the New England Patriots. Including those playoff games, he also played the most snaps of his career, with 760 total by the time the confetti rained down. Branch was a two-gap monster in the run game, posting 39 total defensive stops and shoring up the Patriots' run defense significantly. He didn't offer much as a pass-rusher, but his value as a situational run stuffer was obvious in 2016.

#### 8. Julius Peppers, Edge, Green Bay Packers

Julius Peppers is another of the aging group of edge rushers that has transitioned to a situational role, and it has allowed him to get back some of his efficiency by ensuring he is as close to fresh as possible every snap he plays. Last season for the Packers, Peppers notched 45 total pressures including the playoffs, and was a major part of the Packers success against the Giants in the wild card round of the playoffs, with a sack, hit, two hurries and two passes batted down at the line. Peppers can still be a very productive player in that situational role.

#### 9. Russel, Okung, LT, Denver Broncos

Russell Okung is no longer a good player, but in a league where several teams have disasters starting at left tackle, he can still upgrade several situations in the short-term while those teams search for a legitimate solution in the draft. The security of only being below-average as a pass blocker and solid enough in the run game would be a significant headache alleviated for several teams. Last season, Okung surrendered four sacks with the Broncos, less than half the figure of the most among tackles, shared by six players.

#### 10. Anthony Fasano, TE, Tennessee Titans

In a league that has transitioned to slot receivers and 11-personnel (one back, one TE, and three receivers), the role of blocking TEs has become steadily less important, but several teams still rely on them as important role players, and there are few better in that regard than Anthony Fasano, whose 88.1 run-blocking grade was by far the best in the league last year. Fasano can execute blocks that receiving TEs simply can't, and if your offense has a place for that specialist role, you would be well served to add Fasano to the roster.

# Will the Broncos land Romo? Vic Lombardi says yes

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
March 10, 2017

Tony Romo soon will be released by the Cowboys. So where will he sign next?

Appearing on Thursday's PFT Live, Vic Lombardi of Altitude Sports Network predicted that Romo will end up in Denver — but only after G.M. John Elway plays a "slow dance" that culminates in a deal that works for the Broncos.

"Ultimately he'll become a Denver Bronco," Lombardi said. "They'll hit him with an incentive-laden contract. They'll give him enough now to make it worth his while. And if he stay's healthy and he's playing games, he'll make it up."

Lombardi pointed out that, in 2015, Peyton Manning took a \$4 million pay cut with an opportunity to make it back by winning the Super Bowl. And he did.

As to the other quarterbacks on the roster, Lombardi said that Romo wouldn't be pursued if Paxton Lynch were ready, and that the team should keep both Lynch and Trevor Siemian around, given Romo's durability question.

# Report: Calais Campbell settles on Jacksonville

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
March 10, 2017

There were some bumps along the way, but it looks like the Jaguars have landed Calais Campbell for their defensive line after all.

Word on Wednesday night was that Campbell was headed to Jacksonville as a free agent, but Thursday saw the spotlight shift to the prospect of Campbell returning to his hometown to play for the Broncos. With a little more than an hour to go before hypothetical deals can become actual ones, things have shifted back.

According to multiple reports, Campbell will sign a four-year deal with the Jaguars that is worth up to \$60 million in total value. The deal will include \$30 million in guaranteed money as well and came in ahead of what the Broncos were offering before taking into account the difference in state income tax between Florida and Colorado.

Campbell is expected to be joined in Jacksonville by a couple of other additions on the defensive side of the ball. Safety Barry Church is set to sign with the Jags once the new league year gets underway and the team is reportedly close to a deal with cornerback A.J. Bouye as new boss Tom Coughlin spends chunks of the team's cap space to bolster the defense a year after the Giants celebrated Coughlin's departure by doing the same thing.

# Trevor Siemian, Jay Cutler reportedly on Jets radar

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
March 10, 2017

There's word that the Cowboys are still trying to trade Tony Romo rather than release him and that the Broncos are one of the teams that could wind up acquiring the quarterback.

If they did, the Broncos would have Trevor Siemian and 2016 first-round pick Paxton Lynch on the roster behind Romo but that doesn't have to remain the case. Chris Mortensen of ESPN reports that the Jets have been in contact with the Broncos about a trade for Siemian.

Any deal would almost certainly be contingent on the Broncos acquiring Romo as that would allow them to thin out the quarterback depth chart while adding assets to use in other areas. If that doesn't work out, the Jets have apparently dipped their oars into other water as well.

Rich Cimini of ESPN.com reports that the Jets have reached out to Jay Cutler to express interest in the veteran's services following his release from the Bears. Jets quarterback coach Jeremy Bates worked with Cutler in both Denver and Chicago, which might help make for a smoother transition on the field than the Jets would receive off of it if they wind up going the Cutler route.

# Free-Agency Fits: How Ronald Leary helps the Broncos

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
March 10, 2017

Denver offers Ronald Leary an opportunity that Dallas, with its stacked offensive-line complement, could not: a chance to be the clear No. 1 option at one of the guard positions.

Most of his five seasons with the Cowboys were spent trying to prove himself after breaking into the NFL as an undrafted signee from Memphis. Fifteen of the 17 weeks of Leary's rookie season saw him on the Cowboys' practice squad.

By the 2013 season, Leary became the Cowboys' starter at left guard, and remained there through a 2014 season in which Dallas' offensive line emerged as the league's best. But by 2015, Leary had injuries, and the Cowboys had La'el Collins -- a potential first-round pick who fell out of the draft entirely, but then stepped in for an injured Leary and played like the top prospect he was.

By the time Leary returned for 2016, Collins had taken his left guard job. But Collins suffered a left toe injury, pushing Leary back into the lineup -- and the Cowboys' line and ground game did not miss a beat.

According to a report in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram last summer, Leary requested a trade prior to the 2016 season. But he stayed, and it ended up being the best move for the team -- and now, the player. Being a key component of an offensive line that is perhaps the best of this decade made the life-changing contract he got from the Broncos possible.

Leary's extensive left guard experience makes him a perfect fit there. But that could necessitate a shift for Max Garcia, who could find himself shifting to right guard. That is a spot at which he worked in spurts during his rookie season as he shuffled between left and right guard in relief of then-first teamers Evan Mathis and Louis Vasquez.

Executive Vice President/General Manager John Elway noted last week that the shift away from a pure zone-blocking system to one that incorporates zone and power techniques should help Garcia.

But that also made Leary a perfect fit, as his ability to drive and attack off the snap instantly gives a jolt of energy to a running game that struggled for most of the 2016 season.



# Broncos agree to terms with guard Ronald Leary

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

March 10, 2017

Executive Vice President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway has said repeatedly since the end of last season that the Broncos would find a way to improve the Broncos' offensive line.

Elway got off to a quick start on that promise Thursday when the Broncos agreed to terms with former Cowboys guard Ronald Leary.

The 27-year-old accepted a four-year deal to head to Denver, where he'll play next to center Matt Paradis. The addition of Leary will help beef up the offensive line that could be in a state of transition ahead of the 2017 NFL season.

"Ronald is a big, physical and athletic guard who plays with an attitude," Elway said. "Upgrading the offensive line was a priority for us this offseason, and we're excited to add Ronald to our team."

Leary was not drafted in the 2012 NFL Draft because of health concerns, and he signed with the Cowboys as a college free agent. He received third-round grades from scouts, however, and thrived in Dallas as a member of one of the best offensive lines in football.

According to Pro Football Focus, Leary rated as the 18th-best guard in football in 2016 as he started 12 of the 13 games in which he appeared.

"Having the chance to sign a talented and physical guard like Ronald was very important to us," Head Coach Vance Joseph said. "He played on one of the best offensive lines in football in Dallas and adds toughness to our line."

The 6-foot-3, 320-pounder played college football at the University of Memphis and is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

# Counting down the top 10 Broncos free-agent signings under John Elway

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
March 10, 2017

Some clubs are offseason champions. Others use the offseason to build champions.

Five AFC West titles, two AFC championships and one Vince Lombardi Trophy are direct results of what Executive Vice President/General Manager John Elway managed to pull off during the free-agent signing periods of the previous six years.

With over \$36 million of salary-cap room, the Broncos are positioned to add to their recent free-agent successes.

But which players represent the 10 best free-agent pickups of the Elway era?

## 10. WES WELKER, 2013

Welker and emerging young tight end Julius Thomas were the final pieces of an offensive puzzle that powered Peyton Manning and the Broncos to a slew of league records in 2013. Only a series of concussions slowed Welker down, but in his first season with the Broncos, he burnished a resume that could net him Hall of Fame consideration because of how he changed the possibilities for a slot receiver.

## 9. TERRANCE KNIGHTON, 2013

Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie's contributions during his only Broncos season must be noted, but it was Knighton who not only played beyond expectations, but had the best game of his career in just about the highest-leverage situation possible -- the 2013 AFC Championship Game, where his interior pass rush effectively provided the nail in the Patriots' coffin during the second half. Knighton would eventually become a team captain.

## 8. WILLIS MCGAHEE, 2011

The 2011 free-agent period was the most bizarre in NFL history, as the offseason lockout pushed the signing period all the way back to the start of training camp. When the Broncos signed McGahee, he had just been cut and was coming off the worst season of his career with the Ravens in 2010. Some thought he might be done. Instead, he responded with a Pro Bowl flourish, galloping for 1,199 yards and averaging 4.8 yards per carry as the Broncos led the league in rushing. While Tim Tebow got the national spotlight that year, McGahee provided the every-down blows that ensured the offense had a reliable bread-and-butter option that made the club's first AFC West crown in six years possible.

## 7. LOUIS VASQUEZ, 2013

Although injuries accumulated quickly for Vasquez in 2014 and 2015, his first season in Denver was arguably the finest for a guard in Denver annals. He remains the only first-team All-Pro guard in Broncos

history, and his willingness to put team before himself showed in his flexibility in moving to right tackle when the need arose in 2014.

#### 6. DARIAN STEWART, 2015

Value is the watchword for Stewart, who signed a two-year contract to replace previous starter Rahim Moore, who had moved on to Houston in that year's free-agent period. Moore was cut by the Texans one year into his three-year contract, while Stewart immediately flourished as the final piece in the "No-Fly Zone" puzzle, earning a four-year contract extension that he signed last November. His first Pro Bowl appearance followed two months later.

#### 5. DeMARCUS WARE, 2014

Sack numbers don't measure Ware's impact on the Broncos during his three seasons with the team; his leadership was also essential to the Broncos coming together to win Super Bowl 50. Back and forearm injuries the last two years slowed him down, but Ware remained effective in short bursts and cemented his Hall of Fame status with two Pro Bowls and a dominant postseason run as the Broncos sprinted to their third world championship.

#### 4. T.J. WARD, 2014

It's easy to forget that two other safeties got more buzz leading up to the 2014 free-agency period -- Donte Whitner and Jairus Byrd. Whitner effectively replaced Ward with the Browns; Byrd got \$28 million guaranteed from the Saints. Neither is still with those teams, with Byrd being cut after three injury-marred seasons. Meanwhile, Ward powers onward, providing the thump in the box for the "No-Fly Zone." The Broncos' transition to a 3-4 alignment created a perfect sub-package role for Ward, who is effectively as much a linebacker as a safety. Few players possess his skill set, which the Broncos have used to great effect.

#### 3. EMMANUEL SANDERS, 2014

Few players delivered more in terms of value than Sanders, who lingered on the market until the end of the first wave of free agency because he had been a No. 3 wide receiver in Pittsburgh. The Broncos signed him to a three-year, \$15-million deal, and he quickly proved to be a bargain, handling the step up from No. 3 to No. 2 with aplomb while breaking every season-long career standard in his first Broncos campaign. A two-time Pro Bowler in Denver, Sanders led the Broncos in receiving yardage during the 2015 postseason that culminated in a world title.

#### 2. AQIB TALIB, 2014

At the time the Broncos signed Talib, he was coming off the best season of his career to that point. But his first five campaigns had been marred by injuries and a four-game suspension in 2012. Fortunately for the Broncos, the 2013 season that led to Talib's big contract was just the beginning, and he's only improved his on-field performance from there. With three consecutive Pro Bowls and a first-team All-Pro selection since joining the Broncos, Talib has more than lived up to his contract.

#### 1. PEYTON MANNING, 2012

Not just the best signing of the Elway era, but given the degree to which Manning transformed the franchise's trajectory, it could be considered the best free-agent pickup in NFL history -- or at least since the Packers signed Reggie White in 1993, the first year of the current free-agency system. The Broncos rolled the dice on Manning's surgically-repaired neck holding up, and once he got accustomed to the Broncos after some early ups and downs, he delivered just over two full seasons from October 2012 through November 2014 that represented his career apex. He had just enough left in his final season to push the Broncos over the goal line for their third Super Bowl win, making Manning the first quarterback to start and win Super Bowls with different franchises.