

Broncos address quarterbacks, Tony Romo speculation

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

March 14, 2017

The joshing has become all too familiar.

Reporter: "Lot of talk on Tony Romo ..."

Broncos general manager John Elway, incredulously: "Really?!"

Reporter: "Yes."

Elway: "Among whom? You?"

Reporter: "Yes. Twitter."

Elway: "Oh."

Elway can hear the noise and can see the headlines. He knows what's being said and yes, he's well aware of the cloud of speculation hovering over him. But on Monday, shortly after he introduced his latest free-agent additions, Elway took to the podium at the team's headquarters to address — again — the unsaid.

Tony Romo, the lame-duck Cowboys quarterback, is still waiting to learn his fate and whether Dallas will release him from his contract. The Broncos are still waiting, too, but they're not holding their breath.

"Tony's under contract still, last time I checked," Elway said flatly.

Denver and Houston are still regarded as the leading contenders for his services. But the prospect of the Broncos getting Romo are far from certain even if he's released.

"The Tony thing, I will just tell you this: There have been a lot of things out there that just aren't true as far as what's going on with our quarterbacks," Elway said. "That's what happens. Everything gets frothed up there. So we just continue to go down our plan and continue to stay open. When things come available, we look at them at that point in time."

Elway, as well as head coach Vance Joseph, have said they're happy with their two young quarterbacks, Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, who are due \$1.5 million in combined salary in 2017 — pennies compared to what top-flight quarterbacks like Romo make.

"We're excited about our quarterback future," Joseph said. "We got two young guys — one's a first-round pick and one's played an awful lot. So going forward we're in great shape, not just for next year. Moving forward for the next four or five years, we're in great shape at quarterback."

Missing pieces on the Broncos' roster were obvious going into the off-season and Elway had a plan to fill them. Since the start of free agency last Thursday, he's welcomed a quartet of 300-pounders to the

front lines in guard Ronald Leary, offensive tackle Menelik Watson and defensive linemen Domata Peko and Zach Kerr.

Elway held to a plan he laid out months ago, without waiting on Romo. A third quarterback will be added for depth and camp competition, Joseph said. But the priority is developing Siemian and Lynch, quarterbacks with different skill sets.

Last year, Lynch wasn't in the race to be the starter. Not really, anyway. The transition from the spread offense at Memphis that he ran was difficult for the rookie. The emphasis was on his development and footwork, as Siemian handily beat out Mark Sanchez for the No. 1 job.

Joseph, in reviewing Siemian's performance in 14 starts last season, believes he was denied full credit for what he was able to do, especially behind a porous offensive line.

"When you win nine games in the NFL, that's tough to do with two rookie quarterbacks," Joseph said. "... I am very comfortable with Trevor. He's a smart guy, he's a leader, his teammates love him and they love playing for him. So if he's the guy again, all good. If Paxton comes back and he plays better, all good."

Siemian is recovering from surgery on his left (non-throwing) shoulder but is expected to be ready by the start of organized team activities (OTAs). Lynch, meanwhile, has been working out in Florida with quarterbacks specialist Charlie Taaffe.

It's expected that Lynch will be more comfortable on the field in his second season. But a higher bar is set.

"Paxton's a young guy with great talent. But playing quarterback in the NFL, it's a lot more than talent," Joseph said. "It's leadership — whether you like it or not, it comes with leadership obligations, it comes with obviously studying it and understanding the systems. He's ready for it. He wants the challenge. He's looking forward to getting back in and going to work. It's going to be a fair open competition."

The competition is still on, regardless of what Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones does with Romo, who might be released this week when Jones fails to find a trading partner. And if he is, then the Broncos will consider him, as they've said they would.

"As I said, we're always looking at options," Elway said. "We never say never."

DeMarcus Ware announces retirement after 12 NFL seasons

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
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DeMarcus Ware's time has come. The veteran linebacker announced on Twitter Monday that he will retire from the NFL after 12 seasons.

"After a lot of thought and prayer, I've decided to accept the unknown and retire from my NFL career," he wrote next to a split image of him with the Cowboys and Broncos. "Tempting opportunities still present themselves for me to play and I feel better than I have in years. However, long-term health of quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had.

"With that, I take this opportunity to thank all of the people in my life who had a hand in molding me into a great player and the God fearing man I am today. I thank the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos for opportunities to experience what greatness feels like."

Ware, a Bronco for the past three seasons and a Cowboy the previous nine, ends his career ranked No. 8 on the NFL's all-time sack list with 138.5.

The veteran pass-rusher was signed as a free agent as one of the key pieces of John Elway's defensive overhaul in 2014. The Broncos hoped he would again be a force off the edge — he was — and not only team with fellow linebacker Von Miller, but help to mold him, too.

"DeMarcus was a great role model for Von," Elway told The Denver Post last summer. "We knew what Von could do and we knew the physical talent he had. Obviously, he had some bumps in the road there, but that's going to happen to some guys. They're young. So I think DeMarcus was a guy we thought, no question, would be a great role model for Von to get him to see what it takes to be great, what it takes to be a leader and start creating that legacy for Von."

In his three seasons in Denver, Ware totaled 81 tackles and 21.5 sacks while earning his eighth and ninth Pro Bowl selections (2014, '15). He also earned a prize that had eluded him for 10 years: a Super Bowl ring.

But as he racked up sacks and helped the Broncos' defense become a two-time leader in fewest passing yards allowed, Ware also racked up injuries. In 2015, he missed five games because of a back injury. In 2016, he missed six games because of a fractured forearm suffered early in the season as well as continued back problems.

Ware underwent surgery for a ruptured disk after this past season but said he fully intended to return. His destination remained unknown, however, as an unrestricted free agent.

Monday, after announcing his retirement, Ware received an outpouring of support from former teammates and coaches, as well as opponents.

The Broncos simply said: "See you in Canton." The Cowboys thanked him.

"DeMarcus – you are the epitome of what an NFL player should be," Elway tweeted. "Congrats on your Hall of Fame career & thank you for becoming a Bronco!"

Added former Broncos and current Rams defensive coordinator Wade Phillips: "D-Ware—a true football legend—a privilege to have been with him—HOF on and off the field—Congrats on your career! Luv U. Coach Wade."

And cornerback Aqib Talib: "Congrats on a great career!!! We gone miss you fam!!! It's been an honor and a privilege to play with you @demarcusware!!! #halloffame."

Few were as respected by opponents and as beloved by teammates as Ware. In announcing his farewell, Ware thanked those who supported him and said he begins the "journey to my next destination."

One of his stops en route surely include the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7)," he wrote.

DeMarcus Ware's career sacks by quarterback

(Figures in Italics include playoff totals)

Quarterback	Sacks
Eli Manning	14.5
Donovan McNabb	8.5
Alex Smith	7
Michael Vick	6.5
Rex Grossman	6
Drew Brees	5
Tom Brady	4.5
Marc Bulger	4
Matt Hasselbeck	4
Kevin Kolb	4
Aaron Rodgers	4
Cam Newton	4
Matt Ryan	3.5
Brett Favre	3
Josh Freeman	3
Colin Kaepernick	3
Jon Kitna	3
Jason Campbell	3
Jake Delhomme	3
Joe Flacco	3
Matt Schaub	3
Andrew Luck	3
Ben Roethlisberger	2.5
Shaun Hill	2.5
Matt Moore	2
Mark Sanchez	2

Vince Young	2
Mark Brunell	2
Matt Cassel	2
Sam Bradford	2
Matthew Stafford	1.5
Trent Edwards	1.5
Kerry Collins	1
Todd Collins	1
Jay Cutler	1
Andy Dalton	1
Jay Feeley	1
Philip Rivers	1
Ryan Fitzpatrick	1
Jeff Garcia	1
Bruce Gradkowski	1
Kurt Warner	1
Matt Leinart	1
Peyton Manning	1
Jamie Martin	1
Josh McCown	1
Carson Palmer	1
Tim Rattay	1
John Skelton	1
Geno Smith	1
Russell Wilson	1
Derek Anderson	1
Teddy Bridgewater	1
Marcus Mariota	1
Brandon Weeden	0.5
Nick Foles	0.5
Logan Thomas	0.5

Domata Peko, Zach Kerr central to fixing Broncos run D; updates Kayvon Webster, Vance Walker

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
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Full of energy and excitement, Domata Peko and Zach Kerr began their first day as Broncos on Monday eager to be the solution to one of Denver's problems. Broncos general manager John Elway was tired of watching his defense get pushed around in the run game so he signed two of the biggest defensive linemen on market.

"It's been a focus for us," Elway said. "Getting more physical on both sides of the ball. We feel like we've done that. It's a good start."

Peko, 32, is the leading candidate to replace recently departed Sylvester Williams at nose tackle. Broncos head coach Vance Joseph is hoping that Peko has the same fire as when they were together in Cincinnati from 2014-15.

"He's a big man that understands his job description," Joseph said.

Peko, 6-foot-3, 325 pounds, is expected to assume a leadership position as he did in Cincinnati. He's also excited to play with his younger cousin, Kyle Peko. But his most important role is helping stop the run.

"That's where I see myself here, being a strong nose in the middle holding the point on pass-rush downs and being able to get loose and make some plays," said Peko, who also had interest from the Eagles, 49ers, Bengals and Vikings. "I like to run sideline-to-sideline. I like to run around and make plays on screens and reverses."

Peko is durable, having missed just five games in his career.

Kerr, 6-2, 334 pounds, is a different type of linemen. He played nose tackle in Indianapolis, but was shuffled to different spots on the line. He'll likely compete for playing time at defensive end and sub-packages at the nose tackle.

"He has a high ceiling," Elway said. "We've liked him for a long time. We feel like he really has a chance to fit what we do well. He gets up the field, he can rush the passer, plays hard and chases the ball."

Broncos UFAs. Denver still has eight unrestricted free agents on the open market after DeMarcus Ware's retirement and Williams' signing. Elway said the Broncos are still interested in re-signing end Vance Walker and linebacker Dekoda Watson if they can agree to terms. There's not as much optimism in signing cornerback Kayvon Webster, a top reserve and special teams standout.

"My understanding is that Kayvon wants to play a little bit more," Elway said. "He's out there exploring the market."

Webster met with the Rams and defensive coordinator Wade Phillips Monday.

Broncos sign OLB. Veteran outside linebacker Kasim Edebali, 27, signed a one-year deal. Edebali, 6-foot-2, 253-pounds, played defensive end in the Saints 4-3 scheme since joining the team in 2014 as a college free agent out of Boston College. In 48 games (two starts), he had 54 tackles and eight sacks. Edebali will likely be a special teams and rotational defensive player fighting for snaps behind Von Miller, Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett at outside linebacker.

Broncos sign former Saints OLB Kasim Edebali

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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As the Broncos officially said goodbye to DeMarcus Ware, they signed veteran outside linebacker Kasim Edebali to a one-year contract Monday. Edebali is expected to provide depth at outside linebacker.

Edebali, 6-foot-2, 253 pounds, played defensive end in the Saints 4-3 scheme since joining the team in 2014 as a college free agent out of Boston College. In 48 games (two starts), he had 54 tackles and eight sacks. He also played special teams.

The Saints declined to tender Edebali, 27, a qualifying offer as a restricted free agent, which allowed him to sign with any team.

Edebali will likely be a rotational player fighting for playing time behind Von Miller, Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett at outside linebacker. He'll likely be counted on to play special teams, too.

The Broncos may be losing cornerback Kayvon Webster, a key reserve on the self-titled "No Fly Zone" secondary and a special teams captain.

CB Kayvon Webster to sign two-year deal with Los Angeles Rams

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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Former Broncos cornerback Kayvon Webster announced Monday evening that he is signing with the Los Angeles Rams, reuniting him with defensive coordinator Wade Phillips. After spending the day visiting with the team, Webster accepted a two-year deal, an NFL source confirmed.

“Official a Ram! Los Angeles what’s good time to show up and show out! Grind hard stay focused thankful,” Webster tweeted before thanking his former teammates in an Instagram post.

“Denver,” he wrote, “I will forever have a place in my heart for ya lots of great memories with my brothers I will have for a lifetime, new direction new era! RAMS NATION!”

Webster, an unrestricted free agent, spent the day visiting with the Rams after arriving late Sunday.

A 2013 third-round pick by the Broncos out of South Florida, Webster was a key reserve on the team’s “No Fly Zone” secondary and a core member — and captain — of special teams. In the last four seasons, Webster played 54 games (two starts) and totaled 63 tackles, one interception, 14 pass-breakups and one forced fumble. In 2015, he tied the team lead with nine special-teams tackles and last season played 252 special-teams snaps (66.1 percent).

The Broncos had said they were interested in trying to keep Webster as a free agent, but he generated interest elsewhere on the open market and wanted a greater role on defense, something he wouldn’t have received with the Broncos’ depth on the secondary.

“We love Kayvon and he’s done a heck of a job for us,” Broncos general manager John Elway said prior to Webster’s signing. “Obviously that is position that we’re pretty deep in. My understanding is that Kayvon wants to play a little bit more. He’s out there exploring the market.”

DeMarcus Ware announces retirement

By Mike Klis

9News

March 14, 2017

DeMarcus Ware, a certain future member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, announced his retirement Monday.

Ware played 12 seasons, nine with the Dallas Cowboys, the last three with the Denver Broncos.

Ware leaves the game with 138 ½ sacks, No. 8 on the all-time list – one behind Jason Taylor for seventh place and three back of Michael Strahan.

A first-round draft pick of the Dallas Cowboys out of Troy in 2005, Ware played in the first 134 games of his career, a streak of 8 ½ seasons.

Released by the Cowboys following the 2014 season, Ware signed a three-year, \$30 million contract with the Broncos.

The football gods caught up to his Greek-God body, though, as Ware missed 11 games the past two seasons with back and broken forearm injuries.

Ware, who turns 35 on July 31, had 21.5 sacks in his three seasons with the Broncos, plus 3.5 in three postseason games during the team's Super Bowl 50 run to cap the 2015 season.

He had said he wanted to play one more year with the Broncos but the two sides could not agree on a new contract.

Peyton Manning on Ware: 'Being a captain with him was a privilege'

By Mike Klis

9News

March 14, 2017

Joe DeCamillis was sitting in the hotel lobby of the Denver Broncos' hotel in Nashville, waiting to meet up with another coach for an Uber drive to dinner.

The Broncos special teams coordinator was talking about how good a player former Denver linebacker Bob Swenson was when DeMarcus Ware walked briskly by.

"Let me tell you something about that guy right there," DeCamillis said, pointing at Ware, who smiled and pointed back in acknowledgment but kept on walking. "I had that thing (Dallas Cowboys' practice bubble) fall on me, right? Injured neck. DeMarcus had his personal chef cook up seven or eight meals for (DeCamillis' wife) Dana and I. I had only been with the Cowboys 2 ½ months when it happened. He didn't know me. We weren't close buddies or anything. But he went out of his way to do that."

DeCamillis, the Cowboy's freshly hired special teams coordinator was injured when a high wind storm blew down the team's indoor practice facility in 2009. He wound up having surgery to stabilize the fractured vertebrae in his neck and back and never missed a practice. But that wasn't that point he was making.

"Tell you something else about that guy," he said. "You know that Ed Block deal they have?"

Yes, the Ed Block Award goes to the player who primarily exhibits the most courage each year, as voted on by the players. Only in 2009, Ware made sure the award didn't go to a player.

"They have a meeting to vote and DeMarcus stands up and says, 'We're giving the Ed Block to Joe De,'" DeCamillis said. "And then Jay Ratliff stands up and says, 'We're giving the Ed Block to Joe De.' And then Jason Witten stands up and says, 'We're giving the Ed Block to Joe De.' But it was DeMarcus who started it."

Ware was long gone from the lobby, as DeCamillis finished his thought.

"I tell you what, the NFL needs more people like him," he said.

Ware would get the last of his 138.5 sacks the next day against Tennessee's Marcus Mariota. He announced his retirement as an NFL player Monday, ending his 12-year career that included nine seasons with Cowboys and the last three with the Broncos.

Ware's departure from the Broncos was not surprising. His announced retirement so early in the offseason was a jolt.

From the time the Broncos placed Ware on season-ending injured reserve prior to the final game of the 2016 season, it was clear the team would move on from their veteran pass rusher. They had first-round linebacker Shane Ray sitting behind Ware for two seasons. The Broncos felt it was Ray's turn.

Although Broncos general manager John Elway and head coach Vance Joseph spoke with Ware several times at season's end, the team never extended a formal contract offer. Elway and Ware met a week ago and mutually agreed it would be best if he tested the free-agent market.

Free agency opened Thursday and though Ware, who turns 35 later this summer, said in his farewell tweet he drew interest from teams and was feeling better than ever, decided four days later to hang up his helmet for the last time.

"When DeMarcus became a Bronco three years ago, he was a big piece that helped get us over the top—an elite pass rusher who brought much needed leadership to our entire team," Elway said in a statement. "DeMarcus joined the Broncos on a mission to win a world championship. When you look at how he played during our Super Bowl 50 run, you saw how much he wanted to win a Super Bowl and how he helped lift our team to a World Championship by coming up big in key moments, especially in the playoffs."

Ware was good in each of his three seasons with the Broncos.

There were three games, though, when he was great. Ware was at his best during the Broncos three postseason games of 2015.

First was the home playoff game against Pittsburgh. Ware had a 13-yard sack of Big Ben Roethlisberger, plus the game-turning fumble recovery in the fourth quarter.

Next – and this may have been the best game Ware ever played – was the AFC Championship against the New England Patriots. Ware was credited with not one hit on quarterback Tom Brady, not two hits. Ware hit Brady SEVEN times.

He could not be blocked.

And then, finally Super Bowl 50. Ware delivered the team speech the night before. He then had two sacks and four hits on Cam Newton.

"I played against DeMarcus and played with him," former Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning said in a statement Monday evening. "I played against DeMarcus and played with him. It was an honor and a privilege to have done both."

"Being a teammate with DeMarcus and being a captain of the team was a real privilege for me. DeMarcus loved football. He loved everything about it. He loved putting the work in, loved helping the young players and of course loved playing on Sundays."

"I wish him all the best. He truly is one of a kind."

It's shocking to consider. Manning only played four seasons for the Broncos, and Ware for three, but they were two of the best leaders the Denver franchise ever had. And now in a 12-month span, both retired.

Still don't think the Broncos are in transition?

There was a little more glow around the Broncos with Ware in the building the past three years. A consummate professional. A mature leader. A warm soul with a great smile.

"We're all fortunate to have DeMarcus finish his career in a Denver Broncos uniform," Elway said. "We thank him for everything he did as a player and in the community, and we look forward to celebrating his Hall of Fame induction."

Broncos fan who had surgery told she'll lose season tickets for not attending games

By Kyle Clark

9News

March 14, 2017

How's this for a Catch-22: if you want to sell your Denver Broncos season tickets, you're encouraged to sell through the Broncos Ticket Exchange, and as we found out this year, if you used the system to sell your tickets to all the games this past season, the Broncos know you never sat in your seat, and just revoked your season tickets.

"We did get a letter over the weekend, my husband did, saying that our Broncos tickets had been taken away," said former season ticket holder Susie Brinck. "I was horrified. We've had these tickets since the 60s. We've gone to the games since then. I used to go with my dad, they were my dad's tickets."

Health problems got the best of Brinck, and perhaps the same could be said for the Broncos in 2016.

"I've had a couple hip replacements and a pending knee surgery that I wasn't able to go the games. My husband didn't want to go without me because he knew I loved the games," said Brinck. "I really was uncomfortable going up and down the stairs, it's very hard for me."

Her kids would have gone, but she said one is on the Western Slope and the other in San Francisco.

Their seats are...or were in the seventh row of the southeast stands, around the 25-yard-line.

"They're really decent seats," said Brinck. "If they sell our tickets, I'll be very upset."

Her story is like other season ticket holders who have reached out to Next; fans who sold all their games on the Broncos Ticket Exchange website.

"I guess they checked our account to see how many tickets we had sold, which I didn't think was any of their business because they're our tickets," said Brinck. "We, I do not believe, have any paperwork that says we can and cannot sell tickets. They've always said if you cannot go, please sell your tickets through this site."

The Broncos have participated in the Ticket Exchange, an NFL Ticketmaster, since 2006. Season ticket holders can post their seats for sale, at whatever price they choose. Once they're sold, the buyer is charged the price plus a commission. The season ticket holder's account is credited the sale amount and the Ticket Exchange pockets 10 to 15 percent.

"The Broncos are also making money off of the tickets that we sell, that are ours," said Brinck. "Doesn't sit well. It's not fair. If they look back at our track history since the 60s, they can see we've gone to all the games. They can see that we've been there through thick and thin. I've gone there through snowstorms, rain, sat and got sunburned."

Theoretically, if Brinck had sold her tickets on Craigslist or to her neighbor, the Broncos never would have known they never went to one game. Then again, if you don't sell on the Ticket Exchange, and the person in your seat causes problems, the season ticket holder runs the risk of losing their seats.

The Broncos told Next that they don't know how many tickets haven't been renewed yet. There are expected to be several hundred non-renewals, which would make season tickets available to new people. The team will review valid reasons from season ticket holders, like Brink, who'd like to object to the decision.

Next Questions: Broncos PR guy answers your questions about not renewing season tickets

By Kyle Clark

9News

March 14, 2017

A Broncos audit showed that about 200 season ticket holders did not attend a single game last season, according to the team.

The organization has decided not to renew licenses for those fans, and therefore open up positions for the 75,000 people on the waiting list.

Next reached out to Patrick Smyth, the Vice President of Public Relations for the Denver Broncos, who provided these answers to the questions you've been asking:

1. How many season ticket holders had their season tickets not renewed by the Broncos?

We're still in the renewal process and have not finalized an exact number. There are expected to be several hundred non-renewals this year, which will allow us to offer upgraded seat locations to many current season ticket holders, make season tickets available to fans on our waiting list for the first time in six years and increase our very limited single-game ticket allotment.

2. How were you able to track season ticket holders that did not attend one game?

In an effort to get more tickets in the hands of Broncos fans, we were able to track those who did not attend even a single game through a review of the secondary market.

3. If a season ticket holder sells their tickets on StubHub or Craigslist or to a neighbor, would you be able to track their usage like you can with the Broncos Ticket Exchange?

We're able to monitor numerous services and websites that provide us with a review of the secondary market for Broncos tickets, including season ticket account holders who did not attend even a single game.

4. If a season ticket holder believes they have a valid reason for not attending in 2016, what are their options?

We understood there would be special circumstances that would result in an account holder not attending a game in 2016, including military deployment and personal health issues. Our ticket office is working directly with affected accounts to review those situations. If any affected account holders have any questions, we encourage them to reach out to our ticket office at 720-258-3333 or tickets@broncos.nfl.net.

If the Broncos deem they have a valid reason, how do they get their seats back if they've been offered to someone on the waiting list?

Before we begin the upgrade process and then offer tickets to fans on the waiting list for the first time in six years, we have to complete our renewals, including any appeals of licenses not renewed.

5. When did the Broncos first offer the Broncos Ticket Exchange?

2006

6. I see the NFL Ticket Exchange has a commission of 10% or 15%. What dictates if it is 10% or 15%? And how much do the Broncos get from the 10% or 15%

That's a private contract, and as per club policy, we don't disclose those terms

DeMarcus Ware has case as first-ballot Hall of Famer

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

March 14, 2017

DeMarcus Ware announced his retirement Monday after 12 NFL seasons, nine Pro Bowl selections and 138.5 career sacks.

Ware posted on Twitter that he had "tempting" offers to continue playing, but "long-term health and quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had."

Ware even quoted the same Scripture verse -- 2 Timothy 4:7, that "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." -- as Peyton Manning did when he announced his retirement last year.

Manning is a lock for enshrinement in the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2021. And Ware will now be eligible for, after a mandatory wait of five years, the Hall's Class of 2022.

Beyond a franchise quarterback with multiple Super Bowl wins, there are few first-ballot locks for a gold jacket. In the end, Hall of Famers are Hall of Famers once they receive the honor, one no more worthy than the other. As Deacon Jones has told every class of enshrinees "this is the only team you can't be cut from."

With that said, the Hall's Board of Selectors have begun to honor edge rushers plenty. Jason Taylor of the Class of 2017 was selected in his first year of eligibility.

Ware is eighth all time in sacks and ends his career just one behind Lawrence Taylor on the career list, three sacks behind Hall of Famer Michael Strahan, who is No. 6 all time with 141.5 sacks.

In fact, all of the six players who are retired who are in front of Ware on the all-time sacks list are Hall of Famers -- Bruce Smith, Reggie White, Kevin Greene, Chris Doleman, Strahan and Taylor. Julius Peppers, at No. 5 all time with 143.5 sacks, is the only active player with more career sacks than Ware.

Broncos defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said of Ware: "I've coached guys who are in the Hall of Fame, been around guys who are in the Hall of Fame and DeMarcus is absolutely a Hall of Famer just as soon as he can go in. Look at what he's done, how he's done it, how he's carried himself, worked at his craft. Just how he's performed. I'm a better coach just for having been around him."

Of that list Smith, White, Doleman and Taylor were voted for enshrinement in their first year of eligibility, and all since 2006. But even the most proficient of the non-quarterbacks have to wait at times.

Strahan was a two-time finalist before he was selected, Kevin Greene -- third all time in sacks with 160 -- was a five-time finalist before he was selected for enshrinement, Derrick Thomas was a five-time finalist, Charles Haley was a six-time finalist and Richard Dent was a seven-time finalist.

But as the league has become more and more pass oriented, the most prominent edge rushers have made their way into Canton a little more quickly, with at least one prominent sack artist having been in each of the last four classes.

Strahan was in the Class of 2014, Haley in the Class of '15, Green in the Class of '16 and Taylor this year.

Ware had offseason back surgery and as recently as Super Bowl week had said he felt like a "new man" and "I definitely want to play, I've got a lot of passion."

He was asked then about his standing on the league's all-time list and his ability to move up several spots with a good season, but said at the time he wanted another chance at a Super Bowl ring. Ware was a captain when the Broncos won Super Bowl 50.

"People say if you get four sacks you pass this guy, or if you get five sacks you pass that guy -- four-this, five-that," Ware told ESPN in Houston. "But my biggest thing is always I want a ring while I'm sacking the heck out of the quarterback."

Ware, who will turn 35 on July 31, has rehabbed at the Broncos' complex this offseason and became an unrestricted free agent last Thursday. Ware had missed 11 games over the last two seasons combined and said at the Super Bowl he was at a point when he had to consider "how I feel after football."

Broncos outside linebacker Von Miller endorsed Ware's Canton candidacy.

"DeMarcus is going in the Hall of Fame right after he's done playing," Miller said. "Whatever the wait is, when he's done, he's going in. There's not an argument."

DeMarcus Ware, 8th all time in sacks, announces retirement

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
March 14, 2017

DeMarcus Ware announced via Twitter on Monday that he is retiring.

Before making the decision to retire, Ware was in Los Angeles and met with the Rams over the weekend, sources told ESPN's Field Yates.

Ware was saluted in tweets by John Elway, the Denver Broncos and the Dallas Cowboys. Ware is Dallas' all-time sacks leader, with 117.

Ware came to the Broncos as part of Denver's free-agency binge in 2014, when cornerback Aqib Talib, wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders and safety T.J. Ward were also signed. All four players were selected to at least one Pro Bowl since then.

Linebacker Von Miller said a big part of his rebound from his 2013 suspension for violating the league's substance abuse policy to a perennial defensive player of the year candidate has "been because of DeMarcus. I have so many reasons to thank him."

Both Miller and Talib congratulated Ware on his announcement in separate Instagram posts.

Ware, 34, has been a team captain in his time with the Broncos and universally respected in the locker room. He said in the days before Super Bowl LI that he planned to return from back surgery that sent him to injured reserve just before the regular-season finale.

Back troubles have been a part of his career, but especially the past two seasons with the Broncos. His 2016 season was especially difficult, as he missed most of the offseason work with an infection in his back that required repeated IV antibiotics to treat. He also missed five games with a fractured forearm last season.

A nine-time Pro Bowl selection, Ware will turn 35 in July and is eighth all time in sacks with 138½.

Ware needed one sack to tie newly minted Hall of Famer Jason Taylor, and with four sacks he would have passed Michael Strahan and move into sixth place all time.

In nine seasons with the Cowboys, Ware earned Pro Bowl honors every year from 2006 to 2012. But he had a career-low six sacks in 2013 and missed the first three games with a quadriceps strain. Dallas released him after the 2013 season.

With the Cowboys, Ware had a streak of seven seasons with at least 11 sacks, recording 20 sacks in 2008 and 19½ sacks in 2011.

The Cowboys selected Ware in the first round of the 2005 draft with the 11th pick.

DeMarcus Ware will leave a Peyton Manning-like void

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

March 14, 2017

As the Denver Broncos sifted through the playoff miss that was their 2016 season, hindsight provided its usual clear-eyed review.

As he leaned back in a chair, just days before Super Bowl LI and just a few weeks after he announced he was stepping away from coaching, former coach Gary Kubiak said there were plenty of reasons for the Broncos' first stay-at-home postseason since 2010 -- injuries as well as some football matters such as inconsistencies in the offensive line and run defense -- but as he reviewed those reasons earlier this year, he added one to punctuate the sentence.

"And when Peyton retired, that's a big presence around your team," Kubiak said. "I thought we have a strong locker room, good leaders, good character, but Peyton is a big void."

It was expected, really. How could it not be a void? The Broncos didn't sign Peyton Manning with the level of expectations they had because he was just another guy in a helmet.

No, Manning was a no-doubt Hall of Famer before he ever threw a pass for the Broncos, before he helped the team win four division titles, go to two Super Bowls and set the league's single-season scoring record along the way. When he wasn't in the locker room anymore things were vastly different and the team's offense never really worked through it.

Now it will be the Broncos defense's turn. DeMarcus Ware took to social media Monday to announce his retirement from football to get on with the rest of his life.

Ware, too, had that Hall of Fame air about him before he ever put on a Broncos' helmet. But he was part of three of those division titles in Denver and resurrected some of his best football in the team's postseason run in 2015, finishing with a win in Super Bowl 50.

Oh, and he just might have saved Von Miller's career -- ask Miller about it. Miller looked like an immensely gifted player who had lost his way off the field in 2013 when he was suspended for six games as his name kept popping up in off-the-field stories about things a long way from being good at football.

"I have so many reasons to thank him," Miller has said. "... I can't even count the ways DeMarcus has helped me. Just being around him, seeing how he does it, on the field, off the field, you can't ever say thank you enough for that."

And Ware will not be in the Broncos' locker room when the team reconvenes. Ware was looking at a reduced role if he re-signed with the Broncos as an unrestricted free agent.

The Broncos believe, from a football perspective, it's Shane Ray's time. The former first-round pick has waited his turn and enters his third season carrying the expectations he will be an impact player, a starter in the team's defense.

But the Broncos wanted Ware, a team captain in each of his three seasons with the team, back in the locker room if both sides could agree on the money and the role. Broncos football boss John Elway had asked Ware to take a pay cut last season. Ware said at the Super Bowl that new Broncos coach Vance Joseph had told him he was "part of the equation," but Ware added at the time he wanted to see what that meant specifically.

It's always difficult for an injured player to be a leader, even the best because as Broncos' Ring of Famer Rod Smith has always said "you can't lead in the training room. I had the same brain when I was hurt, but I wasn't on the field. You have to be on the field, guys have to see with their eyes before they hear you with their ears. That's just how it is."

Ware missed a combined 11 games in the past two seasons, including six in 2016. But in '15 he returned after five missed games because of back troubles to do some of his best work in the team's playoff run, including two sacks in the Super Bowl.

Ware certainly wasn't the loudest voice in a defense full of Alpha players with Pro Bowl résumés and personalities to match. But Ware had what the most respected players have -- the reset button.

Ware was the defense's Manning in many ways. Kubiak has openly said he essentially handed the enforcement of the team's off-the-field behavior to Ware and Manning in that 2015 postseason. And those two players kept one of the most dialed-in teams in the franchise's history focused until it won the trophy.

Many of those players remain, like Miller, Chris Harris Jr., Aqib Talib and T.J. Ward. But it will be different for them in the season to come. Especially for Miller, who's best work as a pro has come because of daily interactions with Ware. Ware's absence will leave a void on the other side of the Broncos' locker room, a big one.

And now the defense will have to fill it better than the team's offense did.

Why pass-rushers have become NFL draft's safest bet

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

March 14, 2017

The rarest find in any NFL draft is a guarantee.

Before spread offenses ruled the college football landscape, an offensive lineman who had started at least 45 college games was the closest and NFL front office could come to finding a sure thing. Now, offensive linemen from spread offenses in college are, almost universally, considered projects.

Or as the Denver Broncos chief football decision-maker, John Elway, said at the scouting combine: "That's the hard part any more, that they're not as ready when they come out of college. The game is so much different."

So, say hello to the new boss and watch the edge rushers race up the draft board. Because scouts, personnel executives and many coaches in the NFL believe the proven sack artists in almost any shape, size or 40-yard dash times, have the skills that translate quickly and -- perhaps most importantly -- reliably.

"Young guys who have that knack, that something, to get the quarterback can do it in the pros," said Broncos outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware, a member of the 100-sack club in the NFL. "They have to develop their games, their counter moves and everything, but those guys who know how to win that battle and get the quarterback can do it in the league if they do the work. But they can contribute right away. Look at Von."

The Broncos made Von Miller the second pick of the 2011 draft and he was the first player Elway selected in his current role. At 6-foot-2 5/8-inches tall and 246 pounds at the 2011 scouting combine, Miller did not have the prototypical size of an edge rusher.

But he has rare flexibility, quickness and creates power for a player his size because of his ability to create leverage against bigger players. He also had 33 sacks in his college career, including 17 as a junior and 10.5 as a senior.

Those skills translated into a perennial Defensive Player of the Year candidate who has had at least 11 sacks in five of his six seasons -- 73.5 in his career.

Then there's Elvis Dumervil, who has been one of the leading examples how a player's ability to create sacks can even outweigh the traditional measurables at the position. Dumervil entered the 2010 draft at 5-11 3/8, 257 pounds, which was considered too short to be an NFL defensive linemen.

But Dumervil, with quality balance, a big wingspan to create space with the offensive lineman, and that "it" factor, has done nothing but sack quarterbacks at every level.

He had 78 in his prep career, including 30 in both his junior and senior seasons. He had 10 sacks as a junior at Louisville and 20 as a senior. Dumervil, who was just released by Baltimore, has two 17-sack seasons in the NFL, 99 for his career.

"Those things do translate," Elway has said. "Guys who get the quarterback transition to the league."

Pick a year, any year and you'll find them. Vic Beasley Jr.'s 13 sacks at Clemson in 2013, nine in 2014, were a preview -- even with his struggles as a rookie with four sacks in 2015 -- to his league-leading total (15.5) this past season for Atlanta.

Shaquil Barrett was missing some of the workout numbers after his 12 sacks at Colorado State in 2013. The Broncos signed him as an undrafted rookie, and after a stint on the practice squad, he has continued to carve out prime playing time in one of the best pass-rush groups in the NFL. And it doesn't always matter when the pass rush light goes on.

After one sack in each of his first two seasons at Illinois, Whitney Mercilus had 16 sacks for the Illini in 2011. Despite having started just one season in college, that glimpse of a pass-rusher in waiting was enough to make him a first-round pick by Houston, where he's had a 12-sack season among his 37.5 over five seasons.

Every season there are players a tick slow on the stopwatch, not quite tall enough or explosive enough. But on the game video they get the quarterback, week after week, game after game.

Or as Rams defensive coordinator Wade Phillips has said: "Pass-rushers are pass-rushers, some guys just get there -- hands, speed, leverage, instinct, planning -- and if they get there in college, a lot of times those guys get there in the NFL."

Which is why this year's deep class of pass-rushers -- Texas A&M's Myles Garrett, Stanford's Solomon Thomas and UCLA's Takkarist McKinley and Alabama's Jonathan Allen -- could all be top-10 picks.

They are disruptive players in the defensive front, they get to the quarterback and they are, in the transition from today's college football to today's NFL, the most ready to play. So much so, Garrett could be at the top of the board when Cleveland picks at No. 1.

"I feel like I'm the best player in the draft," Garrett said. "... I feel like I'm a playmaker, so I'm not going to have to worry about that. I feel like I'm going to bring some work ethic into practice and into the weight room that will change things around (in Cleveland), and maybe be a voice of leadership that can help swing things."

And then there's McKinley: "I'm here to get the quarterback. The league now is a passing league. They need young guys who can get to the quarterback, and I feel I'm the best pass-rusher in this draft class to do that." McKinley had shoulder surgery after the combine, and it's doubtful any team whose medical staff gives any kind of recommendation would be dissuaded from taking a potential team sack leader.

"I feel like I'm the best pass-rusher in this class overall," McKinley said. "One year doesn't determine if you're the best pass-rusher. Ten-plus years determine who's the best pass-rusher. Just because I'm getting this surgery ... doesn't mean I'm not going to be the best pass-rusher, even if I don't play my rookie year. If I get 10-plus sacks my second year, third year, fourth year, fifth year, sixth year, etc..., etc..., etc..., I'm proving right there I'm the best pass-rusher."

And if history repeats itself, they will all get the chance to prove who's right.

Kasim Edebali could help Broncos' special teams

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

March 14, 2017

The Denver Broncos continued their free agency work Monday with New Orleans Saints defensive end Kasim Edebali at the team's complex for a visit.

Edebali, who has started just two games in his three seasons in New Orleans, would project as an outside linebacker in the Broncos' defense. The Broncos likely see him as a potential special teams regular as well.

Edebali has 18 special teams tackles in his three seasons with the Saints. Broncos outside linebacker Dekoda Watson, who is an unrestricted free agent, led the team in special teams tackles this past season with 11. Denver hasn't been all that aggressive in trying to bring back Watson, who has been gauging the market.

Edebali is headed into just his fourth season after being signed by the Saints in 2014 as an undrafted rookie. The Hamburg, Germany, native is 27 and a former team captain at Boston College.

Edebali's workout numbers prior to the 2014 draft weren't all that attention-grabbing, but he was still fairly new to football, having come to the United States in high school as part of the USA Football International Student program. Teams liked his competitiveness, and he has consistently shown himself to be a high-effort player.

Broncos add venom, vigor to the trenches

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

March 14, 2017

Domata Peko was drawn to Denver by family and familiarity.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph was on Marvin Lewis' staff in Cincinnati, where Peko spent his first 11 seasons "and he and I had a really good relationship," Peko said Monday after signing his two-year, \$7.5 million contract.

Peko also is reuniting with his cousin, Kyle Peko, a second-year nose tackle, in Denver.

"That also had a little bit to do with me coming here," Peko said, chuckling. "Kyle's my little cousin. His dad and me are first cousins. So, it's good to have another Peko in the house."

That's exactly how general manager John Elway was feeling Monday when he signed both Peko and Zach Kerr, a fourth-year D-tackle from the Colts, to beef up his D-line.

The signings grew in importance hours later when star pass-rusher DeMarcus Ware announced his retirement from the NFL after 12 seasons and 138½ sacks, eighth-most all-time.

The Broncos needed to beef up the middle of their defensive line because it proved the weak link last year after they lost Malik Jackson to free agency and Vance Walker to a season-ending knee injury in training camp.

The Broncos fell from top-5 against the run to bottom-5 and that negated their strengths: the Von Miller-led pass rush and a secondary led by All-Pro cornerbacks Chris Harris Jr. and Aqib Talib.

"Well, the NFL's kind of turned into a passing league a little bit but you still got those teams like Peko just came from the AFC North, they still like to run the ball," Kerr said.

"The Steelers will run the ball all day on you. I think that's important to be stout in the run game and have big size. ... We're trying to get some guys like Peko and myself to beef up the front.

"Obviously we've got the guys on the back end who can cover all day. You got an animal like 58 (Miller) coming off the edge. So, what we need now was some bigger guys, guys like us just to beef up the front and kind of take charge in the run game."

Although Peko and Kerr aren't the kind of splashy free agent signings Elway has become known for, his focus in free agency this year was in adding vigor and venom to both of his lines after watching the Broncos get pushed around too much last season.

On Friday, he lured guard Ron Leary out of Dallas and tackle Menelik Watson out of Oakland, grabbing two players off two of the league's best offensive lines. On Monday, he signed Peko and Kerr to two-year deals.

"It's been a focus for us ... getting more physical on both sides of the ball," Elway said. "We feel like we've done that and so it's been a good start."

Also Monday, the Broncos signed unrestricted free agent outside linebacker Kasim Edebali to a one-year deal. The fourth-year player appeared in all 48 possible regular-season games in his first three seasons with the Saints.

LEFT TACKLE: The Broncos still haven't settled on their left tackle after jettisoning Russell Okung. They restructured right tackle Donald Stephenson's contract over the weekend, giving him \$2 million now and another \$2 million if he makes the 53-man roster in camp. Stephenson can play on the left side as can Ty Sambrailo, who's been bothered by injuries the past two years.

"It's still open and we're not done," Elway said. "Watson's played some left tackle and we're going to take a peek at Stephenson there. And so we feel like we have some different options. We're not done yet. Last time I heard we don't go to camp until July, so we don't have to have that fixed just yet."

ROMO RUMORS: Once again, Elway demurred when asked if he'd be interested in acquiring Tony Romo.

"Tony's under contract still," Elway said, avoiding any hint of tampering with the Cowboys QB. "Nothing's changed since the combine (when Elway said he likes young QBs Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch but would "kick the tires" on any available veterans).

"I'll just tell you this: there's a lot of things out there that aren't true as far as what's going on with our quarterbacks," Elway said. "That's what happens. Everything gets frothed up. We just continue to go down our path and that's to continue to stay open and when things come available, we'll look at them at that point."

DeMarcus Ware announces his retirement from NFL

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
March 14, 2017

DeMarcus Ware won't be returning to either the Dallas Cowboys or the Denver Broncos as expected.

The 12-year NFL veteran is instead retiring from the NFL.

Ware announced his decision Monday on Twitter.

Next to a split image of the Cowboys and Broncos, Ware wrote, "After a lot of thought and prayer, I've decided to accept the unknown and retire from my NFL career. Tempting opportunities still present themselves for me to play and I feel better than I have in years. However, long-term health of quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had."

Ware's decision is a shocker.

Just two months ago, he scoffed at those suggesting he might have played his last NFL game after he missed the Broncos' season finale to undergo lower back surgery.

Hours before Ware announced his retirement, Broncos general manager John Elway said, "He's going to test the market to see what's out there. I told him that's probably the best thing to do at this point in time and we'll stay in touch and see where he is."

After he announced his retirement, the Broncos tweeted, "See you in Canton."

"DeMarcus, you are the epitome of what an NFL player should be," Elway tweeted. "Congrats on your Hall of Fame career & thank you for becoming a Bronco!"

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said: "DeMarcus was everything we could have ever wanted in a player, a person and a representative of the Cowboys organization. He was one of the most dominant NFL players at his position in his era, and he was one of the most dynamic players in the history of the Dallas Cowboys.

"We wish nothing but the best for DeMarcus and his family, and we appreciate and respect his contributions to the NFL and to our team."

In his Twitter post, Ware thanked "all the people in my life who had a hand in molding me into a great player and the God fearing man I am today. I thank the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos for opportunities to experience what greatness feels like."

Ware retires with 138½ sacks, eighth on the career list.

The Cowboys' all-time sacks leader with 117, Ware joined the Broncos as part of Elway's defensive makeover in 2014 along with safety T.J. Ward and cornerback Aqib Talib.

Von Miller credited Ware with helping him become a superstar and Super Bowl MVP.

Late last season, Miller told The Associated Press: "The type of impact that he had on my life, you could just look at my career those years that he was here. If you look at 2011, 2012 and 2013 and then you look at the years that DeMarcus Ware was here — 2014, 2015, 2016 — and on the field it may not be a big change, but the person that I am and the stuff that I've been exposed to sure was.

"You always want to be a leader. You think you know what it takes and you think you have great ideas, but until you're like three feet away from it and you see like nah, he really doesn't do that or he does this instead of that. And it can just be the little subtle stuff like he comes in and watches film on his phone, it's the little stuff that you observe, that you take," Miller said.

"Like, I don't have to come in every day and make an announcement. I can just come in and do my work and say what needs to be said and get things done. I think I just had to calm down and what calmed me down was really just seeing how it was really supposed to be," Miller said. "I was full speed before, 100 percent. DeMarcus, he's like that, too, though. But just not all the time, you get to see there's a time and a place for everything, and in DeMarcus I got to see a great example of that."

Ware totaled 81 tackles and 21½ sacks in Denver and had a terrific playoff performance two seasons ago with a dozen quarterback hits during the Broncos' run to their Super Bowl 50 title.

Injuries took their toll, however. He missed five games in 2015 with a back injury that first flared up in Dallas, and six games last season with a broken forearm and more back troubles.

Ware received an outpouring of support from players and coaches alike after announcing his retirement.

"D-Ware, a true football legend," Rams defensive coordinator Wade Phillips wrote. "HOF on and off the field."

Broncos' DeMarcus Ware announces retirement amid free agency period

By Troy Renck
KMGH
March 14, 2017

DeMarcus Ware stood at his locker on multiple occasions last season, talking more like a coach than a player. He missed time with a fractured right forearm. He finished the season on the injured reserve with a bulging disc in his back that required surgery.

Ware, 34, talked bravely of continuing his career. But as the days became weeks this offseason, the question was simple: What for?

Ware won a Super Bowl ring in 2016. He finished with 138.5 sacks, ranking eighth all-time. He boasts a Hall of Fame resume, and on Monday decided it was time to retire rather than pursue a limited role with the Broncos or another team. It's likely he will have avenues in broadcast available after hosting his own show on NFL Network last year.

"After a lot of thought and prayer, I've decided to accept the unknown and retire from my NFL career," Ware wrote in a statement he posted on Twitter. "Tempting opportunities still present themselves for me to play and I feel better than I have in years. However, long term health and quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had."

Ware made nine Pro Bowls. He joined the Broncos in 2015 as part of a free agent coup that included cornerback Aqib Talib and safety T.J. Ward. His motivation for coming to Denver was simple: win a championship. In 2016, the Broncos upset the Carolina Panthers in Super Bowl 50. Teammates credit speeches by Ware and quarterback Peyton Manning the night before the game for inspiring them. By defensive teammates, Ware was viewed as a legend.

"A great leader. He just put in the work non-stop to be great," All-Pro cornerback Chris Harris Jr. told Denver7. "And when he spoke people stopped and listened."

Ware played his best when it mattered most, notching 3.5 sacks during the Broncos' playoff run. He brought energy, intelligence and calm in the storm.

"DeMarcus was my favorite teammate. I learned so much from him, about football and life," linebacker Brandon Marshall told Denver7. "I am going to miss him, and his jokes and laughter. It was always a pleasure being around him. He always made me feel like I could come and pick his brain about anything. He is a great leader and an even better man. I am happy for him."

Ware formed a vicious tandem with outside linebacker Von Miller. As much as Ware helped Miller on the field, he became more of an asset off it. With Miller at a crossroads in his career following injuries and suspension, Ware provided guidance about everything from diet to sleeping habits. Miller said Monday that "God brought DeMarcus into my life when I needed him the most."

"What has DeMarcus meant to me? I could sit here all day and write a book, the moments where DeMarcus has impacted my life," Miller explained in December. "I have been in the league six years and three of those were with DeMarcus. And if you look at my years with DeMarcus and look at the type of player I was and the type of person that I am now during DeMarcus' tenure is totally different than I was."

Ware finished with 21.5 sacks with with the Broncos. He made the Pro Bowl twice in Denver.

"DeMarcus - you are the epitome of what an NFL player should be. Congrats on your Hall of Fame career & thank you for becoming a Bronco!" Tweeted general manager John Elway.

Former Broncos defensive coordinator Wade Phillips called Ware a Hall of Famer in every way. He told Denver7 on Monday, "DeMarcus was the easiest guy to coach ever. Just had to tell him to sic'em and he did the rest."

Gary Kubiak, who led the Broncos to the Super Bowl win, leaned on Ware to set the tone in the locker room and in meetings. He trusted Ware's influence on teammates.

"He's one of the finest human beings you'll ever come across," Kubiak said. "He was a once-in-a-generation player. I will always remember his talks to our team before the AFC Championship game and the Super Bowl. It was very powerful. It was a privilege to coach DeMarcus."

Ware offered thanks to those who shaped his career before confirming he is walking away from football.

"I will miss my teammates, coaches and fans, who supported me over the years. I am hanging up my cleats and beginning the journey to my next destination."

Broncos GM John Elway remains comfortable at QB position, not motivated to deal for Tony Romo

By Troy Renck

KMGH

March 14, 2017

With Twitter set to explode at his response, John Elway patiently answered the question about the team's interest in Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo. Elway never lost his poise. He is open to everything, but not panicking over anything. Elway exercised disciplined last year, waiting out San Francisco regarding Colin Kaepernick before deciding to move on.

"Yeah [it's similar], because we feel good where we are. There are so many things...Everything gets ratcheted. I will just tell you this: There's been a lot of things out there that are not true as far as what's going with our quarterbacks. So that's what happens. Everything gets frothed up," Elway said when I asked him about last season's run at Kaepernick. "We just continue to go down our plan and that is to stay open and if something comes available we look at it at that time."

Speaking publicly for the first time since the NFL Combine, Elway remained bullish on Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch. Coach Vance Joseph echoed those sentiments, saying he was "comfortable" if Siemian started and that Lynch was ready "for the challenge of an open competition."

Elway and Joseph talked in concert, showing no inclination to trade for Romo. Those covering the Cowboys have hinted at a resolution this week, suggesting owner Jerry Jones recognizes that trading Romo, especially without a restructured contract, is unlikely.

Romo, too, is said to be growing more anxious. He thought he was going to become a free agent last Thursday. He would like to begin exploring his future options. Houston and Denver continue to be the teams expected to pursue Romo. Houston could draft a young quarterback, and sign Romo. If the Broncos engage in serious talks with Romo, negotiating his salary down to a manageable number -- in the \$10 million range with incentives for games played, etc. -- is paramount. The Broncos would want protection against injury for a soon-to-be 37-year-old who has started four games over the last two seasons because of collarbone and back injuries.

"Tony is under contract. The last time I checked he's still under contract. Like I said, nothing has changed since the combine," Elway said. "We are excited about the two guys we have here. We feel like we are in a good space there."

Footnotes

Elway indicated that the team continues to look at options at left tackle. There's no guarantee the starter is on the roster. Menelik Watson and Donald Stephenson are potential candidates as it stands now. But there figure to be more players added through the draft or free agency. ... The Broncos remain interested in re-signing linebacker Dekoda Watson and defensive end Vance Walker, who is moving well in his recovery from major knee surgery. ... DeMarcus Ware is testing the market. The Broncos have left it open-ended with him. Speculation remains that he could end up in Dallas to finish his career.

Broncos sign free agent defensive end Kasim Edebali

By Troy Renck

KMGH

March 14, 2017

The Broncos continue to seek ways to bolster their defensive line and add depth, signing former New Orleans Saints defensive end Kasim Edebali on Monday.

The Saints declined to tender Edebali a contract last week, making him a free agent. Edebali, who projects more as an outside linebacker in a 3-4 scheme, joined the Saints in 2014 as an undrafted free agent. He made only two career starts, but has posted 8.5 sacks. He also helped anchor the Saints' special teams over the past three seasons, posting 14 tackles and playing in all 48 games.

Edebali, 6-foot-2, 253 pounds, grew up in Germany, picking up football after watching the Ravens face the Giants in Super Bowl 35. As a member of an international student program, Edebali matriculated to Kimball Union Academy in New Hampshire. He signed with Boston College, impressing coaches with his athleticism and work ethic.

The Broncos like to sprinkle in veterans on special teams, especially on coverage units, rather than rely on miscast rookies. They are already bracing for the loss of defensive back Kayvon Webster, arguably their best special teams tackler, to the Los Angeles Rams. He is visiting the Rams on Monday.

Broncos revoke season tickets from lifelong fan who had them since 1995

By Greg Nieto

KDVR

March 14, 2017

Hundreds of Broncos season ticket holders had their tickets revoked last week, including a lifelong fan who has had them since 1995.

Eddie Donahoe recently got an email from the team saying his tickets had been revoked because he sold two of the six season on a secondary website.

Donahoe won't likely get his tickets back. The Broncos say the agreement between the team and season ticket holders is clear, but they will hear cases for fans dealing with military deployment or medical issues.

"When I was growing up, it wasn't the M&M's it was Morton and Moses," Donahoe said. "I have the utmost respect for the Bowlen family and John Elway."

The 57-year-old father and grandfather is heartbroken and a bit hopeless, saying he is not holding his breath on getting his tickets back.

"My mortgage is paid off in two months and all of of sudden I get sacked with this whole thing," Donahoe said.

In a statement, the Broncos said season tickets are "granted on a yearly basis at the sole discretion of the club."

"After careful review and consideration of our nearly 22,000 season ticket accounts -- we have informed a number of season ticket holders that their licenses will not be renewed based on their tickets not being used by them for even a single game in 2016," the team said in a statement.

"I think the Broncos care about their customers," said Candy Lewis, a longtime ticket broker running A Lewis Tickets. "I know we care about our customers."

"The Broncos have very explicitly in their terms of agreement -- it's a year-to-year renewal," Lewis said.

Lewis is confident fans with hardship cases such as medical issues or military deployment stand a chance of getting those tickets back.

Any affected account holder with questions is encouraged to reach out to the Broncos' ticket office at tickets@broncos.nfl.net or 720-258-3333.

Farewell, DeMarcus Ware, a Broncos star to appreciate

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

March 14, 2017

Half of the time I didn't know if DeMarcus Ware was just trying to pull a fast one.

Some of Ware's explanations — from his belief that red wine had kept him young to the minute details with which he studied football — sounded more like he knew the media game and wanted to give us something good.

So D-Ware checked both journalism boxes — a superb athlete who also happened to be very interesting — and, yes, I appreciate him for that.

All the time the Broncos knew Ware was committed to winning. The ex-Cowboys pass-rushing star announced his retirement Monday via Twitter. His next stop will be at the wine shop for a 1982 Bordeaux and, later, Canton, for a spot in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The nine-time Pro Bowler won Super Bowl 50 with the Broncos, and you could argue his devastation of opposing offenses in the playoffs equaled that of Von Miller.

Ware's 138.5 career sacks rank eighth all-time.

Ware's impact on the Broncos — specifically with Miller — went beyond the white lines, into the locker room and ultimately to the Super Bowl. It's possible, I suppose, that Vonnie Football would have become the superstar he is without John Elway signing Ware to a \$30-million deal in March 2014.

Possible, but unlikely. You couldn't go a week at Dove Valley without one of his teammates shouting Ware's praise or lauding his attention to detail.

No one grew more alongside Ware than Miller. Von is on a football bender for the ages with sack totals of 14, 11 and 13.5 in the past three seasons. It's no coincidence his rise coincided with the arrival of Ware, or that Ware's arrival coincided with the worst season of Miller's career, his ghostly 2013 campaign. It's not a huge stretch to say Ware did with the Broncos defense what Peyton Manning did with the Broncos offense, at least in the huddle.

The Broncos brought in Ware to sack the quarterback.

It can't be overstated how much more Ware brought to the Broncos.

DeMarcus Ware retires from NFL after 12 seasons

By Lindsay Jones

USA Today

March 14, 2017

After 138.5 career sacks over 12 seasons, and with one Super Bowl ring, outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware is retiring from the NFL.

Ware spent nine seasons with the Dallas Cowboys before finishing his career with the Denver Broncos, where he was defensive captain of the Super Bowl 50 championship team. Ware was an unrestricted free agent after his contract with the Broncos expired last week.

“After a lot of thought and prayer, I’ve decided to accept the unknown and retire from my NFL career,” Ware wrote in a post shared on his social media accounts Monday afternoon. “Tempting opportunities still present themselves for me to play, and I feel better than I have in years. However, long term health and quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had.”

Ware set career lows in sacks (four) and games played (10) in his final season for as he struggled with a back injury. He has been rehabbing from surgery at the Broncos’ facility since the season ended in January.

Ware played in his first Super Bowl the previous February, recording two sacks against the Carolina Panthers in the Broncos’ win. He had 3.5 sacks in the 2015 postseason.

Ware, a first-round pick out of Troy in 2005, had 117 sacks in his nine years with the Cowboys, including a 20-sack output in 2008. He made nine Pro Bowls, was named to the all-pro first-team four times and is a member of the NFL’s 2000s All-Decade Team.

He was second on the active sack leader list, behind Julius Peppers, when he retired and ranked eighth in NFL history.

Broncos defense faces critical pivot point with DeMarcus Ware as latest loss

By Lindsay Jones
USA Today
March 14, 2017

The Denver Broncos defense won't undergo a major overhaul in 2017, but with its leader and architect both now gone, it will certainly have a different look.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing, at least when it comes to the front seven.

Yes, the Broncos will miss the creative play calling of defensive coordinator Wade Phillips, who now is with the Los Angeles Rams, and the locker room presence of outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware, who retired on Monday after 12 seasons, including three in Denver.

But with their departures comes the chance for some major changes up front.

For all of the success of the "No Fly Zone" – the self-administered moniker adopted by the Broncos' secondary in recent season – Denver's defensive front needed a makeover. Fresh off a Super Bowl 50 win powered by their top-ranked defense, the Broncos ranked 28th against the run last year with 130.3 yards allowed per game. By the end of the season, it was no secret that the way to beat the Broncos was to run, run and run some more. It was a way to exploit Denver's biggest weakness and negate its biggest strength.

Denver let starting defensive tackle Sylvester Williams leave for the Tennessee Titans in free agency, and signed a pair of hulking interior presences, 11-year veteran Domata Peko and 26-year-old former Indianapolis Colt Zach Kerr, to take his place. Peko is polished as a run-stopper and familiar with new head coach Vance Joseph from two years together in Cincinnati. In Kerr, the Broncos see raw talent.

"We really believe he has a high ceiling," general manager John Elway said Monday.

When Phillips' contract expired after last season, Joseph decided to promote Joe Woods from defensive backs coach to defensive coordinator, part of a plan to keep nearly all of Phillips' defensive staff in tact even after his departure. The general scheme will remain the same, as will the culture. The biggest stars, like outside linebacker Von Miller and cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Chris Harris, return as well.

The question now is how Joseph and Woods will use those players. Expect them to be aggressive in their play calling, creative in how they deploy Miller and defensive end Derek Wolfe and reliant on man coverage from their cornerbacks.

Ware's absence will be felt most in the locker room, where he was the defense's unquestioned leader, and where he served as a mentor for many young players, most notably Miller.

Ware's retirement announcement might have been a surprise – on Monday morning, shortly before Ware's announcement, Elway said he expected Ware to test the free agent market – but the Broncos were already preparing for life without him. Shane Ray, who had eight sacks in 2016 while starting eight

games, will play an even bigger role as a likely fulltime starter, and the Broncos will also ask more of young pass rusher Shaq Barrett. Denver could also re-sign depth linebacker Dekoda Watson or add another pass rusher in the draft.

John Elway brushes off speculation on Tony Romo, Broncos

By Lindsay Jones
USA Today
March 14, 2017

John Elway might have a Twitter account, but he hasn't been paying attention to the online chatter linking his Denver Broncos team to Tony Romo.

Told at a news conference on Monday that there was "a lot of talk" regarding the Broncos and the Dallas Cowboys quarterback, Elway acted incredulous. "Really? Where, among you?" he asked, gesturing to the assembled group of reporters. No, on Twitter, he was told.

Then Elway was asked directly if the Broncos would be trading for Romo, who has yet to be released by the Cowboys.

"Tony's under contract still. Last time I checked he's still under contract," Elway said. "Nothing has changed since the combine. We're excited about the two guys we have, we feel like we're in good shape there."

Still, like he did nearly two weeks ago while at the NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis, Elway said he will continue to look at "all options" to keep adding to the roster. The Broncos currently have two quarterbacks under contract: 2016 starter Trevor Siemian, and last year's first-round pick Paxton Lynch.

"We're looking at all different options that we can look at at every position," Elway said. "We never say never."

Given Elway's history in free agency – from signing Peyton Manning in 2012 to a trio of star defensive players in 2014 – until Romo has signed elsewhere, expect the speculation to continue that the Broncos could pursue Romo — even if Elway isn't following along online.

2017 NFL Free Agency Grades: Give Saints and Jaguars an 'A,' but Jets get an 'F'

By Pete Prisco
CBSSports.com
March 14, 2017

The first wave of free agency is in the books, and with so many teams flush with cap room, it was as wild as expected.

“Teams are out of control,” one NFL personnel man said. “Bad players are getting good money.”

That’s what happens when there is so much money to spend and so few players to spend it on. Teams acted like they printed money, and players got deals that will make stars who were under contract cringe as they ready for this season.

It’s no wonder Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers took notice when he saw the Chicago Bears give quarterback Mike Glennon a deal that averages \$15 million per season.

Free agency can often be fool’s gold. A year ago, many thought the Houston Texans had solved their quarterback position by signing Brock Osweiler, the top quarterback on the market. They gave him a deal that paid him a guaranteed \$37 million last season, then they benched him during the season. Last week, they traded him to Cleveland to unload his contract.

That should be a warning to all that what happens in the first week of free agency might not be what you or I or the teams think it might be. Most of the time, these deals don’t work out.

With that, here are the grades for each team’s early action in free agency:

Arizona Cardinals

The Skinny: The Cardinals locked up pass rusher Chandler Jones to a long-term deal, which was a smart move. But they also suffered some hits, losing defensive end Calais Campbell (Jaguars) and safeties Tony Jefferson (Ravens) and D.J. Swearinger (Redskins). They replaced Jefferson with veteran Antione Bethea, who might be a stopgap for a year or two. They also re-signed center A.Q. Shipley and added kicker Phil Dawson.

Grade: C+. They suffered a lot of hits that might be tough to overcome.

Atlanta Falcons

The Skinny: The Falcons didn’t do much, aside from adding Cowboys edge player Jack Crawford to help the pass rush. They also re-signed linebacker Courtney Upshaw and put a second-round tender on receiver Taylor Gabriel to keep him. Good teams usually don’t have to be active in free agency, and they weren’t.

Grade: C. They didn't do a lot, which was to be expected. Crawford could help.

Baltimore Ravens

The Skinny: The Ravens added a nice piece to their defense by signing Cardinals safety Tony Jefferson. He will team with Eric Weddle to give them a nice combo in the deep middle. They also re-signed nose tackle Brandon Williams, which was a priority, and added running back Danny Woodhead from the Chargers. Losing right tackle Ricky Wagner will hurt.

Grade: B-. They always seem to lose good players, but getting Williams back was big. So was signing Jefferson.

Buffalo Bills

The Skinny: The smartest move the Bills made was to bring back quarterback Tyrod Taylor on a new deal. They must have looked around and saw the quarterback market, as well as the quarterbacks in the draft, and realized he was their best option. They also brought back pass rusher Lorenzo Alexander, which made sense. But they signed two fullbacks in Patrick DiMarco and Mike Tolbert, which I don't get, although they say Tolbert will be a backup running back, not a fullback. I like the additions of Packers safety Micah Hyde and Browns safety Jordan Poyer.

Grade: B+. Taylor is the big move. They had to bring him back.

Carolina Panthers

The Skinny: The Panthers were active in helping to bolster both lines and the deep middle. They put the franchise tag on defensive tackle Kawann Short, which was wise. They re-signed edge rushers Wes Horton, Charles Johnson and Mario Addison and added former Panthers star Julius Peppers. They added veteran safety Mike Adams and also signed Vikings tackle Matt Kalil to start on the left side. The knock on these moves is they added age, which is never a good thing. Kalil has to be better than what he was in Minnesota.

Grade: C+. They kept their own, which is a good move, but they also seemed to get older.

Chicago Bears

The Skinny: Chicago's biggest decision came at the most important position on the field when the Bears cut Jay Cutler after signing Tampa Bay backup Mike Glennon to be their starter. That's risky. Glennon flashed in his starts with Tampa Bay, but he is raw. The Bears have already said he will start. They then helped him by signing Steelers receiver Markus Wheaton, Titans receiver Kendall Wright and Dolphins tight end Dion Sims. On defense, they added corner Prince Amukamara from the Jaguars and safety Quintin Demps from the Texans. This will all hinge on whether Glennon can become a quality starter.

Grade: C. Is Glennon the guy? That's a major risk.

Cincinnati Bengals

The Skinny: The Bengals re-signed three players, corner Dre Kirkpatrick, receiver Brandon LaFell and backup tackle Eric Winston. But they suffered two big hits on their offensive line, losing left tackle Andrew Whitworth to the Rams and guard Kevin Zeitler to the Browns. That will sting. They needed to keep at least one of them.

Grade: C-. Losing the two starting offensive linemen will hurt them in a big way.

Cleveland Browns

The Skinny: The Browns did a nice job of solidifying their offensive line by signing Packers center JC Tretter and Bengals guard Kevin Zeitler. They also extended their own guard, Joel Bitonio. That means a team weakness is now a strong point for the Browns offense. They added a second-round pick by trading to get quarterback Brock Osweiler from the Texans. They will likely dump him, which means they traded cap room for the pick. They also added receiver Kenny Britt from the Rams.

Grade: B. The Browns are building this team slowly. Now if they could only find a quarterback.

Dallas Cowboys

The Skinny: The Cowboys didn't make many moves, but they did re-sign receivers Terrance Williams and Brice Butler. They were limited by cap room and were unable to land any pass rushers. They did lose guard Ronald Leary to the Broncos and tackle Doug Free announced his retirement. They also lost safeties Barry Church (Jaguars) and J.J. Wilcox (Bucs) and likely will lose corner Morris Claiborne. They did sign corner Nolan Carroll from the Eagles but also lost defensive lineman Jack Crawford and Terrell McClain. The Cowboys are also of course expected to release Tony Romo.

Grade: D. The lack of cap room showed up in a big way. They have to address pass rush in the draft.

Denver Broncos

The Skinny: The Broncos needed help on their offensive line, so they gave Cowboys guard Ronald Leary a big deal. They also signed tackle Menelik Watson away from the Raiders while letting left tackle Russell Okung go to the Chargers. They signed former Bengals defensive tackle Domata Peko to help the run defense, but they lost nose tackle Sylvester Williams to the Titans. They could still land Tony Romo when he's released.

Grade: C. They got better on the offensive line, and that was a priority.

Detroit Lions

The Skinny: Their big-ticket player was Ravens tackle Ricky Wagner, who should upgrade the right tackle spot. The Lions then signed guard T.J. Lang to play next to him. That's because they lost tackle Riley Reiff to the Vikings and guard Larry Warford to the Saints. So give them credit for replacing those two. They also signed Cardinals tight end Darren Fells. On defense, they signed Tampa Bay defensive tackle Akeem Spence to a three-year deal and gave Oakland corner D.J. Hayden, a former first-round pick, a one-year deal. They did the same with Falcons linebacker Paul Worrilow.

Grade: B-. Wagner and Lang will help in a big way, and Spence will be a sneaky-good signing.

Green Bay Packers

The Skinny: General manager Ted Thompson usually isn't active and free agency, and this year was no different. He did re-sign edge rusher Nick Perry, which was the smart thing to do on a team that has had pass-rush issues. Then the Packers signed Patriots tight end Martellus Bennett, which will be an upgrade from Jared Cook, who is leaving in free agency. They also added Rams tight end Lance Kendricks, giving them a nice 1-2 combination. They lost center/guard J.C. Tretter to the Browns and guard T.J. Lang to the Lions.

Grade: B-. Thompson always sits idle for most of free agency, but he did just enough this year to help his football team.

Houston Texans

The Skinny: The Texans didn't do much at all because of cap limitations. They lost a good corner in A.J. Bouye to the Jaguars, which will hurt. They did trade Brock Osweiler to the Browns to free up cap room, but it cost them a second-round pick. Their entire free-agency grade will hinge on getting Tony Romo. If they don't, this will be an F. If they do, it could be an A.

Grade: Incomplete. It's too early to grade. The Romo situation will decide this grade. They better get him.

Indianapolis Colts

The Skinny: The Colts started slowly, but new general manager Chris Ballard was patient and landed two nice pass rushers in John Simon from the Texans and Jabaal Sheard from the Patriots. Improving the edge rush was a priority, and I like those two moves. They will both be immediate starters.

Grade: B-. They didn't do anything on the first day, but they won the second day getting two edge rushers.

Jacksonville Jaguars

The Skinny: This is a team that came in with a lot of cap room, and the Jaguars decided to use it. They landed three new defensive starters in end Calais Campbell, corner A.J. Bouye and safety Barry Church. They also traded to get starting tackle Branden Albert from Miami. They spent a lot, but they could be downright nasty on defense next season. They also added some special teams help in linebacker LeRentee McCray and Audie Cole.

Grade: A. They hate to hear it, but they won free agency again. Someday, it will translate to on-field success.

Kansas City Chiefs

The Skinny: The Chiefs' biggest move of the period came when they gave safety Eric Berry a long-term extension, which was the right move. He is a playmaker in their secondary. They also gave guard Laurent Duvernay-Tardif and safety/linebacker Daniel Sorensen contract extensions. Other than that they didn't do much, since they were up against the cap, which is why they will lose Dontari Poe.

Grade: C. Keeping Berry was the No. 1 priority. That keeps this grade a C.

Los Angeles Chargers

The Skinny: Their best move was putting the franchise tag on pass rusher Melvin Ingram to prevent him from leaving. The Chargers also re-signed safety Jahleel Addae. They gave Broncos tackle Russell Okung a big contract, which is a questionable move based on the way he played last season.

Grade: C-. The Ingram move makes this free agency class. They had to keep the elite edge rusher.

Los Angeles Rams

The Skinny: The Rams put the franchise tag on corner Trumaine Johnson with the idea that he could still be traded. If not, he will be a quality starter. They then helped the offense by signing Bengals offensive tackle Andrew Whitworth and Bills receiver Robert Woods. Whitworth is a quality left tackle, while Woods is a young receiver who can grow with Jared Goff.

Grade: B-. Getting a nice veteran like Whitworth will help this young team and Goff.

Miami Dolphins

The Skinny: The Dolphins made keeping their own a major priority. They re-signed receiver Kenny Stills and defensive end Andre Branch and also gave safety Reshad Jones a contract extension. I like teams that take care of their own. They also traded to get tight end Julius Thomas from the Jaguars. Thomas played his best football in Denver when Dolphins coach Adam Gase was the team's offensive coordinator. They signed Steelers linebacker Lawrence Timmons and also added Titans tight end Anthony Fasano, one of the best blocking tight ends in the league. Timmons has slowed some, but he will be an upgrade in Miami. They also traded a sixth-round pick to get pass rusher William Hayes (and a seventh-round pick) from the Rams. They had a nice start to free agency.

Grade: B+. They have improved their team, but are they good enough to dethrone the Patriots?

Minnesota Vikings

The Skinny: The Vikings had to upgrade the offensive line, and they did. They signed Lions tackle Riley Reiff and Panthers tackle Mike Remmers. While they may have overpaid for both, they are an upgrade over what they had the past few years. The line is no longer an issue.

Grade: B+. If you watched them play offense last year, you knew they had to do something up front. Reiff and Remmers aren't Pro Bowl players, but getting them was the right move.

New England Patriots

The Skinny: The Patriots, with a ton of cap room, were active to start the period, which surprised some. They made their biggest move by signing Bills corner Stephon Gilmore to a major deal. That could lead to a trade of Malcolm Butler down the road. Then they re-signed defensive tackle Alan Branch and safety Duron Harmon. They also made three trades. They traded to get pass rusher Kony Ealy from the Panthers by dropping down eight spots in the draft, then traded to get Colts tight end Dwayne Allen and finally sent their first-round pick this year to get Saints receiver Brandin Cooks. That's a major haul for the Patriots if they all play to expectations, but they don't have a pick in the draft until the third round now.

Grade: B+. They were bold and aggressive, which they deserve credit for being. Bill Belichick knows what he's doing.

New Orleans Saints

The Skinny: The Saints were very active and landed a starting guard in Larry Warford from the Lions, a starting middle linebacker in A.J. Klein from the Panthers and re-signed defensive tackle Nick Fairley. Then, after signing away receiver Ted Ginn Jr. from the Panthers, they shipped receiver Brandin Cooks to the New England Patriots for a first-round pick. They will almost certainly use both of their first-round picks on defense. It was a good first few days for the Saints.

Grade: A. This grade goes up because they got an extra first-round pick to play with in the draft.

New York Giants

The Skinny: A year after spending big in free agency to help their defense, the Giants weren't as big spenders this time around but they still landed a few players who can help. It started with veteran receiver Brandon Marshall, who will be a nice addition outside with Odell Beckham Jr. They also added Vikings tight end/fullback Rhet Ellison. Their best move was to put the franchise tag on Jason Pierre-Paul.

Grade: C. They didn't address the offensive line, which is why this grade is what is right now.

New York Jets

The Skinny: The Jets mostly spent the first few days watching. Their only signings of note were re-signing guard/tackle Ben Ijalana and special-teams player Josh Martin and signing Jaguars left tackle Kelvin Beachum to replace Ryan Clady. That's not much. This is a team that is going in the wrong direction and clearly is ready for a major rebuild. They let go of Brandon Marshall, Nick Mangold, Darrelle Revis and others. It's going to be a long year if you are a Jets fan.

Grade: F. They are clearly not interested in short-term players. They did little to help their team.

Oakland Raiders

The Skinny: After being big players a year ago, the Raiders didn't do much this time around in free agency. They did sign tackle Marshall Newhouse from the Giants, but he is likely a backup at right tackle.

They lost defensive tackle Stacy McGee, which is a bit of a hit, and it appears they will let running back Latavius Murray walk.

Grade: D. They sat back and watched the early part of free agency, which was expected after last year.

Philadelphia Eagles

The Skinny: The Eagles made landing help for Carson Wentz a priority, which is why they signed receivers Alshon Jeffery and Torrey Smith. They will help the passing game, and Jeffery only got a one-year deal (while Smith's deal is for so little guaranteed money it's essentially a year-to-year commitment). They also re-signed guard Stefan Wisniewski and added Titans guard Chance Warmack. They lost corner Nolan Carroll and nose tackle Bennie Logan.

Grade: C+. Getting help for Wentz made sense. And Jeffery should be hungry playing on a one-year deal.

Pittsburgh Steelers

The Skinny: The Steelers are another team that rarely jumps into the free-agency pool. They did put the franchise tag on running back Le'Veon Bell, which will keep him from moving. That was smart. They also extended star receiver Antonio Brown. That's what they do. They also re-signed veteran James Harrison to a two-year deal. As far as adding outside players, they didn't. That's OK -- if you can keep the core group and continue to win.

Grade: B-. Keeping Bell was priority No. 1, and they did it.

San Francisco 49ers

The Skinny: New general manager John Lynch had a clear plan to help upgrade the roster by signing a slew of offensive players. The 49ers added receiver Pierre Garcon (Redskins) and Marquise Goodwin (Bills) to go with quarterbacks Brian Hoyer (Bears) and Matt Barkley (Bears). They also paid fullback Kyle Juszczyk \$5 million a year to be their fullback, which is insane. They spent a lot on that side of the ball, but did they really get much better? They added linebacker Malcolm Smith and tackle Earl Mitchell to the defense.

Grade: C-. They had room and they needed players, but do these signings really make them that much better?

Seattle Seahawks

The Skinny: The Seahawks didn't do a lot. But they usually don't. They might jump in on some lesser guys, but the only addition of note so far is guard/tackle Luke Joeckel, and he is coming off a major knee injury in Jacksonville. They need to get some more line help.

Grade: D. They did little to help their team. But they have a ton of talent already.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

The Skinny: The Buccaneers wanted to get bigger up front on defense and faster outside on offense. Adding Redskins defensive tackle Chris Baker will help with the first part, while DeSean Jackson, another Redskins player, will give them a deep threat outside in the passing game. They also brought back end William Gholston, a good run player, and running back Jacquizz Rodgers, which they needed to do with the uncertainty surrounding Doug Martin.

Grade: B-. I love adding the speed of Jackson, if he doesn't slow down at 30. Baker was an underrated signing.

Tennessee Titans

The Skinny: The Titans had to try and upgrade their secondary, so they signed Patriots corner Logan Ryan and Jaguars safety Johnathan Cyprien, who is coming off his best season. They will help the back end, which needed it. They also added nose tackle Sylvester Williams from the Broncos, but lost tight end Anthony Fasano to the Dolphins.

Grade: B-. The secondary was a priority, and they got two starters. Williams will help inside.

Washington Redskins

The Skinny: With the firing of general manager Scot McCloughan, there is so much uncertainty surrounding this team. The Redskins did get quarterback Kirk Cousins to sign his franchise tag deal, so he will be back for a year. They lost receivers Pierre Garcon and DeSean Jackson, which will hurt, but they brought back tight end Vernon Davis. They also signed Browns receiver Terrelle Pryor. They let defensive lineman Chris Baker leave and replaced him with Stacy McGee from the Raiders and Terrell McClain from the Cowboys. They also added safety D.J. Swearingin from the Cardinals.

Grade: B-. They are a mess and suffered some hits, but they rallied some the second day, despite the problems. Cousins was the key.

Broncos LB DeMarcus Ware retires after 12 NFL seasons

By Chris Wesseling

NFL.com

March 14, 2017

One of the premier pass rushers of the past decade is calling it a career.

Free agent DeMarcus Ware announced Monday that he is retiring from football at age 34.

"After a lot of thought and prayer, I've decided to accept the unknown and retire from my NFL career," Ware wrote on Twitter. "Tempting opportunities still present themselves for me to play and I feel better than I have in years. However, long term health and quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had.

"With that, I take this opportunity to thank all of the people in my life who had a hand in molding me into a great player and the God fearing man I am today. I thank the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos for opportunities to experience what greatness feels like."

Ware finishes his 12-year career with 138.5 sacks, the eighth-most in NFL history. Every retired player in the top 10 has been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Ware should join their ranks once he's eligible for the vote in five years.

Among all players with a minimum of 100 games played, Ware's 0.78 sacks per game rank third behind only Reggie White's 0.85 and Lawrence Taylor's 0.79.

Drafted No. 11 overall out of tiny Troy University in 2005, Ware quickly established himself as a terror off the edge in Dallas' defense. A nine-time Pro Bowl selection and four-time first-team All-Pro, Ware often drew comparisons to Taylor for his high-end athleticism, explosive first step and relentless motor.

Few pass rushers have ever generated a seven-year stretch to match the prime of Ware's career in which he averaged 14.7 sacks -- and twice led the league -- from 2006 through 2012.

Although Ware's effectiveness waned due to injuries in Denver the past three years, he can rest assured that the Broncos wouldn't have captured the Lombardi Trophy in Super Bowl 50 without his leadership and production. Ware was a terror in the 2015 postseason, racking up 3.5 sacks, eight quarterback hits and 11 hurries in three games.

Ware was not just one of the best players of his era, but also one of the most respected by teammates, coaches and opponents.

"I received a text message from Aqib Talib saying: 'Surprising decision. He still has a lot left in the tank. I believe that 100 percent. It was an honor to get to know him, an honor to play with him,'" NFL Network's James Palmer relayed.

"I also got this from Emmanuel Sanders: 'Great player, but an even better person. He was the Peyton Manning of our defense. He carried himself with such class yet played with such tenacity.'"

DeMarcus Ware announces his retirement

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
March 14, 2017

DeMarcus Ware said he's hearing promising offers. But he has chosen to accept "none of the above."

The veteran pass-rusher tweeted out word that he was retiring moments ago.

In saying goodbye, he noted: "Long term health and quality of life outweigh the spark and passion to play that I once had."

The 34-year-old had just talked to Broncos executive John Elway about a comeback, and it seemed he was going to test the market and see what offers were out there. Despite the back problems he recently went through, it stands to reason he'd have had several. And it was only a few months ago that he scoffed at the notion of hanging up his cleats.

If he stays true to his decision, he leaves with 138.5 career sacks, which is eighth on the all-time list.

Cowboy-turned-Bronco Ronald Leary: I'm not recruiting Tony Romo

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

March 14, 2017

Offensive lineman Ronald Leary is on the move from Dallas to Denver, but if a higher-profile player is going to follow him, Leary isn't aware of it.

Asked if he'll recruit quarterback Tony Romo to Denver, Leary said he wouldn't, and as far as he's concerned the Broncos' quarterbacks are Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch.

"Nah, I'm definitely not a recruiter. I'm not getting caught up in that at all," Leary said. "Tony's a great guy. He was a great teammate with me in Dallas, but I'm in Denver now. We have two great young quarterbacks in Trevor and Paxton. I watched them last year, they're getting better. They're young and have bright futures."

That's been the company line out of Denver all offseason: They'll have a training camp competition between Siemian and Lynch, and they're not talking about anyone else. Perhaps that will change at some point, but right now the folks in Denver aren't talking about Romo.

Vance Walker visits with Bears

By Zac Jackson
Pro Football Talk
March 14, 2017

Free agent defensive lineman Vance Walker recently visited the Bears, ESPN.com's Jeremy Fowler reported.

Walker missed last season after suffering a torn ACL during an August training camp practice with the Broncos. He made four starts for the Broncos' Super Bowl championship team in 2015 and entered last season atop the defensive end depth chart.

The report said the Broncos also have interest in bringing Walker back. Both teams are monitoring his progress and rehab from the knee injury.

Walker, 29, previously played for the Falcons, Raiders and Chiefs. He has 12 career sacks and has played in 104 career games since being drafted by the Falcons in the seventh round in 2009.

Vance Joseph on Tony Romo: He's under contract so he's a non-issue

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
March 14, 2017

Newly signed Broncos guard Ronald Leary says he's not going to spend any time recruiting quarterback Tony Romo to join him in Denver and said the team has "two great young quarterbacks" in Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph and General Manager John Elway have both offered similarly positive comments about their current quarterbacks and they did so again during a Monday press conference. Elway said the team is "excited" about Siemian and Lynch and didn't discuss Romo because the quarterback remains under contract with the Cowboys.

Joseph said the same thing and extended it to conversations around the team facility as well. He said there hasn't been one meeting where Romo has been discussed because it's a "non-issue" for the team unless Romo is out of his contract.

The team could discuss trading for Romo, of course, but there's been no sign that the Broncos are willing to make such a move and Elway said Monday that "nothing's changed since the combine" for the team. Word around the Texans has been that they are also averse to making a trade, leaving the status quo in place across the board.

Broncos sign Kasim Edebali

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
March 14, 2017

The Broncos knew they might have to fill DeMarcus Ware's place in the lineup when he became a free agent last week and they found out for sure on Monday when Ware announced his retirement.

They offered congratulations to Ware, who helped them win a Super Bowl, and then turned attention back to the task of filling out their defense. The team announced that they signed linebacker Kasim Edebali to a one-year deal.

Edebali made the Saints as an undrafted free agent in 2014 and played in every game for New Orleans over the last three seasons. He had five sacks in a situational pass rushing role in 2015, but only managed one last season.

The Broncos have Von Miller, Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett returning at outside linebacker and General Manager John Elway said Monday that the team still has interest in bringing back Dekoda Watson.

Five takeaways from John Elway and Vance Joseph as the Broncos continue through free agency

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2017

As the first wave of free agency concluded, Executive Vice President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway and Head Coach Vance Joseph answered questions about where the Broncos stand after the additions of offensive linemen Ron Leary and Menelik Watson and defensive linemen Domata Peko and Zach Kerr.

1. PHYSICALITY, UPSIDE WERE KEYS IN SIGNINGS

"Getting more physical on both sides of the ball -- we feel like we've done that," Elway said. "It's been a good start."

The arrivals of the four linemen alter the personality up front a bit, Elway added, bringing a bit more nastiness to the units than was present last year when the Broncos struggled to run the ball and defend the run up front. They finished in the league's bottom six in total rushing yardage gained and allowed.

"[There is] the size, and obviously, we liked the ability," Elway said. "With Ron, we like the way he [plays] the game. He's a physical guy and plays with an attitude, so there's no question he was our target, and then Menelik has the same ability at tackle.

"The good thing, they have personalities -- they are real positive guys that like playing the game. Not only are they good football players, but I think they're going to add a real positive feel in the locker room with the type of people they are and the personalities -- I think we get a little bit of the personality back, and they're going to help very much there."

Peko and Kerr both bring size, of course, but they have additional attributes. Peko is a longtime team leader, while Kerr has "a lot of upside" that Elway and Joseph love.

"We really believe he's got a high ceiling," Elway said. "We feel like he's a very talented guy, a very young guy. We actually liked him a lot coming out of the [2014] draft and really tried to get him as a CFA [college free agent] coming out; we couldn't get it done, but we've liked him since the draft three years ago ... so we've liked him for a long time, but we feel like he really has a chance to fit what we do well."

2. NOTHING ON TONY ROMO

Although rampant speculation swirls outside of the UCHealth Training Center regarding the Broncos and Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo, his status remains "a non-issue" inside the team offices.

"Tony's still under contract," Elway said.

What's more, the team remains "comfortable with our two young guys -- and we really are," Joseph emphasized.

"Until something happens there with Tony, it's a non-issue with us. And it really is, guys," Joseph told a handful of reporters after the press conference to introduce Peko and Kerr concluded. "We haven't met one time about that, because we can't. It's a non-issue. He's under contract. We've got two good young quarterbacks that we're happy about, and we're going to put our focus there."

Added Elway: "Nothing's changed since the Combine."

Joseph did say that the team would eventually add a third quarterback at some point -- "because you need a third just for arm talent in camp and for injuries and those things," he said -- but that the plan remains to have an open competition between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch.

3. JOSEPH: "ALL GOOD" NO MATTER WHICH QB WINS STARTING JOB

And that's not just the case for the immediate future, but the long term, Joseph noted.

"We're excited about our quarterback future. We've got two young guys -- one's a first-round pick and one's played an awful lot," he said. "Going forward, we're in great shape -- not just for next year. Moving forward the next four or five years, we're in great shape at quarterback. Everyone can't say that. We can."

Joseph believes that Siemian has yet to receive the proper credit due to him for his performance in his first season as a starter -- and with what the coach last month called a "horrific" left shoulder injury.

"I think in some spaces, he has, but overall, I think he has not. When you win nine games in the NFL, that's tough to do with two [first-year starting] quarterbacks," Joseph said. "Two of the games could have been either way, so they could have won 11."

"I am very comfortable with Trevor. He's a smart guy. He's a great leader. His teammates love him and they love playing for him. So if he's the guy again, all good. If Paxton comes back and he plays better and he's the guy, all good."

4. JOSEPH KEEPING IN CONTACT WITH LYNCH

Although Joseph and the other coaches cannot talk about football matters with Lynch, he did say that he has had some "really good" conversations with the second-year quarterback, who is working out in Florida in advance of the beginning of team-organized offseason work next month.

One point that Joseph wanted to make regarding Lynch was about the nature of being an NFL quarterback -- and how it is more than just flinging the football.

"Paxton's a young guy with great talent, but playing quarterback in the NFL is a lot more than talent," Joseph said. "It's leadership -- whether you like it or not, it comes with leadership obligations. It comes with studying and understanding the systems."

"He's ready for it. He wants the challenge. He's looking forward to getting back in and going to work. It's going to be a fair, open competition, and whoever plays better is going to be the guy."

5. LEFT TACKLE IS A 'WORK IN PROGRESS'

"It's still open, and we're not done," Elway said when asked about who would line up at left tackle.

"Last time I heard, we don't go to camp until July, so we don't have to have that fixed just yet," Elway added later. "We'll figure out how to get that done."

But the Broncos do have options there, Elway and Joseph noted. Both cited the past experience of Watson and Donald Stephenson at left tackle, but said that free agency could bring some options.

"Even in free agency, there's going to be guys released from their football teams from now up until the summer. So it's a work in progress," Joseph said. "There's still time between free agency and the draft."

The decision to bring back Stephenson offers the Broncos another option, and Joseph feels that the six-year veteran could benefit from the scheme and coaching changes.

"He's an athletic guy that's played some left tackle in the past. Maybe [with] a new system, maybe [with] a new coach, he can go out left and play for us. No one knows yet," Joseph said. "But he's a guy that when you watch his tape, he does flash great ability -- and that's left tackle. That's the basketball footwork guy. He's got those skills to play left tackle."

The draft is among those options, even though it lacks the depth of quality left tackle prospects of previous years, Joseph added.

"[There are] definitely three guys that are sure-fire first-round picks," he said. Utah's Garrett Bolles, Wisconsin's Ryan Ramczyk and Alabama's Cam Robinson are widely considered to be first-round caliber tackles.

"That is going to be your flavor. So we've got to be careful."

How Domata Peko and Zach Kerr will fit on the Broncos' defensive line

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2017

In signing defensive linemen Domata Peko and Zach Kerr on Monday, the Broncos found a pair of high-energy, high-effort players who use raw strength and persistence to provide interior disruption.

They also found two players who should give the team plenty of options and flexibility for their defensive line to complement the returning linemen already under contract: Derek Wolfe, Jared Crick, Adam Gotsis and Kyle Peko -- Domata's cousin.

Let's take a look at how each will fit:

DOMATA PEKO: PRESENCE

It's not just about what Domata Peko brings on the field -- it's his locker-room contributions, as well.

A long-time team captain in Cincinnati during most of his 11 seasons there, Peko will be counted on to not only anchor the Broncos' defensive line from the nose tackle position, but to provide leadership for not only his position group, but the entire defense.

One example of that came in 2011, during the offseason lockout. With team-organized workouts wiped out, it fell to the players to cobble together their own sessions. In Cincinnati, Peko handled that for the defense.

"He made sure he got the defense up to Ignition [a sports-training center] and he watched out for the young guys," Bengals strength and conditioning coach Clif Marshall told Bengals.com last December. "He made sure they were able to pay their way."

On the field, Peko's role should not change much as he moves from Cincinnati's 4-3 alignment to the Broncos' 3-4 base formation. He'll be asked to clog up the interior and free the inside linebackers to make plays against the run.

ZACH KERR: QUICKNESS AND BALANCE THAT BELIES HIS SIZE

Kerr's arrival gives the Broncos a massive presence on the outside on first and second downs; at 334 pounds, he has the size to go inside, but he also possesses the quickness to operate from a 5-technique alignment.

Kerr had a season-high five total tackles in the Colts' 34-20 loss at Denver last September, showing his versatility and quickness in having perhaps his best game of the season.

Early in the game, Kerr made a solid play against the run, which began when Kerr aligned himself over right guard Michael Schofield's outside shoulder. At the snap, Kerr followed the flow of the play as C.J. Anderson veered left to receive the handoff from Trevor Siemian.

When Anderson received the ball, Kerr immediately used Schofield as leverage to turn and fill the hole being created as Anderson cut back to his right. Kerr then dodged Donald Stephenson to hold his ground and stuff Anderson for a 1-yard gain.

Although Kerr should allow Jared Crick to return to his role as sub-package pass-rush specialist, the fourth-year veteran can also attack the quarterback, as he demonstrated two plays after his stop of Anderson.

With the Broncos in third-and-2, Kerr aligned himself wide of left tackle Russell Okung, and rushed inside at left guard Max Garcia.

Using a bull rush, Kerr knocked Garcia back on his heels, then turns inside as Trevor Siemian steps up in the pocket. Kerr then brought down Siemian for a sack despite Garcia's best effort to hold Kerr back, allowing the Colts to get a third-and-2 stop.

Former Head Coach Gary Kubiak congratulates DeMarcus Ware on retirement

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2017

As the praise for the recently retired DeMarcus Ware rolled in Monday afternoon, former Head Coach Gary Kubiak made sure to express his gratitude for one of the key players in his locker room.

Ware, who joined the Broncos in 2014, served as a captain in Denver for each of Kubiak's two seasons as head coach. When the Broncos won Super Bowl 50 in February 2015, it was Ware — along with Von Miller — who poured Gatorade over Kubiak's head.

After that accomplishment in 2015, the pair spent a final year together in Denver in 2016.

"DeMarcus was one of the great players in this league for many years and one of the finest human beings you'll ever come across," Kubiak said. "He was a once-in-a-generation player who will go down as one of the all-time great pass rushers in NFL history. Just as important, he showed so much class and leadership with everything he did on and off the field.

"The way he battled through injury in 2015 and played at such a high level in the playoffs was remarkable. I'll always remember his talks to our team the night before the AFC Championship Game and Super Bowl 50, telling us what it meant to be part of our team and have the chance to win a Super Bowl. It was very powerful.

"It was a privilege to coach DeMarcus, and I congratulate him on his Hall of Fame career."

Peyton Manning shares his thoughts on DeMarcus Ware's retirement

By Caroline Deisley
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2017

A little more than a year after celebrating the retirement of one of the greatest players in NFL history, the Broncos are doing it all over again. This time, they're honoring DeMarcus Ware after the 12-year veteran announced his retirement Monday.

Peyton Manning congratulated Ware by sharing these thoughts on his former teammate and co-captain:

"DeMarcus Ware is not only a Hall of Fame player, but a Hall of Fame teammate as well. I played against DeMarcus and played with him. It was an honor and a privilege to have done both.

"Being a teammate with DeMarcus and being a captain of the team was a real privilege for me. DeMarcus loved football. He loved everything about it. He loved putting the work in, loved helping the young players and of course loved playing on Sundays. It is no surprise why he was such an outstanding football player. It was because of his work ethic and his real passion for the game. It was an honor to call him a teammate and a friend. I just know he'll be a great success in his post-playing days.

"I wish him all the best. He truly is one of a kind."

Kasim Edebali signs one-year contract with Broncos

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

March 14, 2017

The Broncos made their third defensive signing of the day Monday when outside linebacker Kasim Edebali put pen to paper on a one-year deal.

Edebali played the previous three seasons in New Orleans, appearing in each of 48 possible games and starting twice. He tallied 54 tackles, eight sacks, three passes defensed and one forced fumble with the Saints.

The former Boston College eagle made his way to the NFL as a college free agent in 2014 after a stellar collegiate career that featured 40 starts in 49 game appearances. Edebali's final season featured multiple accolades, including second-team All-ACC honors as awarded by conference coaches, a share of the program's Paul Cavanaugh Award and served as team co-captain.

Broncos sign DE Zach Kerr to two-year contract

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

March 14, 2017

In short succession, the Broncos added a second defensive lineman Monday just after announcing the free-agent addition of nose tackle Domata Peko. Former Colts defensive end Zach Kerr also signed a two-year contract, joining the Broncos as their fourth free agent of the period since it opened on Thursday.

Kerr, who originally joined the Colts in 2014 as a college free agent, has played in 12 games in each of the past three seasons. He made his NFL debut in the 2014 season opener against the Broncos and later had a career game against Denver in 2016 with five tackles and one sack in Indianapolis' Week 2 loss to the Broncos.

In college, Kerr transferred from Maryland to Delaware, where he became a second-team All-Colonial Athletic Association player as a junior. That season, he had 27 tackles, 4.5 of which came from behind the line of scrimmage, and one sack. In his senior season, he more than double his tackle total with 57, had 5.5 tackles for loss, 3.5 sacks, four passes defensed and two forced fumbles.

Broncos agree to terms on two-year contract with Domata Peko

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2017

After signing two offensive linemen in the first two days of free agency, the Broncos beefed up the other side of their line Monday, agreeing to terms with nose tackle Domata Peko on a two-year deal.

Peko, cousin of 2016 Broncos practice squad member Kyle Peko, comes to Denver after 11 seasons with the Bengals. The elder Peko has been a reliable defensive lineman, playing in all 16 games in 10 of those seasons. In Cincinnati, Peko recorded 516 tackles, 18.5 sacks, 12 passes defensed and two forced fumbles.

Cincinnati selected Peko with the 123rd overall pick in the fourth round of the 2006 NFL Draft after he broke through as a starter at Michigan State in his senior season. That year, Peko recorded 53 tackles, one sack, two fumble recoveries, one forced fumble and a blocked PAT.

Life on the Edge: How DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller pushed each other to be great

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2017

This story initially ran on Sept. 8, 2016 ahead of the Broncos' season opener against the Carolina Panthers.

The beginning came five years before DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller grabbed a Gatorade cooler and snuck up behind Gary Kubiak with a Super Bowl 50 victory in hand.

The beginning came before the blockbuster free-agent signing, before the "Dancing with the Stars" appearance and before the Super Bowl MVP award.

The beginning came a combined 114.5 sacks ago.

Long before any of that, Miller and Ware met on the field of Cowboys Stadium.

The Broncos had flown to Dallas to begin the 2011 preseason, and Miller faced the first set of expectations that have followed him ever since Executive Vice President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway drafted him second overall.

On that field in Arlington, Texas, the rookie had his first opportunity to meet one of the game's most-productive pass rushers.

"I just felt like it was just an instant connection," Miller says. "You've got the idol and the guy that looks up to the idol. For us to have that connection, [it was] like he already knew me. And of course I already knew him. ... It was something really like straight out of a movie."

Ware told Miller he'd been watching him play and gave him the first of many pieces of advice that would follow. For Miller, there could be no better role model. Ware was headed into the final season of the most productive four-year stretch of his career. From 2008 through 2011, Ware racked up 66 sacks. Those four years alone would put Ware among the top 100 sack artists to ever play the game.

Miller would tear onto the scene in 2011 as the eventual defensive rookie of year, but for a day, he soaked up Ware's advice.

As a young, raw player fresh off a productive career at Texas A&M, Miller had talent. He didn't know Ware would later help him refine it.

On Sept. 15, 2007, Miller pulled on his Aggie uniform for the first time. The 18-year-old true freshman then ran out onto the Kyle Field grass against Louisiana-Monroe.

The hype that would come after Miller's Super Bowl performance was nowhere to be found. Miller was the 15th-best defensive end in the country, according to Rivals, and he didn't make the list of nationally ranked players.

Miller wasn't even the highest-rated recruit in A&M's class that year.

He would record two tackles and assist on a tackle for loss during that first game, and would finish the season with just two sacks. Still, if he had the choice now, he wouldn't advise his former self about the road ahead.

"I probably wouldn't tell him," Miller says in early August. "What always kept me going was just trying to achieve and trying to get more. I never really expected any of this stuff. I just wanted to be the best Von that I could possibly be. I think the drive that I had my freshman year was exactly what it was supposed to be to get me to this point."

A little more than 24 hours after Miller's first collegiate experience, DeMarcus Ware and the Dallas Cowboys took the field more than 1,300 miles away in Miami. For the second straight game, the third-year professional finished without a sack.

That streak to open the 2007 NFL season would come to an end with that game. Ware threw opposing quarterbacks to the ground in seven of the Cowboys' next eight contests, beginning with a two-sack game the next week. In all, he would end up with 14 sacks and four forced fumbles that season.

The production would be a sign of things to come. Ware put together his finest season as a pro – 20 sacks and six forced fumbles – the following year.

The news broke on a Wednesday.

After a loss in Super Bowl XLVIII, the Broncos had moved fast to bring safety T.J. Ward and cornerback Aqib Talib to Denver.

Then, on March 12, 2014, the Broncos added Ware, a seven-time Pro Bowler, to the fold. His play on the field would make a splash, but it didn't take long before Ware cemented himself as a leader on a team that already featured quarterback Peyton Manning.

Teammates soon learned that, as Ware likes to say, he could "give you bad news and smile in your face at the same time." Ware's messages in Denver stemmed from honesty and his new teammates were receptive.

"I always lead by example," Ware says in mid-August. "When guys see you do the right thing, they have no choice but to follow. But [it's] also being vocal when it's time to open up and say the right things at the right time. I've always been that way, throughout my whole career."

Miller, who racked up 35 career sacks in his first three seasons, suddenly had one of the best to ever play the game at his side. Three years after meeting in Dallas, Ware and Miller got the chance to line up on the same side of the ball.

The next two seasons would serve as Miller's chance to elevate his game with the help of a savvy veteran player. As they went through two seasons, 24 wins and 42.5 combined sacks, Ware didn't see the need to hold back on advice.

"I think it's past the figuring out point," Ware says. "I think you just tell him point-blank how things should be, and we talk all the time about everything. I think some things don't need to be figured out [on your own]. Really nothing does. If you know it, you tell the guys, and it's all about them listening or not."

The advice, paired with Miller's natural talent, seems to have worked. Miller has thrown together double-digit sack performances in each of the last two seasons.

Along the way, both players have thrived outside of football. Miller's love of chickens and "weird" personality is well documented, but Ware also puts football away when he leaves the UHealth Training Center. On the outside, you're more likely to find him taking photos in a national park, trout fishing in Utah or playing with his band than you are to find him stressing about a defensive package.

"When I leave work, there's no more football," Ware says. "It's DeMarcus' time, because I put everything 100 percent in that I can here at work, and then once I leave here, now it's the other guy: the real, intuitive, chill, relaxed dude. And that's what a lot of people don't see."

Inside the building, however, they're all business – except for the dancing show Miller puts on at nearly every practice.

"I play with joy," Miller says. "There's nothing funny about losing games or getting beat or anything like that, so there's definitely a serious element there, as well. [Head] Coach [Gary] Kubiak, he always talks about a switch and turning it on and turning it off. I think I'm a prime example of that."

"I can go on the football field and just be the Von that everybody needs me to be, be the Von that I know I can be. Be serious, get the plays – whatever it takes to make the play on the football field. I can step right off the football field and crack jokes and talk to the fans ... and just bring it back and forth. That quality makes me Von."

As the confetti fluttered down at Levi's Stadium on Feb. 7, 2016, and the Broncos celebrated on the field, Ware found Miller among the chaos.

Miller couldn't even finish pulling on his gray Super Bowl champion T-shirt before Ware pulled him into a hug.

"Put that shirt on, baby boy," Ware said, repeating it again as they embraced.

In that moment, the mentor and mentee reached their respective pinnacles. After a 2.5 sack and two forced fumble performance, Miller had secured his place as the most disruptive defensive player in the game. For Ware, a long-sought-after Lombardi Trophy was finally his.

On the left side of the Broncos' pass rush, there's no reason to suggest Miller can't replicate his postseason success. The expectations for the sixth-year pass rusher are higher than they've ever been, but Ware said he thinks Miller will live up to the hype of his new contract. In Ware's eyes, Miller has

brought a new level of focus to training camp and seems to have gotten everything else “out of his system.”

“[I’m] very proud,” Ware says. “I think I’ve seen his focus in the game really change since I’ve been here. Now he’s seeing a lot more things, doing a lot more technical stuff instead of just worrying about his athleticism. ... He’s using his mind to make plays before they even happen.”

After an offseason of rehab on a back that’s seen 12 years of wear and tear, Ware returned to practice leading up to the Broncos’ third preseason game. He says he’s getting closer to 100 percent after being only 70 percent in the Super Bowl.

With the progression of outside linebackers Shaquil Barrett and Shane Ray, the Broncos have the necessary depth to keep Ware fresh during the year. And while Ware has served as an indelible mentor for Miller, Defensive Coordinator Wade Phillips admits that Miller has influenced Ware, as well.

“I think if you don’t learn something every year, you’re not gonna continue to be the great player you are,” Phillips says.

Despite the Super Bowl victory, Ware says “there’s always competition” and there are still goals he wants to reach. Miller says he thinks “a couple more” Super Bowls may be on that list along with 15 or so more sacks. Just two more sacks will move Ware to ninth for career sacks. If he can get 16.5 more, he’ll move past Chris Doleman for fourth in league history.

“There’s still a lot more that he can achieve,” Miller says, “and whatever it is that he has on his list, I’m gonna help try to get it for him.”

Alongside his 134.5 sacks – and counting – he’s shaped a resume that Phillips considers Hall of Fame-worthy. Hall of Famer Reggie White is the only player with more 15-sack seasons than Ware.

“There’s no doubt about that,” Phillips says. “I’ve had quite a few. He’s a dominant player. Any time you’re a dominant player in your era and everybody acknowledges it, I think everybody sees that.”

Neither Ware nor Miller is ready for that Hall of Fame moment to arrive quite yet. While Miller says he’ll be in attendance someday during Ware’s “special” induction, he knows No. 94 has more left to prove.

“He’s still writing his legacy,” Miller says. “I don’t want to start talking about what it’s gonna be like, ‘cause he’s still got chapters to go.”