

Matt Paradis again leads Broncos in performance-based pay

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
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Center Matt Paradis, one of the best bargains in football, led the Broncos in performance-based pay for the second-consecutive season, according to an NFL source.

Paradis, 27, received an extra \$306,002.71, worth nearly 60 percent of his \$525,000 base salary for the 2016 season.

In 2015, Paradis led the league in performance-based pay, earning \$391,648 on top of his rookie-minimum pay of \$440,850, which includes offseason workout bonuses.

A 2014 sixth-round pick out of Boise State, Paradis went from practice player to starting center in Gary Kubiak's zone-blocking system in 2015 and has played every offensive snap since. Last season, he did so while battling hip pain that had intensified late in the year and forced him to practice only one day a week.

Pro Football Focus rated Paradis as the top center in the NFL in 2016, higher than the Cowboys' Travis Frederick, who anchored arguably the top offensive line in the league.

At the end of the season, Paradis underwent arthroscopic surgeries on both hips, but is aiming to be a full-go by the start of the new season. And health permitting, he figures to be one of the league's best values for a third year as he's an exclusive rights free agent and was tendered a \$615,000 qualifying offer by the Broncos.

The performance-based pay system was implemented as part of the 2002 collective bargaining agreement as a supplemental form of pay based on players' cap figures and playing time. The more the playing time and the lower the salary, the higher the performance pay.

Each team shelled out a total of \$3.995 million in performance-based pay for 2016.

Cowboys rookie quarterback Dak Prescott led all offensive players with \$353,544.57, and Atlanta's undrafted rookie cornerback Brian Poole led the league with a bonus of \$371,873.11. Both earned base salaries of \$450,000.

Broncos, NFL help fund Adams City athletic trainer

By Taylor Temby

9NEws

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From concussions to heat stroke to sprains and broken bones, injuries are not uncommon in high school athletes. These days, many programs rely on athletic trainers to keep their students healthy, but those can come at a high cost.

"[Adams City High School] has actually has never had a certified athletic trainer," Adams City athletic director Joe Ladow said.

For years, coaches served as the first line of defense against injuries. It would also be left up to the students and their parents to take action when necessary.

"In a setting where you have this many athletes and there's no athletic trainer present, it kind of falls on the kids to self-treat or parents to help if they need ice or any other medications," certified athletic trainer Bria Witner said. "It's up to the coaches to try and recognize if there's an injury or if someone needs more water, or needs to take a break or if they can't practice that day."

"We tried our best to go by the protocols of what we learned in the various clinics that talked about concussions, and obviously being able to recognize the signs," Adams City football head coach Jesse Jones said. "We did have volunteers, people who were on the sidelines with us that were able to spot a kid that may be a little woozy or something like that. Sometimes we even had the trainer of the opposing team who would lend a hand and say, 'Hey, [number] 21 may need to be checked out,' or something of that nature."

Adams City has close to 600 student-athletes participating in 18 sports throughout the year. Now, for the first time, they will have a certified athletic trainer tending to its students.

Denver Broncos Charities, the NFL Foundation and Children's Hospital Colorado announced the Eagles will be the beneficiary of this year's NFL Club Matching Certified Athletic Trainer Grant. The \$50,000 grant -- which is split 50-50 between the Broncos and NFL Foundation -- will place Witner, a certified athletic trainer from Children's Hospital Colorado, at the high school for one calendar year. She will work a minimum of 20 hours a week, tending to students of all sports at practices and games.

"[High schoolers'] bodies are built differently than adult bodies and they have to be treated different when it comes to injuring certain body parts," Witner said. "I think being with Children's Hospital, we're trained to see the different things that could happen in a school-aged kid."

Witner's role includes treating athletes for current injuries, rehabbing them from surgeries and preventing future ones.

"We want the best for our kids and their success," Ladow said. "Having someone of Bria's expertise working at Children's Hospital, that's just going to move us forward in that positive direction of what our vision is of what our athletics can become."

Adams City says the addition of an athletic trainer will allow its student-athletes to perform at their peak levels, while also putting parents and coaches at ease.

"For me, it's a Godsend," Jones said. "It adds layers of credibility. I really feel like having an athletic trainer solidifies the culture."

"We get a chance to streamline what we're here for," he said. "We're here to coach the players, we're overseeing various aspects of their athleticism from start to finish. When we have that at our disposal, we can relax as coaches and do our job, and these players know they have someone they can tap into that they trust."

"We want the best for our kids and their success. Having someone of Bria's expertise working at Children's Hospital, that's just going to move us forward in that positive direction of what our vision is of what our athletics can become," Ladow said.

Matt Paradis, Max Garcia, Trevor Siemian lead Broncos in performance-based pay

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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The Denver Broncos continue to get plenty for their money on offense, where some of their key starters do plenty of the heavy lifting with smaller contracts.

Those players were also the team leaders in the NFL's performance-based payouts.

For the second season in the row, center Matt Paradis led the way for the team as he earned an additional \$306,002.71 in performance-based pay as he played every snap of the 2016 season. Paradis' base salary this past season was \$525,000.

Paradis also led the team in performance-based pay in 2015 with a \$391,648 bonus -- the highest in the league that year -- in addition to his base salary. Performance-based pay most impacts players who are starters and usually still under a rookie deal as a late-round pick or a former practice squad player.

Paradis spent his rookie season on the practice squad before he became a starter. He figures to be among the league leaders again next season if he returns from offseason surgery on both hips, as expected, given he's on a one-year tender for the 2017 season (\$615,000) as an exclusive rights free agent.

Performance-based pay was implemented in 2002 as part of the collective bargaining agreement. It is calculated based on a player's salary-cap charge in relation to his playing time. This year, each team divvied up \$3.995 million to its players based on performance during the 2016 season.

Von Miller, for example, who signed a \$114.5 million deal last July, earned \$11,338.46 in performance-based pay despite finishing second in voting for the league's Defensive Player of the Year Award.

The Broncos awarded some of their biggest payouts on offense. Guard Max Garcia was awarded \$263,391.03, quarterback Trevor Siemian was awarded \$234,468.14 and guard Michael Schofield was awarded \$211,034.92.

Other Broncos who topped \$100,000 in performance-based pay were LB Shaquil Barrett (\$177,307.28), LB Todd Davis (\$179,155.47), FB Andy Janovich (\$122,051.73), LB Corey Nelson (\$185,097.19), S Will Parks (\$175,500.27), S Justin Simmons (\$129,040.73) and WR Jordan Taylor (\$145,474.27).

So far, Ronald Leary is Broncos' biggest catch in free agency

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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Here is a breakdown of the first week of free agency for the Denver Broncos:

Most significant signing: When the Broncos reeled in guard Ronald Leary on the day the market opened, the team got an ascending player headed into his second contract who fills a gaping need. Leary will start and, if he improves only a little from this past season, the Broncos will have made a sound investment. Leary is the kind of presence the Broncos desperately need in the middle of the offensive line, given they were near the bottom of the league in rushing yards per game last season. Leary played left guard for the Dallas Cowboys but said he believes he could play either side in the Broncos' offense.

Most significant loss: The Broncos were only lukewarm to their own free agents this time around. They re-signed safety Darian Stewart before the 2016 season drew to a close, and he would have been the priority if he had he not agreed to that deal. Nose tackle Sylvester Williams and special teams captain Kayvon Webster, who signed with the Tennessee Titans and Los Angeles Rams respectively, had significant roles that will need to be filled. Williams was a starter, and the Broncos have signed Domata Peko and Zach Kerr as potential replacements. The Broncos declined the fifth-year option on Williams' deal last year, and though they would have brought him back at their price, he figured to move on all along.

Player they should have signed: Only defensive tackle Calais Campbell and his wife know how close he was to returning to his hometown, but the Broncos believe they were close to signing the Denver native. The Broncos went after Campbell hard and, in the end, Denver's interest likely got Campbell plenty more money in Jacksonville. He signed a four-year, \$60 million deal with the Jaguars; that's a \$15 million per year average. The Broncos were closer to the \$13 million to \$14 million range and stuck to their budget. Their discipline has served them well, as they have kept their salary business in order, even with five division titles and two Super Bowl trips in the past six seasons, but Campbell likely would have been worth the splurge.

What's next: Executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway has said over and over again he believes free agency is where a team should sign for need so the draft can be used to acquire the most talented players on the board, regardless of position. The Broncos need a left tackle, a returner and a consistent third target in the passing game. Elway has said he isn't finished with the makeover of the offensive line, but neither Watson nor Donald Stephenson is the likely solution. Also, Elway hasn't used a draft pick on a return specialist in his tenure. If the Broncos don't believe players such as Bennie Fowler or Jordan Taylor are ready to make a significant jump in their play, they need some wide receiver help. Other than Demaryius Thomas (90 catches) and Emmanuel Sanders (79), no Broncos wide receiver had more than 21 receptions last season. Defenses will keep doubling Thomas and Sanders until the Broncos find somebody who forces them to do otherwise.

Overall grade: B. The Broncos weren't going to plow into free agency in binge mode like they did in 2014. The roster is in a different place than it was then, and they have spent most of their free-agency

money on their own guys, including Thomas, Sanders, Chris Harris Jr., C.J. Anderson, Von Miller and Stewart in recent seasons. The Broncos needed productive players at some positions. Leary will be a starter in the offensive line, and tackle Menelik Watson can be if the Broncos can somehow solve the riddle of a gifted player who has been slowed by a string of injuries. Peko has been a durable, productive pro for more than a decade and should start on the defensive line. Zach Kerr should get situational work in the defense, and linebacker Kasim Edebali should, at minimum, be a regular on special teams.

Todd McShay has Broncos leaning left in latest mock draft

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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It's fairly easy to look at the work the Denver Broncos have done in free agency to this point and see the rather significant, and glaring, need that still remains on the depth chart.

They've signed two offensive linemen, two defensive linemen and an outside linebacker. But they still don't have a player you could point at and say he is the unquestioned left tackle.

And executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway knows it.

"We're not done yet," Elway said this week. "Last time I heard, we don't go to camp until July. We don't have that fixed just yet. But we'll figure out how to get that done."

And it's likely why, for the second time in his mock drafts in recent weeks, ESPN's Todd McShay projected that as the need the Broncos try to fill in the first round of the draft.

In his third mock draft of the pre-draft season, McShay has the Broncos selecting Utah tackle Garrett Bolles at No. 20 overall. In a thin tackle crop overall, Bolles is considered by many teams to be one of just a few tackles who could potentially start at left tackle as NFL rookies.

In his latest mock McShay also made Bolles the first offensive tackle off the board and the second lineman overall, after Western Kentucky guard Forrest Lamp.

McShay gave the Broncos Wisconsin tackle Ryan Ramczyk in his previous mock draft and Florida defensive tackle Caleb Brantley in his opening mock draft of the offseason.

King Dunlap ranks among options mulled by Broncos at left tackle spot

By Troy Renck
KMGH
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The vacancy sign flashing above the Broncos' left tackle position creates options.

King Dunlap, released by the San Diego Chargers, is among the group. Dunlap played for new Broncos offensive coordinator Mike McCoy in San Diego the past four seasons. The Chargers released him when they signed former maligned Denver left tackle Russell Okung to a \$53 million contract. Dunlap boasted a \$5.75 million this season, but his contract was not guaranteed and he had a \$500,000 roster bonus due last week that triggered his release.

Dunlap is among those on the Broncos' radar in free agency, though they are casting a wide net given their 10 draft picks and the possibility another team might consider a trade as the owners meetings and draft approach. Dunlap is impossible to miss. A starter in his fourth season with the Eagles before moving on to the Chargers as a free agent, Dunlap stands 6-foot-9 and weighs 330 pounds.

Concern about the 31-year-old Dunlap could center on injuries. He missed 13 games the past two seasons due to multiple leg injuries and a concussion. He was also arrested in February in Nashville, Tenn., for allegedly violating a protection order.

Dunlap's height is considered advantageous in pass protection, but it can leave him vulnerable at times in the running game. A former NFL tackle described Dunlap this way to Denver7, "He can get mismatched at times once or twice a year in both run and pass enough to make you forget he played well most of the season. In reality, his overall performance is good enough."

Pro Football Focus ranked Dunlap the 53rd best tackle last season, centering on issues in pass protection. Again, Dunlap ranks among several possibilities. General manager John Elway continues to exercise patience.

"It's still open [at left tackle]. We're not done," Elway said Monday. "[Tackle] Menelik Watson has played some left tackle. We're going to take a peek at [Donald] Stephenson there. We feel like we've got some different options. We're not done yet. Last time I heard, we don't go to camp until July. We don't have that fixed just yet. But we'll figure out how to get that done."

The Broncos own the 20th pick in the draft. Most mocks have them selecting a left tackle, either Wisconsin's Ryan Ramczyk, who has three months of recovery remaining following hip surgery, or Utah's Garrett Bolles, who has played only one season of Division I football.

How has NFL free agency potentially altered top of 2017 draft?

By Nate Davis
USA Today
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Nearly a week after free agency officially commenced, many NFL rosters look decidedly different. And as money and players move around, so do draft needs. That may be especially true for the four teams currently atop the draft board, each of them heavily active in recent days.

1. Cleveland Browns

They've upgraded and reinvested in their offensive line while making a de facto swap of WR Terrelle Pryor for Kenny Britt. The Browns still don't have a solution at quarterback, but they do now own four selections during the first two rounds of each of the next two drafts after deciding to swallow the remainder of Brock Osweiler's deal in order to obtain the Houston Texans' 2018 second rounder.

Now what? Texas A&M DE Myles Garrett still seems like a no-brainer with the first overall pick. But that doesn't box the Browns into taking a quarterback at No. 12. They could. They can also trade up to secure the rights to, say, Deshaun Watson, choose another of this year's quarterback projects later on, or balk entirely and wait until 2018 while using this year's haul to build up other areas of a roster with deficiencies. Cleveland also has the draft equity make a run at Jimmy Garoppolo, Kirk Cousins, AJ McCarron or another established quarterback down the road. Bottom line, this franchise needs a lot of help, and there's no reason to overpay for anyone right now when the Browns can continue to adhere to their preference of collecting young players, cap space (they still have more than \$60 million) and additional draft picks.

2. San Francisco 49ers

Like the Browns, they remain unsettled long-term under center. However veterans Brian Hoyer and Matt Barkley are now on board to at least handle the job for 2017, providing more flexibility than the franchise had just a week ago. New coach Kyle Shanahan and GM John Lynch targeted other mid-tier free agents like WR Marquise Goodwin, DT Earl Mitchell, LB Malcolm Smith, FB Kyle Juszczyk and TE Logan Paulsen. WR Pierre Garcon is the biggest name to come aboard. But San Francisco has been prudent financially and currently retains more than \$80 million in cap space, most in the league.

Now what? The Niners could use the draft's second overall pick on a rookie passer if they fall in love with Watson, Mitchell Trubisky or someone else. But given the issues that remain on the league's worst defense (and elsewhere), the compelling talent at other positions, plus the ongoing possibility that Cousins could eventually wind up here, it seems more likely that Lynch and Shanahan continue to import the best players available in the draft and worry about addressing specific needs — even under center — in 2018 and beyond.

3. Chicago Bears

They made a moderate splash by replacing QB Jay Cutler with former Tampa Bay Buccaneers backup Mike Glennon for three years and \$45 million. But the Bears have been quietly busy elsewhere, adding two receivers with upside (Kendall Wright, Markus Wheaton), a blocking tight end (Dion Sims) and secondary improvements (S Quintin Demps, CB Prince Amukamara).

Now what? Though moving on from Cutler had become imperative, Glennon is probably no more than a placeholder (his deal offers an out after one year), so the Bears find themselves in a position similar to the teams picking above them at quarterback. But for a team that won three games in 2016, Chicago is hardly bereft of talent. A big-time receiver may make sense with Alshon Jeffery moving on and Kevin White still unproven. A stud defensive lineman would definitely make more sense than reaching for a quarterback or left tackle at No. 3. But given the players GM Ryan Pace has already added, he might more comfortably roll the dice if not consider trading out if the right value is offered.

4. Jacksonville Jaguars

A defense that was sneaky good in 2016 welcomes CB A.J. Bouye, DL Calais Campbell (both arguably the best free agents at their respective posts) and S Barry Church. This franchise that has been unafraid to spend on veterans in recent years and remains in position to continue doing so.

Now what? A week ago, the Jags might have felt compelled to roll with the best available player at No. 4, which likely would have been a defender. But new executive vice president Tom Coughlin sounds committed to helping QB Blake Bortles beyond supporting him with what appears to be a loaded defense. It would be tough for any tailback to replicate the impact of last year's fourth overall pick, Ezekiel Elliott, but Coughlin would have to feel better now if he decided to pick Leonard Fournette or Dalvin Cook this high in an effort to establish the ground game Bortles has never had in his corner. Of course if Coughlin and new coach Doug Marrone suspect they need a new look at quarterback, they could also opt for a replacement to push Bortles, whose future remains uncertain as the team faces a May deadline to decide on his 2018 option.

Broncos revoke Billings man's season tickets after double-knee surgery

By Dustin Klemann

KTVQ.com

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Die-hard Denver Broncos fan and Billings resident Rick Chirrick may not cheer for the team after the organization revoked the license to renew his season tickets.

In February 2016, Chirrick underwent double knee replacement surgery.

Last season was the first time he didn't attend a home game.

Short of bleeding blue and orange, his chance to become a season ticket holder came a decade ago after being on a waiting list for six years.

Since then, he hasn't let it go to waste.

"It was probably one of the greatest days of my life," Chirrick said.

"You wait on a list for a long time, so when you get them, it's nothing but excitement," said Chirrick.

Unable to attend any games, he sold his seats on the top row for the same price he spent on the Official NFL Ticket Exchange.

"I wanted to make sure someone sat in my seat and cheered on the Broncos," he said.

A few days ago he, along with hundreds of other season ticket holders, was informed without notice his license to renew was revoked.

"If I knew they were going to take my tickets, I would have crawled up the stairs," Chirrick said.

When he informed his kids, they too were devastated.

Now back up and moving, he's reaching out to the team to figure out why.

While the tickets for this life-long Bronco is meaningful, everything is still in perspective.

"To have someone just take something right out from under you, without any warning whatsoever, it doesn't make any sense," he said.

"But like I said, at least I've got my family and my health," said Chirrick.

Broncos spokesman Patrick Smyth told CBS4 in Denver, the decision was made to reward loyal season ticket holders and fans on a season ticket waiting list of nearly 75,000.

Tickets not renewed will first be used to offer *upgrades* to current season ticket holders then, potentially to move people off that waiting list.

The club is now reviewing a “number of concerns” raised by affected ticket holders including Chirrick's.

“We understand there also may be special circumstances, such as military deployment and personal health reasons, that would prevent an account holder from being able to attend a game,” they said in a statement.

The club encouraged affected account holders with any questions to direct inquiries to the Broncos' ticket office at tickets@broncos.nfl.net or (720) 258-3000.

The text of the email reads:

Re: Account #####

Thank you for your support of the Denver Broncos and your interest in renewing season tickets. As you are aware and as stated in our season ticket agreement, Broncos season tickets are revocable licenses granted on a yearly basis at the sole discretion of the club. Therefore, the purchase of previous season tickets does not guarantee the ability to secure future season tickets.

After careful review and consideration of your account activity, we have determined that you did not personally use your tickets for even a single game in 2016. As a result, we regretfully inform you that your season ticket license will not be renewed.

Thank you again for your support of the Denver Broncos.

Sincerely,

Denver Broncos Football Club

Calais Campbell: I felt I could add more value to Jaguars

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
March 16, 2017

Defensive lineman Calais Campbell's brief time as a free agent featured some intrigue as initial reports he was headed to Jacksonville were followed by word that the Broncos were making a late push to sign him.

Campbell ultimately wound up with the Jaguars, which led Broncos cornerback Chris Harris to make a Twitter post about players not trying to win a Super Bowl that appeared to be directed at Campbell. Campbell told Robert Klemko of TheMMQB.com that he saw Harris' tweet and that he believes "the rest of the world doesn't see Jacksonville the way I do."

Campbell pointed to the amount of one-score losses the Jaguars picked up last season as a sign that the team is close to breaking through. While the money couldn't have hurt in the final reckoning, Campbell said that he feels he can play a big role in making that happen.

"Playing with Von Miller was a big temptation," Campbell said. "He's going to be a first-ballot Hall of Famer. Playing next to a guy like that is a positive, because you feed off a guy like that. That would have been cool. Also, being home would have been a good situation. But you look at the division the Jaguars are in, the AFC South, and the players they're bringing in, and I felt like it could be an opportunity to go out there and leave my mark on a young team. I didn't want to go to Denver and just be one of the guys, which is cool. But I knew in Jacksonville I could add a lot more value."

The Jaguars also signed cornerback A.J. Bouye and safety Barry Church to a defense that already looked pretty good on paper. It's not the first time that the Jags have emerged from free agency with optimism, though, and they haven't been able to keep it up once the games started in the past.

Five takeaways from Broncos coaches as they answer fan questions

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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Vance Joseph didn't have to wait long to receive the obvious, most pressing question on the minds of just about every Broncos fan as he sat down for a conference call with 1,060 season-ticket holders and Orange Herd members Wednesday.

"I would like to know who the quarterback is gonna be," asked a caller named Teresa, a season-ticket holder since 1980 who lives in Arizona.

Joseph couldn't help but chuckle. He knew this sort of question would come at some point.

"That's a great question, Teresa," he began his reply.

But Joseph he knew his answer would allow him to reiterate what he said at the NFL Scouting Combine and again Monday in a question-and-answer session with media: that an open competition between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch will take place.

"Right now, we've got two young guys that we're really excited about," Joseph said.

"It's going to be an open competition, and the best guy will play. But it's fun to have two great options there."

And with that, the conference call with Joseph and coordinators Mike McCoy, Brock Olivo and Joe Woods was off and running.

Here's a few tidbits to emerge from the hour-long question-and-answer session:

1. EMPHASIZING THE COMMITMENT TO SIEMIAN AND LYNCH

"Those two kids should be our future going forward," Joseph said early in his time on the call. For each quarterback, their growth will start with becoming familiar with McCoy's scheme.

Of Lynch, Joseph said, "He's a first-round pick for a reason. He's a tall guy with a big arm. He's very athletic. Again, it's a new system, so learning the system is going to be his [task] this spring. Once he does that, he can compete at a high level."

Of Siemian, Joseph noted: "You want to see Trevor grow into the new system. But he played really well last year.

"To have a chance to play that much and win nine games combined [between him and Lynch], that's a good thing for two young quarterbacks."

As Siemian and Lynch learn the scheme, McCoy and the offensive coaches will learn about them and adapt the scheme accordingly during OTAs and training camp. McCoy said that he and the offensive assistants "have been working endless hours" in the last month to put the playbook together.

"The big thing is to find out what those guys do best, and what the quarterbacks like and they can execute," McCoy said.

2. INCUMBENTS A BIG PART OF THE PLAN IN THE BACKFIELD

Both of the first-teamers who lined up behind Siemian to start the season ended the year on injured reserve, but Joseph expects both running back C.J. Anderson and fullback Andy Janovich to be key contributors in 2017.

Anderson is doing "really well" in his rehabilitation from knee surgery, Joseph said.

"He's here every day working and training," Joseph said. "He's obviously a big part of our offense and he's going to be healthy enough to play well this year for us.

"He's an every-down back. He's a hard guy to tackle. He's a guy that can change the game as far as pounding the defense, so we're looking forward to getting him healthy and getting him back going again."

As for Janovich, he will remain a component of the offense after the scheme change, although the use of the second-year fullback will likely change based on game plans and situations.

"We have a great fullback here, so we're definitely going to use that guy," Joseph said.

3. WOODS CONFIDENT IN INTERNAL OPTIONS

In the wake of Kayvon Webster's free-agent departure and DeMarcus Ware's retirement, Woods believes the Broncos can lean on players already on hand to fill the voids. Woods cited Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett at outside linebacker and third-year player Lorenzo Doss as a potential No. 4 cornerback.

"At some of those positions we already have guys in place that can step in and play," Woods said.

Woods said he plans to keep the team in a base 3-4 alignment, restating the point he made at a press conference last month. He also expects more from second-year defensive end Adam Gotsis now that he is another year removed from the torn anterior cruciate ligament he suffered at Georgia Tech in 2015.

"He's been around the building, working in the weight room, doing some things to improve physically," Woods said. "We really feel like he's going to do good things for us this year."

4. PLANS AT LEFT TACKLE

"If we played tomorrow, it would be [Donald] Stephenson or [Menelik] Watson at left tackle," Joseph said.

Of course, the Broncos' first regular-season game of the Joseph era is still nearly six months away.

"Obviously it's a process as far as free agency and the draft. That's continuing today," said Joseph, who added that he's been in pre-draft meetings throughout the week as the team formulates its evaluations and draft-week strategy.

When asked specifically about draft prospects Garrett Bolles of Utah and Ryan Ramczyk of Wisconsin, Joseph pointed to both of them as "prime candidates for a lot of teams -- especially for teams that don't have [a left tackle]."

What happens at left tackle -- and potentially any other spots -- in the several weeks will also affect some of the things McCoy does in designing the offensive scheme.

"We're going to build our system around our team, and our team is not finalized right now," McCoy said. "So with free agency [having] just started and the draft, there are going to be some changes in the next couple of months, and then as a staff we're going to figure out what our team, what our offense does best."

5. OLIVO WOULD LOVE TO HAVE McCaffrey ... BUT SO WOULD EVERYONE ELSE

Toward the end of the call, a fan asked Olivo if there was a single special-teams player for whom he'd be willing to "stand up and pound the table" in the draft-room discussion.

"I think along with the other 31 [special teams] coordinators in the NFL, Christian McCaffrey's probably the guy that's on the top of everyone's list," Olivo said. "He's a difference-maker. He's a dual-threat returner and a great football player overall.

"He's a special player," Joseph added. "He gives you a first-, second-, third-down player. He's also a returner. It's a need for us. He would definitely be in the conversation."

But if the Broncos can't land McCaffrey, there are internal options -- including Kalif Raymond and Emmanuel Sanders. Olivo also cited Jordan Norwood, who is currently a free agent and not under contract.

"It definitely starts with the returner, and we have some guys on the roster who are very capable," Olivo said.

Trevor Siemian wild for 'Cats as NCAA Tourney approaches

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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For the first time, Trevor Siemian can pick his alma mater as he fills out his bracket for March Madness.

His Northwestern Wildcats will play in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament for the first time in the 78-year history of the tournament, breaking one of sports' most-futile streaks. Though Northwestern hosted the inaugural NCAA Tournament in 1939, the Wildcats had been the only team in a Power-Five conference to never go dancing.

That's not the case anymore, and Siemian has Northwestern going quite far in his bracket.

"All the way," he said. "Of course." The Wildcats, who play Vanderbilt in their opening game on Thursday at 2:30 p.m. MT., learned of their No. 8 seed at a watch party Sunday night in their home arena.

"I watched," Siemian said. "I was jealous I wasn't there because it looked like a great time, but I mean it's just really cool. Everybody back there in Evanston and at Northwestern, it's something we've never experienced. So it's all new to us. It's just been a cool ride the whole way through watching these guys."

The Wildcats' long-awaited trip to the tourney caps an unparalleled year for Northwestern fans. In September, Siemian became the first former NU quarterback to begin an NFL season as a starter since Otto Graham in 1955.

In Siemian's first year as a starter, he threw for 3,401 yards, 18 touchdowns and 10 interceptions. Head Coach Vance Joseph reiterated Wednesday that Siemian will again have the chance to compete for the starting job when OTAs and training camp arrive.

The Wildcats basketball team followed up Siemian's success with the team's first trip to the tournament. Northwestern increased its win total in four consecutive years under head coach Chris Collins and finally found long-desired success. When Siemian was a freshman at Northwestern, he wasn't sure the program would ever reach that point.

"Never say never, but ..." Siemian said, trailing off. "Every year I was there, there was kind of this buzz of, 'Well, maybe this is the year we make it.' So it's cool to kind of see that come to fruition. I saw a cool quote from Coach Collins, kind of saying, 'This is just the beginning for us.' Which I think is cool, because at a certain point the expectation is get into the tournament and make a run."

While Siemian said it's difficult to reflect on what his own success means to Northwestern, he said seeing the basketball team perform at its highest-ever level has excited the fan base.

"I think there's so much positive energy around the program and the school right now," Siemian said. "It's kind of cool to be a part of it and see everything get to the point it's gotten to now. It's kind of galvanizing."

Regardless of where the program heads, Siemian and his girlfriend, who is also a Northwestern graduate, will certainly be watching the Wildcats' ride through the tourney – no matter how long it lasts.

"I'm enjoying it," Siemian said. "Who knows? That's the cool thing about March Madness. You see these teams make runs out of nowhere.

"Maybe that's us this year."