

Kickin' it with Kiz: Is Cleveland star Joe Thomas the answer to the Broncos' big question at left tackle?

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
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Let's dream. How about the Broncos get Joe Thomas from Cleveland to play left tackle?

Bob, just trying to help

Kiz: At the NFL trade deadline during the 2015 season, John Elway acted on a suggestion from the deep thinkers here at Kickin' It Headquarters and was this close to acquiring Thomas from the Browns. The deal fell apart because Cleveland kept bumping up the price, even after Elway believed the framework of a trade was in place. The Broncos went on to beat Carolina in Super Bowl 50 without Thomas. He has earned two more invitations to the Pro Bowl since the last dalliance with Denver, but there are signs Thomas' best football is behind him. While the Broncos have a big question mark at left tackle, Thomas no longer appears to be the right answer.

If you were half as smart as you think you are, you would have Elway's job. I trust his knowledge, instincts and actions far, far above your inane and childish comments.

Jerry, favorite number is 7

Kiz: I also grill a tastier rib-eye steak than Elway does, and will sell it to you for half the price.

I know you have written columns on the Avalanche's mess of a season, and I appreciate your tough comments. I believe a big problem is the core feels they are untouchable. They play without any fire. If the Broncos blew games in the fourth quarter all season, the coach would be fired. I feel for Jared Bednar, but come on! This is a business, not a fraternity.

Cindy, finishes her checks

Kiz: Say hello to Tyson Jost, which will make it easier for the Avs to say goodbye to Matt Duchene. But if Duchene goes and Bednar stays, that's a joke.

Are you a journalist or a fan? Your suggestion the Nuggets go after Gordon Hayward was an attention-seeking headline about a free agent with no reason to leave Salt Lake City for Denver's descending NBA franchise. You conveniently ignored the 800-pound gold-miner in the room that Kenneth Faried says got outcoached in Portland during the biggest game the Nuggets have had in years. Michael Malone stinks, and you know it, or you are in the wrong job, too.

Jordan, tired of Malone's baloney

Kiz: On orders from above, Malone tried to sneak into the playoffs with his veterans while also developing a young core, and nobody in the locker room was happy with the half-baked results. It's time

for the Nuggets to choose a direction. I say move on from Wilson Chandler and Danilo Gallinari to let the kids grow.

And today's parting shot mentions some guy that used to be on ESPN. Where did he go anyway? I heard a rumor he took a big stack of money and buried it in TV's version of Siberia.

Step up your game, boy. You make Skip Bayless seem like a walking basketball encyclopedia. Good luck in the future. You'll need it.

Brett, never misses "Undisputed"

Broncos draft preview: Left tackle or best player available?

By Mike Klis

9News

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In a matter of hours, John Elway will gather his player personnel executives headed by Matt Russell, his scouts, his new coaching staff led by Vance Joseph, and commence the Denver Broncos' draft meetings.

There have already been thousands of hours put in during the player evaluation process, a bulk of which occurred during the NFL scouting combine five weeks ago. Come Monday morning, Elway and his men will start talking about how to proceed with their No. 20 pick in the first round, No. 51 pick in the second round, two selections in the third round, and 10 draft picks overall.

The draft will be held April 27-29. Plenty of time for the Broncos to settle on their favorite rookie players. But also time to get going.

"Once we start getting our board stacked, then we start talking philosophy and looking at different game plans," Elway said last week at the NFL owners' meetings in Phoenix.

This draft will test Elway. Always, the Broncos' general manager has said he wants to take the best player available.

It's been a while, though, since Elway went into a draft with some glaring needs.

Best player available? Or best player available at position of need?

"I think it's a combination of all of that," Joseph said. "Obviously, you don't want to reach on a player because of need. But if a player's there that you feel good about, it's value at the spot, and it's a need, then it's a slam dunk. I think it's going to be a combination of all those things."

The Broncos must get a left tackle who can play Day 1. But unlike the drafts of recent years, there are not five or six, first-round caliber offensive tackles in 2017.

The Broncos don't pick until No. 20. Do they take Cam Robinson, Garrett Bolles or Ryan Ramczyk if one of those offensive tackles are there even if living local legend Christian McCaffrey is available? In this case, McCaffrey would clearly be the better player.

But the Broncos have C.J. Anderson and his \$3 million guaranteed salary, plus second-year, fourth-round draft pick Devontae Booker returning at running back.

The Broncos do not have a legitimate starting left tackle. Left tackle, or best player available?

"It always depends," Elway said. "We always want to get the best player available and hopefully that fits those scenarios. That's the ideal situation if that were to happen, but the bottom line is when you go

into a draft you want to draft guys who are going to make your team better and sometimes that doesn't fall into positions of need. Because if you start reaching that's the worst you can do."

Here are some players at positions of need whom the Broncos may consider with their top two draft picks, No. 20 and 51 overall:

Left tackle: If this offensive tackle class is as thin as many draftniks say, I wouldn't be surprised if the Broncos try to acquire an established left tackle by dangling a couple of their extra draft picks for trade.

Joseph said if the season started today, veteran Donald Stephenson, who took a pay cut from \$4 million to \$2 million this season, would be the left tackle. Elway hasn't given up on Ty Sambrailo, who was the Broncos' starting left tackle through the first three games of 2015 until he was beset by various injuries.

But expect the Broncos to zero in on a left tackle in either the first- or second-round of the draft. Robinson, of Alabama, may be the best fit for the Broncos' new power-blocking offensive line scheme. But there are draftniks who believe Robinson is a better right tackle, and possibly a guard, than a left tackle.

Wisconsin's Ramczyk, Utah's Bolles and Western Kentucky's Forrest Lamp are considered first-round offensive linemen. Taylor Moton, Will Holden, David Sharpe and Julie'n Davenport would be second-day (second- and third-round) candidates.

If the Broncos don't get their left tackle by day 2, they will have to either sign a free agent or execute a trade before the draft concludes.

All-purpose running back: I haven't spoken to Ed McCaffrey about this but I could understand if he would have reservation about his son Christian playing in Denver.

I've been around professional sports enough to know any excitement generated by the hometown hero factor can be offset, and then some, by hometown distractions.

Still, the Broncos do need a McCaffrey-like player. That became obvious when the team met two weeks ago with Joe Mixon, a talented running back from Oklahoma who is the No. 1 character concern in this draft.

What the Broncos' offense may need more than a left tackle is a home-run threat. Demaryius Thomas' yards-after-the-catch have dipped the past two years. Neither Anderson nor Booker are speed backs. The Broncos don't have a true slot man or returner.

If McCaffrey is available at No. 20, it would take a conference roomful of guts for the Broncos not to take him. If McCaffrey and Florida State's Dalvin Cook are gone by No. 20, or the Broncos feel they can't pass up a left tackle, they could possibly get Tennessee's Alvin Kamara or Mixon in the second round.

Tight end: Like running back, this draft is considered deep with tight ends. It's long past time for the Broncos to get one.

Look at the Patriots. For a few years they had Rob Gronkowski and Aaron Hernandez. Last year it was Gronkowski and Martellus Bennett. When Gronkowski got hurt, the Patriots still had Bennett.

These are tight ends who not only catch passes downfield, they serve as a sixth offensive lineman in the run game.

Shannon Sharpe was a Hall of Fame H-back and Julius Thomas was a Pro Bowl receiving tight end, but the Broncos haven't had a two-way tight end since Riley Odoms. You can look him up.

The Broncos could do worse at No. 20 than take Alabama's O.J. Howard or Miami's David Njoku.

Edge rusher: It was an hour after Super Bowl 50 and in the victorious Broncos' locker room at Levi's Stadium, Elway talked about how the first picks in his first five drafts were all defensive players.

Von Miller, Derek Wolfe, Sylvester Williams, Bradley Roby and Shane Ray.

Even though the Broncos won Super Bowl 50 largely because of their swarming group of edge pass rushers – Miller, DeMarcus Ware, Ray and Shaq Barrett – Elway said he'd take a pass rusher again if one was there with their No. 31 draft selection.

He traded up to take quarterback Paxton Lynch instead in the first round of 2016, but then followed up with defensive players Adam Gotsis and Justin Simmons in the second and third rounds.

If Elway happens to fall in love with an edge rusher like Stanford's Solomon Thomas, or Tennessee's Derek Barnett or Alabama's Tim Williams and one of them falls because of a last-minute issue, don't forget DeMarcus Ware cannot be replaced by Shane Ray alone.

5-technique defensive end: The Broncos tried twice to upgrade their 3-4 defensive end position opposite Wolfe this offseason. But they lost out on, first, Earl Mitchell, and, then, Calais Campbell in free agency.

The Broncos then decided to upgrade their nose tackle position by signing Domata Peko, while taking an inexpensive flyer on Lawrence Kerr, who can play the nose, 3-technique and 5-technique positions.

Michigan's Taco Charlton, Alabama's Jonathan Allen and Michigan State's Malik McDowell – another 5-tech Malik! – should be high on the Broncos' draft board. Which is about to get set.

Broncos' offense must play with the same edge the defense brings

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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When QB Peyton Manning retired last year, some thought that the Denver Broncos were losing not only football's most beautiful mind but also the edge to their offense. That the fire in their proverbial belly walked out with him.

Given inexperienced quarterback play, an underperforming offensive line, a subpar running game and Manning's departure, the 2016 season was full of almost constant frustration when the Broncos had the ball.

Or as wide receiver Demaryius Thomas put it: "We can be better, all of us. I think we left a lot of plays out there -- me too." Former coach Gary Kubiak called the offense's struggles, especially in the run game, his biggest disappointment of the season.

The Broncos' new offensive staff has certainly addressed the playbook, and the Broncos have made some personnel moves and will make some more. And they hope players such as running back C.J. Anderson return from injury ready to have an impact.

The team's decision-makers, including coach Vance Joseph, have talked about the offense's attitude and personality. They want execution and drives that result in points, but also that bring-it-on swagger the team has carried on defense.

"I want an offense that scores points. I don't want an offense that leans on our defense to win the games for us," Joseph said this past week. "I don't want that. ... We can't go into it thinking they are going to rescue our offense every game. That's a bad way to go into the season. I want those guys to be aggressive. I want them to attack defenses and score as many points as they can."

Manning's relentless pursuit of excellence was both rare and taxing on those around him. But the results of his four seasons in Denver were historic for the Broncos: four division titles, two Super Bowl trips, a single-season scoring record and a win in Super Bowl 50.

One school of thought is that it was only natural to have a "ceremonial exhale" during the transition from a dominant figure such as Manning, especially while young quarterbacks such as Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch worked at quarterback. But the Broncos have considered this since the end of the season.

Less than a full day after they had closed out their 9-7 season, executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway put it this way:

"I think offensively we have to take that on as a challenge and find guys who want to compete. We have to get better offensively and we have to compete better offensively to say, 'You know what, we carry half of this load.' You can't rely on that defense. We're going to be good on defense. But as an offense,

we have to take it as a challenge. The players have to take it as a challenge as well as the coaches, who need to take it on as a challenge."

When Elway signed guard Ronald Leary and tackle Menelik Watson this offseason, he talked about the attitude they play with -- the edge, the physical side of their games. Joseph, a defensive coordinator before he was hired by the Broncos, was quick to point out the need for an "attitude" on offense as the team gets ready to open its offseason program in less than two weeks.

As a defensive playcaller, Joseph said the offenses that worried him the most were the ones that were "in attack mode all the time." And that's how he has framed the discussion with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy, whose previous stint as the Broncos' playcaller included Manning's first season with the team in 2012.

"I told Mike when I hired him -- I said, 'Mike, I want you to go score points. Whoever is our quarterback, let's score as many points as we can, and our defense is going to play behind you,'" Joseph said. "... Now, if they can't -- defense, help us. But their mindset just has to be, be aggressive and score points."

Joseph said Siemian and Lynch will compete in training camp for the starting job, and at least some of the decision will be based on which QB can best add that edge to the offense.

"It's just what I want," Joseph said. "... Those are the offenses that, calling plays on defense, give you the biggest problems."

Vincent's stand against domestic abuse is painful, personal

By John Wawrow
Associated Press
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For Troy Vincent, the bloody sights and bone-chilling sounds are as raw today as they were when he was an 8-year-old, huddling with his younger brother in a closet while his mother was being beaten by a boyfriend.

Rather than repress those painful memories, Vincent is driven to share them. The NFL's vice president of football operations has taken a vocal stance against domestic violence. To stay silent, he feels, would mean condoning what occurred.

"There's no such thing as an innocent bystander," Vincent said. "What does your silence imply? If I'm watching it and I'm seeing it or I'm hearing and I'm just saying, 'You know what, that's not my problem.' Well it is your problem. It's all of our problem."

Vincent took a public role for the NFL in the aftermath of the league's mishandling of Ray Rice's suspension in December 2014, breaking down during a six-minute opening statement at a Senate committee hearing . In fact, he often gets emotional speaking about the topic — and his mother.

And it'll likely happen again when he gives a talk at Niagara University on Tuesday.

The former NFL Walter Payton Man of the Year speaks from experience, from that closet in Trenton, New Jersey, where he and his brother hid, their little hands tightly cupping their ears to mute what was taking place on the other side of the thin wall.

Vincent lists all the times he called 911, sought help from neighbors, wiped bloody lips, soothed a swollen jaw or came home to learn his mother was back in the hospital — leaving Vincent to guess which one.

"When you say witness, I saw everything," Vincent said. "You're being awakened by a scream or a moan. You're hearing the door slam. The experience of walking out, peeking out a door and someone is lying in a pool of blood."

This is what drives him to tears.

Vincent hasn't been spared the trouble as an adult, either — two of his children were molested by people close to his family.

Rather than turn to vengeance, the deeply religious Vincent instead holds firm to his message.

It's a message of rehabilitation and forgiveness, a stance that is regarded as controversial by some. Vincent argues perpetrators need more avenues to get help. That includes Rice.

And, the former defensive back and NFL Players Association president added, it also includes those who assaulted his children.

"There are times in my mind where I want to do things or take action out. But what good does that do? Who loses there?" Vincent said. "If I don't forgive, then God can't move our family because my heart's hard."

Katie Ray-Jones, president of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, agrees with Vincent. Punishment can't be the only solution when a majority of couples in abusive relationships stay together, she said.

Aside from counseling victims, the hotline has also had contact with perpetrators.

"They don't know where to go. And they're feeling shameful or they're frustrated because they don't know that they're responsible for what's happened in their relationship," Ray-Jones said. "Men need to have outlets where they can go and talk about this."

This is why Vincent's message resonated with Ray-Jones in 2014, even as the NFL was criticized for being too lenient on domestic violence. Rice was initially suspended for two games for punching his then-fiance, Janay Palmer, and dragging her unconscious body by the feet from an elevator of a casino.

Rice is grateful for Vincent's support and counsel.

"You've got to give a man credit when he's able to acknowledge his past," Rice said. "When you're talking about having courage and having faith and not worrying about pushback or anything, he's telling his story. And I think that's very honorable."

Vincent's story has helped inspire Rice to speak out on domestic violence.

"That's his therapy, him telling his story," Rice said. "He knows you have a certain duty to help people out."

Former linebacker Takeo Spikes played with Vincent in Buffalo and said hearing Vincent speak at a domestic abuse discussion in Atlanta was like "someone hit me in the gut."

Spikes addressed the group, recalling the time he held court in the Bills locker room, looking at the women pictured in a gentleman's magazine. Vincent pulled him aside and questioned what he was doing.

"He said, 'There's plenty of other things that you can consume your mind with outside of football that can help you grow as a person,'" Spikes recalled. "And he just walked away."

Spikes stewed for a moment and stared down at the magazine.

"I never even told him this. After, I couldn't turn that next page, I just closed the magazine and put it in the trash," Spikes said.

Desire' Vincent was working in New York City in 2014, when she turned on the TV to watch her father address the Senate committee hearing on professional sports and domestic violence. She never expected him to grow so emotional.

"Just to see him be so vulnerable and be so open, it was really encouraging and it was really moving," said Vincent's daughter, a sexual assault survivor. "But it moved me to tears as well."

She wanted to reach through the TV to hug and comfort him, because she knows what drives her father.

Troy Vincent is aware of the impact his discussions can have, and is struck by the number of survivors who approach him afterward.

"You know the look in their eye because you've seen it," Vincent said. "And they're just waiting for that moment, and they give you a hug and they say, 'Thank you, that was me.' Or they'll say, 'Thank you, can you help me?'"

Football operations symposium for women just a start

By Barry Wilner
Associated Press
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If you can help a team succeed, there is a place for you.

That was among the many messages shared at the NFL's women's career development program during the owners' meetings this week.

Dozens of women from across the NFL, along with several working at universities, attended the symposium at which they learned about football administration, operations, coaching and scouting. They went to presentations, panel discussions, breakout sessions and experienced networking opportunities with club and league executives.

No press coverage. No social media entries about the discussions.

Just honest, in-depth sharing of knowledge, advice, even war stories.

"No event in the clubs' year brings this all together in football operations," says Sam Rapoport, director of football development and a key assistant to Troy Vincent, the NFL's vice president of football operations. "We created a bond with the two days in this setting because there was a trust that everything we were sharing was only between the people attending.

"There was so much football acumen that you can't get elsewhere," he said.

Indeed, along with a group of highly accomplished women currently or previously in the NFL — from Bengals executive VP Katie Blackburn to former league executive Dawn Aponte to Falcons coaching intern Katie Sowers, a former player and now a scout for the team — speakers included Cardinals owner Michael Bidwill, Chargers football operations chief John Spanos, and Atlanta assistant general manager Scott Pioli.

To Pioli, the seminars were enlightening for their depth of frankness.

"From the dynamics to the dysfunctions, on whatever level," he says, "Samantha created an environment where everyone was comfortable expressing themselves. We made it a safe place to ask anything, to talk about any issues. We heard stories very similar to what we hear from the men about making breakthroughs, about the challenges everyone faces. We gave our own vulnerabilities and talked about our own mistakes."

Pioli has been fortunate to work for three organizations — New England, Kansas City and now Atlanta — that have been leaders in the push for diversity in the NFL.

"You find time if you want to care," he says, adding of football operations, "this is not a gender-specific business."

Indeed, Kate Kost is the manager of football operations for the Rams. She has been in that department for 11 years and helped oversee the team's relocation from St. Louis to Los Angeles last year. That included traveling from Missouri on a Monday to California and staying through Friday every week until the final move in March. She helped with site visits for the Rams' football facility, business offices, finding a home hotel during the season, along with meeting with vendors.

Even with so much experience, some of it unique for her position, the symposium was extremely educational for Kost.

"I was really looking forward to meeting the other participants and learning everyone's path they took to get where they are today," says Kost, who also does scouting work. "It was uplifting to see the amount of women in that room that had stories similar to mine, and to gain this network of women in the NFL is invaluable to me.

"The symposium made me appreciate my opportunity to work for the 'shield' even more than I did before, not that I take it for granted," Kost added. "But it made me realize that there are only 32 positions out there like mine, most of them held by males. I realized I was accomplishing the dream I had to work for the NFL growing up."

That's precisely what Rapoport envisioned for this event, something she hopes to stage often in the future.

"There's a lot of interest around the combine," she says, adding "this could be bigger than just football. It helps the cause to have other leagues involved and broadens the picture."

Rapoport also made sure to include in Phoenix women working in college sports. Callie Seidman, the assistant director of football operations at Stanford, has a somewhat different set of challenges than her counterparts in the pros. So taking part in the program was a chance to gather info she could use back at Palo Alto — and to share procedures she uses with the Cardinal.

"I was hoping to learn from some of the best in the business about the football operations side of NFL clubs and the league office," she says. "It was a tremendous experience to be surrounded by successful women in football, who are like-minded and share similar experiences, most being the only female on the club."

Both Kost and Seidman believe this is only the beginning. In fact, to them it's essential that such dialogues continue.

"There is something to be said about being a part of a team and the feeling you get after a win," Kost says. "To feel like you were a part of making it happen. Maybe not by making plays on the field, but doing your job so the players and coaches can do theirs."

Seidman is looking forward to further advancement for women in football and in the sport in general. It should be a natural progression, she notes.

"I think that when organizations realize they are eliminating 50 percent of the pool by not hiring highly qualified women into roles," she says "they will see how much of a disadvantage it is."

John Elway prepares for another draft after learning from his father, Jack

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
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On Dec. 6, 2010, at 7:45 p.m., John and Paige Elway greeted Pat and Annabel Bowlen at a back table in Elway's namesake restaurant for a dinner that had been arranged a few days before.

Oddly, at that exact time, Josh McDaniels, fired that day from his position as Broncos coach by Bowlen, was leaving Dove Valley.

The casual evening for Bowlen and Elway eventually morphed into a serious business conversation. The team's owner asked the legendary Broncos quarterback if he would be interested in rejoining the franchise that he had been mostly disconnected from for a decade.

I had written a column on Nov. 28 that "the savior of the Broncos in 1983 could be the best man to salvage the franchise ... that has been characterized as the laughingstock of the NFL."

Sources very close to The Comeback QB said he wanted to come back. Two days before his 50th birthday on June 26 of that year, Elway told me in a lengthy interview at the Cherry Creek steakhouse he desired to "reunite with the Broncos."

During dinner, Elway said yes to Bowlen, who would soon offer the Hall of Famer two alternatives: He could buy a piece of the ownership, or he could take control of the football responsibilities, but not both. Elway preferred the hands-on job.

Precisely a month after that night, when he and Pat high-fived as they left the table, Elway officially was named executive VP of football operations.

Four months afterward, Elway, who had been a No. 1 overall pick, ruled over his first Broncos draft, and his first selection, the NFL's No. 2 prize, was Von Miller.

The decision was John's best in six drafts - but 27 other Broncos' draft choices have started games.

O! No. 7's seventh draft is this month.

Elway actually learned the psychographics and peculiarities of picking personnel 16 years ago this month.

In 2001, Mike Shanahan, Broncos coach and de facto GM, requested that John, who retired in 1999 after winning consecutive Super Bowls, and his father Jack, who retired as Broncos director of pro scouting in 2000, help for two weeks in the predraft planning phase. The younger Elway's goal was to get into football administration or ownership. John had sold his automobile dealerships for \$80 million - "my lottery ticket," he said to me.

Jack was the Washington State quarterback for one season, but a knee injury prematurely ended his playing career. After earning a master's degree, Elway was an assistant and a head coach in high school, college and the pros from 1953-1992, most prominently at Stanford for five seasons. In 1993 he joined the Broncos' scouting department, where his Stanford-educated son, was quarterback.

During early April 2001, Jack and John ceaselessly studied tapes of college players, and the father taught his son the art of drafting. "He was the best evaluator of young talent. I learned so much from him," John once told me. "He'd stop tapes and explain everything about that player. We watched a quarterback from Purdue, and I dismissed him because he was short, and I didn't think he had a great arm." But Jack cautioned John to "to look inside the player's heart" and consider if he was a winner. Purdue was the Big Ten tri-champion that year, and Drew Brees set conference records in completions, passing yardage and touchdowns.

The Broncos already had another Big Ten quarterback - Brian Griese. The team used the first round's 24th selection for Minnesota cornerback Willie Middlebrooks, who would start only two games in four seasons. Griese, who was chosen in 1998 to become Elway's successor, lasted five oft-injured seasons.

Brees would be the first pick of the second round by the Chargers. After five seasons, he was traded to the Saints. Brees has thrown for 66,111 yards and 465 touchdowns and won a Super Bowl.

He has a big heart.

Jack Elway passed along his evaluating expertise to John Elway.

On April 15, 2001, a week prior to the draft, Jack died sitting on his sofa watching ESPN. This April, the son again dedicates the Denver draft to the dad.

From Kiski Area to Broncos defensive coordinator, Woods takes career in stride

By Doug Gulasy
Tribune-Review
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Joe Woods never fretted about his coaching trajectory, even as his work took him to nearly a dozen stops in more than two decades.

The North Vandergrift native and Kiski Area graduate kept plugging away as a defensive backs coach, leading talented secondaries and working for and alongside some of the most well-known coaches in college and the NFL. But he never established a set goal.

So when new Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph hired Woods as defensive coordinator in January to replace Wade Phillips, Woods took it in stride.

“My whole process in coaching has been just try to be the best coach you can be at your position,” said Woods, 46, who previously served as Broncos' defensive backs coach. “So my whole focus, my whole coaching career was to be the best defensive back coach I could be, and then if I was afforded an opportunity to become a defensive coordinator, that'd be the next step in my career.

“Basically 26 years later, the opportunity presented itself to me, and I didn't feel like it was too long of a wait or it didn't happen fast enough. I felt like for me, at this point in my career, it was the right place and right team.”

A 1988 Kiski Area graduate who played cornerback and safety at Illinois State, Woods began coaching at Division III Muskingum University in 1992.

Woods was all over the map for more than two decades. He spent one spring as linebackers coach at Northwestern State (La.) and eight years as Minnesota Vikings defensive backs coach.

“From when I started and was a Division III coach at Muskingum all the way to where I am right now, it's all really been enjoyment because I'm doing what I want to do, what I love to do, and that's coach football,” Woods said. “From that standpoint, it hasn't been anything where I look back on my career as drudgery. It was really more of a learning experience every spot I was at.”

Woods can name-drop some of the most famous coaches in the country, from Ohio State's Urban Meyer — his special teams coach at Illinois State — to Notre Dame's Brian Kelly, whom he worked for at Division II Grand Valley State. He considers Steelers coach Mike Tomlin, whom he coached with in Tampa Bay and Minnesota, a close friend.

“All the different coaches I've encountered or worked with throughout my career all had an impact on who I am as coach,” Woods said.

Woods came to Denver in 2015 and led the Broncos' “No Fly Zone” secondary the past two seasons. With Pro Bowl cornerbacks Chris Harris Jr. and Aqib Talib and Pro Bowl safeties Darian Stewart and T.J.

Ward, Denver led the NFL in pass defense in 2015 and '16 — a run that included a victory over the Carolina Panthers in Super Bowl 50.

“Keeping Joe Woods as a coordinator was vital,” Joseph said in a January news conference. “He was a guy who had opportunities to take other interviews, but he wanted to be here. I wanted to Joe here. Joe's been a secondary coach here for two years. They've been first in pass defense the past two years. All four (starting defensive backs) have made (at least) one Pro Bowl under Joe, so keeping that system intact was very important to our defensive success moving forward.”

Woods said his biggest task in his first season as defensive coordinator is improving the Broncos' run defense, which ranked 28th last season.

“The position coach always has their position they look over and manage, that they're responsible for,” he said. “For me now, it's just a responsibility of me getting the whole defense to play at a high level. It really comes down to making sure we're on the same page from a players' standpoint, just making sure those guys are doing their job, executing and playing hard. And then for me personally, making sure from a game-plan standpoint that I'm doing my best to put those guys in the right position.”

Woods returned to Western Pennsylvania last summer, bringing a replica of the Lombardi Trophy to Kiski Area High School. He calls winning the Super Bowl a “surreal experience,” one he hopes to have again.

“The pieces are here,” he said. “There's some things we need to clean up. That's a process you go through every year. But from our front to our linebackers to the secondary, with the additions we've made in free agency and the additions we'll make in the draft, we should be able to play at the same level and even play better than we have the last two years.”

NFL held an owners-only meeting in Arizona

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
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Every league meeting includes a variety of sessions attended by a variety of people. Last week in Arizona, one specific session included only the owners.

Unusual but not unprecedented, the owners-only meeting (technically an executive session of the Finance and Compensation Committees) focused in part on discussions regarding Commissioner Roger Goodell's next contract and succession planning, based on a potential transition that would be initiated by Goodell after the next labor deal and TV contracts are finalized. The owners-only meeting also included an opportunity for any and all owners to speak about any and all topics they chose.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones spoke extensively during the meeting, per a source with direct knowledge of the session. As a source close to Jones explained it to PFT, Jones knows from experience that most of the membership will choose not to speak up in those situations. Jones decided to introduce topics about which he and other owners have questions or concerns.

As to the issue of Goodell's next contract, Jones suggested that all owners be involved in the process. Currently, the Compensation Committee handles the determination and negotiation of Goodell's pay. Multiple owners currently believe that broader involvement of the membership would result in terms more favorable to the league. (To put it more bluntly, some in the room thinks they may be paying Goodell too much money.)

Jones also raised the question of the NFL's position on marijuana. Jones, per a source who heard the comments, wants the league to drop its prohibition on marijuana use. Jones was reminded that the issue falls under the umbrella of collective bargaining, which would require the players to make one or more concessions in exchange for significant changes to the marijuana prohibition.

Separately, the league office reiterated to PFT its position that any changes to the substance-abuse policy would occur within the confines of labor negotiations, and that the league is willing to listen to the medical community about any potential changes to the rules regarding marijuana.

Jones likewise urged an end to the practice of investigating off-field misconduct. The NFL became more proactive regarding these issues after the Ray Rice situation forced the league to no longer defer to the criminal justice system, which often imposes insufficient sanctions for clear acts of misbehavior.

A league spokesman told PFT that the NFL continues to maintain its commitment to pursuing investigations that are relevant and meaningful, and that the league office always look to be efficient when conducting investigations.

The Cowboys had no comment as to any aspect of this story.

Jones' concerns regarding marijuana and investigations are understandable; he has seen players like Rolando McClain, Demarcus Lawrence, and Randy Gregory lost in recent years to suspensions under the substance-abuse policy. As to the league's recent decision to investigate misconduct even after a

criminal case is closed, Jones has lingering frustrations flowing from the Ezekiel Elliott situation, which has still not been resolved by the league.

That said, a source close to Jones insisted that he remains fully committed to Goodell. Which is important for Goodell, given the influence Jones has over many league matters.

He'd apparently like to have even more influence as to the three specific issues mentioned. For now, though, it appears that dramatic changes aren't coming, on any of those points.

As once source explained it, it's possible that owners-only meetings will occur on a more regular basis moving forward. This would give Jones and others a chance to raise any and all ideas or concerns that they may have regarding a wide variety of topics and challenges facing the league.

Sacco Sez: Same face, new places for the AFC West

By Jim Saccomano
DenverBroncos.com
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When the National Football League owners voted 31-1 earlier this week to allow the Oakland Raiders to move to Las Vegas, that meant change was headed to the AFC West.

The AFC West may be the only division in pro football that has the same four franchises in 2017 as it had in 1960, but the locations have certainly shuffled.

The Los Angeles Chargers were first, moving to San Diego following their inaugural 1960 season. They're headed back to Los Angeles for the 2017 season, during which they'll play at the StubHub Center.

The Dallas Texans, owned by league founder and Dallas native Lamar Hunt, moved to Kansas City following their 1962 AFL championship season in Texas. The team would change its name to the Chiefs once in Kansas City.

The Raiders were the team that might never have been, save for two factors: the Minneapolis franchise bowing out of the AFL; and Chargers owner Barron Hilton saying that he too would leave if he did not have a West Coast rival. So the AFL founding fathers solved both issues by giving a last-minute team to Oakland. That team was initially known as the Señors, but the ownership quickly changed course and named the team the Raiders.

During their first two years in the league, the Raiders didn't have a home stadium. They played every game on the road during the 1960 and 1961 seasons and had home games at San Francisco's Kezar Stadium and Candlestick Park, respectively. Then the city of Oakland built them their first stadium — one that seated about 22,000. That stadium, Frank Youell Field, was their home until the now infamous Oakland Coliseum was built.

And even then, the motivation for the construction of the Coliseum was only half about football; Kansas City Athletics owner Charlie Finley wanted to move his team to Oakland, but needed a ballpark in which to play. To this day the Coliseum is the last of the active, continuous use NFL and Major League Baseball stadiums.

They later played yet another season in which they didn't host a single game in Oakland.

In 1982 they had announced their move to Los Angeles but did not yet have a practice facility in LA. So the Los Angeles Raiders still practiced at their Oakland headquarters and then took a plane flight every single week to a road game, either in the opponent's city or to Los Angeles.

They won the Super Bowl that year, proof once again that anything can be done. But the Broncos are the only Super Bowl champions from the AFC West that have never moved.

The Raiders moved from Oakland to Los Angeles, back to Oakland from Los Angeles and now to Las Vegas. The Broncos, however, have enjoyed stability unlike the other teams in the division.

Team Owner Pat Bowlen sometimes said in his early years, just before his powerhouse legacy of success began, that "People around the country just know us as that team that wears orange and plays somewhere in the mountains!"

That was true once, but largely due to the great legacy continued by Mr. Bowlen and his entire organization, the Broncos still wear orange and still play real near the mountains.

His franchise is the last one standing in its original AFC Western Division home.