

Broncos to begin 2017 offseason program April 10; workout schedule released

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 4, 2017

The Broncos' offseason will soon shift gears.

The team announced its offseason workout schedule Monday, which starts April 10 and extends to June 15. The nine-week program is voluntary — save for the three-day mandatory minicamp (June 13-15) at the end — and marks the start of the team's renewed hopes for a playoff return.

First day: April 10

Voluntary minicamp: April 25-27

Rookie orientation: May 11-13

OTA offseason workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8

Mandatory minicamp: June 13-15

Per the NFL's collective bargaining agreement with players, offseason workouts are broken up into three phases, each with progressive levels of permitted activity.

Phase 1, for the first two weeks, allows for only strength and conditioning and rehabilitation.

During the three-week second phase, teams can conduct on-field workouts as well as individual instruction and drills, but no live contact or team offensive vs. defense drills.

And in phase three, which lasts the final four weeks of the program, teams can host 10 total days of organized team activities (OTAs), with 7-on-7, 9-on-7 and 11-on-11 drills. But live contact is still prohibited. Included in this phase is the mandatory three-day minicamp that will cap the offseason program.

After the April 27-29 draft, held in Philadelphia this year, teams can hold a rookie development program that spans seven weeks, plus a rookie minicamp, that can be held either on the first or second weekend following the draft.

The Broncos will hold an orientation May 11-13, following a recent trend of teams who have opted for less on-field contact. In 2015, Denver lost tight end Jeff Heuerman to a season-ending knee injury on the second day of rookie minicamp. The issue was revived during last April's draft and former coach Gary Kubiak said the team was looking to adjust its protocol.

"There's a fine line there because you've obviously gone and drafted these young men," Kubiak said then. "They work hard to get ready for the combine. What have they been doing since then? You run them in here this weekend and all of the sudden, you go full-speed for four practices. Probably not the smartest thing to do. So we're adjusting. We want to do a lot of teaching. We'd like to come out of the weekend knowing exactly where our guys are and then put them with our football team on Monday and

start to acclimate them with the guys. That's a great point. I think everybody has taken a hard look at that, and I think we have too."

Unlike last year when the Broncos' offseason was limited because of their Super Bowl 50 run, the team will return after more than three-and-a-half months off. In that span, the team hired a new coaching staff, led by Vance Joseph, and it will soon introduce a new scheme and offensive philosophy.

Per league rules, because Denver has a new head coach, it could have started its offseason program as early as April 3. But Joseph opted for a later start to provide a more seamless schedule.

"April 10 gave us the opportunity to go straight through," he explained at the NFL owners meetings in Phoenix last week. "April 3 would have had one week off in the middle somewhere. Players don't want that. They want to work through, have a great offseason, get their vacation and come back."

And when they do come back, Joseph will waste little time in reshaping the offense.

"(Offensive coordinator) Mike (McCoy) and his staff have done a great job of combining systems. (We're) keeping some stuff from last year as far as terminology, but putting Mike's system in play," Joseph said. "April 11 is the first install. Hopefully, we have a chance to have 10 different installs three different times between phase one, between phase two and OTAs before training camp. The players should hit it four times before we play our first game. That is the goal."

By the numbers: Broncos key cap figures, positional spending for 2017

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 4, 2017

A breakdown of the Broncos' 2017 salary cap and positional spending.

BY THE NUMBERS

71: Total current contracts

\$162,732,782: Total cap liabilities

\$152,907,782: Cap number for top 51 contracts

\$16,148,416: Estimated cap space

\$110,787: Dead money, second-lowest in the NFL behind the Raiders

2017 CAP HITS

Largest: Von Miller, OLB – \$20.4 million (\$16.5 million base salary + \$3.4 million prorated signing bonus)

Second-largest: Demaryius Thomas, WR – \$12,033,333 (\$8.5 base salary + \$3,533,333 signing bonus)

QBs Cap: \$2,781,902 for Paxton Lynch and Trevor Siemian combined

CONTRACTS

Largest total value: Miller – \$114.5 million, over six years

Highest average salary: Miller – \$19,083,333 million

Highest total guarantee: Miller – \$42 million

Top rookie cap number: Shane Ray, OLB – \$2,486,971

POSITIONAL SPENDING

Offense: ~\$65.3 million (third-lowest in NFL)

Defense: ~\$92.4 million (second-highest in NFL)

Special teams: ~\$5 million

Jerry Jones, still searching for trade partner for Tony Romo, to allow teams to contact QB, per report

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 4, 2017

The Tony Romo hostage situation is closing in on a month.

According to NFL Network's Mike Garafolo, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has notified the league's 31 other general managers that they are allowed to contact Romo or his agent to schedule a workout, visit or physical. But, per Garafolo, Dallas has told teams they are limited to talks about Romo's remaining three years on his contract.

In short: Jones is still trying to find a trade partner, despite having no success over the last three-plus weeks.

At the league's annual meeting in Phoenix last week, Broncos GM John Elway said the Broncos "really feel good about the two young" quarterbacks that they have in Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch and that "the plan is to stay the course there and see what's available in the draft."

Romo is still under contract with the Cowboys and until he's released — if he's released — he's a "non-issue" for Denver. The Broncos have been unwilling to trade for him. The Texans haven't been, either.

And even if Romo is released, it's far from guaranteed the Broncos will pursue him.

Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said in Phoenix that the team plans to bring on a third quarterback, but indicated it would not be an older veteran.

"It could be a young veteran. Why not?" Joseph said. "I would not perceive it being an older veteran. If it's going to be a veteran, it's going to be a young veteran for us. I wouldn't discount drafting a young quarterback in the draft next month. That's possible. Again, I would focus on those first two. The third is going to fall to us. Whether it is the draft or free agency, that won't be hard to do.

"We haven't had one meeting about Romo. We've got these two young guys that we're focused on right now. Absolutely, moving forward in the draft or free agency we have to acquire one more quarterback because of the reps that are going to be taken during the spring and the fall. But as far as Romo, that's a non-issue for us."

Matt Paradis among three Broncos now under contract for 2017 after signing exclusive rights tenders

By Cameron Wolfe

Denver Post

April 4, 2017

It was little more than a formality, but the Broncos will have their starting center Matt Paradis under contract in 2017.

Paradis, receiver Jordan Taylor and long snapper Casey Kreiter officially signed their exclusive rights tenders placing them under contract for the 2017 season. Each tender is a one-year deal worth \$615,000.

Five other Broncos — running back Kapri Bibbs, outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett, receiver Bennie Fowler, center James Ferentz and inside linebacker Zaire Anderson — were tenders as exclusive rights free agents but they hadn't officially signed their deal yet.

Exclusive rights free agents (those with two or fewer accrued NFL seasons) can only negotiate with the team that tenders them.

Paradis is recovering well after offseason surgery on both of his hips. He was able to shed his crutches a couple of weeks ago and the hope is he won't miss any regular season action. He'll be a huge key as Denver looks to change the mentality and performance level of its offensive line.

Paradis is the only Bronco to play every offensive snap in each of the last two seasons. He's one of the team's most underpaid players due to a late start in accruing NFL service. He spent his rookie season on the practice squad before becoming a starter in each of the last two seasons. He'll be a restricted free agent in 2018.

The Broncos also placed second-round tenders on linebacker Todd Davis and kicker Brandon McManus last month. Both players are expected to return to Denver under the one-year, \$2.746 million tender or a long-term deal if it can be worked out.

Davis and McManus have an April 21 deadline to sign their offer sheets. Other teams can sign them to an offer sheet, but the Broncos would have an opportunity to match and the acquiring team would forfeit a second-round pick if they didn't. That seems unlikely at this point.

Vance Joseph thinks Broncos' defense will overcome biggest offseason loss

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 4, 2017

The Denver Broncos have seen all of their high-profile free agents sign elsewhere so far, with players like Sylvester Williams, Kayvon Webster and Russell Okung having moved on.

But if you ask many among the team's faithful, those who see the world through the most orange-colored glasses would say the team's biggest loss this offseason was not any of those players, but rather a silver-haired, almost-70-something with a sharp wit and an unwavering devotion to preventing touchdowns and making life miserable for opposing quarterbacks.

Yes, when the Broncos and Wade Phillips went their separate ways this offseason, there were varied levels of panic among the folks who spend their hard-earned dollars on season tickets. And Broncos coach Vance Joseph has since made two things very clear:

The spirit of Phillips will remain in the defensive playbook as the team's base formation will remain a 3-4.

And Joe Woods is more than ready to call plays in the Broncos' defense.

"My system comes from Wade," Joseph said last week at the league meetings. "I was with Wade in Houston. I was with Mike Nolan, who learned from Wade, in San Fran. I was with Billy Davis in San Fran who learned from Wade. I was with Greg Manusky in San Fran who learned from Wade. So my belief system is Wade's. So I'm walking into a defense that I'm very familiar with. We're not going to change the structure of the defense."

Joseph was the Texans' defensive backs coach during Gary Kubiak's tenure as Houston's coach when Phillips was the team's defensive coordinator. Woods was the Broncos' defensive backs coach in each of the past two seasons, on Kubiak's Broncos staff when Phillips was the defensive coordinator.

Joseph has been adamant the players won't see much difference in the overall philosophy on defense when the team begins its offseason program next week and moves through the workouts toward training camp this summer.

"Players love playing for Wade, he's an easy-going guy," Joseph said. "He's the same every day whether you won or lost. Wade is always the same guy. But in my past, players have also loved playing for me also. I'm a different style than Wade but I've maximized players also. But again, Joe [Woods] is the coordinator. Joe has coached the secondary, which has a lot of personalities back there. Those guys believe in Joe. So I don't see any issues with those guys playing for Joe Woods."

The backdrop to all of this is when Kubiak elected to step away from coaching after the 2016 season and the Broncos were in the process of hiring Joseph, none other than the team's top football decision-maker, John Elway, said the top "priority" this offseason didn't have anything to do with how

quarterbacks throw the ball or how the Broncos block in the run game, but rather to "stay great" on defense.

Joseph and Woods say a secondary with four starters who have each gone to the Pro Bowl at least once during the past two seasons to go with a perennial Defensive Player of the Year candidate in Von Miller is the most enviable of starting points for any staff.

Overall, the Broncos retained Woods, defensive line coach Bill Kollar, linebackers coach Reggie Herring and outside linebackers coach Fred Pagac from Phillips' staff. As a result, the expectation, Joseph said, is the Broncos players likely won't see any major differences between how things went in the previous two seasons and how they conduct their business in the weeks and months to come.

"The system is not going to change," Joseph said.

The Broncos have finished among the league's top five in total defense and scoring defense in each of the past two seasons, and have been the league's top passing defense in each of those years. Joseph did say there will be some schematic tweaks made as he and Woods add things they'd like to see in the playbook and as they try to repair a run defense that finished 28th last season.

"We can add some things to make us better in my opinion," Joseph said. "... That won't be different from any season when you go from one year to the other. You're always going to look at what you did and what needs to be addressed. That's just part of it, too. But I feel good about where we'll be on defense."

Sources: Tony Romo heading into broadcasting

By Adam Schefter

ESPN.com

April 4, 2017

Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo is leaving football and going into broadcasting, even with Dallas planning to release him Tuesday, league sources tell ESPN.

Romo has received interest from CBS, Fox and NBC, and can choose to be a color commentator where he wants. That move could come as early as Tuesday, sources said.

But the decision to leave football already has been made. His run as the Cowboys' quarterback -- and an NFL player -- officially ends Tuesday.

Dallas is expected to designate Romo as a post-June 1 release, softening the blow against the Cowboys' cap this season. Instead of counting \$24.7 million in 2017, Romo would count \$10.7 million this year and \$8.9 million in 2018. The Cowboys would gain \$14 million in cap space, but it would not become available until June 2. But after Tuesday, Romo will no longer be with the Cowboys.

Romo's decision came down to his health, sources close to the situation told ESPN. Romo, who turns 37 on April 21, believes his family and his health are paramount at this time in his life. He was limited to playing in just parts of five games over the past two seasons because of collarbone and back injuries, and he suffered a compression fracture in his back last August that led to him ultimately giving way to [Dak Prescott](#).

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He now will get to spend more time with his family while still retaining a strong connection to the game he loves. Romo spent the past several weeks working through the decision, sources told ESPN.

Romo already has informed Cowboys owner Jerry Jones of his decision to step away from the game for now, sources said. The networks courting him also are aware.

One NFL executive, however, told ESPN via text message that "Romo is now every team's emergency backup QB in case your starter gets hurt" and that those teams would have to "pay him to come out of 'retirement.'"

Stepping away from the game also will impact NFL teams, as the market for Romo was expected to be robust. But with his transition to TV, Romo no longer will be a consideration for the Houston Texans and Denver Broncos -- not unless he were to unexpectedly write another chapter in his NFL journey and return from the broadcast booth to the playing field.

The Texans had been considered the leading contender for the services of the Cowboys' all-time leader in passing yards and touchdowns. But without Romo, Tom Savage now is expected to be Houston's starting quarterback with former Cowboys quarterback Brandon Weeden serving as his backup.

In Denver, Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch will compete for the Broncos' starting quarterback job.

Romo's transition to TV will finish off one of the great undrafted free agent stories in NFL history.

In 2003, Romo bypassed a larger signing bonus from the Broncos to join the Cowboys out of Eastern Illinois. He did not throw a pass in a regular-season game during his first three seasons, but Bill Parcells turned to him in the sixth game of the 2006 season at halftime against the New York Giants.

Romo then sparked the Cowboys to a playoff berth and held the Cowboys' starting job through last August.

In his first full season as the starter in 2007, Romo threw for a then-franchise record 4,211 yards -- a mark he would surpass twice more in his career -- and a franchise record 36 touchdown passes. The Cowboys finished with the best record in the NFC (13-3) but lost in the divisional round of the playoffs.

Romo has a career record of 78-49, but never was able to get the Cowboys past the divisional round in four playoff appearances. His 34,183 passing yards and 248 touchdown passes are the most in team history.

Romo also holds team records for most 300-yard passing games (46), multiple touchdown pass games (79) and consecutive games with a touchdown pass (38). In 2012, he threw for a club-record 4,903 yards and on Oct. 6, 2013, against the Broncos, he threw for a franchise record 506 yards. He owns the NFL record with a touchdown pass in 41 straight road games.

In 2013, back injuries started to slow Romo down. He had two back surgeries, including a discectomy before the season finale. He suffered two transverse process fractures in 2014 but missed just one game in leading the Cowboys to a 12-4 record and NFC East title. In 2015, he suffered a broken left collarbone against the Philadelphia Eagles and missed seven games. He broke the collarbone again in his second game back and missed the final five games as the Cowboys went 1-11 without him.

After undergoing collarbone surgery last spring, Romo said his back felt as strong as it had in years. However, on the third play from scrimmage in a preseason game against Seattle, he was awkwardly driven to the turf by Cliff Avril and suffered the compression fracture in his back.

Romo's absence allowed Prescott, the Cowboys' second fourth-round pick last year, to ascend to the starting job. After losing the season opener, the Cowboys won a franchise-record 11 straight games. Prescott finished his rookie season with 23 touchdown passes and just four interceptions and was named the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Disappointed he would not have the chance to win the job back, Romo diffused any controversy with a heartfelt statement backing Prescott upon his return. He served as the backup for the first time since 2006 and saw action in just one game, throwing a touchdown pass on his lone drive in the 2016 finale against the Eagles.

Why the Tony Romo-Cowboys breakup still hasn't happened – yet

By Kevin Seifert

ESPN.com

April 4, 2017

Editor's note: This story was originally published on March 21, but it has been updated as of April 3 to reflect the Cowboys' decision for teams to contact quarterback Tony Romo.

More than three weeks have passed since the Dallas Cowboys appeared set to release Romo, their former franchise quarterback who lost his starting job last season. Romo remains on the Cowboys' roster, even after posting a farewell video on social media, and the free-agent market has slowed considerably.

What's happening here? Let's update the situation as best we can.

Why haven't the Cowboys released Romo already, as multiple reports initially suggested they would?

Put simply, they don't need to.

The Cowboys have enough salary-cap space, about \$1.8 million at last check, and there aren't many high-priced options remaining on the market whom they would need to create room for. Their original plan to designate Romo a post-June 1 cut means they had already accepted that his \$24.7 million cap number would remain on their books until then. They weren't going to get any immediate cap relief.

So, has Dallas changed its mind?

There is no indication of that. Cowboys general manager and owner Jerry Jones would no doubt prefer Romo as a backup to Dak Prescott, rather than Kellen Moore or some other lesser player. But that appears to be unrealistic, both financially -- Romo's contract calls for him to earn \$14 million in 2017 -- and from a chemistry standpoint. And the Cowboys have now allowed teams permission to speak with Romo and/or his agents directly. If Romo is going to be on an NFL roster, he wants to play.

What's the point of Dallas holding on to him?

It's presumed that there are two leading contenders for Romo's services: The Houston Texans and Denver Broncos, probably in that order. Perhaps one of them will get antsy and offer a draft pick to secure him now. But there has been no indication any team, most notably the Texans or Broncos, would be willing to do anything to trade for Romo, either. Other than Jay Cutler, there isn't a quarterback on the free-agent market who would project as a likely starter. And if either of those teams preferred Cutler, they probably would have signed him by now.

What's the downside to the Cowboys' approach here?

None, as long as Romo is fine with it. To this point, there is no indication he is getting impatient or that he would create a public spectacle to force the Cowboys' hands.

Really? No repercussions at all?

Well, one tangential issue arose this week when veteran Josh McCown signed with the Jets. McCown previously visited the Cowboys but held off on signing because Romo's situation was unsettled. So you could argue that this approach cost the Cowboys having McCown as Prescott's backup.

Are you sure Romo wants to play in 2017?

Not entirely, no. The informed guess is that Romo wants to play for a contender at what he considers a fair starting-level salary, but he isn't committed to playing anywhere for any price. At this point in his career, he has a right to be picky. Don't forget about Adam Schefter's reports that Fox Sports as well as CBS want to hire Romo as an analyst.

But assuming he is destined for the Texans or Broncos, wouldn't those teams want him on their roster and in their building now to begin the transition?

If it was important enough to them, they would have pursued a trade. But in reality, NFL offseason programs start in a couple weeks. There isn't much of substance that Romo could be doing with new coaches and teammates now, anyway, at least at the team facility.

Is there a flashpoint of any kind on the horizon?

To the best that can be ascertained, there is no imminent deadline or other timing factor that would force a decision anytime soon. Romo could get impatient or the Cowboys might simply give up on pulling off a trade. Plus, the Cowboys will have a right of first refusal as to who can and cannot talk to the quarterback. Absent that turn of events, the issue could remain in stasis for several more weeks. The Broncos can't start their offseason program until April 10. The Texans' earliest start date is April 17.

Reports: Cowboys owner permits teams to talk to Tony Romo to facilitate trade

By Troy Renck
KMGH
April 4, 2017

Continuing to work every angle to trade their veteran quarterback, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones granted general managers permission to speak with Tony Romo or his agent to arrange a visit or workout, according to multiple reports. The move is designed to facilitate a trade. As such, it remains unlikely, as of Monday, that the Broncos' stance regarding Romo will change. They have not closed the door on Romo, but it has yet to open. Their interest hinges on Romo becoming a free agent, which would allow the Broncos to talk contract parameters with incentives to protect against injury. The Broncos dived into full-throttle draft preparation Monday. They have never had interest in dealing for Romo, and held no discussions with the Cowboys at last week's NFL owners meetings.

Last week I asked Broncos coach Vance Joseph, given his growing comfort level with young quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, why not eliminate Romo as an option? Siemian continues to recover on schedule from left shoulder surgery, and Lynch has returned to Dove Valley to acclimate to the altitude before workouts begin on April 10.

"I would say this: It's our overall philosophy to not rule anything out. If a player is available who can help us get better in any area then we're going to research and explore it. That's everyone who becomes available. That's the issue. You can't say, 'Never, never, never.' Right now, today, we're fine with our quarterbacks," Joseph said. "Moving forward, if anyone becomes available who can help us get better we're going to explore it."

Romo's situation became muddied when the Cowboys didn't release him as expected at the start of free agency. He lost his starting job to rookie Dak Prescott, and will be 37 this month after making four starts over the past two seasons. The Texans and Cowboys are the two teams most often connected to Romo, with Houston given the slight edge by industry sources after trading Brock Osweiler last month. Romo, according to reports, is also considering retiring and beginning a broadcast career with offers from Fox and CBS.

Offseason Dates set

As a new coach, Joseph could have begun workouts on April 3, but told me starting April 10 worked better because the players progress through without a break. The first phase of the Broncos "voluntary" offseason program begins April 10 with voluntary mini camp April 25-27. During the first two weeks of the program, players can go through strength and conditioning and physical therapy activities.

Voluntary mini-camp runs April 25-27, followed by rookie orientation May 11-13. The voluntary organized team activities (OTAs) are May 23-25, May 30-31, June 5-8.

Mandatory minicamp is scheduled for June 13-15 with no date yet established for the start of training camp in late July.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones reportedly allowing other teams to contact Tony Romo

By Eric Edholm
Yahoo.com
April 4, 2017

We're now into Day 26 of the Tony Romo hostage standoff, and there has been some movement in the situation. The Dallas Cowboys apparently are allowing others to negotiate his freedom.

According to NFL Network's Mike Garafolo, other teams have been granted permission by Cowboys owner Jerry Jones to contact Romo or his agent if they're interested in his services for the 2017 season.

Romo said his goodbyes to Cowboys Nation last month when it appeared the team was set to release him. But Jones and Co. apparently had a change of heart, feeling that Romo might have had some trade value if there was more than one team — say, the Houston Texans and Denver Broncos, or perhaps others — were willing to throw a draft pick or a bag of balls their way.

But it remains clear that at this point, Jones is trying to trade Romo — until it's obvious there's no deal to be made, we assume.

Even if the Cowboys end up cutting Romo, they would designate him as a post-June 1 cut and in theory could drag this thing out as long as they please, even if the ousted starter is now a boat anchor on their salary cap. Jones might not be doing Romo any favors by hanging onto a player whom Jones has said is as close as kin, and Romo might like to know sooner rather than later what his options are — especially with a pregnant wife due to deliver their third child in August.

The Texans have traded Brock Osweiler and have only Tom Savage as a realistic starting option. The Broncos might be talking up their young QBs, but don't close the door on them as a possible landing spot. There might even be a third team interested in the soon-to-be 37-year-old quarterback, who played one series last season after suffering a back injury and watched Dak Prescott take his starting job he held for more than a decade.

Jones promised to "do right" by Romo, and yet the owner also is trying to improve his team first. Will any club be willing to give up much in a trade for a player with a lengthy injury history and who might be on the metaphorical 18th tee of his playing career? We're not sure. But NFL teams now can try to make their move, with Jones' permission.

Even as 'Hard Knocks' shows signs of fading, NFL and HBO extend it for four more seasons

By Frank Schwab

Yahoo.com

April 4, 2017

Last season, “Hard Knocks” wasn’t very good. The season with the Los Angeles Rams fell flat because the Rams were the dullest team that has been on the show and every story line could be predicted before the opening credits rolled.

The NFL isn’t giving up though, as Sports Business Daily reported that the HBO show has been extended for four more seasons.

One big problem is that teams don’t want to be on the show. The Rams “volunteered” to be on the program (sure they did), but it seems obvious they were on because the NFL wants us to believe everyone is excited about football in Los Angeles, even though Los Angeles itself doesn’t seem to care much. We’ll be exposed to the incredibly boring 2016 Rams again on Amazon’s “All or Nothing” series, which was a compelling show when it featured the highly entertaining Arizona Cardinals last year.

Until the NFL can figure out a way to get a marquee team on (if the league got the New England Patriots to do it, that would fix pretty much every problem the show has), it’s just not going to have that much pop.

The other issue is tougher to figure out. There have been 11 seasons of “Hard Knocks.” They’ve settled on the same types of players to feature. Those angles were great early on in the series, and now they’re practically a drinking game (“Finish your beer when they show the family that has had to move from city to city as the veteran player battles for a job!”). If you watched “Hard Knocks” and “All or Nothing” last year, there’s zero doubt “All or Nothing” was better. “All or Nothing” was different and new, following a team around during the regular season. We’ve had more than a decade of “Hard Knocks.” We can guess what this season’s show will be like before we even know which team will be on.

Make no mistake, “Hard Knocks” was an excellent, groundbreaking show in many ways, for many years, and it deserved every award it got. It’s just hard to keep the show fresh, especially when it’s obvious no NFL team wants to be on it.

Maybe the show will rebound over the next four years. Having a more interesting team on will help. It’s hard to see the NFL forcing one of the top teams to do it, but whichever franchise is told it has to be on will be more watchable than the Rams.

There will officially be four more seasons of the show. Plenty of challenges are ahead.

NFL announces 2017 offseason workout program dates

By Staff

NFL.com

April 4, 2017

Free agency is winding down. That means it's almost time for all 32 teams to commence their offseason programs.

Here are the key offseason dates to know for every NFL team -- all dates are tentative and subject to change.

Arizona Cardinals

Report: April 17; Organized Team Activities Offseason Workouts: May 16-18, May 23-25, May 30-31; Mandatory Minicamp: June 6-8

Atlanta Falcons

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 30, June 1-2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Baltimore Ravens

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Buffalo Bills

Report: April 3; Voluntary Minicamp: April 18-20; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 16-18, May 23-25, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Carolina Panthers

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Chicago Bears

Report: April 18; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 30, June 1-2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Cincinnati Bengals

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Cleveland Browns

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Dallas Cowboys

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-7, Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Denver Broncos

Report: April 10; Voluntary Minicamp: April 25-27; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Detroit Lions

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Green Bay Packers

Report: April 18; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-24, May 31, June 1-2, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Houston Texans

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Indianapolis Colts

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 31, June 1-2, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Jacksonville Jaguars

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23, May 25-26, May 30, June 1-2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Kansas City Chiefs

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 6-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Los Angeles Chargers

Report: April 3; Voluntary Minicamp: April 25-27; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 16-18, May 23-25, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Los Angeles Rams

Report: April 10; Voluntary Minicamp: April 25-27; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Miami Dolphins

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Minnesota Vikings

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

New England Patriots

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 31, June 1, June 12-13, June 15; Mandatory Minicamp: June 6-8

New Orleans Saints

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

New York Giants

Report: April 18; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 30-31, June 2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

New York Jets

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Oakland Raiders

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 30-31, June 1-2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Philadelphia Eagles

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Pittsburgh Steelers

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

San Francisco 49ers

Report: April 10; Voluntary Minicamp: April 25-27; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 22-23, May 25, May 30-31, June 2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Seattle Seahawks

Report: April 18; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 30, June 1-2, June 5-6, June 8-9; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Tennessee Titans

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Washington Redskins

Report: April 17; OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8; Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15

Full breakdown of the league's offseason program:

As per Article 21 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, each club's official, voluntary nine-week offseason program is conducted in three phases:

Phase One consists of the first two weeks of the program with activities limited to strength and conditioning and physical rehabilitation only.

Phase Two consists of the next three weeks of the program. On-field workouts may include individual player instruction and drills as well as team practice conducted on a "separates" basis. No live contact or team offense vs. team defense drills are permitted.

Phase Three consists of the next four weeks of the program. Teams may conduct a total of 10 days of organized team practice activity, or "OTAs." No live contact is permitted, but 7-on-7, 9-on-7, and 11-on-11 drills are permitted.

Article 22 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement stipulates that clubs may hold one mandatory minicamp for veteran players. This minicamp, noted below, must occur during Phase Three of the offseason program.

New head coaches are entitled to conduct an additional voluntary veteran minicamp. Any voluntary minicamp for veteran players must be conducted prior to the NFL Draft (April 27-29), but no earlier than week three of the club's offseason workout program and after at least one week of the two weeks of Phase One activities that the clubs may hold pursuant to Article 21. This year, five clubs will hold voluntary veteran minicamps, as noted below.

Each club may hold a rookie football development program for a period of seven weeks, which in 2017 may begin on May 15. During this period, no activities may be held on weekends, with the exception of one post-NFL Draft rookie minicamp, which may be conducted on either the first or second weekend following the draft. The dates of each club's post-draft rookie minicamps will be circulated at a later date.

For specific information and detailed offseason program rules, please see Articles 21 and 22 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (beginning on page 131), available on nflcommunications.com.

Report: Broncos, Texans still not trading for Tony Romo

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

April 4, 2017

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is trying to drum up interest in a Tony Romo trade, but it's apparently not happening.

The two teams that have been tied to Romo in various trade scenarios, the Broncos and Texans, are both unwilling to trade for Romo, according to Ian Rapoport of NFL Network.

Jones told the other 31 teams that they are free to contact Romo, even though he's under contract to the Cowboys, if they want to have him come in for a visit or a workout. Obviously, that means Jones hopes some team will kick the tires on Romo, conclude that he's still got something left in the tank in the month he turns 37, and offer the Cowboys a draft pick for his services.

But so far there's been no interest in Romo, as teams may figure that he'll be eventual with no compensation soon enough because the Cowboys will cut him rather than keeping a backup with a \$14 million base salary on their roster. It's unclear whether Romo will play at all this season, and unclear where he'll play if he does play, and Jones's efforts haven't done anything to clarify the situation.

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One month left to pick up 2014 first-round options

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
April 4, 2017

One month from today, teams with 2014 first-round picks still playing under their rookie deals have a decision to make: Extend the contract for a fifth year, or let the player enter a contract year.

Several no-brainers dot the landscape, from Texans defensive end Jadeveon Clowney to Raiders linebacker Khalil Mack to Buccaneers receiver Mike Evans to Giants receiver Odell Beckham Jr.

Two quarterbacks will dominate the speculation and reporting in advance of the deadline: Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles and Vikings quarterback Teddy Bridgewater. Both teams have said they'll make a decision closer to the deadline, a position that some have interpreted as an indication that the decision to not pick up the option already has been made.

For Bortles, a top-10 pick, his fifth-year salary will match the 2017 transition tender for quarterbacks. That's \$19.05 million, guaranteed for injury. Which means that, if Bortles emerges from the season with an injury that prevents him from passing a physical before the amount becomes fully guaranteed on the first day of the new league year, the Jaguars will owe him that amount for 2018.

Conversely, the Jags could opt not to exercise the option, resolving to use the franchise tag if Bortles finally breaks out in 2017. The downside is that it would cost roughly \$3 million or \$4 million more to keep him under the franchise tag. The upside is that they would save the \$19.05 million if Bortles: (1) doesn't improve; and (2) tears an ACL along the way.

For the Vikings, the potential investment would be much lower, given that Bridgewater was picked outside of the top 10, where the salary becomes the average of the third- and 25th-highest-paid players at the position. But the bigger question for now is whether he'll ever play again. With Sam Bradford performing well and entering a contract year of his own, the Vikings may decide to not pick up the option and to take their chances with Bridgewater, who may not draw significant offers on the open market if he isn't able to return to action in 2017.

As to the other quarterback taken in the first round three years ago, the decision became moot more than a year ago, when the Browns cut the man who instantly flashed the money sign — and never really earned all that much of it.

Broncos announce offseason workout program schedule

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

April 4, 2017

The Broncos will officially commence their preparation for the 2017 season as a team on April 10, when their nine-week voluntary offseason program will begin.

Details of the Broncos' schedule follow:

First Day: April 10

Voluntary Minicamp: April 25-27

Rookie Orientation: May 11-13

OTA Offseason Workouts: May 23-25, May 30-31, June 1, June 5-8

Mandatory Minicamp: June 13-15 The program consists of three phases that progressively allow more activities in the process.

- Phase One: During the first two weeks of the program, teams may conduct only strength and conditioning and physical rehabilitation activities.
- Phase Two: The following three weeks may include on-field workouts, individual player instruction and drills. Teams can also conduct separated team practice with no live contact or team offense vs. team defense drills.
- Phase Three: The final four weeks may include a total of 10 days of organized team practice activities (OTAs) and a mandatory veteran minicamp. Though teams are still not allowed to have live contact, they may conduct 7-on-7, 9-on-7 and 11-on-11 drills.

Because the Broncos hired a new head coach this offseason, they are also permitted to have a few added benefits during this time to help the coaching staff get their team up to speed. Teams with new head coaches may begin their offseason programs as early as the first Monday of April while other clubs must wait until the third Monday of April. The Broncos will begin on April 10, a week before franchises with returning coaches may.

New head coaches are also allowed to hold a voluntary veteran minicamp before the NFL Draft. The Broncos will have theirs from April 25 through April 27.

The team will also have a rookie orientation from May 11-13.

Matt Paradis, Jordan Taylor and Casey Kreiter sign exclusive rights tenders

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
April 4, 2017

Center Matt Paradis, wide receiver Jordan Taylor and long snapper Casey Kreiter — three of the eight players who received exclusive-rights tenders from the Broncos in March — signed their tenders on Monday, the team announced.

As players with fewer than three accrued seasons, exclusive-rights free agents may only re-sign with their prior team once their team issues tenders to them.

Paradis is the most experienced of the three, as he started every game in the past two seasons. Taylor, a 2015 college free agent signing, appeared in 16 games in 2016 after spending the previous year on the practice squad. Kreiter, signed in 2016, won his position battle and played 10 games for the Broncos before suffering a calf injury that ultimately sent him to injured reserve with three games left in the season.

The five players yet to sign their exclusive-rights tenders are inside linebacker Zaire Anderson, outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett, center James Ferentz, running back Kapri Bibbs and wide receiver Bennie Fowler III.