

The Broncos' faith in their two quarterbacks shouldn't be questioned now. But something else can.

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 6, 2017

Vance Joseph shook his head incredulously and then repeated, almost verbatim, what he said weeks prior.

"We've got two young guys that we believe in," he said, standing in the corridor of the Indiana Convention Center amid a stampede of media and draft prospects.

"They won nine games combined and probably should have won more," he added. "... We're fine."

Few wanted to believe him that day at the NFL combine. Few wanted to believe him when he uttered similar words at the Broncos' headquarters weeks before. And few still wanted to accept his comments during his latest address, at the league meetings last week.

"We have two young guys that we feel really good about," Joseph began again in Phoenix. "I've said it 10 times, this team won nine games last year with two rookie quarterbacks. They probably could have won 10 or 11. We feel strong about our two young guys."

Despite what Joseph and general manager John Elway said in months past, it wasn't until Tony Romo was officially taken out of contention Tuesday that their declarations began to set in as reality.

Denver is moving forward with a pair of quarterbacks in Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch who cost pennies compared to most starters and who might be able to lead the Broncos back to the playoffs — maybe even deep into the postseason — along with an improved offensive line and more efficient run game.

The Broncos' faith in the two can no longer be questioned.

No, the question now is who will join Siemian and Lynch in the quarterback room.

Joseph has also said multiple times that the Broncos will bring on a third quarterback for depth. If it's a veteran, it'll be a younger veteran, he said. Or it could be a rookie, pulled from the class of 2017's relatively shallow pool of quarterbacks.

"We have to add a third in some capacity," Joseph said. "Now, could that third outplay our one and two? if he's that good, absolutely. But right now, we have a one and two in our building."

The faith and focus are on the two returning quarterbacks both of which were rookies, in most respects, and are pressured to make the critical Year 2 leap.

But it's foreseeable QB No. 3 could be a guy making his return, as well, be it Austin Davis, who has played only 13 games over his five-year NFL career but has the experience of working for the Broncos

and with their current two quarterbacks. Or Christian Ponder, who temporarily joined the Broncos in 2015 when Peyton Manning was nursing a foot injury.

Lingering in the background is Matt McGloin, the former Raider who started in place of Derek Carr for Broncos' season finale in Denver, and even Blaine Gabbert, who went 1-4 as a starter in San Francisco last season before losing his job to Colin Kaepernick.

In the draft, the Broncos have a bevy of picks — 10, all-told. They don't need a franchise quarterback, and finding one in a draft is rare anyway. Unlike last year, when Elway moved up to land Denver's possible quarterback of the future in Lynch, depth and development are key this time around. The selection of a quarterback, if one is selected at all, would likely get pushed to a later round, if not to the list of undrafted players.

Denver has priorities and holes to fill in the draft, namely an offensive tackle, defensive line depth, perhaps a fourth cornerback, maybe a tight end or a slot receiver, maybe another inside linebacker or running back.

"We have to go into the draft with an open mind as far as taking the best player for our needs," Joseph said. "It's a combination of both. It's not only the best player, but it's your need. If there is a tackle there that has a first-round grade from us, that's awesome."

"The third (quarterback) is going to fall to us. Whether it is the draft or free agency, that won't be hard to do."

And in the meantime, Nos. 1 and 2 will again take center stage. Their place on the depth chart will be determined by multiple factors in another open competition this year, but to know where things stand now, go back to what Joseph said about Siemian:

"Obviously, he has more experience. He had a fine year," Joseph said during his introductory news conference in January. "I watched him getting smart. He's fast with the ball. He makes little error with the football and that's important."

Go back to what he said about Lynch:

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

And go back to what Joseph said about the Broncos' future at quarterback:

"They're so different. Playing quarterback in this league is about decision-making," he said at the league meetings. "That is important. They both are young guys. They both have to learn that part of playing the game. If they do that, we're going to win football games. It's going to be a great competition in the spring and the fall, and the best man wins."

Listen to Joseph.

Chad “Ochocinco” Johnson challenges Demaryius Thomas, Odell Beckham Jr. to 1-on-1s

By Hugh Johnson
Denver Post
April 6, 2017

That’s not a typo. Chad “Ochocinco” Johnson, the controversial former Cincinnati Bengals receiver known for his antics on and off the field, is calling out the best receivers of today’s NFL for a little 1-on-1.

Johnson, now 39, has found a new hobby for when he’s not playing for the Monterrey Fundidores in a Mexican football league, testing the skills of the NFL’s best receivers by covering them as a defensive back.

Tuesday, Johnson squared off in a series of 1-on-1 drills against Pittsburgh Steelers receiver Antonio Brown. Clips of the contest can be viewed on Brown’s and Johnson’s respective Instagram accounts (be warned the majority of them are NSFW). While facing Brown, Johnson took to Twitter to challenge Giants receiver Odell Beckham Jr. and Denver’s Demaryius Thomas.

Never the quiet sort, Johnson dared Beckham to “come get this work.” (WARNING: strong language)

@ochocinco
Somebody tell @OBJ_3 I'm looking for him!!
[https://twitter.com/Truth_305/status/849328616924225537 ...](https://twitter.com/Truth_305/status/849328616924225537)

Thomas, not known for being much of a talker, accepted Johnson’s challenge and said he’d do his talking on the field.

@DemaryiusT You're next 🍑

@ochocinco Told u before I don't talk.. we gone see @ochocinco

It didn’t look like Johnson appreciated DT’s tone

@ochocinco
Technically you just talked even though you said you don't, just for getting slick at the mouth you won't catch ONE ball!!

Don’t know when Thomas and Johnson will go at it but here’s hoping DT puts up a good showing for Broncos country.

As Broncos prepare for offseason work, QBs know what they need to do

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 6, 2017

The Denver Broncos will formally begin their offseason work Monday when players report for their first set of voluntary workouts.

The first two weeks will be conditioning work only. Coach Vance Joseph has repeatedly said the work in April, May and June for the two quarterbacks -- Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch -- will be mainly to learn the new offense. The competition for the starting job is certainly underway in some respects as the coaches see how the two deal with the new playbook, but things won't get cranked up in earnest until training camp.

And much like former Broncos coach Gary Kubiak outlined for the two earlier this year, Joseph has made it clear in recent weeks what parts of the quarterbacks' respective games need the most attention. They'll certainly have to show command of the offense in the weeks and months to come. They'll have to show leadership, calm under pressure and the ability to close out drives with touchdowns.

Each also has at least one major item he'll have to wrestle with as well to win the job. If both succeed in ironing out the wrinkles in their respective games, it will make the decision only that much more difficult for the Broncos' hierarchy.

"We feel good about those two young guys," Joseph said last week. "They'll get to work, we'll get to work and the competition will be a good thing for both of them, and they'll both be better for it."

For Siemian, opposing defensive coaches have said he has the demeanor in the pocket that's tough to face because he makes quick decisions without being rushed in his reads. Those same coaches also have said his willingness to fit the ball in tight spaces and throw with anticipation gives him the look of a starter.

His biggest hurdle in the months to come is to know when to say when with the ball. In short, he takes too many hits and he often takes a risk or two with throws outside the numbers that he shouldn't.

Siemian has spent his offseason at the Broncos' complex as a reminder of that -- he had surgery on his left (non-throwing) shoulder just after the 2016 season. While the struggles in the offensive line last season have certainly been factored into the evaluation, Broncos coaches still want Siemian to find a way to reduce the pounding he took.

"That comes with being a young quarterback," Joseph said. "You learn that part of when the down has expired, get rid of the football and live for the next down ... A couple of those shots he took last year he could have probably prevented."

Kubiak has said he talked with Siemian about that plenty in 2016 and also just before he stepped away from coaching at the end of last season.

"He's very bright. Can Trevor stay healthy?" Kubiak said earlier this year. "He's got to learn to do that. He and I have talked about that. We basically lost him three times last year, and if you're going to play in this league, you look at the great ones, they're there 16 times a year."

For Lynch, who is one of the biggest quarterbacks in the league at 6-foot-7, 244 pounds, he has to recognize more of what defenses are doing against the Broncos' offense -- and do so quicker. Lynch made two starts last season for an injured Siemian -- a win over Jacksonville and a loss to Atlanta. Kubiak talked about the importance of Lynch's footwork throughout last season -- he can get too deep in the backfield, even off a shotgun snap, because of his stride length.

Lynch was often too quick to push the ball toward the sideline with his throws, rarely challenging defenses in the middle of the field, and also too quick to leave the pocket before the actual pressure would have made that a necessity.

"I know he's been working down in Florida with a coach and working on some technique things," executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway said at the league meetings last week. "So he's down there working hard ... And I'm sure [the coaches] are looking forward to him having a good offseason."

In the end, even as the two battle it out to be the starter, Joseph said, they must understand the team around them and how they should fit into it as they do their work with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy and quarterbacks coach Bill Musgrave.

"We're going to play good defense in Denver," Joseph said. "I think what's going to help Trevor and Paxton is running the football better. Running the football better is going to help both quarterbacks ... That part I'm excited about. But again, the best teams win. I think Trevor and Paxton understand that. Just do your job. Do your job the best you can do and that's going to be good enough to win football games."

Mel Kiper, Todd McShay have Broncos looking offense in two-round mock

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 6, 2017

Even after roughly a month of free agency has passed the Denver Broncos' biggest roster need has not changed.

And despite the team having signed guard Ronald Leary and tackle Menelik Watson among their acquisitions on the open market, the Broncos still have a glaring hole at left tackle. Executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway has promised "we'll get it fixed," but the pickings are slim among veteran players.

Elway and coach Vance Joseph have floated the idea either Watson or Donald Stephenson, who played right tackle for the Broncos last season, getting a look at left tackle. But Stephenson was benched briefly late last season because of the Broncos' struggles up front in the offensive line, and neither player would be the preferred option at this point.

Which is why when ESPN's Mel Kiper Jr. and Todd McShay worked their way through a two-round mock draft, both said the Broncos would make their first pick – currently No. 20 – a potential rookie starter at left tackle. Kiper gave the Broncos Wisconsin tackle Ryan Ramczyk, who had hip surgery in January, while McShay offered the Broncos should take Utah tackle Garrett Bolles.

Some personnel executives see Bolles as a better potential left tackle over the long haul because of his athleticism, but others say Ramczyk is more versed in a pro-style offense, especially in the run game. Ramczyk said at the scouting combine he expected to be ready for training camp.

In three previous mock drafts Kiper has said the Broncos would take a tackle two times – it was Bolles both times. The two-round mock was the second time McShay has said Bolles would be the Broncos' first-round pick.

The Broncos have also taken a long look at a deep group of pass catching tight ends in their pre-draft work, and both Kiper and McShay said that position will be the target in the second round. Both also said Ashland tight end Adam Shaheen would be the pick.

In a group where there are players who are either top-quality receivers or high-end blockers – but not both – Shaheen is considered by many teams to be the best size-speed combination at the position.

Shaheen was both the tallest – 6-foot-6 ½-inches – and heaviest (278 pounds) player at the position who was invited to the scouting combine. His 4.79 40-yard dash showed quality movement skills for a player that size as well.

Ex-NFL RB Montee Ball reveals he would get drunk 4 times a week

By Staff

ESPN.com

April 6, 2017

Former University of Wisconsin and Denver Broncos running back Montee Ball says he drank heavily throughout his college and NFL careers, and that through counseling he has accepted he is an alcoholic.

Now sober, Ball is enrolled at Wisconsin for summer classes. He told the Sporting News that his heavy drinking began in 2011, his junior season for the Badgers, and throughout his brief NFL career when he would get drunk four times a week.

He said he regrets not taking advice given to him in the NFL seriously.

"I wouldn't take any of it seriously," Ball told the Sporting News. "I was naïve enough to think my playing days would last forever. I would literally sit in the back of the room texting or being on Instagram not paying attention to the professional explaining to me about preparing for life after football and how important it is.

"I failed to use my platform to help others and to use the NFL as a steppingstone in life. I surrounded myself with bad people, not on the team but in the city. I was naïve enough to believe I had all the answers. I'm still kicking myself in the butt for that."

Ball said Broncos running backs coach Eric Stutesville told him after one meeting that he could smell alcohol on his breath.

"He talked about how he could smell the alcohol on me and that he thinks I may have a problem with drinking," Ball told the website. "He said if I needed any help with that he could reach out to people I could talk to. I didn't listen to him."

The Broncos waived Ball in 2015 after selecting him in the second round of the 2013 draft. The New England Patriots signed him to their practice squad in 2015, but he never played a game for the team. He watched the Broncos win Super Bowl 50 over the Carolina Panthers from his jail cell after he was arrested on a felony battery charge Feb. 5 of last year.

"It brought tears to my eyes," he told the Sporting News. "At one point, I was on top of the world and now watching the team that cut me a few months prior from a jail cell, that stung a lot."

He was sentenced to 60 days in jail last August after pleading guilty to disorderly conduct and battery for his role in two domestic abuse incidents.

In the Feb. 5 incident, his girlfriend told police he had thrown her across a Madison hotel room. A month later, a previous girlfriend told police she had been assaulted by Ball in 2014. He told the Sporting News that he has evidence to show the previous girlfriend was lying but decided to accept a plea deal as he

was facing six charges, including two felonies, and didn't think he would receive a fair trial because he is black and because of his history.

Also last year, Ball learned he was a father when a past girlfriend from Denver told him in a telephone call that she was pregnant. He says the birth of his son, Maverick, "was the turning point" for him as he "realized I have a purpose to raise that kid."

His addiction and mental health therapist told the Sporting News that Ball's turnaround began last summer.

"He acknowledged being an alcoholic, which is a significant thing, and coming from a domestic violence background himself," Cory Devine told the website. "He recognized, 'This is a pattern I've got to stop. It's my responsibility to do so.'"

Ball told the Sporting News that alcoholism runs in his family, starting with his grandfather and then his father.

Now back as a student at Wisconsin, he told the website he is "focused on improving my image and relationships I destroyed." He said he hopes to open a charitable foundation and is writing a book about his struggle with alcoholism.

Romo said Houston was 'at top of his list.' Why? Because Broncos never showed much interest

By Troy Renck
KMGH
April 6, 2017

It struck me Wednesday there were some misguided takes on Tony Romo's exit to CBS.

The point was driven home as I discussed the issue on 104.3 The Fan's morning drive for the better part of three hours. Let's retrace our steps, shall we.

Over the past three months, the Broncos existed as a possible destination for Romo. Beginning in January after missing the playoffs for the first time in six seasons, the Broncos opened their eyes to all options. As late as the NFL combine, Denver maintained interest, tepid as it was, in kicking the tires on Romo if he became a free agent. Given the chance to close the door on Romo at the combine, general manager John Elway and coach Vance Joseph cracked it ajar.

Then, gradually, the sands shifted.

The Broncos cooled to the idea of pursuing Romo, growing more comfortable with sticking with Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch rather than stalling their development for a soon-to-be 37-year-old with four starts over the past two seasons. By the time I arrived at the owners meetings last week in Phoenix, the scenarios painted for Romo began to crystallize: Texans or retirement.

Romo chose CBS, moving to the head of the line to land one of the best jobs in the industry opposite of Jim Nantz. He pulled a Dak Prescott on Phil Simms, if you will. This represented a savvy read of the market, but came with a dig, in my opinion.

"Obviously, Houston was at the top of the list of teams I looked at," said Romo on a CBS conference call Tuesday. "It was a very difficult decision. I went back and forth many times. It had nothing to do with the Texans. It had everything to do with CBS."

Romo never mentioned the Broncos, which felt purposeful. In talking to multiple NFL sources, including players, Romo had his eyes on the Broncos for months. The problem was the Broncos never reciprocated. They were never trading for Romo, not even one of the last picks in the draft. Any possibility, slim as it was, required talks of a low-salaried, incentivized contract as a free agent. Sometime between the start of free agency and the owners meetings, the Broncos closed the door on Romo. Admittedly, I am not sure when. It was not an epiphany as much as a pendulum swinging in the opposite direction.

I know this: By last week, Denver was not chasing Romo. The Broncos made it clear it was not their intent. Joseph then told me in a one-on-one interview of his increasing fondness for Siemian and Lynch. As opposed to the combine, this didn't sound like a company line. It sounded like a coach talking with conviction.

Romo made a brilliant move, saying yes to CBS before Peyton Manning decides his future plans or Drew Brees retires. The CBS gig represents a lifetime job, and there was no guarantee it would remain open a year from now. But let's not pretend Romo didn't see himself as a Bronco. The NFL Network reported as much on Nov. 20. Romo witnessed how Manning rewrote history and polished his legacy during four seasons in Denver.

With hindsight sharpening focus, it was telling when Romo did not become a free agent on March 9. The market for his services was limited. No teams were lining up to trade for one of the Cowboys' all-time greats. It is a bit sobering for a player of Romo's status to find this reception. With his 2014 season as the most recent evidence, Romo can rightly argue he belongs among the league's elite quarterbacks, if healthy. And watching Mike Glennon receive \$15 million a season from the Chicago Bears, well, that is jarring. Romo had a right to want to be paid well. But Romo's health and age were real factors when I talked with NFL folks.

As the Romo-coaster clickety clacked down the tracks over the past month, it spawned confusion. Why wouldn't Cowboys owner Jerry Jones release him? I believe it provided safe cover for Romo as he began to explore a fantastic broadcasting opportunity at CBS, while continuing to see if a trade would surface that would benefit the Cowboys and the quarterback.

Romo, in fact, thanked Jones, who has treated him as family for years. There was no anger, only a hint that Jones was working with him to provide the best landing spot.

"Jerry was amazing," Romo said. "I know sometimes it didn't look like it from the outside, but he was really in my corner. I've never had a better boss, owner, mentor than Jerry Jones."

Romo eventually saw Houston as tops on his list. The Broncos were once there. It never gained traction for a number of reasons. Both parties moved on. Denver hopes it has the horses to contend with two young quarterbacks and I wish I could be a fly on the wall when Romo shows up at Dove Valley for his first CBS production meeting.

John Elway, Denver Broncos dodged Tony Romo problem

By Bill Williamson

All22

April 6, 2017

This is a good week for the Denver Broncos.

The news out of Dallas has kept John Elway from doing John Elway things. Don't get it twisted; Elway does mostly really good things. Five AFC West titles, two Super Bowl appearances and a Super Bowl ring in six years on the job as the general manager of the Broncos makes Elway an elite front-office man. Elway has a reputation for going for it, and that approach has most often worked well for the Hall of Fame quarterback in his second NFL life.

But this time, it wouldn't have worked. Tony Romo saved Elway and the Broncos a lot of time and is forcing the franchise to do the right thing and stick with what they have at quarterback. It will pay off in the long run for Elway and his team. Officially, the Broncos were lukewarm on the idea of adding Romo – who Tuesday decided to retire and head to the TV booth rather than trying to play for Houston or Denver. Unofficially, there were rumblings that if Romo were to become a free agent, the Broncos would seriously consider adding him.

Now that option is gone and that's great for the Broncos. It would have been a bad idea.

Romo and the Broncos would not have worked out well.

Romo, who battled injuries his entire career, barely played the last two seasons and he is turning 37 years old this month. He's not suddenly going to get healthy. It's a primary reason why he left the game. But had he decided to play, his acquiring team would be taking a huge gamble that Romo would be able to make it through an entire season, since he's three years removed from a full season.

Houston is desperate for a quarterback so it's interest in Romo would be understandable. Denver is not desperate. That's why a Romo pursuit would have been starkly different than Denver signing Peyton Manning five years ago. There was a natural comparison because of their previous success and their age. But Denver badly needed Manning.

The Broncos are in better shape at quarterback now than they were in 2012. Tim Tebow is not the other option here. The future is much brighter. That's why the Broncos have no need to turn to a veteran free-agent option such as Jay Cutler or Colin Kaepernick with Romo out of the picture.

The Broncos will simply move on this season with Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch. That has been the plan all along. The Broncos like these young quarterbacks a lot. However, with the potential of Romo hovering over them, the Broncos were quietly looking over their young quarterbacks' shoulders. Now that the distraction has been eliminated and the Broncos are much better for it.

The Broncos are going to be fine at quarterback next season. Lynch, their first-round pick from a year ago, will develop. He could earn the trust of the coaching staff and use his natural abilities and become

the starter. Or Siemian is going to hold him off again. If Lynch is ready, he should do well because he has a strong skill set and scouts believe he can become a plus-starter. If Siemian wins, it will mean he has made strides. The reality is that Siemian played pretty well last year despite being very raw. He is a smart player who doesn't make a lot of mistakes. His teammates really believe in him.

The Broncos have done a solid job in free agency and they will continue to add to the roster in the draft. This should be a good team. Romo wasn't the missing link. With him in the TV booth, Elway has lost his temptation, and that's a good thing. Elway will make big splashes in the future and they probably will help the Broncos. This one wouldn't have helped, but now Denver doesn't have to find out the hard way.

Winners and losers of Tony Romo's decision to retire from NFL

By Lorenzo Reyes
USA Today
April 6, 2017

The Dallas Cowboys released Tony Romo on Tuesday so that he could pursue broadcasting opportunities. CBS Sports then quickly announced the network had signed the retired Romo to a contract that paired him with Jim Nantz and made him the network's lead analyst.

Here are the winners and losers from the ripple effect of Romo stepping away from football.

Winners

The Cowboys: When Romo tweeted a photo of himself wearing a jacket with the CBS logo, it was clear that this was a move that was in the works for weeks. So although it may have appeared that the Cowboys were stringing Romo along, they ended up doing right by one of owner Jerry Jones' favorite players. Dallas also breaks away from its starting QB of the previous decade pretty cleanly, allowing Dak Prescott to have the full focus and support of the entire organization in 2017.

Romo: He got his release from Dallas, so he keeps his signing bonus. And if that "competitive spirit" that he referenced on a conference call Tuesday afternoon ever becomes too big to ignore, he'll be able to test the market and come back to the NFL pretty easily, with the Cowboys no longer holding his rights. After all, "99 percent certain" does leave the door slightly open. Romo becomes just the fifth lead football analyst in CBS history, so his new role is one with plenty of prestige.

Tom Savage: Brock Osweiler was traded to Cleveland and Romo is in a suit with a headset, so Savage is firmly entrenched as the favorite to win the starting quarterback job in Houston. Savage played in relief of Osweiler late in the year, but a concussion prompted Osweiler to play in the Texans' playoff run. Now, it will be Savage's job, unless the Texans swing big for a rookie quarterback in the draft or make another expected move.

CBS: Phil Simms was a polarizing figure on the network's broadcasts, and though Romo is a complete experiment in the booth, CBS wins big. First, the network is adding a dynamic personality and a – now former – star player. Romo is a big draw, and the network should see early returns from his presence. At the very least, there will be significant curiosity to see how Romo performs in the network's first broadcasts. And CBS also gets to have Romo on the call for the Cowboys' Thanksgiving game, which should draw significant interest.

The New England Patriots: Any team looking for a quarterback and banking on Romo becoming available now will have to look elsewhere – and New England might be the first place to turn. A trade is still unlikely, and Patriots coach Bill Belichick was never going to ship backup QB Jimmy Garoppolo to Texans or the Denver Broncos, which are both contenders in the AFC. But with Romo off the market, the potential price for Garoppolo just keeps going up.

Jay Cutler: The best-available passer on the market, Cutler now becomes a more appealing option with the Romo option now gone. Could Houston be interested? Cutler's market could depend on his asking price, but his reps should field more calls with Romo's status now resolved. Colin Kaepernick might have been considered here, but because his skill set does not fit that of a traditional dropback passer, any team that was interested in Romo would be more likely to kick the tires on Cutler.

Losers

The Texans: Houston is the biggest loser on this list by far. Long-rumored to be his preferred landing spot, Romo admitted on a conference call with reporters that the Texans were on the top of his list.

Simms: Though CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus indicated that the network is looking for a new role for Simms, this is clearly a demotion. Simms had served as lead analyst for almost two decades, so he had a long run. But whatever his new function is, it's going to be an adjustment.

Fans: The NFL is better when it has talented quarterbacks playing. Losing Romo is another blow for fans, especially with the storylines that would've emerged had he played for the state-rival Texans. But there are some silver linings. CBS has the Cowboys Thanksgiving game this year, and there should be plenty of other chances for Romo to meet up with Dak Prescott, Jerry Jones, Jason Garrett, and the rest of the Cowboys.

Romo: Sure, he was listed as a winner earlier in this story, but in Romo's concession speech to Prescott in November – the one in which he recognized the reins to the team now belonged to the rookie – he acknowledged how much he wanted to compete and play. Romo will turn 37 later this month, and his window to play in the league is narrowing. Even in his conference call after his new position was announced, Romo didn't completely close the door on returning and never used the word "retire." Those feelings could grow even more complicated if he gets a stronger urge to play again.

Richard Sherman Trade Talk: 'There Is No Bad Blood'

By Albert Breer

MMQB

April 6, 2017

The news from John Schneider's Wednesday interview on ESPN Radio in Seattle wasn't that the Seahawks GM is listening to offers for star corner Richard Sherman.

It was that Schneider was talking so openly about it.

I've always argued to coaches and general managers that there is little gained or lost competitively in what they say to all of us in the media. But the fact is that because it happens so rarely—Schneider told radio hosts Brock Huard and Mike Salk that what "you've seen lately in the news is real"—a football exec simply confirming that he's even listened to the idea of dealing a cornerstone is going to turn heads.

So I texted Sherman, and he gave me an answer that sounded remarkably similar to what his GM said: "Very little chance it happens, but both sides are listening. I honestly don't have much more to say about it than what I've already said. We have a great relationship. ... There is a lot of love and respect. There is no bad blood."

As for the idea that the Seahawks might be sending him a message, Sherman quickly responded that he's not taking it that way: "Not at all. I'm not in the least bit concerned about that."

April is the time of the NFL calendar when you have to be careful parsing what you believe from what you hear. But at the very least, Schneider has swung open the door for business, and the Sherman trade story figures to linger at least until we know who'll make up the Seahawks' draft class at the end of the month.

In this week's Game Plan, we're going to dive in on Tony Romo, reheat a few leftovers from the annual meeting—including the reason for some of the, uh, buzz on marijuana emerging from it—and discuss where the expected top pick will be spending his draft night.

But we'll start with the story that's kind of come drip by drip over the past few weeks, before Schneider made it splash Wednesday.

Would it buck convention for a team in the middle of a championship window to deal a cornerstone, one who was arguably the face of the run to its only world title? Sure, it would. But Schneider and Pete Carroll aren't prisoners to convention. They weren't when they anointed a 5-foot-10 franchise QB, they weren't when they dealt for Marshawn Lynch, Percy Harvin or Jimmy Graham, and they won't be now.

So, as I understand it, the Seahawks are now looking at getting ahead of the aging of their core. Seattle has 10 players taking up 61 percent of its cap space—those guys count for a total of \$101.26 million on the '17 cap—and all 10 have played at least five NFL seasons. Seven of the 10 are 28 or older, and Earl Thomas and KJ Wright will make it nine of 10 before the season starts.

The idea here is to find a way to extend that aforementioned window, lots of solutions have been discussed, and the secondary is an easy place to start. Yes, the team's identity has been built there, but Kam Chancellor is in a contract year, and Thomas and Sherman are up after 2018. Sherman and Chancellor turn 30 next spring. The three take up \$32.156 million on Seattle's cap. And this year's draft is strong at both corner and safety.

That's why Seattle had conversations at the combine involving Sherman—remember, Carroll's scheme values safeties over corners—and let him know about it beforehand. It's why the idea hasn't come off the table yet. And it's why Schneider didn't seem to mind sending a signal affirming that over the Seattle airwaves.

For Sherman's part, he's seen players at his position like Darrelle Revis and Aqib Talib enhance their Q-rating later in their careers by switching teams. It certainly won't do any less to stoke his competitive fire.

So what teams would be most interested in dealing for Sherman? The Patriots and Raiders have been the two most mentioned as good fits, as both have needs at cornerback. But others could still emerge, especially in the days leading up to and after the draft. Remember, the draft is deep at cornerback, which complicates the market a bit for a potential Sherman trade.

And so it'll come up plenty over the next few weeks. And with that, here are some other draft-related talking points worth watching as April 27 draws closer ...

- **WHO'S FALLING?** From a talent standpoint, Alabama pass rusher Tim Williams is a Top 10 pick. I've heard him called a more explosive Bruce Irvin, and Irvin went 15th overall in 2013. But there's the drug issue (Williams admitted at the combine to failing tests in college), and the gun charge, and a real question as to whether or not he'll be able to grow past his problems. "He's up there with the top pure pass rushers," said one area scout assigned to the Tide. "The real question is his personality, and the trust factor with teams. The problems aren't rare, it's more whether the team can trust the person. Can he work through the problems? Is he smart enough to work through the problems?" Worth noting: Past personality issues with pass-rushers (Randy Gregory, Aldon Smith, Greg Hardy, Dion Jordan) aren't helping Williams. I'd be surprised if he goes in the first round. And he may fall further than that.
- **WHAT'S SAN FRANCISCO DOING?** It's the most asked question I'm hearing from teams, and Stanford pass-rusher Solomon Thomas has long appeared to be the leader in the clubhouse to go No. 2 after Cleveland takes Texas A&M freak Myles Garrett off the board. But I'd be surprised if GM John Lynch doesn't make an effort to try and deal down and accumulate more draft capital. I've heard from a number of people that the Niners like Alabama LB Reuben Foster and LSU RB Leonard Fournette.
- **WILL THE BEARS TAKE A SAFETY?** Word is the Bears like both LSU's Jamal Adams and Ohio State's Malik Hooker, who are widely considered two of the best safety prospects to come out of the college ranks in years. The problem? It's the idea of drafting a safety that high, and whether the impact will meet the price of the third pick in the draft. That would naturally make the Bears another candidate to at least explore trading down.

- IS ANYONE LOOKING TO TRADE UP? As of right now, the ranks are thin, and for a couple reasons. First, the quarterbacks haven't built the momentum that Jared Goff and Carson Wentz did in 2016, and that position is usually a driver in major moves at the top of the first round. Second, as strong as this draft is, where it's strong it's also deep (receiver, tight end, corner, safety, edge rusher), so plenty of teams are thinking that the difference between, say, 5 and 15 or 10 and 20 isn't huge.
- HOW WILL THE BACKS SHAKE OUT? I know a couple teams that like Dalvin Cook over Leonard Fournette, because of the 21st-century style of back Cook is. (It's similar to why the Colts took Edgerrin James over Ricky Williams a generation ago.) And there are teams that like Joe Mixon, as a player, more than Cook. Jaguars coach Doug Marrone said to me last week he wants a team that can run it when the opponent knows what's coming. So would Fournette be in play at 4? I'm hearing Mixon is likely to go in round two or three. Whenever he goes, it's a big and complex story. Add in Christian McCaffrey and Alvin Kamara, and this historic class of backs will be pretty compelling to watch when we get to Philly.
- AND THE QUARTERBACKS? Remember, everyone believed the Jaguars were not taking a quarterback with the third pick in 2014. And then they did. So take that into account when I say that there's very little buzz for the quarterbacks inside the top few picks, with Buffalo at 10 (yes, even with Tyrod Taylor under contract) being the earliest selecting team being connected to the group. This one, of course, will evolve in the coming weeks.

* * *

FIRST AND 10

1. The vote on changing the celebration rules has been tabled, but commissioner Roger Goodell is privately advocating more leniency, telling those around him he believes it's what's best for players, officials and fans.
2. To that end, and potentially during draft week, the plan is for Goodell to meet with a cross-section of players—including some who've been habitual offenders—to discuss what makes sense in reforming the celebration rules.
3. I'd be stunned if the Krafts gave Bill Belichick the OK to sign Adrian Peterson. So Peterson's visit, I believe, was just a two-way favor—creating some heat for Peterson, and the Pats putting some heat on unsigned RB LeGarrette Blount.
4. The NFL's \$50 million Amazon deal to stream Thursday Night Football live is worth your attention. It's worth five times what last year's Twitter deal was, and it's likely a precursor for upcoming changes when the TV deals expire in 2022.
5. The Bills opened their offseason program this week, and what stuck out to players quickly is how straightforward and detail-oriented new coach Sean McDermott is. And, of course, they noticed the pool table was gone.

6. Also while we're here, it's worth noting that the players in Buffalo already see one on-field difference from the Rex Ryan regime. Per one vet, "You can see the schemes are simple, and intended to help the players play fast."

7. I like the Rams signing veteran center John Sullivan. The team poured a ton of draft picks into the line the past few years, and having Sullivan and Andrew Whitworth aboard should help OL coach Aaron Kromer bring the young guys along.

8. Good creative move by the Eagles to replace Bennie Logan with the talented-but-inconsistent Timmy Jernigan. On paper at least, Jernigan is a better fit for Jim Schwartz's attacking, upfield scheme than he was in Baltimore.

9. If I was Blake Bortles, the Jaguars bringing Deshaun Watson to Jacksonville this week would get my attention. And given that Tom Coughlin is in charge now, I wouldn't be surprised if that was the whole idea from the start.

10. Now that Tony Romo is out, the Broncos QB competition should be fascinating. New offensive coordinator Mike McCoy has always fit his scheme to his QB deftly, and so what he might be able to do for the talented-but raw Paxton Lynch merits watching.

* * *

FOUR-DOWN TERRITORY

1. Could Tony Romo still come back? On his CBS conference call, the retiring Cowboys quarterback hardly closed the door on the idea that he could trade his blazer for a helmet in the fall. The next question, then, would be whether he's capable of it. And my feeling is that will boil down to how he spends his downtime now that he's a professional broadcaster.

Last November, just before Romo asked for the opportunity to win his job back from Dak Prescott—a request that was denied—Romo put on a show for his coaches. Playing Ben Roethlisberger on the look team—the Cowboys had Pittsburgh that week—Romo flashed all the athleticism and arm talent that fueled his breakneck style of play for 14 years as a Cowboy. "It was clear he could make all the throws he'd made in the past," said one Dallas staffer. "He was very aggressive, made some decisions I'm sure he wouldn't have in a game, but it was scout team, so there was little consequence. He had some pocket collapsing situations with the backup OL vs. the first DL, and his accuracy, arm strength, and vision all looked up to his standard. There was some rush, working with some receivers he hadn't before, but the elements were there." From what little tape Romo had over the past two years, others teams saw glimpses too. "From the little bit he played in 2015," said one rival defensive coach, "yeah, it still looks like he has something left in the tank."

Now, the flip side of this would be Romo's will to play. As I mentioned in my Wednesday column, Romo didn't show up to camp the past few years in peak condition. And while he could work his way to where he needed to be, to some on the Dallas staff, that was the first sign that his desire to play was beginning to wane. It is, in fact, one reason why those staffers took Romo's flirtation with the TV networks

seriously from the start. And that was when he actually had a season to prepare for. Now that he doesn't? It's fair to wonder whether or not he'd even be physically ready to play in September or October. Could he be? I think so. Will he be? That much is up to him.

2. What's left in Lynch's tank? The idea of the Raiders adding Marshawn Lynch for what could be their swan song in his hometown of Oakland is awfully poetic on paper. In practice ... we'll see. Lynch only played in seven games in 2015, and rushed for a career-low 417 yards on 111 carries at a career-low 3.8-yard per clip. He'll be 31 in two weeks, and his punishing, upright style hasn't historically been sustainable for aging backs. Still, I think he has a chance.

I don't think the question is whether or not he's finished—it's if he can stay in one piece. In other words, if he's healthy and in fighting shape, he can still be a force, but that right there is one big if. He battled abdomen, hamstring and calf injuries that limited him to seven games in 2015, but according to those who faced him, what they got wasn't far off from vintage Lynch. Remember, he was playing behind a struggling line, and Russell Wilson didn't come alive until after Lynch began his extended stay on the shelf at the end of November and through December. One defensive coach whose team played Lynch in 2015 explained, "Russell made some big plays running it and extending plays, but the game plan was still to stop the run game first. Maybe he wasn't at the same level as he was in 2014, but we still felt like we needed three guys to tackle him. So done? No. We had to sell out, completely commit to stopping the run to minimize his damage. We hit him pretty good." One staffer from another 2015 Seattle opponent put it succinctly: "He was still their offense."

In his last regular season game as a Seahawk, Lynch averaged 5.3 yards per carry against a good Arizona defense. When he came back for the divisional playoffs, the Panthers took a quick lead on Seattle, which limited the Seahawks' ability to lean on the run game. Lynch finished that one with 20 yards on six carries. The bottom line here? The Raiders need to manage him right, but can probably still squeeze good production out of a player who has nearly 300 fewer career carries—about a full season's worth—than his draft classmate Adrian Peterson.

3. The NFL's marijuana issue, and what it means for the future. Last weekend, Pro Football Talk's Mike Florio reported that the league's 32 owners held a meeting amongst themselves at the larger annual meeting in Arizona to discuss sensitive issues on the future of the league. And there, Florio reported, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones spoke about lifting the league's ban on marijuana in light of changing attitudes nationwide towards the drug. That's interesting, and not just because there are plenty of players who find their own ways around the league's policy on marijuana. Sources say the same subject was on the docket for the union's player rep meeting, also in Arizona, the week before.

So both sides are talking about it. Now, it's not like this is a show-stopping issue for either side, but there's acknowledgement that simple discussion over it is one thing that could spark CBA extension talks. A potential change to offseason rules—we reported last week on how a group of four head coaches met with the league to talk about that in Arizona—is another. From the NFL's view, the current CBA has worked, which is why the league is very open to the idea of revising some policies and procedures, and tacking on a few more years to the current deal, perhaps to get it past the 2022

expiration of the current television deals. What the league has told the union it won't do is negotiate different CBA issues piecemeal.

So the desire to get some change based on how the nation's feelings on marijuana have changed the past six years, and how the results of the scaled-back offseason program have played out, could help both the union and league get ahead of another work stoppage at the beginning of the next decade. The biggest winner if that happens, of course, would be all of you.

4. Relocation game over? Lost in all the recent Las Vegas news, and the L.A. relocations before that, was the bitter part of what were bittersweet conclusions for three franchises. NFL vice president Eric Grubman was put in front of the league's Los Angeles effort a few years back, and became a de facto spokesman for 345 Park's work in trying to find stadium solutions for the Chargers, Raiders and Rams. And so I asked if he was disappointed not to find solutions in San Diego, Oakland or St. Louis.

"It's very disappointing to me personally and professionally," Grubman answered. "Each of those markets has passionate fans, and each of those markets has the building blocks to support professional sports franchises and those building blocks didn't get put together. And I was one of the people who tried, so it's hard not to be disappointed to try in three places and not get any of them done."

For Chiefs CEO Clark Hunt, who has grown into one of the NFL's most influential voices over the past half-decade, these changes hit home in that they came at the expense of his long-time division rival cities. "Going back a year, year-and-a-half ago, I was hopeful we'd have as little relocation as possible," Hunt told me. "And that's just personal perspective on my part, those teams have great fan bases and I think the league is better served for teams to stay in their markets. We recognized it was likely a team was going to go to LA, there was momentum on that, and I hoped we'd have one team go to LA and that'd be it. So I'm disappointed with the way it turned out, particularly since two of the teams are our divisional rivals. We have great history with both those franchises that'll continue but in different markets."

Of course, I'm sure all that is little (or no) consolation to the angry people in the three cities the NFL just abandoned. But I think it's important to know that this wasn't exactly viewed as a roaring success in every corner of the league.

* * *

OFFSEASON LESSON TO LEAVE WITH YOU

Myles Garrett won't be within a thousands miles of the NFL-appointed draft capital of Philadelphia when the Browns (presumably) make him the first overall pick. And because this is even news in the first place, I'll use this as your reminder for the week: The NFL draft is big business. And it should also show that there's hay here to be made for everyone, players included.

So rather than being where the league would like him to be, Garrett plans to spend draft night around family and friends in his hometown of Arlington, Texas, and he'll do it with the NFLPA helping to recreate much of what he may miss being at the big show.

Garrett told his agent, Bus Cook, a while ago that he wanted to stay home on April 27, and afford more people close to him the chance to experience the night with him. Cook then mentioned that to the union, and the union came up with the idea to run the show through ACE Media, which launched in September 2015 as an extension of their for-profit arm, Players Inc. Plans are well underway.

“This is something we’ve wanted to do for a while,” NFLPA president Eric Winston said Wednesday afternoon. “We wanted to give guys the opportunity where they don’t feel like they have to go to the draft, they can have the day at their house and host all their family and friends, but still be able to capture it for them. And to have Myles Garrett, maybe the first pick, do it is awesome.

“We’re hopeful that we’ll be producing something pretty cool for Myles and ACE.”

ACE is still in its infancy, but the concept upon launch was to find a way to capture the off-field lives of players, and the execution of the concept has already had a few trial runs.

The media arm partnered with E! to produce the dating show Chasing Kelce, which starred Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, and has also worked with Spotify to set up a players playlist exchange. And it’s involved players, like Seattle’s Michael Bennett, who have an interest in getting into this type of media post-career.

How they’ll handle Garrett’s draft night is still up in the air. ACE may stream it live, or just do produced content. And to what level ACE will make its access to Garrett exclusive is still to be worked out.

But it’s clear here that Winston and Co. envision this being a launching point. Winston spent his draft night at home in Texas, and having that experience in 2006 is part of his motivation. He wants others to have the option to do it without worrying about not being able to have the record of it being on-site would give them.

Garrett will be the only one ACE does this for this year. But there’s a good chance that the union will grow this in 2018 to where ACE is doing multiple players at multiple sites.

“He’s just the start, we hope to do a lot of this in future drafts,” said Winston. “This doesn’t apply to Myles, but the opportunity to not have to go to the draft and sit through two hours of not being picked, and have it not just be your parents and brothers and sisters, but also all your friends and, since you can’t bring everyone to the draft, that’s what we want to give them.

“We hope this will allow all the notoriety they’d want, but share it with everyone that played a part in it.”

And if it works out, Garrett won’t just be doing that, but also helping build a burgeoning piece of a union he’ll soon be a part.

How Tony Romo's departure shakes up the plans of the teams still looking for a QB

By Chris Burke
Sports Illustrated
April 6, 2017

Well, now what?

That's the question facing the Texans and possibly the Broncos, in light of Tony Romo's decision to "retire" from football and enter broadcasting. Those two teams were linked most often to the Cowboys in trade talks for the veteran QB, whose decision to hang 'em up topples the biggest domino left standing this off-season.

The ripple effects could be felt by several teams, including ...

Houston Texans: Word out of Houston since the 2016 season ended has been that the organization feels more comfortable with Tom Savage at QB than most would expect. We're about to find out if that was posturing or truth.

Because of their proximity to Dallas, strong defense and recent success within the AFC South, the Texans were believed to be the most likely candidates to land Romo, whether via trade or by signing him after his release. They obviously never reached a point where they were desperate enough to meet the Cowboys' trade demands, but their next course of action will reveal how much they actually trust Savage.

Still out there in free agency are ex-Bears QB Jay Cutler and ex-49ers QB Colin Kaepernick, either of whom, on paper, could represent an upgrade over the inexperienced Savage. The trade options include Jimmy Garoppolo (who seems destined to remain a Patriot until at least 2018) and Cincinnati's A.J. McCarron, although the latter would hardly be an obvious improvement on what Houston already has.

The Texans are a virtual lock to draft a quarterback—their current depth chart is just two-deep, consisting of Savage and journeyman Brandon Weeden. Whether or not that pick happens in Round 1 is the real question now. Houston sits at No. 25 in that opening round, behind a host of teams that could chase Deshaun Watson, DeShone Kizer, Patrick Mahomes or Mitchell Trubisky. It might take a massive leap up the board, say to around 10 or 11, for the Texans to get their QB of choice.

Denver Broncos: The Broncos always appeared to be on the fringes of the Romo discussion, mainly because they already have a Trevor Siemian-Paxton Lynch combo on their roster. Siemian was far from a world-beater as Peyton Manning's replacement last season, but he did start 14 games for a Broncos team that was in playoff contention until late December. Another off-season's worth of development could lead to better play from Siemian in 2017.

And Denver traded up in Round 1 last year to land Lynch, out of Memphis. He looked overwhelmed when pressed into the lineup for two starts, but the Broncos' belief has been that he could grab the starting job eventually. When the Romo rumors were swirling, it was Siemian who stood as the potential odd man out, not Lynch.

So, the simplest solution for Denver now is to move forward with Siemian and Lynch again, then reassess come 2018 if need be.

The Broncos were linked to both Kaepernick and Robert Griffin III in the wake of Peyton Manning's retirement last spring-Kaepernick stayed in San Francisco, while Griffin signed with Cleveland. GM John Elway recently told USA Today's Tom Pelissero that Denver was "likely to go with someone who's a better fit for their offense" than Kaepernick.

New York Jets: After signing Josh McCown to a free-agent deal, Jets GM Mike Maccagnan said it was "highly unlikely" the Jets would pursue any other veteran quarterbacks. That statement seemingly closed the door on the Cutler-to-New York connection that popped up after the Bears released their former QB.

But the Jets remain a wild card-perhaps more so for the draft than free agency or a trade, at this point-because McCown is merely a stopgap, and the jury remains very much out on Bryce Petty and 2016 draft pick Christian Hackenberg.

Romo's retirement does not directly impact the Jets' plans, but it could indirectly close the door on their ability to circle back on Cutler later this summer.

Cleveland Browns: Romo was never going to be a Brown, but the more teams that head into the draft needing quarterbacks, the trickier life becomes for Cleveland. In an ideal world for the Browns, they would be able to take Myles Garrett at No. 1, then still find the QB of their choosing at No. 12 or even 33.

The chances of that happening atop Round 2 are dwindling by the day. Ahead of Cleveland's pick at No. 12, the 49ers, Bears, Jets and possibly even the Chargers or Saints could take a swing at QB, and now the Texans (pick 25) have joined the Chiefs (27) as obvious possible landing spots deeper into Round 1.

Odds are, the Browns were going to take a quarterback at 12, if they wanted to address the position. They almost have to do so now, or they risk missing out on all of the perceived top-tier options.

Ourand: Peyton not interested in sports broadcasting

By Chris Wesseling

NFL.com

April 6, 2017

Now that Tony Romo has left the gridiron for the broadcast booth, questions arise about another recently retired quarterback legend.

Over the past year, social media has been awash in speculation over Peyton Manning's next career move.

Will he try to get into NFL ownership with the Titans? Will Browns owner Jimmy Haslam lure him to Cleveland as the football czar? Is Colts owner Jim Irsay intent on carving out a front-office job for his former quarterback? Will Manning eventually return to Denver as the head coach? Would he rather return to his old college stomping grounds at the University of Tennessee?

Is he a natural for the Sunday Night Football broadcasting team?

Don't count on the latter option.

Appearing on Wednesday's edition of Good Morning Football, John Ourand of the Sports Business Journal reported that Manning won't be joining Romo as a television analyst.

"I haven't actually talked to Peyton about this," Ourand said, "but people who are close to him say he has no interest in being a sports broadcaster. ... He has little interest in traveling every Sunday. He has little interest in going into work every Sunday to do a studio show."

What does intrigue Manning, Ourand explained, is continuing along the John Elway path and mastering the business side of football.

Manning has already followed in Elway's footsteps by bringing a championship to Denver and walking off into the sunset.

Might the two join forces in the Broncos front office, with Elway grooming Manning as his first lieutenant and eventual successor?

Manning seems to be in no hurry to jumpstart his post-playing career. Once he does get the itch, though, it makes sense that Elway would be one of his first phone calls.

Montee Ball opens up about his alcoholism, hoping to help others

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
April 6, 2017

There was a time when Montee Ball was on top of the world.

But as his NFL career and life unraveled because of alcoholism and domestic violence arrests, he's realized that the things he might have thought were rock bottoms actually weren't.

"I just couldn't handle all this," Ball told Alex Marvez of the Sporting News. "I don't want to whine or seek public pity. But I do want to explain everything and give everybody some insight on what I've been battling."

Ball said he started drinking heavily while in college at Wisconsin, and never stopped. He was such a productive back the Broncos used a second-round pick on him, but cut him two seasons later. And even though he's 26, he says he has no interest in returning to the game.

"I started to drink a lot more and it started to pour into football," Ball said. "If I knew we had a super-easy practice the next day, I'd go out and get drunk with a whole bunch of people. I'd wake up drunk, hit the steam room and go to practice. . . ."

"Ultimately, I didn't really enjoy the NFL as much as college. It's a business. All in all, I was very fortunate to play for the Broncos. They were my favorite team as a child. My ultimate goal was to play for the Broncos. But it wasn't what I thought it would be. It's a very lonely, lonely world. [The NFL] is a very money-driven organization that kind of takes away from the joy of the sport."

But his problems continued to cascade, including a pair of domestic violence arrests which left him to watch his former teammates win the Super Bowl while he was in a Wisconsin jail. He admits his drinking problem played a part in both arrests but still disputes some the facts in the case, but still took a plea deal which included a 60-day house arrest and mandatory alcohol and domestic-violence counseling.

He went into some degree of detail about those arrests, but said learning he was going to be a father last spring became a turning point for him, and that the birth of his son Maverick was his "turning point."

"I finally realized I have a purpose — to raise that kid," he said. "That's a responsibility I will take."

He's taking other steps, including charitable efforts and writing a book about his struggles, in hopes of providing the kind of advice he wasn't always willing to take. He's also returned to school to finish his degree, with hopes of postgraduate program.

"I'm really focused on improving my image and relationships that I destroyed," he said. "I let down the fans, the entire University of Wisconsin and my family. I want people to know I am deeply sorry."

“I feel way better now. I feel like I’m free.”

And he’s willing to share his story, in hopes of staying that way.

ESPN's Mel Kiper Jr. has Broncos looking to O-line and tight end

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
April 6, 2017

In Mel Kiper Jr.'s eyes, the answer to the Broncos' lingering question at left tackle could come in the first round of this month's draft.

The longtime ESPN draft analyst projected Wisconsin offensive tackle Ryan Ramczyk to the Broncos in his mock draft released Wednesday.

"For him to go to Denver at [No.] 20 would be a nice fit," he said during an hour-long conference call with national media Wednesday afternoon. "If you look beyond that, and you get into the latter portion of the first round, I can't see him getting past Houston at No. 25, [or] Seattle at No. 26.

"But certainly, Denver -- whether it's Ryan Ramczyk, Garrett Bolles out of Utah, Cam Robinson out of Alabama -- you would think one of those three could be the pick. All three could still be there very easily for Denver, so they may be looking at all three linemen."

In Kiper's mock draft, all three were available when the Broncos selected. Kiper tapped Robinson to the Texans with the 25th pick and Bolles as the No. 37 overall pick to the Los Angeles Rams.

Kiper sees Ramczyk as a potential left tackle based on his tape study.

"Ramczyk, you look at the way he keeps that big frame between the defensive end and the quarterback -- he's very, very good at that," Kiper said. "He really has a lot of savvy for an offensive tackle."

Kiper added that Ramczyk's medical reports "came out favorably" in the wake of Jan. 5 hip surgery.

"He's an underrated pass blocker; he gets after it in the run game," Kiper said.

In the second round, Kiper projected the Broncos to pick tight end Adam Shaheen of Division II Ashland with the 51st pick. In a deep tight end class, Kiper has Shaheen as the fourth tight end selected, following Alabama's O.J. Howard to Buffalo at No. 10, David Njoku of Miami (Fla.) to Tampa Bay with the 19th pick and Mississippi's Evan Engram to Jacksonville at No. 35, the third pick of the second round.

This year's tight-end class is perhaps the deepest in draft history, and even though Shaheen lacks high-level college experience, Kiper sees the 6-foot-6, 278-pounder as a "rare talent."

"You can see the talent and the ability," Kiper explained. "He's a huge target -- you talk about a guy with his height, 275-280-pound frame, runs so well, so fluid, smooth, good hands, basketball background -- as a second- or third-round pick, that's where you expect him to go."

Kiper had Shaheen off the board before Michigan's Jake Butt, who he said was the fifth-best tight end in the draft, but was not in his two-round mock draft because of the torn ACL he suffered in the Orange Bowl on Dec. 30.

"Shaheen, I [initially] thought third or fourth round, but you keep hearing maybe in the second round," Kiper said. "That's why I projected him in the mock to the Denver Broncos."