

# 2017 NFL draft quarterback rankings, breakdown and sleepers

By Cameron Wolfe  
Denver Post  
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Editor's note: Second in a seven-part series breaking down the NFL draft. Today: the quarterbacks

It appears, for better or worse, either Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch will be the Broncos' starting quarterback this fall.

Denver likely won't select a quarterback in the first two days (rounds one through three) of the three-day draft, which begins April 27. Still, there's reason for them to do research on potential late-round prospects.

The Broncos will bring in a third quarterback. Coach Vance Joseph said he would prefer to add a young veteran (names such as Matt McGloin, Austin Davis and Christian Ponder make sense) or draft a developmental arm (names such as Montana's Brady Gustafson, Virginia Tech's Jerod Evans and Central Michigan's Cooper Rush make sense).

"It's a fairly deep draft. I've watched I'd say 15 quarterbacks," Joseph said recently. "I wouldn't discount drafting a young quarterback in the draft. That's possible."

Here's a breakdown of how I see the top quarterbacks in the class.

1. Mitchell Trubisky, North Carolina, 6-foot-2, 222 pounds; Grade: First round

Strengths: Makes NFL throws with accuracy. Throws well on the run. Calm under pressure. Solid ball placement and velocity. Willing to thread the needle. Goes through his progressions effectively. Can start Day 1.

Negatives: Played in a heavy shotgun system. He can be confused by defensive disguises, as Stanford did to him. Occasionally telegraphs passes with his eyes and lets defenders bait him into interceptions.

2. Patrick Mahomes, Texas Tech, 6-2, 225 pounds; Grade: Second round

Strengths: Ball just flies out. Pure thrower with the draft's best arm. Wizard at keeping plays alive and keeping eyes downfield. Strong improviser. High-energy, fun style of play. Accuracy is generally a plus. Some "wow" throws on tape.

Negatives: He's more thrower than quarterback as of now. Makes a few no-no decisions per game. Ball placement inconsistent. Needs to calm down the wildness. Played in spread, shotgun-only system with simple routes.

3. Deshaun Watson, Clemson, 6-2, 221 pounds; Grade: Second round

Strengths: Winner. Tough. Athletic and effective as a runner. Calm, poised, has control of offense and team. Steps up in the pocket well and knows how to extend plays. Fits the ball into tight windows and anticipates his receivers well.

Negatives: Ran simple system that gave him half-field reads with only one or two options. Will likely take a year or two to transition to NFL progressions and defenses. Poor decision-making led to high interception numbers. Deep accuracy is shaky.

4. DeShone Kizer, Notre Dame, 6-4, 233 pounds; Grade: Late third round

Strengths: His size, impressive athleticism and strong arm is a great base for a developmental project. Can move well in the pocket. Can make NFL throws. High upside.

Negatives: Inconsistency is frustrating. Team may need to correct footwork, arm slot and reteach him how to play quarterback naturally. Seemed robotic and predetermined at times. He's boom-or-bust with a real low floor.

5. Davis Webb, Cal, 6-5, 229 pounds; Grade: Early fourth round

Strengths: Big arm with easy delivery. Goes through his progressions. Pocket passer with good feel for pressure. Good accuracy when throwing in rhythm. Great size and willing to take some hits.

Negatives: A bit of a statue. Ball gets away from him. Will throw off his backfoot and his footwork is inconsistent. Often predetermines receivers. Decision-making over middle of the field is iffy. Transferred after getting beat out by Patrick Mahomes.

Next up: Josh Dobbs, Tennessee; Brad Kaaya, Miami

Midround starter: Dobbs — A developmental quarterback with high intelligence, good, deep accuracy and ability to make plays in the clutch. If a team can figure out why his accuracy and ball placement is hot-and-cold, they'll have a solid starter.

Late-round sleeper: Brady Gustafson, Montana — Big, tall quarterback with a strong arm is enough to get a shot. And it might be fruitful if a team can fix his long, arching delivery.

# Joseph to address Broncos team for first time Monday

By Mike Klis

9News

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For the first time in his life, Vance Joseph will step in front of a football team as a head coach Monday.

He's been a college quarterback. He's been a professional defensive back. He's been an assistant coach for years and a defensive coordinator for one year.

But when the Denver Broncos gather for the beginning of their offseason program Monday at the team's UHealth Training Center headquarters, Joseph will deliver his first speech as a head coach.

Well, speech may be a little formal. A head coach address, perhaps. A talk. Some introductions and a chat about expectations. Joseph got the Broncos' head coaching job on January 11 -- a date when, for the first time in six years -- the Broncos were on vacation. Vacation ends Monday.

Curious what the new boss will say?

"Kind of," said Broncos running back C.J. Anderson. "But we also kind of know what the expectation is. The expectation is come to work every day. Be great at what you do. Do your job to the best of your ability. And keep getting better at your position and your job. Trust they're going to find the best 53 (players) to go win a championship."

Among current Broncos players, the biggest question marks are about the three starters coming off surgeries: Quarterback Trevor Siemian, center Matt Paradis and Anderson.

Those questions will not be answered these next two weeks as the players will not be permitted to do any work on the field. It's all weight room stuff. Siemian is coming off surgery to his left, non-throwing shoulder. He is expected to recover in time to fully participate in the Broncos' organized team activities (OTAs) that begin May 23.

Paradis is coming off surgery to both hips. He's not expected to be ready until training camp in late-July.

Anderson is coming off surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee.

"I'm not sure how they're going to bring me along," Anderson said. "It feels good. They haven't tested it out, full open-up running and full, open-up cutting. They want to ease into that, which is fine. But as far strength and stability, the knee is 100 percent."

Bronco players will take physicals and have meetings on Monday. Then hit the weight room for strength and conditioning with coach Luke Richesson on Tuesday.

Besides the injuries, the Broncos have questions at left tackle, where Donald Stephenson is expected to get the first chance, at least until the draft on April 27-29, and at quarterback, where Siemian and Paxton Lynch will eventually engage in a competition for the starting job.

The ultimate question for the 2017 Broncos: After missing the playoffs with a 9-7 record last year, what kind of team will they have?

“We picked up some players we needed,” Anderson said. “That’s exciting. Coming off a year we didn’t go to the playoffs, that’s something we don’t want to get used to.”

The most significant new players will be positioned up front: Left guard Ron Leary, right tackle Menelik Watson, nosetackle Domata Peko and defensive end/tackle Lawrence Kerr.

# As Broncos open offseason program, left tackle still biggest issue

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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With a rookie class still to come and a smattering of veteran players possibly becoming available at a later date, the Denver Broncos will convene for their first day of the offseason program Monday.

The group will arrive for player physicals and a team meeting, their first with coach Vance Joseph. Then Tuesday they'll get to work as they move through the various "phases" of what's allowed in the offseason, starting with conditioning-only workouts over the first two weeks.

And the Broncos certainly do have some significant questions to answer in the weeks and months to come. Among them:

Who is the left tackle? The Broncos have floated the idea that either Donald Stephenson or Menelik Watson could play left tackle, though both players are largely considered around the league as right tackles who would do well at left tackle. Maybe the Broncos prove otherwise, maybe not. But the bottom line is a tackle likely will not be the best player on the board when the Broncos pick at No. 20 in the NFL draft and the tackle they could take in the second round may not be a player who can be ready to step in as a rookie. So, they can either pass over more highly graded players to use their first-round pick on a tackle who would project to play as a rookie, or they can hope to find a tackle in the second round. The team also can use some of its 10 draft picks to make a deal for somebody else's left tackle. Its roster is deep enough to cover for many eventualities, but right now an open left tackle spot likely isn't one of them.

How's Von Miller? This time last year, Miller was months away from a \$114.5 million contract that made him the highest-paid defensive player in league history. With DeMarcus Ware now in retirement, the Broncos need a defensive leader, and Miller's stature as an All-Pro player as well as the team's highest-paid player makes him the guy who should also be one of its most important voices. He has traveled near and far this offseason, as you would expect a 20-something with piles of disposable income. The Broncos expect to get their first look at him this week, as Miller has promised to return ready to show his best.

Who's the quarterback? Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch won't get down to the real business of competing for the starting spot until training camp. But the guy who makes the most of the next three months could well have a head start. That's because the two will be asked to learn the new offense in earnest during the coming OTAs and minicamps. And the guy who has the best grip on it all when the team adjourns in June will be able to show more right out of the gate when the players come back in July for training camp.

Did they learn their lesson? Almost to a player, the Broncos repeatedly said in the wake of last year's 9-7 finish the team was better than its record. If that were truly the case, then the season got away because the Broncos didn't make the most of the talent they had. Or they just thought the talent they had would kick in at some point and they would close out 2016 with another playoff spot. It's all in the past now,

and how the Broncos handle their business through the summer will show if the playoff miss really did, or didn't, leave a mark. The Broncos' Super Bowl window is still open, but other teams, including the defending champs in New England, have made improvements, and the Broncos need to work to their talent level just as they did when they won Super Bowl 50 to really be a player at the league's grown-up table.

Which rookies can help? It's 17 days until the draft opens and the Broncos have 10 picks, or the potential for the biggest draft class of John Elway's tenure as the team's chief football decision-maker. The Broncos' nine-player class in 2011, his first, was the foundation of the five division titles that followed, four of those with Peyton Manning behind center. Seven of those nine players in that '11 draft class eventually started games for the Broncos, a group led by Miller. If the Broncos find that kind of potential in this year's class, they are certainly back in the title conversation. Overall, it is a crossroads class for the team and it will have a big say in what the next few seasons look like, because the Broncos, or anyone else in the league, can't buy their way out of draft mistakes in free agency. And a 10-player class is a rare opportunity.

# Participants in arm wrestling event in Vegas could face NFL fines

By David Purdum

ESPN.com

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The NFL is looking into an arm wrestling contest at the MGM Grand casino in Las Vegas that reportedly featured more than 30 current and former players, including Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Harrison and retired running back Marshawn Lynch.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy told ESPN on Sunday that the league just became aware of The Pro Football Arm Wrestling Championship and will be looking into it further.

Participating players could be in violation of the league's gambling policy and may face fines. League personnel are prohibited from making promotional appearances at casinos or other gambling-related establishments.

"Had we been asked in advance if this was acceptable, we would have indicated that it was in direct violation of the gambling policy," Joe Lockhart, NFL vice president of communications, told USA Today Sports, which first reported the league's concern over the event. "No one sought pre-approval."

The contest, which took place April 5-9, is scheduled to be broadcast on CBS on May 27-28, with the championship round shown on June 3.

A portion of the prize purses for both individual and team competitions will be donated to charities of the player's choice, according to the event's website. ESPN has reached out to event organizers for comment.

In addition to Harrison and Lynch, Miami Dolphins receiver Kenny Stills, San Francisco 49ers linebacker NaVorro Bowman and Oakland Raiders punter Marquette King were reportedly among the players who participated in the contest.

The arm wrestling contest is the latest test of the NFL's gambling policy, which has been in the spotlight recently with the Raiders' approved relocation to Las Vegas. NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said the Raiders' relocation would not affect the league's gambling policies.

The league has been consistent in regard to events held at Las Vegas casinos. In 2015, a fantasy football convention featuring NFL players, including now-retired Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo, was scheduled to be held at a Las Vegas convention center connected to the Venetian. In that case, the NFL warned participants that they could be in violation of the league's gambling policy and face potential fines. After the event was eventually canceled, organizers sued the NFL, but the case was later dismissed.

# Tony Romo, TV Underdog? Don't Bet Against Him

By Peter King

MMQB

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I'm not saying Tony Romo will make it. I'm not saying he won't make it. I am saying he's a different guy, a unique case. And though I think doing football on TV is harder than the public thinks, and probably harder than Romo thinks, and though I think Romo's got a huge bridge to build to ever get to be Cris Collinsworth II, I'm not betting against him.

A few reasons why, but let me tell you a story first. Actually, the story is from Sean Payton, Romo's quarterback coach with the Cowboys when Romo came out of Eastern Illinois undrafted in 2003. Payton, quarterback coach. Bill Parcells, head coach.

This was Payton's version of the story the way he told it to me Thursday night: "We're at Oakland in the [2004] preseason. Fourth quarter, late, and we're in a two-minute drill, driving, down a touchdown [actually 20-14]. We get down to, like, the one, and Tony's the quarterback, and the clock's running down, and Parcells yells, 'Clock it! Clock it!' So I tell Tony to clock it, and he runs to the line, and we all think he's going to clock it. But he calls, '98! 98!' That's the call for the quarterback sneak."

... :11, ... :10 ... :09 ... Snap to Romo.

Payton: "So Tony, instead of clocking it, does a Brady-like sneak and somehow he gets over the line, and we end up winning the game. After the game, I couldn't really say, 'Great job!' If he didn't make it, we'd have both been in trouble. Big trouble."

That's part of the story. On Sunday, Romo picked up the rest of it.

"That's so funny," Romo told me. "The one thing they didn't know on that play was I called '98' to quarterback-sneak it, but I was still planning on spiking it. I just wanted the option to sneak it if the defense wasn't aligned properly. If Oakland would have been aligned right and in their stances with intensity, you have to spike it. But they weren't. It's an educated guess I took."

But if you were wrong?

"I'm pretty sure I'd have been on a bus back to Burlington, Wis., if I wasn't lucky enough to get in. It was pretty stupid at that stage to risk that. But hell, I was young and dumb."

Imagine you're fighting for a roster spot—Romo was behind Vinny Testaverde and Drew Henson in camp in year two of his career—and the only chance you get to prove yourself is in the preseason, and you choose, on the likely last play of a game, to go counter to what a future Hall of Fame coach (Parcells) and a future Super Bowl-winning coach (Payton) tell you to do. You're an unproven kid, a half-scholarship player at Eastern Illinois, uninvited to the combine, undrafted ... and you make your own call at the goal line? How do you have the stones to do that?

“Man, I don't know,” Romo said. “You just want to win, and it felt like the percentages of me scoring were high. Not scoring never crosses your mind. So I never thought about the consequences in that moment of failing. If you fail you fail, but I'll deal with the failure after the game and take the responsibility that comes with that. But you have no chance of being great if you can't be decisive. Make a decision and roll with it.”

Sounds exactly like Romo's thought process this spring. Today, he could be on the verge of signing with the Houston Texans, a 42-minute plane flight from the home he does not want to upend in Dallas, with his wife and two children and a third on the way. He could have been the quarterback of a team with a Super Bowl defense, with Defensive Player of the Year J.J. Watt likely to return, and he could have showed the Cowboys what they're missing. If he could have stayed healthy for one season, which he knew too was absolutely no lock, this could have been his best shot at a Super Bowl, ever. (I'm projecting the Houston signing. I think it was likely, because the Texans know they can't enter the season with Tom Savage and Brandon Weeden as their prime quarterbacks. No one's told me Romo was a sure thing in Houston, but logic is logic.)

But despite that opening, Romo chose a pretty challenging world. As Romo told the Mike Krzyzewski podcast on SiriusXM Radio: “Right after the season I was playing football. That was a no-brainer for me at the time. And then I just, I feel like I do with all big decisions I've made in my life, you don't want to make them emotional or quick, you want to kind of just soak in it, think about it and take your time and things start to reveal themselves. And you pray about it, go talk to your close family and people you trust, then you make the call.” Doing the number one job in the CBS NFL booth alongside Jim Nantz, he said, “feels right. It really does.”

Romo says he knows what he doesn't know. I hope so. The NFL hasn't announced the TV slate for the year, though a complicating factor for Romo will be that CBS is likely to have about nine weeks when the network will either have the Thursday night games simulcast on CBS and NFL Network, or the crew will do the games and they'll be on NFL Network. One game's hard enough. Two? In 70 hours? In different cities? The one sane factor here: There will be some of those weeks, if CBS isn't doing the national doubleheader game in the 4:25 ET late window, when Romo and Nantz could have Sunday off, seeing that there won't be a true national game on CBS on Sunday.

Then there's this, from former CBS sideline reporter (on the Simms/Nantz crew) Bonnie Bernstein, encapsulating Romo's task on Friday to The MMQB's Kalyn Kahler: “As an analyst in a two-man booth, you have to take every single play you see, be able to process the All-22 [full-field video replays], decide what to dissect on-air for the audience, and then, without stepping on your play-by-play guy, you have to provide perspective. Is that personnel package working? What was wrong with that defensive back's technique covering the back shoulder fade? And be able to provide perspective on a player's history. Whatever the context of the moment requires. You have one shot to get it right and 15 seconds to do it—and if the offense is running hurry-up, you have even less time. You have all of this information at your fingertips, what you're seeing, all of the insights gathered from players and coaches during our production meeting. So, on Fridays when we get there, we meet with the home team head coach and coordinators and star players. You have all of this insight that you gather from the production meeting;

essentially you are trying to flawlessly and cohesively stuff 50 pounds of information into a two-pound bag. Ask anybody who has tried it, and easy is the last adjective they will use.”

Of course, Romo has come this far before. Only difference: He had three years with training wheels on before he had to be The Man.

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“You have no chance of being great if you can’t be decisive.”

Romo caught the Cowboy coaches’ eyes in 2003 at the combine. He wasn’t invited to participate, but he was asked to be one of two “camp arms,” basically. His job was to throw to receivers during receiver workouts. Payton met him there and found him to be a gym rat. Asking questions, trying to ingratiate himself with teams, making himself known. He went undrafted, to his chagrin.

“I recall we had a fifth-round grade on him,” Payton said. “In the sixth round and seventh round, we debated him as an option but chose other guys. I can imagine his disappointment, sitting home. You know, the neighbors are over, the cheese dip’s gone stale, the neighbors have all gone home. But we really wanted him as a free agent.”

As did Mike Shanahan in Denver. Funny story here. Mike Shanahan, former Eastern Illinois quarterback. Sean Payton, former Eastern Illinois quarterback. Tony Romo, now a former Eastern Illinois quarterback.

Denver’s QB depth chart: Jake Plummer, Danny Kanell.

Dallas’ QB depth chart: Quincy Carter, Chad Hutchinson, Clint Stoerner.

“I actually wanted to go to Denver a little bit more, I felt like I had a better chance of making the roster,” Romo said. “The money ... Arizona, I believe, offered the most, probably around \$20,000 or \$25,000, which was like being rich at that time. Denver came in and they were like 15 to 20 but they also had Mike Shanahan who I had strong respect for, and obviously the Cowboys came in. It was Mike Shanahan on one side and then Bill Parcells on the other. Sean would call in and then eventually he passed the phone to Jerry [Jones], so you went through the whole gamut.”

Dallas was at \$10,000. Said Payton: “Parcells asked, ‘How we doing?’ And I was confident. I thought we had him. Jerry didn’t want to lose a player we really wanted over \$5,000 or \$10,000. I said, ‘Mr. Jones, I think we’ll get him at 10.’ And then Tony said he’d come, and Jerry said to me, ‘I don’t know you too well, but I sure am glad you just saved me \$10,000.’”

Romo told me he went with his gut back then. That’s the same way he played quarterback, a dodging/diving poor man’s Favre who should not be remembered mostly for the fumbled PAT snap in the playoffs in Seattle, or his early-career hiccups in big late-season games, or for just two post-season wins. Those are parts of his résumé, not the whole of it. And though he’s not going to go down as an all-time great, he’s going to go down as a great leader, an exciting player who lifted good but flawed teams, a prime example of today’s quarterback—a thrower/runner with a flair for knowing when to do both.

“The game I’ll remember,” said Payton, “is 2009, in New Orleans. I’m coaching the Saints. It’s a Saturday night, we’re 13-0, and Dallas comes in, and they’re fighting for the playoffs. Tony was magnificent. He started something like eight for 10 [exactly], and they just couldn’t be stopped. They beat us. Tony beat us. I just will always remember his consistent production, what a threat he was. I loved him as a player. He got better every year.”

In his new life, Tony Romo won’t have three years to make his mark. It’ll be great to get better every year. But in his new world, he’ll start as a green rookie, on one of the very big TV stages. One thing he’ll be, judging by the past 14 years: confident.

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Where’s McCaffrey Going? (Hint: Cheesesteaks)

In the past three days, I’ve asked some of the smartest draftniks and former NFL scouts this question: If you had to project where Christian McCaffrey will go in the draft, what overall pick would you guess? I asked because McCaffrey is one of the most discussed players in this draft. Most people see him as a hybrid weapon—a runner/returner/slot receiver—who shouldn’t be overused. Smart, seeing that McCaffrey’s likely to play at about 203 pounds. “He’s got the ability to make people miss, but also to make tough yards in the pile,” said Payton, who likes him. “I’ve got a crystal-clear vision of the player. He’d be like Darren Sproles, Reggie Bush for us, kind of the Joker role [versatile back]. But I think you have to have a pitch count on him.”

My panel of experts see him going in the teens, and three of them said particularly they think he’d be the best fit in Philadelphia, as the successor to Sproles and the swiss-army knife in coach Doug Pederson’s game plan. The Eagles are scheduled to pick 14th in the first round.

The projection of my panel:

<b>Draft Analyst</b>	<b>Pick Projection</b>
Dan Hatman, The Scout Academy	8
Bucky Brooks, NFL Network	14
Todd McShay, ESPN	14
Mel Kiper, ESPN	14
Matt Miller, Bleacher Report	14
Dane Brugler, NFLDraftScout.com	14
Daniel Jeremiah, NFL Network	15
Mike Mayock, NFL Network	16

## Our Tom Brady Jersey Story

This week at The MMQB, and also in Sports Illustrated, you'll read a piece by Robert Klemko and Jenny Vrentas, edited by Gary Gramling, on the two-country saga of the stolen Brady Super Bowl jersey. It's a fun and rollicking and oft-surprising tale that asks and answers this multi-layered question: Who is professional jock thief Martin Mauricio Ortega, and how did he get away with stealing Brady's Super Bowl jersey, and how was he caught? The tentacles of the story, from Foxboro to Denver to Seattle to Houston to Mexico City, with secret baggage compartments and contraband in black garbage bags, are sublimely fascinating.

A very short preview of the Klemko/Vrentas piece, from the Sunday morning when Mexican authorities made the big bust:

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March 12: At 3 a.m. Mexican law enforcement officials arrive at Ortega's doorstep. They have a search warrant for his home in this suburban, gated community in Condado de Sayavedra. But they will not execute it.

Dressed in his pajamas, his stunned wife looking on, Ortega was face to face with armed federal agents. A deal was presented: Hand over the Super Bowl jerseys and whatever else you've stolen, and you will sleep in your own bed not only tonight, but for the foreseeable future. Ortega fished a black trash bag out of a dresser drawer and handed it over to the police, who took photos of the transaction to prove Ortega's cooperation.

Agents didn't tear up the floorboards, toss cabinets or pull kitchen appliances from their wall connections. They didn't even search the lower floor. They simply asked, "Do you have anything else?"

He made a phone call to a friend who arrived shortly thereafter (Mexican police on the scene dubbed the physically stout newcomer with the helmet, Gordito, or "fat little one"). The friend brought with him an orange and navy blue helmet with year-old scuffmarks on the crown: Von Miller's Super Bowl 50 helmet.

To the Mexican authorities, the haul might as well have been laundry. They declined to search the rest of the house and left as quietly as they'd arrived, leaving the slumbering stallions at a neighboring horse farm none the wiser. To the American officials waiting back at the U.S. embassy, the trash bag and the helmet represented the culmination of a weeks-long, cross-continental search that had cost hundreds of man hours and tested the geopolitical relationship between two countries.

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Read the entire piece later this week at The MMQB. And listen to Klemko and Vrentas discuss the caper on my podcast Wednesday morning.

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### Ten Things I Think I Think

1. I think there are five clues about the possibility of Richard Sherman being traded that lead me to believe it's more likely than not he will be traded, and probably before the April 27 first round. I'll give you those in a moment. But this is one of those be-careful-what-you-wish-for moment for the Seahawks. Sherman's still an excellent cornerback, clearly a top-five corner with the physicality and smarts to still be a shutdown corner, and the Seahawks are bereft of good cover guys after Sherman. That would suggest Seattle absolutely should not trade Sherman. But maybe the braintrust feels there's no time like the present: Seattle's lucky to be in a quarterback lull in the NFC West right now, with only an aging Carson Palmer a current threat now that Brian Hoyer (Niners) and Jared Goff (Rams) are likely starters for the other two division teams. Now for the clues:

- Sherman's aware of the trade talks, told our Albert Breer he's not upset about it, and apparently wouldn't mind it happening.
- GM John Schneider and coach Pete Carroll have both acknowledged it's possible.
- Carroll said at the NFL meetings recently, "Richard went through a lot last year, and most of it self-inflicted." Referring to the Sherman freaking out on the sidelines once, and rebelliously questioning an offensive play-call that drew the ire of Carroll. That quote really stuck with me. Pete Carroll very rarely says anything about his players remotely negative, and here he's saying something negative about one of his biggest stars.
- The Seahawks have to know that they've been so empowering with their players that this could give them the chance to start fresh on the attitude front. Marshawn Lynch and then Sherman went too far with that freedom. With Lynch gone, getting rid of Sherman for a fair price could be the logical next step for Seattle.
- Sherman at 29 for \$22 million over two remaining contract years might be too tempting for cornerback-needy teams to pass up.

But—and this is a big but—I find it interesting that the team often most interested in milking a couple of years out of veterans who've been great elsewhere apparently won't bite on Sherman. The Patriots chose to give huge money to Stephon Gilmore, and I doubt they'd employ two corners making in excess of \$11 million a year. Just not their way.

- IS RICHARD SHERMAN ON THE DECLINE? Andy Benoit found a flaw in the cornerback's game that shows why Seattle might be questioning Sherman's long-term future in Seattle

2. I think the fact that passed gas has become a microscopic factor in the Phil Simms could be the funniest note in the 20-year history of this column. Judge Jim Nantz's reaction to this moment in the booth for yourself.

3. I think (and take this with a shaker of salt, not a grain, because I also work for NBC) the CBS move with its number one teams sure seemed like an awkward announcement, Tony Romo replacing Simms. The fact that this wasn't totally buttoned up showed, when Simms wasn't quoted in the announcement and hasn't spoken publicly since. I've heard Phil Simms won't mind making a new start (for at least the remaining two years on his contract), either on a lower team doing games, or in the studio. We'll see.

4. I think there is only one message in the NFL's one-year deal with Amazon to stream games this fall, the way Twitter streamed them last year: The experiment continues. There's a reason that every year Roger Goodell and NFL executive vice president of media Brian Rolapp take a group of league employees to Silicon Valley, trying to keep current with the latest trends in the digital world. All of this is fact-finding that the NFL must do prior to the next broadcast rights negotiations four years from now. Don't be blinded or really very concerned by the fact that, according to Sports Business Journal, Amazon paid five times (approximately \$50 million) what Twitter paid for the rights to stream some games last year. The most important thing is that by the end of the 2017 season, the NFL will have experimented streaming games via a website (Yahoo), a social-media staple (Twitter) and an all-things-to-all-people site (Amazon) through its Amazon Prime portal. Don't be surprised if the NFL finds another new-media-world way to stream games in 2018.

Now, for all of you like me who still will want to find the games on television, I have this message for you: You can. The Thursday Night streaming games will be on CBS, NBC or NFL Network, depending on the week. Just remember that when you see some new Silicon Valley partner doing a deal with the NFL, it's all about the future—much more than the present. (And a reminder that the NFL and Amazon have worked together previously, on the All or Nothing series. Last year's product, featuring the Arizona Cardinals in 2015, was a success. And this year's version, which will feature the 2016 Rams, will likely be released this summer.)

5. I think if you're looking for draft information (as I am every year about this time), I've got some recommendations:

- Dane Brugler's 2017 NFL Draft Guide (\$9.99). Cool thing about Brugler: He is good with being controversial, because he trusts his gut. He's got Christian McCaffrey rated ahead of Leonard Fournette, questioning Fournette's decision-making, instincts, pass-protection and receiving skills. Brugler's detail reminds me of the late Joel Buchsbaum.

- Pro Football Focus Draft Pass (\$19.95). What distinguishes the PFF product, to me, is the statistical detail, such as this: Pitt's Nathan Peterman, the dark horse among the quarterbacks likely to be picked on day two, has a better adjusted deep-ball completion percentage (54.7 percent) than any of the top guys (Mahomes, Kizer, Trubisky, Watson) ... and strangely, PFF writes, "Arm is limited," and has "a limited ceiling." It's a brutally honest and revealing review of every player likely to be drafted.

- Dan Hatman's 2017 ITP Draft Guide (\$34.99). Hatman, a longtime NFL scout, has started his own scouting business now. His guide has some team-speak to it, so you'll feel like you're in a draft meeting sometimes. But like Brugler, Hatman is beholden to no one and gives opinions and gut feelings that are particularly valuable this time of year.

6. I think former The MMQB columnist Austen Lane (What It's Like To Get Whacked, 2013) deserves kudos. Transitioning to a new career—MMA heavyweight combatant—Lane debuted in Sarasota, Fla., with a first-round knockout of John Darling. Pretty quick too: 14 seconds into the bout. "I think I've found what I'm meant to do," Lane told me. "I loved football, really did. But there's something about this man-on-man sport that I really love." Good luck to Lane.

7. I think Oklahoma running back Joe Mixon is going to be one of the two or three stories of the draft. Get ready. I agree with what Albert Breer wrote the other day: I think he'll be gone by the end of round three. That's a significantly different story than the one we thought it'd be last fall, when Mixon—dropped for a season from the Oklahoma team after being caught on video punching a woman in the face—was playing well but was so pockmarked by the horrendous event that some wondered if he'd be drafted at all. But the fact that he's making 15 visits to teams, and the fact that he has shown significant remorse, leads me to believe some team is going to take a chance on him earlier than the Chiefs with receiver Tyreek Hill after his domestic-violence arrest; Hill went in the fifth round. I can tell you this: One team in the league believes, with no punch, Mixon and Leonard Fournette would be neck-and-neck for the number one back on its draft board. So we'll see what happens 17 evenings from now.

8. I think that video will never go away. That's the pitfall for the team that drafts Mixon.

9. I think if someone from Latvia asks you today, "What is this NFL thing? Why do people talk about it all the time, even when they are not playing?" You should tell this person something like: Well, NFL Network is this 24/7 NFL channel, and this afternoon at 5 Eastern, NFL Network will reveal the preseason schedule on a TV show. The preseason schedule is 65 practice games no one cares about. And I mean no one. The aim of these games, aside from testing rookies and unproven players, is mostly for teams to come out of them uninjured. But there's going to be a show with a reveal of the schedule of those games today.

10. I think these are my non-football thoughts of the week:

a. Attaway, Sergio Garcia. I love when top athletes bury stereotypes.

b. Detroit: The end of Joe Louis Arena is at hand. And you sent it out wonderfully and emotionally Sunday night, with a crushing win over the Devils and an emotional tribute. Beautiful.

c. Lord, enough with the triple-double talk. Nonstop. Absolutely nonstop. Even Russell Westbrook has to be sick of it by now. How many different ways can talk radio and sports TV shows extol the absolutely endlessly fascinating, never-happen-again-in-a-million-years season in which a basketball player averages double-figures in scoring, rebounding and assists? I agree, of course: It's a tremendous

achievement. It's only been done once before, by Oscar Robertson, more than a half-century ago. So it's worth a lot of attention. But "a lot" has a limit. I beg we have reached it.

d. The solution to the NBA "players' rest" issue strikes me as pretty simple: Cut the schedule from 82 to, say, 74. Every team loses four home games. So the records change. The sport has to evolve.

e. I see you, Nets. Playing hard when no one is watching, and when only professional pride is on the line. Good stuff.

f. Loved this podcast—and it's got some age on it—on Steven Dubner's "Freakonomics" show, about when to quit. It takes in the life of Justin Humphries, a former Astros prospect who quit, and it takes in the calculations of when it's actually smart to walk away from a job or a passion. Interesting.

g. Wow. Mike Trout has seven home runs off King Felix.

h. Jackie Bradley Jr., has already saved about 16 runs in center field for the Red Sox. And with that bullpen, he's better be ready to save 160 more.

i. Beernerdness: What a beer list at Eastern Standard, the restaurant around the corner and just down the street from Fenway Park. Peerless. Mystic Table Beer (Mystic Brewery, Chelsea, Mass.) was my choice, a saison, and it didn't disappoint. Very flavorful, easy to drink, with a slight citrus and light-alcohol (4.3 percent) taste and feel. Delicious.

j. My gosh. Remember Otis Nixon? That incredible base-stealer? He's missing. If you know anything, please help.

\* \* \*

The Adieu Haiku

Happy for Sergio.

Parcells once said, "Now they can't

say you can't do it!"

# Seahawks set high price tag for Richard Sherman trade

By Chris Wesseling

NFL.com

April 10, 2017

In a rare bout of candidness from an NFL executive, Seahawks general manager John Schneider acknowledged that his organization is open to the idea of trading Richard Sherman.

The star cornerback confirmed Thursday that both sides are listening to offers.

What would it take to pry the three-time All Pro away from a Super Bowl contender?

Appearing on Thursday's edition of Total Access, NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport confirmed Seattle is trying to set a "very high price" for Sherman.

What does that mean?

"Potentially a first-round pick," Rapoport continued. "Potentially a very good player on a low contract and a pick as well."

Rapoport emphasized that the two sides maintain a high degree of mutual respect, which is reflected in the price tag.

The Seahawks don't feel pressure to deal one of their best players. If a desperate team is willing to make it worth their while leading up to a loaded 2017 draft class, though, Sherman could find himself in a different uniform this season.

# Denver Broncos, John Elway 'have a plan' for Paxton Lynch

By Alex Butler

UPI.com

April 10, 2017

Tony Romo is in the broadcast booth and officially out of the Denver Broncos' mind as a quarterback option for 2017.

That leaves second-year gunslinger Paxton Lynch and 2016 starter Trevor Siemian primed for a position battle heading into the season.

And that's just fine for Lynch. The 23-year-old Memphis product was the No. 26 overall pick in the 2016 NFL Draft, but only saw action in three games. Lynch completed 49-of-83 passes for 497 yards, two scores, and an interception last season for the Broncos.

"You have a young man who has unbelievable core values," Lynch's agent Leigh Steinberg said. "He has a faith-based, strong and supportive family with parents and a brother. His core values are faith, family, friendship, and he's surrounded by great friends. He's internally motivated and he well understands that the adjustment process from college to pro football takes time. So the best thing he can do is work as hard as he can this offseason so he is ready for the competition this summer."

Steinberg, who also represents Texas Tech prospect Patrick Mahomes, said that he and his client have a "fair belief" that Broncos general manager John Elway is "as good of an executive as he was a player."

"Elway drafted him and they've got a plan," Steinberg said. "Last year, Denver was trying to go back to the Super Bowl, so the real question is, 'how does he have the most effective 10-12 year career he can have.'"

"Not when it starts."

Siemian, who entered last season without a career passing attempt, completed 289-of-486 passes for 3,401 yards, 18 scores, and 10 interceptions and posted an 8-6 record as a starter.

Lynch trained with quarterback guru Charlie Taaffe earlier this year. He also worked with the throwing coach before the NFL Scouting Combine.

NBC Denver reported that former coach Gary Kubiak was more of a fan of Siemian than Lynch. Since Kubiak departed, that leaves the door more open for Lynch's ascension.

Elway maintains that "it will be a great competition" between Lynch and Siemian this time around.

"Like we've said, we really feel good about the two young ones that we have," Elway told reporters at the NFL Owners Meetings last month. "Trevor did a good job for us last year and Paxton was young. The plan is to stay the course there and see what's available in the draft. We'll go from there."

"But we like both. Paxton was a first-rounder last year for a reason, and then Trevor came in and played very well. It'll be a great competition between them this spring."

ESPN reported last month that the New York Jets were attempting to trade for Siemian as news circulated regarding the franchise's interest in Romo, but nothing materialized.

Siemian underwent offseason shoulder surgery, including the repair of torn ligaments where the clavicle, scapula, and AC joint connect. He was given a four to six month timetable for recovery in January, according to NBC Denver.

The Broncos begin OTAs on April 10, but Lynch arrived in Denver a week ago.

Steinberg pointed to a cast of stellar franchise quarterbacks who didn't get to start immediately when asked about the start to Lynch's career.

"The point is that he's competitive," Steinberg said. "He would have loved to start last year. He will be hyper-competitive to start this year. If it were to happen though, if you look at, I've shared with him that Philip Rivers, Carson Palmer, Aaron Rodgers, and some of the best quarterbacks in football didn't get to start immediately."

"He came out of a spread," Steinberg said. "He's dealing with it really well. He's in putting work in the offseason. He has been. He will come back for OTAs. He has been working and training with the same people who trained him for the combine, in Charlie Taaffe of QB Country in Orlando."

"I think as soon as the offense [starts] throwing the ball deep, and [Lynch] is getting outside the pocket if he can...some of his strengths, you know it will be a new coaching staff," Steinberg said. "My guess is the game plan will be a little more suited to some of his strengths."

Lynch said last season that it immediately felt like he "was wanted" in the Broncos facility.

"Once I got here and walked into the building, it felt like home," Lynch told reporters after getting drafted. "Kind of like when you get recruited out of high school to go to college, you walk in and you know that's where you're going to be for hopefully all four years. Here, [it's] your whole career. When I walked in, I felt good. I felt like I was wanted here. Like I said, I'm excited to spend a lot of time here and be around this coaching staff and all these players."

Elway told Pro Football Talk last month that he thinks he drafted the team's franchise quarterback in Lynch.

"I think so. I'm excited about Paxton. But you never know," Elway told PFT. "Last year, picking Paxton in the first round, and the talent level that we see, Paxton is going to have a great career in the NFL. The bottom line is bringing him along the right way and developing him the right way."

In his 2016 NFL Draft profile, the NFL Network's Mike Mayock said Lynch had "elite arm talent and athletic ability." Lynch has a terrific frame, at 6-feet, 7-inches, and was compared to Marcus Mariota by NFL.com before entering the league.

While the first day of voluntary workouts is April 10, voluntary minicamp is set from April 25 to April 27 for the Broncos. Rookie orientation is from May 11 to May 13. OTA offseason workouts are from May 23 to May 25, May 30 and May 31, June 1, and June 5 through June 8. Mandatory minicamp is from June 13 to June 15.

# Five under-the-radar draft wide receivers you should know

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
April 10, 2017

An annual tradition of Broncos training camp is the arrival of the under-the-radar receiver who becomes a fan favorite by making a slew of plays during practice.

It's a testament to the nature of practice, of course; drills often favor the receiver over the cornerback. But in recent years, it's also an example of the team's good work in finding late-round and undrafted contributors. Three examples are on the current roster: Bennie Fowler, Jordan Taylor and Kalif Raymond.

The depth of quality receiving prospects is why it always pays to take a close look at the receivers who project as mid-to-late-round prospects. Here's five who've caught my eye in recent months:

## RIVER CRACRAFT, WASHINGTON STATE

HEIGHT: 6-0 - WEIGHT: 193

BENCH PRESS: 15 repetitions

One of the deepest sleepers in this year's draft, Cracraft looked poised to become a mid-to-late-round selection before he suffered a torn ACL against California last Nov. 12.

Cracraft's game is built on the sharp cuts and quickness required in running precise routes from the slot -- areas keenly affected by an ACL injury. Given the typical recovery time, it could be another year before he's all the way back to his pre-injury form, so a team that adds him will have to be patient.

However, if Cracraft's recovery is successful, he could have a bright NFL future. At 6 feet and 200 pounds, he has the size and frame to make plays in the slot against tight coverage from nickel cornerbacks. He also has a knack for moving the sticks; 64 percent of his receptions last year went for first downs.

## ISAIAH MCKENZIE, GEORGIA

HEIGHT: 5-7 - WEIGHT: 173

ARM LENGTH: 28 7/8 inches - HAND SIZE: 8 7/8 inches

40: 4.42 seconds - BENCH PRESS: 11 reps

SHORT SHUTTLE: 4.15 seconds - THREE-CONE DRILL: 6.64 seconds

McKenzie has potential as a weapon who forces teams to shuffle their defensive assignments when he steps out of the huddle. Georgia sometimes used him on sweeps and end-arounds, and he averaged 8.9 yards per carry in 2016. Last year, McKenzie scored once every seven times he touched the football on offense.

He has work to do to grow into an every-down contributor at the next level. He must protect the football better; he struggled with fumbles at times during his college career. His 173-pound frame means that he isn't yet ready to take an every-down pounding, even on the outside.

But McKenzie should be a change-of-pace threat who immediately steps in on returns. He averaged 11.2 yards per punt return and 22.1 yards per kickoff return. He returned five punts for touchdowns, giving him a rate of one score every 12.4 chances.

JALEN ROBINETTE, AIR FORCE

HEIGHT: 6-3 - WEIGHT: 220

ARM LENGTH: 32 3/8 inches - HAND SIZE: 10 7/8 inches

40: 4.62 seconds - BENCH PRESS: 13 repetitions

SHORT SHUTTLE: 4.46 seconds - THREE-CONE DRILL: 6.77 seconds

Unlike the other receivers on this list, Robinette isn't a slot target and doesn't project as a returner. His size and ability to maximize his opportunities in a triple-option offense evoke memories of Demaryius Thomas, who made the most of limited chances at Georgia Tech.

Robinette averaged 27.4 yards per reception last year, nearly finishing with a 1,000-yard season despite catching just 35 passes. He scored once every 5.5 receptions the last two years.

Although his timed speed doesn't raise eyebrows, his size allows him to win jump balls downfield. He'll be a tough physical match for most cornerbacks he faces. If he can refine his route-running with pro coaching, he has the potential to develop into a productive starter.

RYAN SWITZER, NORTH CAROLINA

HEIGHT: 6-3 - WEIGHT: 220

ARM LENGTH: 32 3/8 inches - HAND SIZE: 9 1/4 inches

40: 4.51 seconds - BENCH PRESS: 11 repetitions

SHORT SHUTTLE: 4.00 seconds - THREE-CONE DRILL: 6.77 seconds

Perhaps the best pure slot target in this year's draft class, Switzer is also among the quickest receivers available. His short-shuttle time at the Combine ranked first among the wide receivers there.

Switzer had a career-best 1,112 receiving yards as a senior last year, but what could push him above other slot receivers is his electric work on punt returns. He averaged 10.6 yards on his 102 runbacks for the Tar Heels, scoring every 14.6 opportunities.

The primary knock on Switzer is arm length. At 28 inches, his arms are the shortest of any wide receiver invited to the Scouting Combine.

TRENT TAYLOR, LOUISIANA TECH

HEIGHT: 5-8 - WEIGHT: 181

ARM LENGTH: 28 3/4 inches - HAND SIZE: 8 1/4 inches

40: 4.63 seconds - BENCH PRESS: 13 reps

SHORT SHUTTLE: 4.01 seconds - THREE-CONE DRILL: 6.74 seconds

His height, length and hand size ensure that he will be a late-round pick -- if he's drafted at all. But his production, route-running and on-field quickness demand a second look; he racked up 3,085 yards and 21 touchdowns on 235 catches the last two seasons.

Despite his average numbers in terms of timed quickness and his size, Taylor is elusive and racks up plenty of yardage after the catch, frequently making the first tackler miss.

Taylor also has experience as a punt returner. He averaged 8.3 yards on 58 punt returns for the Bulldogs.

# Mason's Mailbag: Patience needed with young quarterbacks

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
April 10, 2017

Do you think it's fair to judge a QB after only one season? I mean, Elway struggled his first season, Peyton Manning threw 28 interceptions, Tom Brady was considered average and a stop-gap and they had/have all Hall of Fame careers. On the other hand RGIII was considered good, Colin Kaepernick led San Francisco to the Super Bowl, etc. and their careers have gone downhill since then.

-- Abby Wilson

Absolutely not. Those examples you cited generally stand as reasons why you don't rush to conclusions regarding a quarterback's potential (although by the end of Brady's first season as a starter, he'd led a game-winning Super Bowl drive, so it was clear something special existed in him).

With Kaepernick and Griffin, both had systems and game plans that played to their strengths from their first starting assignments and they were able to flourish. Griffin's knee injury in a January 2013 wild-card loss to Seattle hindered his mobility; he was unable to fully adjust to the altered reality of not having the same elusiveness. Kaepernick has never been as accurate as he was in his first season as a starter; in three of the last four seasons, his completion percentage hovered below 60 percent, widely considered a demarcation point in that statistic.

It's difficult to have patience in the win-now environment of the NFL. But at quarterback that is required for proper evaluation. It's also necessary to prevent a perpetual spinning of wheels that results from hasty and preemptive cycling through quarterbacks.

Can Austin Pasztor be a possibility for Broncos at LT in free agency? He's still young and very underrated. Last season he played well for the Browns and would give insurance.

-- Luis Torres

Given that Pasztor has never started a game at left tackle in his professional career, that does not appear to be a realistic possibility. His versatility, including starts at both guard spots and at right tackle, should ensure that he lands somewhere.

It seems like most draft analysts, and even fans for that matter, develop a list of "my guys". That is, a list of players that they personally hold in higher regard than where those players are being projected. Who are some of "your guys" in the upcoming draft?

-- Mike Middleton

Florida linebacker Alex Anzalone: Injuries restricted his college playing time; if they recur, they could hinder him in pass coverage. But as a two-down defender against the run, he could be the best in this draft class.

Virginia Tech tight end Bucky Hodges: Last year, the Hokies hired Justin Fuente as their new head coach. Fuente brought the offensive concepts he used at Memphis to Virginia Tech, and no one benefitted more than Hodges, who lined up all over the place. If he can cut his drops, he will cause matchup problems for defenses.

Villanova defensive end Tanoh Kpassagnon: Smart, athletic and raw, with a very high ceiling. At 6-foot-7 and 289 pounds, he has a body that could handle another 10 to 15 pounds. If he adds bulk, maintains his quickness and adds another move or two to his pass-rushing repertoire, he could be Malik Jackson, 2.0.

Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey: Given the stampede of praise for him from all corners, it seems like he's everybody's guy.

Who will step up and be a solid No. 3 receiver? Seemed like Bennie Fowler was ready to be the guy after 2015, but not so sure after last year. Maybe it's someone not on the roster yet?

-- Joey Sanchez

I wouldn't be surprised if the Broncos draft a wide receiver at some point, but beyond Fowler, you have potential on the roster in Jordan Taylor and Kalif Raymond, with Raymond a more natural fit as the slot receiver.

The quality of this year's tight end class could also allow the Broncos to add another tight end, and in effect, that player could fill the role of a No. 3 receiver. Prospects such as Hodges, Mississippi's Evan Engram or South Alabama's Gerald Everett, may fit that bill. They're all versatile targets that could be used more in the slot and outside than as an in-line tight end.

Do you think the Broncos could possibly trade up for Forrest Lamp if he drops to 15??

-- @AO350legend (via Twitter)

Lamp seems most likely to go off the board late in the first round or early in the second round. There's a lot to like about Lamp, including his persistence, his work against high-level competition and his versatility. But I think that he'd be a reach at No. 15. Trading up to get him at that spot is likely to be an unnecessary move.

Which starting position do you feel is most "up for grabs" for somebody to steal by good work in training camp/preseason?

-- Kaden Smith

It would be obvious to reply, "left tackle." But since that position group could look radically different by the end of this month, it's best to sit and wait to see what the Broncos do there.

At this point, the answer is right defensive end. Jared Crick, who started there last year, returns. Zach Kerr was signed to push for that job. The wild card is Adam Gotsis; he could be in the mix if he does the required work in the weight room and can translate added strength to the field, especially in holding his ground at the point of attack.