

Broncos to host Utah OT Garrett Bolles on pre-draft visit this week

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The Broncos will get another face-to-face with a player who could be a viable and coveted option for them in the first round of the upcoming NFL draft. According to a league source, the team is scheduled to fly in former Utah left tackle Garrett Bolles for a visit this week.

Bolles met with the Broncos at the NFL combine in Indianapolis and is widely regarded as one of the top three tackles in the draft, along with Wisconsin's Ryan Ramczyk and Alabama's Cam Robinson, the latter of whom met with the Broncos last Wednesday.

Bolles (6-foot-5, 297 pounds) played two years at Snow College, about 100 miles south of his hometown Saratoga Springs, Utah. It was at Snow that Bolles, a two-time junior college All-American, continued to turn his life around after a difficult childhood that included multiple school suspensions, run-ins with the law and jail time, and drug use.

"Many of you guys know my story," Bolles said at the combine. "I'm a changed man, and I know exactly what I want and where I'm going. I just got married a year ago. I have a son, so I've got to take care of them and show them what I'm going to do."

Part of his turnaround, he said, was due to a mission trip in Colorado Springs before he went to Snow. Potentially returning to Colorado as a Bronco is an opportunity he said he'd welcome.

"I love Colorado. I have a heart there, because those are the people that I taught on my mission. So if I end up going there, I'd be just fine," he said. "But I don't care where I go. Wherever I end up, I'll be happy."

Bolles transferred to Utah in 2016 and in his lone year of FBS football was named a first-team All-Pac 12 selection as the Utes' starting left tackle. Now he figures to be among the most sought-after players in the draft.

Although the class of 2017 is said to be relatively weak in tackle talent, Bolles has stood out for his athleticism and quickness, two things high on the list of Broncos head coach Vance Joseph.

Bolles flashed both at the combine with a 4.95-second 40-yard dash and 115-inch broad jump that ranked second and first, respectively, among participating offensive linemen.

"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 Broncos acquired guard Ron Leary and tackle Menelik Watson in free agency to bulk up the line, and then they restructured the contract of tackle Donald Stephenson. Along with Ty Sambrailo and Michael

Schofield, the Broncos have four veterans who can play the edges, but no clear starter for either side. Yet.

Denver's offensive line was its biggest weakness last season, with the tackles causing the most problems, especially in protection. With Russell Okung's departure, filling the left side has been a priority, but Joseph has made it clear he wants to find a pair of starting tackles equal in ability.

"We need to acquire tackles who can block speed," he said. "In our division, every team has two (rushers) so it's a concern for all of us in the division blocking edge rushers. Left or right? Not concerned. I want two guys who can block speed rushers."

Bolles could be one.

Broncos could go defensive end in first round

By Mike Klis

9News

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The Denver Broncos could use a Taco.

Finishing second in the free-agent recruiting bids for Calais Campbell and Earl Mitchell left the Broncos hungry (sorry) at the 3-4 defensive end position.

The Broncos have Derek Wolfe at one inside defensive end position while Adam Gotsis, Zach Kerr and Jared Crick will compete for the other.

Kerr was an offseason addition after he was non-tendered as a restricted free agent by the Indianapolis Colts who had turnover in their front office. He is a nice rotational player, but the Broncos pursuit of Campbell and Mitchell proves they want a solid anchor and backfield penetrator on the left side.

Taco Charlton (his given first name is Vidauntae) is a defensive end who is getting first-round consideration. The former Michigan Wolverine had 9.5 sacks last season. The Broncos' No. 20 overall pick might be a little rich for Taco. Outside of Alabama's Jonathan Allen, there might not be another 3-4 defensive end worthy of No. 20.

But if the three, first-round offensive tackles – Cam Robinson, Ryan Ramczyk and Garrett Bolles – are unexpectantly gone by No. 20, 5-technique defensive end is the Broncos' next most pressing need.

Barring a trade for a veteran, offensive line (offensive tackle, plus guard-center Forrest Lamp if he's there), defensive end, tight end, pass-rushing outside linebacker and perhaps a certain running back from Valor Christian are the Broncos' only possibilities in the first round.

We'll look at each before April 27, when the first round of the NFL Draft will be held. Today we look at nine defensive ends the Broncos may consider in either the first- or second rounds.

1. Jonathan Allen, 6-3, 286, Alabama

Projected as a top 5 talent, but perhaps he'll plummet because of shoulder concerns. The Broncos can only hope. Had 9.5 sacks and 15 tackles for loss and returned an interception 75 yards – 75 yards! – for a touchdown in his senior season.

2. Taco Charlton, 6-6, 277, Michigan

One year, senior starter who grew up outside Columbus, Ohio, but wound up at Ohio State's rival. A bit of a tweener who would have to eat a few more tacos to play the 5 technique.

3. Caleb Brantley, 6-3, 307, Florida

Came out after his redshirt junior season. An inside pass rusher although he may be more 3-technique defensive tackle.

4. Malik McDowell, 6-6, 295, Michigan State

Malik! Remember, it wasn't until his fourth season that Malik Jackson became a dominant 5-technique. There's been some concern McDowell's production hasn't matched his first-round skills. Skipped his senior year. Ran his 40 in 4.85.

5. Chris Wormley, 6-5, 298, Michigan

Very good against the run and coming on as an inside pass rusher – which makes him a possibility with the Broncos' No. 51 pick in the second round.

6. Tanoh Kpassagnon, 6-7, 289, Villanova

Long arms at 34 ¾ inches. And for all that size he ran his 40 in 4.83. When Wade Phillips was the Broncos' defensive coordinator, he sought defensive linemen who could run.

7. Montravius Adams, 6-4, 304, Auburn

Ran the 40 in 4.87 at the combine. Derek Barnett, considered a 4-3, pass-rushing defensive end, ran a 4.88.

8. Larry Ogunjobi, 6-3, 305, North Carolina-Charlotte

A redshirt senior as it can take a while for small college prospects to get discovered. Mike Mayock loves this guy, but it would still be a surprise if he went as high as the second round.

9. Vincent Taylor, 6-3, 310, Oklahoma State

The Broncos are known for finding sleepers at the 3-4 defensive end/defensive tackle position. Draftniks didn't know much about Wolfe or Gotsis until the Broncos drafted them in the second round. Besides Taylor, who just started to come on before skipping his senior season, Notre Dame's Jarron Jones, Iowa's Jaleel Johnson or LSU's Davon Godchaux could be second-day surprises.

Broncos' QB competition is about leadership, too

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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The Denver Broncos' two quarterbacks know the competition for the team's starting job that unfolds in the weeks and months to come will be about the hardcore football matters.

It will be about footwork and preparation, accuracy and anticipation with the ball, all to go with the ability to construct touchdown drives. But Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch also know it's about presence, about leadership, about keeping the team pointed in the right direction.

And being that strong front-of-the-line voice in the locker room can be a tall order for one quarterback who is 25 (Siemian) and one who is 23 (Lynch). Siemian got a glance at the entire job description when he started 14 games as a team captain last season -- chosen by his teammates -- but as he competes to be the starter again, he said he knows he must advance that part of his game.

"I've tried to be the same guy since I walked into the building," Siemian said. "Obviously my role has changed a little bit, but just be the same guy, work hard and be a good teammate. I think that helps. I'm not the only one like that by any means. We have a heck of a locker room. I'm really fortunate to be a part of that group. I'm looking forward to see how this thing comes together."

When asked if he thought he could be a leader in an offense that is still searching for leadership a calendar year after Peyton Manning retired, he added:

"There is no reason not to. Playing obviously helps. It was my first year playing last year. As I get older and play more reps and do those types of things, that's kind of my role moving forward."

One of the main criteria former coach Gary Kubiak used in making the selection at quarterback last summer, after a camp competition between Siemian, Mark Sanchez and Lynch, was "how I saw the quarterback run the team, in the huddle, in practice, in meetings."

Lynch started two games last season and as he enters his second season trying to win the job, his demeanor with his teammates will be part of the equation as well. Lynch, who will be with his second offensive coordinator in as many seasons in Mike McCoy, said this past week he believes how quickly he gets a handle on the offense will help show his teammates he's ready for the job.

"To me it's just really worrying about myself and focusing on myself, knowing what I've got to do day in, day out, to win the trust of these guys," Lynch said. "Become a leader and show these guys I can carry the team."

Lynch has already expressed the hope McCoy's offense will be a little friendlier to his skill set than the Broncos' offense under Kubiak. However, the Broncos traded up in the first round to select Lynch in last April's draft with the idea that he would run Kubiak's offense in the future, so his transition into McCoy's offense will still take his full attention.

“Some of the stuff that we’ve seen, I know he’s going to put us in the shotgun a little bit more,” Lynch said. “That is one thing I am definitely excited about just because my whole college system was shotgun, really. I know we’re going to have to get under center. Pressing the ball downfield, I’m definitely excited about that, too. Having the opportunity to run around a little bit, that excites me.”

McCoy has also already said he will tailor the offense to whichever quarterback is behind center. That is a thought coach Vance Joseph has echoed as well.

Joseph said last week: “I think the structure of your offense won’t change. That would come into play more when the game-planning stuff starts in the fall. Right now, the overall structure won’t change whether it is Trevor or Paxton playing the quarterback position for us now. It’s Mike’s basic offense, basic route tree and basic run game going in, so that won’t change until the fall.”

So, in the end, whether it’s eventually Siemian or Lynch that is named the starter, the quarterback will have to look, and act, the part well beyond the play that gets called in the huddle.

“I’m really excited,” Siemian said. “I’m really excited to get rolling.”

Who's No. 3? Broncos could pick another Tennessee QB

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
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Word association.

Quarterback. Orange. University of Tennessee. Denver Broncos.

And you immediately think:

Peyton Manning.

Think again:

Joshua Dobbs.

The Broncos need and want a third quarterback this season.

Most of the free agent quarterbacks already have signed with other teams, and the Broncos are not bringing back Jay Cutler under any circumstances (John Elway never liked him a whit). They won't consider Colin Kaepernick (after he turned down Elway a year ago at this time, and he's now a baggage handler), and RG3 and Johnny out-of-Football never will play in Denver.

The Broncos might contemplate Christian Ponder, who is 29, but it seems like light years since he was the Vikings' starter. This line, though, would be slick: "Christian Ponder hands the ball to Christian McCaffrey, and they are both very religious Christians."

It's highly probable that the Broncos will choose another young quarterback. Elway, as might be suspected, is passionate about quarterbacks. He has picked four in the past five drafts - Brock Osweiler, Zac Dysert, Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch. All still are in the league (if you count Brock).

Coach Vance Joseph said at the league meetings that adding a veteran as the No. 3 quarterback "makes no sense." He then said: "I wouldn't discount drafting a quarterback ... That's possible."

However, the Broncos have given no indication who it will be, and when. They did interview one - Pat Mahomes of Texas Tech - but he'll go in the first round. They have watched quarterbacks at the Senior Bowl, the NFL combine and Pro Days, and they possess dossiers on the top 21. They could try to uncover another in the last round, as they did with Siemian (who was injured late in his senior season) and Dysert (a third-stringer on six teams in four seasons).

Or they could choose a QB in the fourth round, where Dak Prescott was selected last season. Prescott, as I wrote before the draft in 2016, was my preference.

This year before the draft, my preference is Dobbs. He would be an exceptional pick and pick-up. The 22-year-old, 6-foot-3, 210-pound graduate in space aerospace engineering is among only four

quarterbacks in SEC history to throw for 50 touchdowns and run for 30. The others were, uh, Tim Tebow and, ugh, Johnny Manziel and, oh, Prescott.

Dobbs was mentored, over the phone and in person, for the past four years, by Manning His Own Self.

"The best advice, easily, I've gotten from Peyton Manning is the importance of preparation," Dobbs told profootballtalk.com.

"He just talks about his preparation each and every week, his pre-snap process and his communication at the quarterback position. And then to go on the field with him and see the importance of each and every rep ... that's definitely made me a better quarterback."

Dobbs was the most impressive quarterback at the Senior Bowl and was in the top three quarterbacks in all the measurables at the combine. He is the most intelligent quarterback in the draft. The consistent criticism is his accuracy, despite Dobbs completing 63 percent of his passes as a senior.

One NFL scout said Dobbs' Pro Day was the best of all the college quarterbacks, and Jon Gruden said after grilling Dobbs during his taped QB Camp: "He's going to be a steal for somebody in the draft."

Why not the Broncos?

Full disclosure: Tennessee is my alma mater, and I'm obviously biased. But I once told Dan Reeves after I covered a Stanford game in 1982: "I've just seen a kid who will become the greatest quarterback in the NFL." And Reeves replied: "We'll never get Elway, so forget about it."

And the Broncos did OK drafting Vols Al Wilson and Malik Jackson, and signing a guy named Manning off the street.

Speaking of, if the Broncos want to improve Siemian, Lynch and, possibly, Dobbs, Elway (who worked with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy) would be wise to ask Manning to drive down the street several days, or perhaps for two weeks, during OTAs and training camp and talk to, and coach up, the quarterbacks.

The Broncos also should draft Alvin Kamara, the Tennessee running back they've interviewed, in the second round. He could be the best of the bunch.

Orange is the ideal color for Alvin and Joshua.

On Dan, Dean and the Draft

By Peter King

MMQB

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On March 31, two days after returning from a historic NFL owners meeting in Arizona (for several reasons), NFL commissioner Roger Goodell flew to Pittsburgh to see the ailing Steelers owner, Dan Rooney. Goodell feared what he might see. Rooney, 84 and seriously ill, was now in a rehabilitation facility with major back problems and an undisclosed ailment. Goodell hadn't seen him since Super Bowl Sunday in Houston.

When Goodell opened the door to Rooney's room, Rooney was in bed, too weak to get up and greet him. A slim man already, Rooney had lost weight. But when he saw Goodell, Rooney smiled broadly.

"Commissioner," Rooney said.

Goodell didn't want to get emotional just then. It was difficult. "I flashed back," Goodell said Sunday afternoon. "It was exactly the same thing he'd said to me once before."

Eerily, it was. Same word, same smile too, as on a hot day in August 2006, in a hotel in Northbrook, Ill. In a ballroom of the hotel, the 32 NFL owners ended a lengthy debate about the man they'd elect to succeed Paul Tagliabue as commissioner, choosing Goodell over league lawyer Gregg Levy. One of the league's biggest power players for four decades, Dan Rooney, was dispatched to give the winner the news. Rooney went to room 755 and knocked on the door.

When Goodell opened the door, Rooney smiled broadly.

"Commissioner," Rooney said.

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The NFL is buzzing, with the first round of a mysterious draft 10 days away, with no quarterback emerging as the favorite for at least five QB-desperate teams, with Marshawn Lynch in Raider limbo, and with vice president of officiating Dean Blandino quitting at a terrible time as the NFL gets ready to run replay out of New York this year. Dan Rooney died Thursday, and it took the media world a half day to move on to the next story. I know how it works. But this week, I'm not moving on. When a Mount Rushmore figure in NFL history dies, he's going to get his due in this column. I hope you read about Rooney, but if not, there's 6,000 more words here about the rest of the football world. Before that, I'm going to try to explain why Dan Rooney matters, and why he'll be missed for years to come.

* * *

Thirteen days after Goodell's hospital visit, Rooney died, and so much of the history of the league (and the all-for-one, one-for-all nature of the old NFL) died with him. Rooney had a key role in four labor

negotiations; I believe he's the most significant diplomat between players and owners in NFL history, and that had much to do with him skating into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2000. Rooney stuck his neck out to hire the unknown Chuck Noll, 37, in 1969 (and to keep him when the Steelers went 12-30 in his first three years) and the unknown Mike Tomlin, 34, in 2007; in this era of instant gratification, Rooney knew something so many other owners didn't. The Steelers have had three coaches in the 48 seasons since 1969, and won six Super Bowls, more than any NFL team.

And so unique. In a league filled with Republican owners, he campaigned hard in Pennsylvania for Barack Obama in 2008—then took the ambassador appointment to Ireland by President Obama in 2009. He worked for years on the peace process between Ireland and Northern Ireland. For the past 41 years, he awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature to a young Irish writer. The annual prize money (now 10,000 euros) wasn't as significant to most of the writers as the career push. Rooney didn't forget his first sporting love while ambassador: On each of the Fourth of July holidays he served in Ireland, an American football game was played on the front lawn of his ambassador's residence in Dublin.

"The NFL was the least of his accomplishments," Tagliabue told me. "He truly cared about an extraordinary array of world affairs."

Rooney longed for the Steeler life while in Dublin, and when he returned four years ago, he was back running the team with son Art Rooney II. Intensely loyal to his team, he was as loyal to his league. Rooney was in Pete Rozelle's kitchen cabinet throughout his tenure, then in Paul Tagliabue's, then in Goodell's, almost until the end. When I mentioned to Goodell on Sunday that he must have learned a lot in his weekly talks with Rooney, he said, "It was more than weekly. Really, it was daily. I talked to him almost daily. It goes back, I'd say, 30 years.

"So many of the conversations I had with him, I came to realize, were to prepare me to become commissioner. He has such a strong sense of history. He has a perspective that is unmatched by anybody in the league. Often we'd talk about his historical perspective, and things that were important to focus on for the future, and the importance of the game itself, which he was intensely focused on. The players, the officiating, the game ... the game. He had a focus that a lot of other owners didn't have.

"Pete would always say, 'Dan is one of the most valuable owners in the league.' And Paul would say that. And of course, now, I would say that. He was a treasure."

Goodell got quieter for a moment. Over the phone, he sounded emotional.

"I never met a better man in my life. He had the highest integrity. There was a genuine goodness about him. He was the most devoted man I ever met ... devoted to his wife—he met his wife in 1936! Devoted to his family. Devoted to his city, Pittsburgh. Devoted to his Steelers. His father, The Chief [Hall of Fame owner Art Rooney] was a legend, and Dan came in and created his own legend. It was always about the game, his team, and his league."

Said Tagliabue: "His values were so traditional, but he was one of the first people to support major change and innovation. Stadium financing, the salary cap. He was for free agency, and for fundamental

changes in how players were treated. The Rooney Rule, so characteristic of him, seeing a wrong and trying to right it. I don't think enough attention has been paid to a man who was such a traditionalist and was truly so innovative.”

I found it compelling that as much as Rooney was egalitarian about every team in the league being able to compete fairly, he never minded sticking a needle into Goodell (or the commissioners before him) when he felt his team had been wronged. I witnessed it at a dinner in 2009, when Rooney bitterly complained to Goodell (with wives present) that the NFL was unfairly trashing the reputation of Hines Ward. I reminded Goodell of that Sunday.

“I used to tease him,” Goodell said. “He would call up on a Monday, and if he was mad about the officiating, he’d say it was ‘your officials.’ After a good game, he’d said, ‘The officials did a pretty good job.’ With Dan, his guys never committed a foul. He was all Steeler, through and through.

“I remember he was the first person I fined as commissioner. Remember that?”

October 2006, seven weeks into Goodell’s reign: After a 41-38 Atlanta win over the Steelers, Rooney, mad at several calls from ref Ron Winter’s crew, said, among other things: “Those officials should be ashamed of themselves.”

“So,” Goodell said, “I got Dan on the phone. I read him his quotes. I said, ‘Dan, is this what you said?’ He said, ‘That sounds about right.’ I said, ‘That’s a violation, Dan. I’ve got to fine you.’ He told me, ‘That’s okay. I deserve it.’ He knew.”

* * *

Rooney was at the fore for a lot of famous things—CBA talks, the Rooney Rule, commissioner elections. But where Goodell valued him was as a conscience, and a sounding board. Before he became commissioner, the NFL was about to expand to 32 teams, and realign from six divisions to eight. It was a clunky time, back in 1999. Few teams want major changes. And so Tagliabue and top lieutenant Goodell and Rooney (among others) began months of talks to figure out how to take a 31-team league with six divisions, add Houston in 2002, and become a 32-team league with four divisions.

At the time, all visiting teams would get a financial share of the eight games they played on the road from the home teams. And the teams playing at Dallas or the Giants, for instance, lucrative dates, didn’t want to give those up. So it wasn’t going to be easy to form an AFC South with smaller markets (Nashville, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, for example) making less than the teams with foes from bigger markets. So it was proposed that instead of each game being an individual visitors’ share, all 256 regular-season games be pooled and all 32 teams get the same collective visitors’ share each year.

Rooney loved that. “Both to maintain the proper rivalries and to get the schedule perfect, and to get the regional divisions right, it made sense,” said Goodell. “Through the process, Dan would scratch out his ideas for the right divisions, and he’d send them all to me. With the financial incentive taken away, it leveled the playing field. It was crucial for revenue sharing. It got us to a place where we could now talk football. Dan would talk to owners, I would talk to owners, Paul would talk to owners. Dan did a lot for

that process and that solution, but he didn't want any credit. He operated with total humility. He just wanted what was best for the health of the game, the future of the game, the future of the league. He just always put the game first. I start almost every league meeting with that point.

"In fact, I talked about that in Arizona. History is so important to our league. When we started the meeting this year, I said, "Except for a year or two when he was in Ireland serving as our ambassador there, this is the first league meeting since 1961 that Ambassador and Mrs. Rooney have not been to a league meeting."

I wrote this the other day, but it is Rooney to the core. One year, the Steelers announced they were holding the line on ticket prices, which means that the percentage the Steelers would be contributing to the visitors' share of the pie would stay flat. He heard some grouching at a league meeting about it. He got up and said: "I'm not concerned about your share. You've got enough money—we've all got enough money. I'm concerned about our fans and their ability to afford the tickets."

Are there enough Dan Rooneys out there to keep this game great, and to be fan advocates? After a four-month period during which rabid fans in San Diego watched the Chargers leave because a new stadium wasn't forthcoming, and rabid fans in Oakland watched the Raiders leave because a new stadium wasn't forthcoming there either, are there enough men and women of conscience in the league to watch out for the fans and the football? If Dan Rooney could have left one message to his peers—the 32 stewards of the game, and Roger Goodell—I can pretty safely predict what it would have been:

We've all got enough money. It's got to be about the game. The game. The game.

* * *

The Dean Blandino Mess

It's true: If the NFL knew vice president of officiating Dean Blandino was going to leave for a TV job—which Ian Rapoport and Aditi Kinkhabwala reported Friday—there's a strong chance owners would not have voted for centralized replay last month, with Blandino making the calls from the league's New York officiating command post. Clearly, a big part of voting for centralized replay was because of the strength of Blandino, and how good a media face he was for officiating.

He ran the beehive of an officiating command center, the size of a large Manhattan studio apartment, with 82 TV monitors and 21 employees following the games, calmly and authoritatively. He earned the trust of the league, and the officials. Blandino rose from never being on the field as an official to lording over the best football officials in the world. "You ask the officials ... and they trust Dean," Rich McKay, the chair of the rules-making NFL Competition Committee, told me last month. "He's very detailed. We're fortunate to have Dean Blandino as our head of officials."

So why didn't the NFL make sure to have him under contract so he couldn't walk away to do TV? That's the question many around the league were asking after this bolt out of the blue happened Friday. It was such a surprise that three prominent club officials over the weekend said they hadn't heard about Blandino and TV until they heard the news Friday. And though it wasn't a shock to some of his friends,

and some in the league office knew Blandino would want to do TV one day, they didn't think one day was now. This was not an active rumor, at all, at the league meetings, when the centralized replay vote passed in a landslide, moving the final calls on reviewed plays from the referees on the field to the Blandino team in New York. I can tell you with certainty that the Competition Committee was blindsided by the news Friday.

No one can blame Blandino. If, as Mike Florio reported, Blandino leaves for FOX to supplement his smooth predecessor, Mike Pereira, as a second voice interpreting calls, he'll be doing a job with far less pressure for significantly more money. As one of Blandino's friends told me Saturday: "Dean's 45, married, and has two children under 5. He's probably working 80 hours a week in-season at the NFL. That's not really good for a father of two young kids." Another friend said Blandino has long fancied himself a future TV guy. Being home for dinner five nights a week, and working 50 hours a week in the fall instead of far more, and having much of the off-season off—and making more money? A logical decision.

Still, there's no logical person to take his place. NFL execs have a big problem on their hands. I'm assuming they tried to negotiate a deal with Blandino and failed. They should have tried harder. So what does the league do now?

This job requires a public figure comfortable in front of the camera and on social media. Blandino was just that. Al Riveron, Blandino's lieutenant and a former referee himself, is not regarded as comfortable with that part of the job. He could still be considered for it, but after Carl Johnson never could get comfortable on TV and video as Pereira's first heir, I would expect the league to cast a wider net. The three most prominent candidates—my guess—among current officials are three referees: Gene Steratore, calm and comfortable with a mike on; Clete Blakeman, a Nebraskan with a good presence and very well-liked by the league; and Bill Vinovich, who, while on health leave from on-field duties, worked in the New York command center for almost two years. The NFL could also consider Mike Carey, who had a shaky TV tenure as CBS' rules analyst, or Terry McAulay, whose side job is as supervisor of officials for the American Athletic Conference.

Of course, it wouldn't surprise me if one of the TV-comfy officials emerged as media voice for, say, ESPN soon either. ESPN has to look at FOX and say, "We've got high-profile college and NFL games, as FOX does. They've got two officiating experts now?" ESPN doesn't have an in-studio rules expert either Saturday or Sunday, and the absence seems notable now. Which is why it wouldn't surprise me if they added a smart and cool voice to the studio shows, at least.

But this is a fire the NFL's going to have put out, and soon. It's a bad look after a bold March step to centralize replay.

* * *

Draft Tidbits of the Week

Ten of them:

1. Rampant belief: Myles Garrett number one—to some team. One executive told me Saturday it's "100 percent ... no, 99, because you can't predict Cleveland." Another veteran scout called him a "once in 10 years player."

2. Adrian Peterson might wait (or have to wait) till after the draft to sign. But the good sign, I hear, is that he's willing to play for a reasonable sum for a 32-year-old back with two washout seasons in the past three years. I hear in the right situation he would be willing to play for \$5 million or less. He's had a few visits, the most recent of which was New Orleans, which could hold some fascination because of the proximity to Peterson's Houston home, and because Sean Payton would know well how to use him. But right now, I'm told there's no leader in the clubhouse. After the draft is smarter for him and for teams, because that's when teams can see most clearly their needs.

3. Marshon Lattimore the second Ohio State cornerback taken? Strange as it may seem to draftboard nerds, some in the NFL think Lattimore is too much an injury risk to take him very high. "I'd take [Gareon] Conley," the other OSU corner slated to go fairly high, one club official said. "More reliable."

4. I think Cleveland wants Mitchell Trubisky or Pat Mahomes. Big arms. Love football. My gut: If it's Mahomes the Browns covet, they can stay at 12 and pick him. But one bit of warning ...

5. The Cardinals like Mahomes. They pick 13th. They might love him. Beware, Cleveland. GM Steve Keim's a bold guy. Emily Kaplan's "24 Hours" piece with Mahomes illustrates why he's so well-liked in the NFL community.

6. Teams that want to trade down. San Francisco (two), Chicago (three) and the Jets (six) are the ones I hear are most antsy to move back in a market with few teams wanting to move up.

7. Teams that want to trade back up. Cleveland at 12, if the Browns take Garrett number one (most likely scenario) and want to use their treasure trove of picks (12, 33, 52, 65, 108 this year, with a first- and three second-round picks next year) to move up from 12 to, say, 2, to ensure getting the quarterback they want. Spitballing only: But Cleveland from 12 to two makes a lot of sense. This would allow the Niners to still get a good player at 12 (Solomon Thomas? Christian McCaffrey? Mike Williams?), as well as Cleveland's one next year and at least one other prominent pick.

8. Leonard Fournette is not Ezekiel Elliott. Some durability concerns with Fournette, and there's lots of different opinions about which back goes first, and which sinks like a stone.

9. The second pick is a fascinating, and a bit unfortunate, spot. So the book out there is that there's Garrett, and then there's about 15 other players who could be number two on 32 draft boards. But that doesn't necessarily mean new San Francisco GM John Lynch won't have a strong market for the pick, because if a team loves, say, Trubisky and feels it must get him, the Niners will be able to move down even if the return isn't as lucrative as a traditional trade-down from that slot.

10. Someone's going to get a hungry player in Haason Redick. Really interesting story, this defensive end/WILL linebacker from Temple. He walked on and paid his own way to play at Temple before his

strong play led to him getting a scholarship. He thought of quitting several times at Temple because he was becoming a burden on his family. And now he'll be a first-round pick.

* * *

Stat of the Week

I'm not sure you should be surprised by this, but I think it's worth noting as we approach the time of year when fans get as excited about their team's first-round pick as they would if Ed Sheeran or Kendrick Lamar played their birthday party.

The first-round draft choice should be a cornerstone player for years, obviously. But if you look back at the first round of the draft 10 years ago, you will find this many players out of 32 teams still starting for the team that drafted them:

Two.

Joe Thomas went third overall to Cleveland. Joe Staley went 28th to San Francisco.

The only two teams, then, that picked wisely long-term to lead the 2007 NFL Draft are the same teams picking 1-2 on April 27: Cleveland and San Francisco.

Maybe you don't think it's a surprise that a player would still be starting for his original team 10 years after he was picked. Football's a rough game. But two of 32, lasting 10 years with their team—and, adding to that, Thomas and Staley were the only ones at the start of the 2016 season too—seems like a pretty short shelf life.

Was 2007 a fluke year? Not at all. Among the top 25 picks in 2009, here's how many are starting for the team that picked them:

Two.

Matthew Stafford (one, by Detroit) and Brian Cushing (15, by Houston).

Moral of the story: It's fine to get excited about the draft, but rarely do the top prospects change franchises the way fans would hope they would.

* * *

Ten Things I Think I Think

1. I think I don't know how you can't have a broken heart hearing about the horrible accident that took the life of Todd Heap's young daughter. I know Heap some, and he was not only an excellent tight end—he was, and is, a generous, thoughtful family man whose wife and kids are the center of his universe. So many hearts all over the country go out to the Heap family.

2. I think there's no way to follow the horribly accidental death of a 3-year-old girl with anything about football. Or anything about anything. But go on we must.

3. I think, still, that Marshawn Lynch ends up with the Raiders. It makes too much sense for the Raiders and for him for it not to happen.

4. I think it would be amazing if the Bills—who traded a quarterback-like haul (first-round and fourth-round picks in 2015 to move up five spots in the 2014 draft) to get him—did not pick up the fifth-year option on wideout Sammy Watkins ... and it would be a strong indication that the franchise is worried that his lingering foot injury in 2016 is a continuing factor. Watkins has averaged an unimpressive 51 catches a year in his three NFL seasons, missing 11 games due to injury in the process. He never was right all of 2016. But if this is his last year in Buffalo, it could be a harbinger of doom for GM Doug Whaley.

5. I think the situation doesn't look good for Eli Manning, based on the email he allegedly sent to a Giants' equipment manager asking for two jerseys that could pass as game-used in 2010. There's still much to be discovered here. But the advice I'd give to anyone about to buy stuff they think is game-worn or authentic is this: Don't. I once saw a quarterback sign a jersey for a teammate, then sign a form (feeling awful about it) saying it was game-used. He did it because he didn't want to be known as a guy who wouldn't help out teammates when they had fund-raisers, and the teammate in this case cajoled him strongly to do it because "game-used" would fetch more money. I once suspected that an administrative assistant in a football coaches' office was being paid to sign different players' autographs on cards and photos for people who mailed in requests. In other words, I wouldn't trust the authenticity of an autograph unless I witnessed it being signed.

6. I think I'm proud of our team on the Tom Brady jersey-caper story. Not just because Jenny Vrentas and Robert Klemko and editor Gary Gramling put together a compelling account of one of the strangest stories around the NFL in years—how a member of the media from Mexico, who, we've come to find out, is a sports-memorabilia burglar, got away with pilfering the jersey in a locker room packed with players and interlopers and Patriots employees. But how they were able to find out things in the course of their reporting that confirmed what a cool and brazen character Martin Mauricio Ortega was. A Patriots' camera in the locker room captured for a moment Ortega standing next to Brady's locker before the theft, looking like he fit in the space perfectly. He belonged. "He looks very relaxed," one investigator told our team. "He's honed his sills over the years." Imagine how you'd feel if you were Ortega. I'm about to steal the jersey of this great quarterback who just completed the greatest comeback in Super Bowl history—with any of 100 people who could spot me doing it! It is just stunning, even now that we've known the outcome for a month. Our team also got one of the coolest images from this investigation: a photo from a collector, a Patriots fan living in Seattle, that he sent to an investigator. It's a cell photo he got from Ortega of the Brady jersey from the Seattle Super Bowl two years ago. Amazing discovery. You'll like the digging, and the story.

7. I think this is exhibit one in why so many people think America's gone way too far with football, and not just in the NFL: Bruce Feldman of FOX Sports reports that each locker of University of Texas football

players is equipped with a 43-inch flat-screen TV and has a cost per locker of \$10,500. We officially have gone off the deep end with this game, if you didn't know that already.

8. I think I think this is the Oral History of the Week: Don Banks is so good at these, and he's authored a memorable one for Patriots.com on the 1967 draft. Imagine no one calling you to say you'd been the fourth pick in the draft. That's what happened on draft day 1967 to Miami pick Bob Griese, who told Banks: "I think I had a job interview scheduled with some company that had come to campus. I majored in industrial management, so I'm thinking I'll go to work for Johnson & Johnson or Procter & Gamble, some company like that. The way I found out I was drafted was my offensive [coordinator]/quarterback coach, Bob DeMoss, saw me in the hallway as we were passing, like we had done a million times, and he kind of looked down at me and said, 'Hey, congratulations. I hear you're going to Miami.' Just like that. I mean, nobody called me. The Dolphins didn't call me. The NFL didn't call. The writers, the media, nobody called me." Some great stuff in here too about Steve Spurrier and playing among the seagulls and worms at Kezar Stadium.

9. I think I challenge you to read this, by Garrett Downing of the Ravens team site, and not get misty. Konrad Reuland, and his family, should be in all of our thoughts today. The story was also done well, the same day, by Dan Brown of the San Jose Mercury News.

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

a. Steve Buckley, you wrote a real gem. Column of the Week, on the day 50 years ago that everything changed for the Boston Red Sox, and it was someone no one knew who did it.

b. "But then came 1967, and the sun came out." Great line, Steve.

c. Amazing: In a game of such historic import, in the home opener for the New York Yankees, Boston's pitcher and catcher were making their major-league debuts.

d. Facing Whitey Ford. With Jackie Kennedy and 6-year-old son John in the crowd. That is some great history work by Buckley.

e. Time of game: 2 hours, 11 minutes. Attendance to a Yankees home opener: 14,375. Man, a lot about baseball has changed.

f. Best example of meaninglessness of spring training: Greg Bird. He's batting .038. He's one for 26. But he does have 13 strikeouts.

g. Baseball Oddity of the Week: Cardinals pitcher Carlos Martinez didn't allow a fair ball to be hit in the first two innings Saturday at Yankee Stadium. He struck out six. He walked six.

h. Could be a long year for the Cards. You can't touch C.C. Sabathia? Yikes.

- i. The one word on the front of Mookie Betts' T-shirt in batting practice Saturday, Jackie Robinson Day: EQUALITY.
- j. I wish I could watch every pitch Chris Sale throws this season. What a competitor. Smart pitcher, too, knowing when the off-speed stuff will buckle knees.
- k. Happy 70th birthday (last Friday), Joe Lahoud.
- l. Happy 13th birthday (last Friday), Kate "Nocturnal" Benschel.
- m. Coffeenerdness: One great coffee thing about England is the multiple choices of good chain coffee houses. Caffe Nero's good. Costa is everywhere. Good espresso at both.
- n. Beernerdness: Pilot Blonde Ale (Pilot Brewery, Edinburgh, Scotland). Had this in the Red Squirrel, a pub in the heart of Edinburgh, and really enjoyed it. A very hoppy ale, it's a darker blonde with a strong bite, and would do smashingly well on tap in a craft-crazy city like Denver or Seattle.
- o. Interesting follow-up story by the Washington Post about the Washington team name.
- p. Harden v Westbrook. That might make me watch some NBA this week.

Broncos bringing Garrett Bolles in for a look

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
April 17, 2017

The Broncos were willing to let Russell Okung walk, and haven't replaced last year's left tackle yet.

They're looking at a guy this week who could potentially replace him, as they continue to attempt to rebuild their offensive line.

According to Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post, the Broncos are bringing Utah left tackle Garrett Bolles in for a visit this week.

Bolles is interesting for a number of reasons, primarily for a past that includes school suspensions, legal problems and drug use, which he has admitted through the pre-draft process. But he's also extremely athletic and could project as a long-term left tackle as well.

The Broncos have a pretty glaring need at his position, as well. They spent big money on guard Ronald Leary and brought in free agent tackle Menelik Watson in free agency, and they kept veteran tackle Donald Stephenson around. They also tried Ty Sambrailo and Michael Schofield last year, but lack a cornerstone tackle at a time they're not sure who their quarterback will be either.

Referees want NFL to eliminate celebration penalties

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

April 17, 2017

NFL fans, players and referees all seem to agree that the league office is too concerned about cracking down on touchdown celebrations.

The head of the NFL Referees Association, Scott Green, said on SiriusXM NFL Radio that the on-field officials think the league office is putting them in a difficult situation with trying to figure out where the line is between a celebration that deserves a penalty and one that can be permitted. Green said the officials would prefer to eliminate penalties and instead enforce any celebration issues with fines.

“Nothing is worse than someone going 80 yards for a touchdown and then we’re trying to figure out does that warrant a flag for what he’s doing in the end zone,” Green said. “We don’t really enjoy that. If we could get to a point where it would simply be fines by the league, that would be great. The issue we’ll still have is that guys can get pretty creative out there. The question of whether it’s a foul or not a foul, hopefully we’ll get closer to more of a black-and-white situation.”

Unfortunately, the NFL is considering going in the opposite direction, and enforcing celebration violations only with on-field penalties, not with fines after the fact. That puts even more pressure on the officials to figure out where the seemingly arbitrary lines on celebration penalties are drawn.

Mason's Mailbag: Why it's wise to always look at drafting a quarterback

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
April 17, 2017

Any shot that Bradley Roby will see time at safety this season? I was nearly hit by a tree while camping when I thought of this, but it seemed like a decent concept at the very least.

-- Josh Lawton

Like George of the Jungle, you need to watch out for that tree.

As for Roby, he could see occasional safety looks, but barring a tsunami of injuries, that would be the extent of it. With T.J. Ward, Darian Stewart and Justin Simmons leading the safety corps, there is not room for Roby to break into the mix there. The position that offers him the chance for the most playing time remains the No. 3 cornerback.

With the Broncos' lack of a running game, why aren't they interested in Christian McCaffrey?

-- Ronald Martindale

They met with him at the Scouting Combine and reportedly hosted him at UHealth Training Center this week. It seems like they're quite interested.

How many compensatory picks do the Broncos have this year and would it be smart to draft another quarterback in the late rounds in the draft?

-- Panic Espinoza

Four, and it's always smart to keep adding quarterbacks. The position is of such a high value that it's crucial to keep taking shots at developmental prospects. Furthermore, if a late-round quarterback flourishes, he has value even if he doesn't become your starter, as you can trade him for potentially far more than his initial draft value.

Hall of Fame general manager Ron Wolf used this strategy to great effect with the 1990s Packers, continuing to add young quarterbacks even after Brett Favre established himself as the unquestioned starter. He turned Mark Brunell, a fifth-round choice, into third- and fifth-round picks in a trade with Jacksonville. Matt Hasselbeck, a sixth-round pick in 1998, eventually was part of a deal that allowed the Packers to move up seven picks in the 2001 first round, while also adding a third-round pick.

Do you think it's smarter to start Trevor Siemian if he's a step ahead of Paxton Lynch after preseason even if it looks like Lynch has a higher ceiling if given time to develop in regular-season games? I think the Broncos are wise to focus on these two at QB but it's hard to root for one over the other as a fan.

-- Brice Grunert

I would suggest it is best to root for the team and what is best for it, rather than rooting for one Bronco over another. That means rooting for both quarterbacks to excel and push each other forward.

If Siemian is "a step ahead" of Lynch at the end of the preseason, as you put it, he should start. With a veteran-laden team just 14 months removed from a Super Bowl win, you can't go into that locker room and start a quarterback who is the lesser of the two right now just because he has a higher ceiling. Further, a 16-game schedule is simply too brief to not put your best players out there when the regular season begins.

Do you think bringing in a vet guard like Jahri Evans would be good competition for Max Garcia and help our RT?

-- Tyler Black

If you're adding a six-time Pro Bowler like Evans, you're not adding him for competition. You're adding him to start. A team that adds Evans wouldn't need to do so immediately, anyway. He showed last year that he is willing to bide his time before taking the right offer; he remained unsigned until joining the Seahawks on Aug. 6. They later released him, leading to his return to the Saints.

Will we DENVER BRONCOS FANS ever host a SUPER BOWL IF NOT WHY?

-- Bruce Morales

We'll see. Never say never. When the AFL and NFL began playing Super Bowls, who could have seen Jacksonville hosting one? There's a decent chance we'll be talking about Las Vegas in the same regard; its population was still under 100,000 in the mid 1960s.

@BroncosEUR

@MaseDenver #AskMase would you ever visit Europe?

Sure. I hope I'm there to cover a Broncos game sometime in the future. It's been nearly seven years since the Broncos' last game overseas, and I know the club would love to return.