

Return of Receiver Heaven? Emmanuel Sanders has great expectations for Broncos' "pass-happy" offense

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Before the start of the 2015 season, Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders purchased a JUGS passing machine to plant in his backyard so he could field pass after pass after pass. Hundreds a day were the norm, with anyone around feeding the beast.

The investment was well over \$2,000, but the payout was much higher. After winning a Super Bowl ring that season, the Broncos awarded Sanders a three-year, \$33 million contract extension before the start of the 2016 season opener.

So this year, he invested even more into the stock of Sanders.

"I put a nice weight room in my house so that when I wake up in the morning I can go right in the gym or 11 o'clock at night I can go right in the gym," he said. "Honestly this is the best I've felt in a long time just having that gym and having that JUGS machine out there and being able to train out there whenever I want."

Although the Broncos' offense as a whole struggled in nearly every facet last season, Sanders was again a mark of consistency with 1,032 receiving yards, five touchdown catches and zero drops.

Playing with two young quarterbacks and a sieve for an offensive line, Sanders' touches were limited and he let it be known he wanted the ball more. He wanted the wins and the rings, but he wanted the numbers to boot. The "receiver heaven" offense of 2014, when he had a career-best 1,404 yards and 101 catches, had disappeared.

But with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy back on the sidelines and on the headsets, Sanders' hope has been renewed.

"I'm excited. I believe it's going to be a pass-happy offense," he said. "I had the opportunity to play in this offense my first year here in 2014 and had 1,400 yards. Hopefully we can simulate that some type of way and put up points and score and help our defense. That's our goal."

New Broncos head coach Vance Joseph has thrown out a different adjective in every media appearance to describe his goals for the offense. He wants swagger. He wants aggression. He wants scoring. He wants "juice."

He wants a new mindset.

"The mindset is we're going to play with a swag, we're going to play with a confidence that nobody can shatter, nobody can break us, no matter if we go three-and-out," Sanders explained. "We still have to keep our confidence level up."

The retirements of Peyton Manning and, most recently, DeMarcus Ware has left the Broncos on a search for its primary leader in 2017. The defense isn't short on vocal players. But the voice of the offense has been quiet.

In March, Joseph put the onus on quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch to lead on the field and off, too. But he also not-so-subtly called for leading receiver and team captain Demaryius Thomas to take on greater role, too.

There's no "C" on Sanders' sleeve, but he puts himself in the same class.

"Do I see myself as a leader? Yeah. I am a leader on this team," he said. "Demaryius was a captain last year — him and Trevor. I see myself as one of those guys as well, always trying to pick up guys, to better guys and help guys out. Me and Demaryius, this is our eighth year. I think we might be the oldest on the offense, which is crazy to say, but time flies."

The return of McCoy and arrival of offensive line coach Jeff Davidson is expected to lead to a mix of zone-blocking and power principles up front with a heavy emphasis on the passing game. More shotgun formation. More deep balls.

More opportunities for Sanders to get his.

Now contractually secure, he wants his investment to continue to pay dividends and his stock to continue to rise — his numbers, too.

"I want to go over 1,000 yards," he said. "Pro Bowl, all-pro — the sky's the limit, honestly. Last year I said 1,200. In another pass-happy offense, hopefully I can get up to 1,400, 1,500 like I did in 2014."

Broncos to have joint practices with 49ers in Santa Clara, Calif.

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The Broncos' second week of preseason will be an extended road trip.

Denver will have multiple joint practices with the 49ers in Santa Clara, Calif., ahead of their preseason matchup, which is tentatively slated for Aug. 17-20. The exact dates for the practices and the game will be announced when the NFL's full schedule is released, likely later this week.

This year will be the third consecutive season the teams will have practiced together before facing off in the preseason, but it will be the first time ever in Santa Clara. And this year will include some familiar faces on the other side.

Broncos Ring of Famer and former safety John Lynch is now the 49ers' general manager and Kyle Shanahan, the son of former Broncos coach Mike Shanahan, is their head coach and play-caller. The younger Shanahan interviewed for the Broncos' head coaching job before the team hired Vance Joseph.

Last year, after talks fizzled to potentially acquire quarterback Colin Kaepernick in a trade, the Broncos hosted the 49ers for a week of joint practices at Dove Valley before their preseason game at Mile High. The year before, Denver hosted the 49ers for practices before meeting them in their preseason finale, Aug. 20.

The last time Denver hit the road for joint practices was in 2007, at Dallas.

Broncos' Joe Ellis, Ray Jackson to attend funeral for late Steelers owner Dan Rooney

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Broncos president/CEO Joe Ellis and director of player development Ray Jackson will attend Tuesday's funeral for the late Steelers owner Dan Rooney.

A public viewing was scheduled at Heinz Field on Monday and the service, to be held at St. Paul's Cathedral in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh, is set for Tuesday at 11 a.m. ET. Among those expected to attend is former President Barack Obama.

Rooney, 84, was among the most beloved NFL owners and is remembered for being a champion for diversity and for the players.

In 2002, he spearheaded what is now known as the Rooney Rule, which requires NFL teams to interview at least one minority candidate for head-coaching jobs. In January, Vance Joseph became the Broncos' first full-time African-American head coach.

Upon hearing of Rooney's passing, Joseph released a statement Thursday saying:

"As someone who's privileged to work in the NFL, my sincere condolences go out to the Rooney family, Mike Tomlin and everyone else at the Steelers who knew Mr. Rooney. I know he was a champion for diversity, not only around the NFL but also within his team. I believe the opportunity he gave Coach Tomlin many years ago opened up a lot of doors for minority coaches around the league, including myself. When you talk about the "Rooney Rule," and giving everyone a chance to interview for these jobs, that's a credit to Mr. Rooney and his incredible legacy."

Before the Broncos hired Jackson in 2015, he had spent the previous 10 seasons in the same role in Pittsburgh, where, among other things, he helped to organize a career transition program and life skills seminar for players.

Receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who signed with the Broncos in 2014 as a free agent after four years with the Steelers, said he was saddened to hear of Rooney's passing.

"I remember when I was there, he was still moving around, even when everyone was telling him to sit still," Sanders recalled Monday. "He was still moving around and trying to fly his plane around. I remember James Harrison telling stories about how he was up in a plane with him one time. He was flying and James was like, 'What is going on? How can he fly this plane?' Just an amazing man. He always treated you with the utmost respect. He treated you not like I was No. 88, but like I was Emmanuel Sanders, like I was a human being. He will definitely forever be remembered."

Broncos hosted OT Ryan Ramczyk on pre-draft visit

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The Broncos' tour of tackle prospects continues.

The team hosted former Wisconsin tackle and projected first-round pick Ryan Ramczyk on a visit Monday, according to an NFL source. Later in the week they are scheduled to host former Utah tackle Garrett Bolles.

Ramczyk and Bolles are viewed by many draft experts as the top two tackles in the class of 2017. Both have accolades to match but only one year of Division I experience.

The two met with the Broncos at the NFL scouting combine earlier this year and could be real options for them in the first round. Denver signed guard Ron Leary and tackle Menelik Watson in free agency, but the left tackle job left vacant by Russell Okung has yet to be filled.

"There was a possibility that we weren't going to have it filled (during free agency)," Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said at the league meetings. "You talk through every issue that's possible with free agency and with your roster. So I'm not surprised that we're sitting here without a known left tackle."

Ramczyk (6-foot-6, 310 pounds) has deeper ties to the Broncos after playing for Paul Chryst at the University of Wisconsin. Paul, who first tried to recruit Ramczyk to Pittsburgh when he was the head coach there, is the brother of new Broncos tight ends coach Geep Chryst.

Ramczyk turned down a scholarship offer from Pitt and instead attended technical college not far from his hometown of Stevens Point, Wis. He transferred to Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 2013 to pick up two all-Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference selections before moving on to Wisconsin-Madison. Ramczyk was forced to sit out the 2015 season, per NCAA transfer rules, but quickly moved into the starting role at left tackle the following year. The redshirt junior earned first-team all-Big Ten honors last season.

Among the biggest questions with Ramczyk, however, is his health. Following Wisconsin's bowl game against Western Michigan, he underwent hip surgery.

At the combine, he said the that injury requires five months of recovery and that he expects to be cleared in time for training camp in July, if not sooner.

Broncos CB Chris Harris alludes to wanting Christian McCaffrey, Emmanuel Sanders on Dan Rooney, more

By Cameron Wolfe

Denver Post

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Chris Harris knows exactly how he would make his mark during the NFL draft's first round if he were in Broncos general manager John Elway's shoes.

"I like playmakers," the Broncos' all-pro cornerback said Monday. "I want a playmaker on defense or offense, a guy that's going to put up some points or a guy that's going to change the game. We definitely need a guy who can play running back, receiver and returner. Any guy who can do that, I would definitely love him."

If that sounds eerily similar to a description of former Stanford and Valor Christian running back Christian McCaffrey, that was the intention. Harris sported a wry smile when McCaffrey's name was mentioned.

It seems a lot of teams want McCaffrey and the likelihood that he's available for Denver to pick at 20 is dwindling.

Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders has a closer view of the offense's struggles and would prefer to see Elway go another route with the first pick.

"We need help all around the board in terms of the offensive line, so if we could draft a tackle," Sanders said. "In terms of my position, I like (Oklahoma's Dede) Westbrook, I like (Washington's) John Ross. The tight end class is so deep, look at those guys. A lot of explosive guys."

Trust in the QBs. Harris knows the offense needs to be better, but he doesn't feel like quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch were the biggest problems a season ago. He spoke on behalf of the defense in reference to this summer's impending quarterback competition.

"We thought Trevor had a great year," Harris said. "He definitely had some ups and downs, but the dude played injured a lot. He took a lot of hits. For him to get back up and do that, we see a lot of promise in."

As for Lynch, Harris has high expectations for the Broncos 2016 first-round pick as well.

"It's going to be a huge year for him to go from year one to year two and have two offensive coordinators," Harris said. "Mike McCoy's offense will help him a lot more... He came in with a tough offense to learn so I think McCoy's offense will be a lot more like he ran in college."

Remembering Dan Rooney. It was Steelers chairman Dan Rooney who gave Sanders his first NFL opportunity when the team selected the diminutive SMU receiver in the third round of the 2010 draft. Sanders, who made his biggest career jump after joining the Broncos in 2014, has fond memories of Rooney, who passed away last week.

“I remember when I was there, he was still moving around even when everybody was telling him to sit still – trying to fly his plane around,” Sanders said. “Just an amazing man. He always treated you with the utmost respect, not like I was number 88, but like I was Emmanuel Sanders, like I was a human being. He’ll definitely forever be remembered.”

Footnote. Harris was named athlete of the year by the Denver Athletic Club. He’ll be honored May 31.

Chris Harris Jr., Emmanuel Sanders address Broncos draft needs

By Mike Klis

9News

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The NFL Draft is 10 days away. Who will the Broncos select with their No. 20 pick in the first round?

There is a need for a defensive end. There are 32 teams in the NFL. The Broncos ranked 28th against the run last year.

“We just didn’t have enough beef,” Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said Monday. “We weren’t big enough.”

Harris thinks the Broncos have enough size now following the free-agent additions of 325-pound nose tackle Domata Peko and 334-pound defensive end Zach Kerr.

So, who does Harris want the Broncos to draft?

“We definitely need a guy who can play running back, receiver and returner,” Harris said. “Any guy who can do that, I would definitely love him.”

He didn’t have to say his name. But Harris just described Christian McCaffrey. Or Oklahoma’s Joe Mixon, or, to a lesser degree, Tennessee’s Alvin Kamara.

Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders has been paying attention to the prospects available in this draft that begins April 27 with the first round, continues April 28 with the second and third rounds, and concludes April 29 with rounds four through seven.

“I feel like we need help all around the board,” Sanders said. “In terms of the offensive line, if we could draft a tackle. As far as our position, I like a lot of receivers. I like (Dede) Westbrook, John Ross.

“The tight end class is so deep. Look at those guys. A lot of explosive guys. I think this is a good draft and I know Elway and those guys will make the right decision.”

Broncos weighing \$8.526 million option on Bradley Roby

By Mike Klis

9News

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As several teams have already decided to exercise, or decline, the fifth-year options on their first-round picks from the 2014 draft, the Denver Broncos have not yet committed on which way to go with Bradley Roby.

The deadline for exercising his \$8.526 million fifth-year option is May 3.

Yes, that's too much money for a No. 3 cornerback. Then again, A.J. Bouye was a No. 3 cornerback for the Houston Texans at this time last year – and for part of the 2016 season – and he just got a multiyear contract worth \$13.5 million a year.

Even if the Broncos exercise the fifth-year option on Roby, it would only be guaranteed against injury. So if Roby didn't have a good year in 2017, the Broncos wouldn't have to pay him \$8.526 million next year.

But if Roby does have another Roby-like season that \$8.526 million figure would be used by his representatives as a jumping-off point toward a long-term deal.

Historically, the Broncos have been split on fifth-year options. They exercised their \$9.754 million option on pass-rushing linebacker Von Miller in 2015, but declined to pay a \$6.757 million salary on defensive tackle Sylvester Williams.

Roby is likely considered somewhere in between – not as good a player as Miller but better than Williams. After playing out his rookie contract with the Broncos last year, Williams became a free agent and received a three-year deal worth \$5.83 million a year with Tennessee.

Roby would also give the Broncos cornerback protection for the 2018 season. The cornerback market has only advanced salaries through free agency in recent years.

Broncos, 49ers to again hold joint camp practices

By Mike Klis

9News

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For the third consecutive year, the Denver Broncos will hold joint practices with the San Francisco 49ers prior to their preseason game, league sources told 9News.

Only this time, the practices will be held on the 49ers' grounds in Santa Clara, Calif. And this time, John Lynch will not be the Broncos' color commentator but the 49ers' general manager.

Lynch, a Broncos Ring of Fame safety, left the broadcast booth three months ago to head the 49ers' football department.

The Broncos and 49ers held joint practices at the UCHealth Training Center prior to their preseason games in August of 2015 and 2016.

The Broncos beat the 49ers, 19-12 in preseason game 3 of 2015 and lost to San Francisco last year, 31-24 -- an event later marked by the first time San Francisco quarterback Colin Kaepernick sat during the playing of the National Anthem.

The exact dates of this year's joint practices and game won't be known until later this week when the NFL announces its full 2017 schedule. What is known is the Broncos and 49ers will play sometime between Aug. 17-20 at Levi's Stadium, which was the site of Denver's Super Bowl 50 victory.

The Broncos have also held joint training camp sessions with the Houston Texans and Dallas Cowboys in recent years.

Even the Broncos' top pass defense gets an offseason makeover

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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The Denver Broncos defense isn't broken -- far from it in fact, as it's one of the best units in the league. But that doesn't mean some repairs aren't underway in the earliest stages of its offseason program.

The Broncos finished in the league's top five in both scoring and total defense in each of the last two seasons and finished as the league's No. 1 pass defense. But with a playoff miss, troubles in the run defense (they finished 28th against the run) and a change in coaching staffs there is a recipe for at least some change.

"We've added more wrinkles, taking it another level," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We were on level two on a lot of things, now we're on level three on some coverages."

Despite being a few days into their offseason program, Harris said Monday he believes it's clear first-year defensive coordinator Joe Woods likes what Wade Phillips had installed on defense, but Woods wants to add a few things as well.

The Broncos have four players in the secondary who have played in a Pro Bowl at least once over the last two seasons and they have a pass-rusher in Von Miller who is annually in the discussion for the league's Defensive Player of the Year. It's why they held teams to just 185.8 yards passing per game last season, almost 16 yards per game, on average, better than the next best team.

Last year's total was also a big improvement from the 199.6 yards passing per game the Broncos surrendered in 2015 as the league's top defense on the way to a Super Bowl win. They are the only team in the league to finish with fewer than 200 passing yards allowed per game in each of those seasons.

"If we can cut it to 175 that would be amazing," Harris said. "I think it's possible, though. I'm not going to say we can't do that."

The Broncos took a measured dip into the free-agency pool, and among their signings were defensive linemen Domata Peko and Zach Kerr, two stout run defenders who each tip the scales at over 320 pounds. That additional bulk, the Broncos believe, should help them control opposing run games better.

And if they control opposing run games better, it would allow the Broncos to get in more favorable third-and-long situations to rush the passer and challenge quarterbacks in coverage more than they were able to last season. Harris lamented several times last season that "nobody throws at us because they don't always have to."

"Have you seen those guys? Those guys are huge. Have you seen them?" Miller said. "Peko, he's athletic. ... Just by looking at those guys, you can already tell they're going to be able to feel and correct some of those weaknesses that we had last year. The run defense was one of our weaknesses."

"I think our run defense is going to be so much better, they're going to have to throw the ball now," Harris said. "They're going to have to throw to us, we're going the chance to get more picks ... just looking at those guys. We just didn't have enough beef, we weren't big enough. Just adding that size."

Harris said one advantage Woods has in adding some things to the defense so early in the offseason program is the experience level of the players, especially in the secondary. Harris, Aqib Talib, T.J. Ward and Darian Stewart -- last year's starters -- are starting their fourth season together.

Even the team's fifth defensive back, Bradley Roby, is entering his fourth season.

"We're able to handle that," Harris said. " ... To be able to have that chemistry, we can learn very fast together. That's a big plus. ... We already had the staple here, what we were very good at."

Chris Harris Jr.: Broncos 'definitely' need more speed on offense

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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Opinions are like, well, draft picks these days.

Everybody's got some.

And when it comes to what the Denver Broncos should include in their draft class next week, especially with their first-round pick at No. 20, two of the team's most high-profile players know what they'd like to see.

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr., who has been named to the last three Pro Bowls, and wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who has had three consecutive 1,000-yard seasons, echoed Monday what coach Vance Joseph said in recent weeks.

"overall to our offense in general [we need to] add more juice there, whether it's a receiver or a running back," Joseph said when the team's offseason program opened last week. "Every good offense needs a guy who take the ball from the [line of scrimmage] and go the distance with it. It's important to have that aspect of an offense. Running back, receiver, wherever it comes from, but definitely having more juice on offense is a must in my opinion."

Harris was on board with those sentiments as the Broncos began their second week of the offseason program.

"I like playmakers, man," Harris said. "If it's a playmaker on defense or offense, just a guy who is going to put up some points, a guy who's going to be able to change the game. So, we definitely need a guy who can play running back, receiver and return. Any guy who can do that I would like, I would definitely love that."

Told that sounded like the resume of Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey, a suburban Denver native whose father, Ed, played for the Broncos, Harris would only laugh.

"I feel like we need help all around the board, in terms of the offensive line, so if we could draft a tackle," Sanders said before he added: "... As far as position, I like a lot of the receivers."

Sanders then named Oklahoma wide receiver Dede Westbrook and Washington wide receiver John Ross. Those two players are among the fastest on the draft board with Ross having set a record in the 40-yard dash at the scouting combine with an official 4.22-second clocking (electronically timed).

"[The] tight end class is [also] so deep, lot of explosive guys," Sanders added.

Since John Elway was hired as the team's top football decision-maker, he has used the team's first pick in the draft in five of six previous drafts. One of those initial picks came in the second round – defensive end Derek Wolfe in 2012.

When the Broncos traded up in the first round to get Paxton Lynch in last April's draft, it was the first time Elway had used the team's opening pick on an offensive player. This year, with what Joseph said about the need for more speed on offense and an opening at left tackle, the Broncos' biggest needs are on offense.

Barnwell's '17 All-Trades Mock Draft

By Bill Barnwell

ESPN.com

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Mock drafts are ridiculous. You know this. I know this. The people writing them know this. They're also fun, which is why we all read a million of them before the draft. It's hard enough to predict what 32 teams will do, but it's downright impossible when you consider how the vast majority of mock drafts avoid projecting trades, which blow the draft order apart. With that in mind, over the past few years, I've decided to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction and put together a mock draft that consists entirely of trades.

Below, you'll find 32 trades involving each of the 32 selections in the first round of the 2017 NFL draft. The trades are intended to be reasonable for both sides while keeping in mind each team's history and style of management. The Browns are more aggressive in trading down and for future picks, while the Dolphins are more likely to move up for the player(s) they want. I'm not suggesting that these trades would necessarily be good ideas for either side or what I would recommend each team do, but it's an attempt to find fair value given the complex motivations and needs of an entire league.

Picks in the 2017 draft are notated with the round and overall pick number, so the 33rd pick (which is the first selection in the second round) would be designated as 2-33. Picks in future drafts are written out. Crucially -- and this is important to note before getting angry -- this is a multiverse in which each trade takes place in its own universe. The Saints trade I propose with the first pick has nothing to do with the Saints trade I throw out at 11.

While I typically measure the actual value of picks using the draft value chart created by Chase Stuart, the reality is that more teams will measure their trades using something closer to the chart generated by Jimmy Johnson in the early 1990s. That chart is outdated for a number of reasons, but traditional teams are still applying it, so it's more relevant to this conversation. For teams with an analytics bent like the Browns and Ravens, I'll lean heavier on the Stuart chart.

Let's just start with total lunacy and go from there:

1. Cleveland Browns

Patriots get: 1-1, 2018 conditional fourth-round pick, WR Josh Gordon (from Browns)

Saints get: CB Malcolm Butler (from Patriots); 2-53, QB Cody Kessler (from Browns)

Browns get: QB Jimmy Garoppolo, 2018 conditional fifth-round pick (from Patriots); 1-11, 3-76, LB Stephone Anthony (from Saints)

This is a three-way trade designed to solve everyone's problems. The Patriots are biding their time with Garoppolo and Butler, both of whom are due to hit unrestricted free agency in 2018 and attract deals the Patriots would be unlikely to match. It's possible the Patriots could franchise Garoppolo, but as I've written about in the past, it's at least difficult to imagine agent Don Yee -- who represents both Garoppolo and Tom Brady -- wanting to keep his quarterbacks on the same team.

The Patriots have floated their desire to get multiple first-round picks for Garoppolo and the 12th overall selection for Butler, but it's hard to see how they have the leverage to pull all of that off, given how teams know they can go after these guys next year while the Patriots will be left with only a pair of third-round compensatory selections in the 2019 draft as a result. The dream of getting three first-round picks for their star players was always going to be hard to pull off, but in this deal, the Patriots settle for the top selection in a draft with a few options at No. 1.

Bill Belichick loves trading down, which he could then do and amass additional selections in what is projected to be a deep class, but he also can just stay put and draft a franchise pass-rusher in Myles Garrett at a relative position of need for the Patriots. Not a bad fallback plan. We'll give the Pats Carolina's fourth-round pick in 2018 through Cleveland, with the selection conditionally improving to a third-round pick (if Garoppolo takes 70 percent of the offensive snaps) or even as high as Houston's second-round pick (if Garoppolo makes the Pro Bowl). They also take a flier on Gordon, whose story is well-documented; the Browns have publicly wavered on bringing back the troubled wideout, but the Patriots have taken a risk on players before, and Gordon's production would make him a franchise-caliber wideout if he stayed on the straight and narrow.

The Saints want Butler, but they don't want to trade the 11th pick, a straight-up deal, for the privilege of acquiring the Super Bowl XLIX hero. They're giving up Anthony, but they soften the blow of losing the 11th selection by moving up 24 picks into the middle of the second round and acquiring Tennessee's second-round selection. We'll also send them Kessler, who was reasonably competent for the Browns in eight starts, albeit all winless. Kessler gives them a developmental prospect behind Drew Brees and Chase Daniel.

The Browns get their franchise quarterback while moving down 10 spots in the first round, leaving them with consecutive selections at 11 and 12. They miss out on Garrett, of course, but in a draft that is deep with pass-rushers, Cleveland shouldn't have trouble adding a useful contributor with one of its six picks in the top 80. The Browns also will get a conditional fifth-rounder back from the Patriots, which should escalate if Gordon breaks out in New England; this will be a fourth-rounder if Gordon plays 50 percent of the offensive snaps and a third-rounder if he racks up 1,000 receiving yards.

They'll also make a Patriots-esque move for Anthony, who fell out of favor with new Saints defensive coordinator Dennis Allen after being taken with the 31st pick of the 2015 draft. The Patriots have gone after linebackers like Kyle Van Noy and Akeem Ayers in the past, but Anthony is a better fit in a 3-4 at inside linebacker, where the Browns can slot him alongside Jamie Collins. This trade is nuts, and there are too many moving parts for it to ever happen. That doesn't make it unfair or implausible.

2. San Francisco 49ers

Washington gets: 1-2, QB Brian Hoyer
49ers get: QB Kirk Cousins

Cousins has been linked to a reunion with his former offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan in San Francisco all offseason. Washington has locked up Cousins for 2017 with the exclusive franchise tag, but there has been no progress on a long-term deal. It would either lose Cousins for free (minus a possible third-round comp pick) next year or be stuck franchising him at a staggering \$34.4 million price tag, which is unlikely to be a viable option.

If Washington doesn't think it can bring back Cousins, the time to strike is now. This is likely the best asset it will be able to get in return for Cousins before he leaves, and while Hoyer would be a downgrade, the 31-year-old would be a useful, cheap stopgap for two years with just \$8 million heading over to Washington. The 49ers would eat the \$4 million they already paid Hoyer as a signing bonus, but something tells me they wouldn't hesitate if it meant getting a franchise quarterback in Cousins.

3. Chicago Bears

Jets get: 1-3

Bears get: 1-6, 3-107, DE Sheldon Richardson

The Bears are in a great spot at three, given that they have needs all over on defense and will likely be in line to grab one of four defenders from defensive end Jonathan Allen, cornerback Marshon Lattimore, or safeties Malik Hooker and Jamal Adams. Here's a way for them to end up with two impact defenders. Richardson's stock is low after a disappointing 2016 campaign, one in which he was basically forced out of position by the Jets' depth up front. He's likely to leave New York after this season in free agency, so the Jets could try to move him throughout the draft. Here, they move up three spots and can get one of the defensive backs they need to restock a porous secondary. This values Richardson as equivalent to the 38th pick on the old draft chart, which is high, but the picks are essentially a wash on Stuart's chart without even considering Richardson's value. In this draft, which isn't top-heavy but is very deep, middle-round picks are likely to be more valuable than usual.

4. Jacksonville Jaguars

Panthers get: 1-4, 4-110

Jaguars get: 1-8, 2-40

The Jaguars are relatively stacked on defense after signing Calais Campbell, A.J. Bouye and Barry Church this offseason, and this is likely to be a defense-intensive portion of the draft. Their biggest need is along the offensive line, but there aren't any offensive linemen worth taking this early. They've been linked to running back Leonard Fournette, but with the Titans, Jets and Chargers between them and Carolina at eight, the Jags could very well move down and grab Fournette with the eighth selection. Carolina could move up for one of the top-tier defensive backs. This trade is pretty close on both the traditional and Stuart charts, too.

5. Tennessee Titans

Bills get: 1-5

Titans get: 1-10, 3-75, 2018 second-round pick

The Bills didn't really commit to Tyrod Taylor in the long term as much as they kicked the can a little further down the line. Taylor is signed only through the end of the 2018 season, and the Bills can get out of the deal after this year. If they're in love with Deshaun Watson or Mitchell Trubisky and both quarterbacks fall out of the top two, the Bills will have to be worried about the Jets lurking with the sixth pick.

I'm not sure the Bills should be in the business of trading up given their current roster, but if they're all-in for one of these young quarterbacks, they've probably got to sneak ahead of their division rivals. The

Titans, who are working from a place of strength with this chit from the Jared Goff trade, can move down five spots and pick up two extra picks as they continue to piece together a compelling roster.

6. New York Jets

Titans get: 1-6, 5-150, WR Eric Decker

Jets get: 1-5, 6-214

Alternately, if the Jets are worried about a team moving ahead of them to grab a quarterback, they can just make their own push for the fifth selection. The Titans are in need of a wide receiver to flesh out their offense, and if they aren't in love with any of the options available at this point of the draft, they can go after help in the secondary with their pick and still acquire a useful player in Decker.

The 30-year-old missed virtually all of the 2016 season after undergoing surgeries on his hip and rotator cuff, but he's only one year removed from a 1,000-yard season despite playing alongside Brandon Marshall (who gobbled up targets) and Ryan Fitzpatrick (who is Ryan Fitzpatrick). The Titans could take a shot on Decker without missing out on anybody they would have drafted at five, although they may want the former Broncos third-round pick to take a pay cut from his \$7.3 million base salary.

7. Los Angeles Chargers

Cardinals get: 1-7

Chargers get: 1-13, 2-45, 2018 fourth-round pick

The strength of Arizona's team for years has been its secondary, but the Cardinals are suddenly looking thin in their defensive backfield after losing Tony Jefferson, D.J. Swearinger and Marcus Cooper in free agency this offseason. The hope will naturally be that Tyrann Mathieu will look more like the slot cornerback who excelled in 2015 than the guy who was rusty in returning from his second torn ACL and had to play a lot of free safety this past year. The Cards did sign veteran Antoine Bethea, but they could very well trade up to target one of the class's top defensive backs.

If Jonathan Allen somehow falls here, the Cardinals also could target the Alabama standout as a Calais Campbell replacement. The Chargers are another team really looking for offensive line help in a draft that doesn't offer much; they're better off trading for additional depth and maybe using one of the extra picks they get in this deal on a rookie to develop behind Philip Rivers.

8. Carolina Panthers

Seahawks get: 1-8, 3-98

Panthers get: CB Richard Sherman, 2-58

If the Seahawks really do intend to trade Sherman this offseason, Carolina looms as a logical target. The Panthers, who felt the impact of losing Josh Norman a year ago, are a veteran team with a defense capable of competing for a Super Bowl right now. Sherman's contract -- two years at an average of just over \$11 million per year -- is totally reasonable for a Panthers team that could create cap space by restructuring Cam Newton's deal.

The Seahawks would be drafting high enough to go after Marshon Lattimore or Gareon Conley, who could be rising toward the top 10. This is the first of several possible Sherman trades you'll see here, and it would be about as good of a deal as the Seahawks could hope to receive given their public stance on dealing him away.

9. Cincinnati Bengals

Chargers get: 1-9, 4-116

Bengals get: 1-7

The Bengals generally stay put on draft day, having traded up once (for Russell Bodine) and down once (with the Patriots in the Chandler Jones-Kevin Zeitler swap) over the past five seasons. This year might be a little different, if only because the Bengals have 11 selections to work with, including compensatory selections in each of the final four rounds. They probably don't need to draft yet another cornerback in the first round, but the Bengals could move up to grab defensive line help in Jonathan Allen or edge rusher Derek Barnett. Cincinnati would be paying a premium by both charts to make this move, but only a small one -- 6.2 percent by the Johnson chart and 12.2 percent by Stuart's model.

10. Buffalo Bills

Washington gets: 1-10

Bills get: 1-17, CB Bashaud Breeland

The Bills are dangerously thin at cornerback after losing Stephon Gilmore and Nickell Robey-Coleman this offseason. New addition Micah Hyde will be slotting in at safety, so the Bills need to add help across from Ronald Darby. Buffalo might be able to draft a corner here, but one alternative would be to trade down and pick up a starting-caliber cornerback in the process. Breeland seems on his way out of Washington; he publicly struggled during a frustrating 2016 campaign and is one year away from free agency.

Washington might find it difficult to pay Breeland in excess of \$10 million per year after committing to Josh Norman last offseason, and a change of scenery might do Breeland well. It can trade up here to get a shot at drafting Leonard Fournette, who would fill a frustrating hole for the team at running back after Matt Jones' struggles. It's not a trade Washington would have made under former general manager Scot McCloughan, but McCloughan's no longer in charge.

11. New Orleans Saints

Cardinals get: 1-11, 7-229

Saints get: 1-13, 3-77, 5-157

With the Saints looking at edge rushers and cornerbacks in a draft full of both -- and having two first-round picks -- they probably don't need to trade up. (That won't stop us from putting together one more crazy Saints trade.) Instead, they can trade down and pick up an additional draft pick by letting the Cardinals jump ahead of the Browns at 12. Arizona could be looking for help at safety, but more plausibly, this would be to take the first quarterback off the board.

12. Cleveland Browns

Rams get: 1-12, 3-65

Browns get: 2-37, 2018 first-round pick

I love these sort of challenge trades, although most teams aren't willing to pull them off. The Rams are in rough shape after their seemingly ill-fated move to trade up and grab Jared Goff last year, a decision that will hand the fifth and 100th picks in this year's draft to Tennessee. The Rams can be patient and eat their vegetables before returning to the first day of the draft next year, or they can rush back into the room and hope to turn things around. They have a blank space at tight end and could fall for O.J. Howard here.

If anyone is willing to take a risk, it's the Browns. For sacrificing the first-round pick they got from the Eagles in the Carson Wentz trade, Cleveland can move up 28 spots in this year's draft and bet that the Rams will be mediocre once again in 2017. If there's no future discount on the pick, this deal would be a net victory for the Browns if the 2017 Rams hand them the 18th pick (by Johnson's chart) or the 21st pick (by Stuart's chart) in the 2018 draft. Of course, it's more plausible that the 4-12 Rams struggle during their first year under coach Sean McVay, which could push Cleveland's pick into the top five in 2018.

13. Arizona Cardinals

Broncos get: 1-13, 4-119, 2018 third-round pick

Cardinals get: 1-20, 5-177, QB Paxton Lynch

I just suggested the Cardinals could trade up from 11 if they're in love with a quarterback, but if they're not interested in anybody this year, let's get the Cardinals the quarterback they wanted last year to develop behind Carson Palmer. Arizona apparently wanted to draft Lynch in 2016, only for the Broncos to trade up and beat them to the punch. Lynch was underwhelming during his rookie season, failing to beat out Trevor Siemian, and the Broncos have since rebuilt their offensive coaching staff with Mike McCoy and Bill Musgrave returning to the organization.

If the Broncos have soured on Lynch at all (or are significantly confident Siemian will be their quarterback of the future), here's their chance to move on. This would cost them \$4.4 million or so in additional dead money on their cap this year, but they would move up into the upper half of the first round with a chance to add an offensive piece such as top tight end O.J. Howard or top guard Forrest Lamp.

14. Philadelphia Eagles

Texans get: 1-14

Eagles get: 1-25, 2-57

The Colts and Ravens, who pick next after the Eagles, are likely to consider trading down and acquiring additional picks. As a result, teams that want to try to grab one of the quarterbacks in the middle of the first round might have to move up to Philadelphia's pick to beat the competition.

Enter the Texans, who are left with Tom Savage and Brandon Weeden under center after dumping Brock Osweiler's contract on the Browns earlier this offseason. Houston sent its 2018 second-round pick to the

Browns for the salary relief, but it still has its 2017 second-rounder to move as part of a deal. The Eagles are desperately in need of cornerback help and could try to pry away 2015 first-rounder Kevin Johnson, who missed most of last year with an injury, but the Texans will be loath to trade away the future starter after losing A.J. Bouye to the Jags in March.

15. Indianapolis Colts

Dolphins get: 1-15, 4-137

Colts get: 1-22, 3-97, 2018 second-round pick

New Colts general manager Chris Ballard inherits Andrew Luck and precious little else after years of subpar drafts under Ryan Grigson, so his first priority will be stockpiling draft picks to fill out the roster. It's likely the Colts will trade down out of the 15th pick, and they have a natural match with the Dolphins, who are often interested in moving up to grab specific players. Miami is missing third- and fourth-round picks this year after trading up to draft Leonte Carroo last year, so they'll need to leverage the third-round pick they got as compensation for Olivier Vernon and send a second-rounder in next year's draft to move up seven slots. This could be a landing spot for guard Forrest Lamp or pass-rusher Derek Barnett if they're still around.

16. Baltimore Ravens

49ers get: 1-16, 6-186

Ravens get: 2-34, 4-109, 4-143, 2018 second-round pick

If the 49ers aren't confident about getting Kirk Cousins and want to draft one of the defensive stars with the second overall pick, here's a deal in which they get back into the middle of the first round to nab a quarterback. The Ravens are likely looking for pass-rushers and offensive linemen, and in this draft, it's better to go after those guys in the middle rounds. Ozzie Newsome should be effective at drumming up interest in this pick from teams looking at quarterback options, and while it would be tempting for the Ravens to trade this selection for San Francisco's 2018 first-rounder, my deal provides a mix of useful draft assets for a Baltimore team that is increasingly dependent upon guys playing out rookie deals.

17. Washington

Bengals get: 1-17, 4-123

Washington gets: 2-41, 3-73, QB AJ McCarron

I already said that the Bengals don't make many trades, but given the market for tall quarterbacks who have shown some moderate semblance of competence in small samples (see: Glennon, Mike), it might behoove the Bengals to explore their trade options for McCarron. Here, they move up and get an additional first-round pick as part of a deal which values their backup quarterback as roughly equivalent to a late second-round pick on the traditional Johnson depth chart.

McCarron is entering the final year of his rookie deal, which seems like a bad fit given that Washington might lose Kirk Cousins after this season, and he'll be a restricted free agent next offseason. The extra year of cost control provides Washington with leverage as it attempts to negotiate a deal with Cousins, and if it's unable to come to terms with their incumbent on an extension, McCarron could get the first crack at replacing him. Jay Gruden left Cincinnati just before McCarron arrived, but you would figure

Gruden might be able to work out something and get a reliable scouting report on the Alabama product from former boss Marvin Lewis.

18. Tennessee Titans

Chargers get: 1-18, 3-83, 5-164, 2018 second-round pick

Titans get: 1-7

The Titans would surely like to come away with a wide receiver and a cornerback early in this draft, but with the likes of Mike Williams and Kevin King moving up draft boards, they may not wait until the 18th selection to go after the position they leave open at No. 7. It takes four picks for them to move up and procure a second top-seven selection, but by doing so, now the Titans could leave the draft weekend with immediate starters such as King in their lineup. It would be an aggressive move, but after initially trading down last year, general manager Jon Robinson then traded up to grab Jack Conklin and came away with a Pro Bowler.

19. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Browns get: 1-19, 2-50, 5-162

Buccaneers get: 1-12, 6-188

Jameis Winston already added a weapon this offseason when the Buccaneers signed DeSean Jackson in free agency. Now, let's nab him another tight end to work alongside Cameron Brate. Moving up from 19 to 12 puts the Bucs in line to grab either O.J. Howard or fast-rising athlete David Njoku, each of whom could interest several teams in the upper half of the draft and then Tennessee at 18. The Browns might not be willing to take the public relations hit of trading down from Myles Garrett with the first overall pick, but they're far more likely to use the first-round pick they acquired from the Eagles as a means to accrue even more capital.

20. Denver Broncos

Colts get: 1-20, 3-82

Broncos get: 1-15

Regardless of whether they intend to start Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch at quarterback next season, the Broncos should probably do something in a big way at the tight end position. They've made half-measures -- drafting Jeff Heurman in the third round of the 2015 draft, trading for A.J. Derby last season -- but they still need a pass-catching tight end to emerge alongside Virgil Green. Howard probably will be off the board by 15, but if the Broncos move up five picks, they should have a shot at adding David Njoku to the mix alongside Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

21. Detroit Lions

Browns get: 1-21, 5-165, 2018 first-round pick

Lions get: 1-12, 6-185, 2018 second-round pick (from Eagles)

One more trade up from a team acquiring Cleveland's 12th overall pick and I'll stop for now. The Lions are another team targeting cornerbacks, as D.J. Hayden is more of a reclamation project than a viable

starter across from Darius Slay. This is a deep draft for corners, but the Lions probably have to think about jumping the line and hopping past Philadelphia, Indianapolis and Tennessee if they want to come away with someone like Kevin King.

Detroit also desperately needs pass-rushing help alongside Ziggy Ansah, and in a draft deep in pass-rushers, it probably doesn't want to dump multiple early 2017 picks to move up. Instead, the Lions can entice the Browns by swapping picks in 2018, a move which would leave the Browns with two first-round picks, two second-round selections and two fourth-rounders next year.

22. Miami Dolphins

Seahawks get: 1-22, 2018 fourth-round pick, CB Byron Maxwell

Dolphins get: CB Richard Sherman

The Dolphins aren't exactly shy about going after players they value, and they would be getting a massive upgrade at arguably the weakest position on their roster by trading for a future Hall of Fame cornerback in Sherman. Miami doesn't have a ton of cap room, but by packaging Maxwell and saving \$3.5 million as part of the trade, the Dolphins should be able to squeeze the Stanford product onto their roster. Maxwell improved dramatically as the season went on in 2016, and he would give the Seahawks some semblance of familiarity as they rebuild at cornerback. There's also not a ton of risk, as Seattle would be able to cut Maxwell after the season without incurring any dead money.

23. New York Giants

Buccaneers get: 1-23, 3-87

Giants get: 1-19, 5-162

The Giants probably aren't in a position to trade a bunch of assets to move up into the top 10 and grab Leonard Fournette, but Christian McCaffrey should be a good fit for Ben McAdoo's one-back passing attack and might be available into the late teens. It's entirely possible that Denver general manager John Elway has his eyes on McCaffrey at 20, so the Giants might need to move up four spots if they want to upgrade on the duo of Shane Vereen and Paul Perkins.

24. Oakland Raiders

Jets get: 1-24, 6-208

Raiders get: 2-39, 3-70

General manager Reggie McKenzie has generally placed a high value on amassing additional picks, and he should be in a good spot to trade down. The Texans are likely to be thinking quarterback at 25, so teams who want to jump ahead of them will be calling the Raiders at 24. If there's no pass-rusher worth lining up next to Khalil Mack available at 24, the Raiders can justify trading down and picking up more of those juicy mid-round picks. Meanwhile, the Jets might not be able to justify drafting somebody like Mitch Trubisky at No. 6, but if they can add an anchor in the secondary and then trade up to grab a quarterback late in the first round, Mike Maccagnan might be able to call that a successful draft.

25. Houston Texans

Patriots get: 1-25, 2018 first-round pick

Texans get: QB Jimmy Garoppolo, 4-131, 2018 first-round pick

One more trade to get the Texans a quarterback. The Patriots probably wouldn't take the 25th pick for Garoppolo in a straight-up swap, but this trade also sees the Patriots and Texans swap first-round picks in 2018 in a deal that is likely to benefit the perennially excellent Patriots. (Imagine how bad this deal would look if Tom Brady tore his ACL in Week 1 again, though!)

Let's just throw one arbitrary but plausible possibility out there and suggest that the Texans finish with the 17th pick in the first round and the Patriots end up with the 30th selection. Without any discount for future years, this trade would value Garoppolo as equivalent to something between the 25th pick (Stuart chart) and 16th pick (Johnson chart). If the Texans sink with Garoppolo next year, though, the Patriots could be picking up a far more valuable asset.

26. Seattle Seahawks

Vikings get: 1-26, 3-106

Seahawks get: 2-48, 3-79, 3-86

The Vikings don't have a first-round pick after sending it to Philadelphia in the Sam Bradford trade, but let's sneak them into Day 1 here in a swap that could make sense for both sides. The bottom of the Seahawks' roster is increasingly threadbare after being ravaged by years of free agency and traded picks, while the Vikings are relatively deep -- especially on defense -- and would love to find someone else who can immediately contribute along the offensive line. (Don't ask me why the Seahawks aren't interested in the same thing.) This swap leaves the Seahawks out of the draft until the 48th pick, but they would then have five picks between 49 and 90.

27. Kansas City Chiefs

Ravens get: 1-27, 2-59, 5-180

Chiefs get: 1-16, 3-99

Chiefs general manager John Dorsey comes from the Ted Thompson school and places plenty of value on draft picks, but the Chiefs may have an opportunity to acquire a franchise cornerstone at a position of need by trading up. Derrick Johnson is probably in his final year with the Chiefs after tearing his Achilles for the second time last season, and inside linebacker Reuben Foster probably won't make it to the bottom of the first round, even though he's had a rough pre-draft process. Foster could immediately step in for the Chiefs alongside Johnson while also playing a key role in coverage on passing downs.

28. Dallas Cowboys

Seahawks get: 1-28, 2018 fifth-round pick

Cowboys get: CB Richard Sherman

The Panthers' offer at No. 8 would be the high end of a return for Sherman. This, on the other hand, would be the lowest offer the Seahawks would likely be willing to accept for their franchise cornerback, and it might make the stomachs of Seattle fans churn. The Cowboys are likely to be competing with the Seahawks atop the NFC this season and in years to come, and Sherman would be a major upgrade at

Dallas' weakest position. If the Seahawks are committed to removing Sherman from their locker room, though, the Cowboys are likely to be interested.

You don't need me to tell you that Sherman is the exact sort of superstar Jerry Jones wants to acquire. The Cowboys would go over the cap by acquiring Sherman, but they've already created some cap space for 2017 by extending Jason Witten, and Dallas could convert most of Dez Bryant's \$13 million base salary into a signing bonus to create additional cap room. The Cowboys also could offer Sherman an extension that would begin next season, as the cornerback enters the final year of his deal, and Tony Romo's massive cap charge comes off the books.

29. Green Bay Packers

Jaguars get: 1-29

Packers get: 2-35, 4-110, 7-222

When the 49ers traded up to grab guard Joshua Garnett last year, it exhibited how teams picking toward the top of the second round want to move into the bottom of the first round. In addition to shoving ahead of competitors who might also be interested in the same prospects, jumping into the bottom of the first round provides for a fifth-year option as part of your pick's rookie contract. Players taken in the second round have no such option at the end of their deals.

The Jags could move up here to grab an offensive player such as Forrest Lamp or David Njoku if they fall to the tail end of the first round.

30. Pittsburgh Steelers

Colts get: 1-30, 3-94, 2018 second-round pick

Steelers get: 1-15, 5-158

Ben Roethlisberger isn't retiring this offseason, but even the most optimistic Steelers fan knows that the sun is setting on the future Hall of Famer's career. Smart teams prepare for this inevitability by finding their new quarterback before they're desperate to do so. It's possible that the Steelers could stick around at 30 and hope to land somebody like Patrick Mahomes, but they could trade up to the middle of the first round before anyone suspects they're in the quarterback market -- if they think somebody like Mitch Trubisky has franchise potential.

31. Atlanta Falcons

Dolphins get: 1-31

Falcons get: 2-54, 2018 first-round pick

After a great 2016 draft, the Falcons are sitting pretty. They have one of the deepest rosters in the league, franchise players on either side of the football and a steady cap situation. Their only significant hole is at guard, but this is a terrible draft for offensive linemen. Atlanta can trade down and use a later pick on a secondary pass-rusher to support Vic Beasley while waiting to draft its right guard of the future in what should be a better draft for offensive linemen next year.

Few teams would consider making this second-round and future first-round trade in 2017, but the Dolphins are the exception to many rules when it comes to player evaluation and valuation. Would they make this move for someone like Jabrill Peppers or Christian McCaffrey if they're still on the board at 31? It wouldn't be out of the question.

32. New Orleans Saints

Browns get: 1-11, 1-32, 2-42, 2018 third-round pick, 2019 first-round pick

Saints get: 1-1, 3-65, CB Joe Haden

This mock draft started with a crazy trade, so let's end with one, too. If the Saints want to go all-in with the best possible defense they can field in the final days of Drew Brees' career, here's their chance. Instead of trading for Butler, they make their move for a veteran cornerback in Haden, who is signed for three years and \$39.3 million. The Saints probably have to rework Haden's contract to get him under the cap, but they were already going to perform cap gymnastics to fit Butler in. They also upgrade their biggest hole on defense with the best player in the draft. Suddenly, the Saints have Myles Garrett, Nick Fairley and Cameron Jordan rushing the quarterback with Haden and Delvin Breaux at cornerback.

By including Haden, the Browns get a haul closer to the sort of deal a team would get when there's a compelling quarterback available at No. 1. They end up with three first-rounders (admittedly one of which is the worst possible first-rounder) and a second-round selection from the Saints, although the timing is what makes this deal interesting for both sides. The Saints don't have to feel the punishment of dealing away that final first-rounder until 2019, at which point they might already be rebuilding, anyway. That could be a feature for the Browns; if Brees retires or leaves New Orleans after 2017 or 2018, that 2019 first-rounder could be a top-five pick.

Would I make this trade if I were on either side? Probably not. The Saints can use the picks they have to draft young talent at corner and edge rusher, although I would be skeptical of their abilities to bring through young talent after having had some development disasters in recent years. The Browns are probably better off just drafting Garrett and hoping Haden is a defensive anchor as the Cleveland defense around him improves. Is it at least feasible that each of these teams would consider this trade? Absolutely. And for a very silly mock draft, that's good enough.

Ray Rice to contribute to NFL's annual social responsibility presentation to players, staff

By Jane McManus

ESPN.com

April 18, 2017

Ray Rice will contribute to the NFL's annual social responsibility presentation to players and staff this year. The former running back for the Ravens, whose career came to an end after video emerged of him punching his fiancée in an elevator in 2014, will discuss the impact his behavior had on his life.

"We shot a video that just highlights everything that I've been talking about decision-making, how things happened in my life, how things unfolded," Rice said. The guys get to hear it from me, how it unraveled."

This is the first time Rice has formally worked with the NFL since the elevator video became public in September 2014. The segment he worked on with the NFL will be a short component of what is generally an hourlong program for all its employees.

"I've been building relationships with [the NFL front office], and it's a mutual thing," Rice told ESPN. "The NFL has a great platform, they reach a lot of people. It's part of our responsibility to reach out for not the on field opportunity but off field too."

This is the fourth year that the NFL has put together a video and educational program related specifically to conduct issues. Last year the emphasis was on DUI, sexual assault and gun safety. In past years, the NFL asked former wide receiver Donte Stallworth to participate in a video on driving under the influence. Stallworth was suspended from the NFL for a year in 2009 after pleading guilty to DUI manslaughter.

This year the NFL is hoping to focus on healthy choices and healthy masculinity for the video, which will ultimately be released for schools and other programs to use in educating athletes and students.

"We started bouncing the idea around where what if Ray could share the journey he'd been on and the choices that led him to his series of bad decisions that led him to where he is now," said Anna Isaacson, the NFL's senior vice president of social responsibility. "And that wasn't an easy decision to make."

Rice has spent the last three years with his now-wife Janay and their two children, Rayven and Jaylen, and the family has moved back to the area where he grew up. In the time since his act of violence became a symbol of the NFL's failings to deal with this issue, Rice has been to therapy and tried to learn about the issue. He has also spoken to high school and college teams about the importance of decision-making.

Rice's video was the catalyst the NFL used to revamp its personal conduct policies and educational program, including issues such as domestic violence and information about issues like consent in the context of sexual assault.

"I think that the league now, when my situation happened we knew that the policy wasn't strong enough," Rice said. "The one thing I know the league is doing they're continuing to educate these players and the severity of this issue. You look at a guy like Joe Mixon, and I don't know him personally, but you'd hope before the draft anyone who has an opportunity to mentor him, make him understand the real issues."

Like Rice's video, a video of Oklahoma prospect Joe Mixon has sparked discussion about how much has changed in terms of what the NFL will tolerate from players. In that video, Mixon punches a woman. Although it is technically not domestic violence since he wasn't in a relationship with the woman in the video, Mixon's assault will not prevent him from being drafted.

"I really hope the kid has exhausted all his resources to really, to really understand what this issue is," Rice said. "I would not be opposed to telling him my story, but he'll get a chance to see it."

At age 30, Rice would still like to play professional football, although no NFL team has signed him since he became the face of a massive perception problem for the league. His biggest contribution now may be to try to prevent other players from making the same mistake.

"I think that my résumé on the field and off the field, the way things unraveled, they will hear a true message and hopefully it changes the way you think," Rice said.

Sanders sees a return to 'wide receiver heaven' in Denver

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
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Emmanuel Sanders called Denver "wide receiver heaven" back when he joined the Broncos in 2014. He's counting on Mike McCoy bringing back nirvana to the Rocky Mountains in 2017.

Running routes called by Adam Gase and catching passes from Peyton Manning, Sanders posted career highs with 101 receptions for 1,404 yards and nine touchdowns in his first season with the Broncos.

Then, Gase left town and Manning got old.

Sanders' numbers dipped to 76 catches for 1,125 yards and six TDs in 2015, but the Broncos won the Super Bowl that year, so Sanders had no complaints.

That changed last season when both he and Demaryius Thomas got off to slow starts under coach Gary Kubiak and offensive coordinator Rick Dennison. With a combined \$92 million in contracts and the high expectations that accompanied their big paychecks, Sanders and Thomas griped about their dearth of catches in September, insisting their frustrations stemmed not from selfishness but out of a sense of duty.

Sanders finished with 1,032 yards and five touchdowns on 79 receptions, but the Broncos missed the playoffs a year after winning it all.

When new coach Vance Joseph brought back McCoy, Gase's mentor, as the Broncos' new offensive coordinator, Sanders rejoiced.

"I believe that it's going to be a pass-happy offense," Sanders said Monday. "I had the opportunity to play in this offense in 2014, had 1,400 yards. So, hopefully we can simulate that some type of way and put up points and score and help our defense. So, that's the goal."

Sanders said he expects to be used in the slot more this season, just like he was in 2014 when the bulk of his receptions came across the middle of the field.

Sanders, who bought a JUGS machine a few winters ago, said he installed a home gym this offseason to get a jump-start on his offseason training: "Honestly, this is probably the best I've felt in a long time because of just having that gym and that Jugs machine out there and being able to train at home whenever I want," he said.

Joseph said last week he wanted this QB competition between incumbent Trevor Siemian and former first-rounder Paxton Lynch to "go down to the wire " this summer.

Sanders said he's OK with that.

"Obviously, the earlier that we can get clarity, the better. But do we want to rush that process? No, we don't want to rush that process. We want to have the right guy," Sanders said. "I know those two guys are excited. I'm excited to see it because competition brings out the best in you. So, we're going to see who it brings out the best in. It's going to be pretty cool to see."

Sanders endorsed both of his QBs, the heady Siemian, the 250th pick in 2015, and the athletic Lynch, the 26th selection a year ago.

"I think both of them got everything that you look for," Sanders said. "They both have a confidence, they both have a presence, they both can throw the ball, make every single ball: deep ball, short, out, all across the field. So, I think we are sitting here right now in a good position with two guys that are hungry, that want to be starters, that want to be franchise quarterbacks."

"So, with that said, all I can do is go out and handle my business, see how it all pans out. It's crazy because it seems like every year it's a question about the quarterback, the quarterback, the quarterback. And every year, it's the same answer: The best guy is going to show. Obviously, we want a guy that can take us all the way to the Super Bowl."

Sanders said his personal goals, regardless of who's on the other end of all those passes, are to top 1,000 yards receiving for a fourth consecutive season, make his third Pro Bowl and be voted an All-Pro again.

"Another pass-happy offense, hopefully I can get up there in the 1,400-1,500 range like I did in 2014," Sanders said.

"The sky is the limit."

Broncos CB Chris Harris expects defense to take it to 'another level' under Joe Woods

By Troy Renck
KMGH
April 18, 2017

This was a press conference. "This is Spinal Tap," however, was briefly the vibe.

All-Pro cornerback Chris Harris Jr. stood in the front of the media Monday and made a promise. The Broncos' own the NFL's top-ranked pass defense over the past two seasons. Harris believes this year's defense could turn it up to 11. Get the amp ready.

"(Joe Woods) getting elevated to defensive coordinator is the perfect fit for us and what we are trying to do. We are adding more wrinkles and taking it to another level," Harris said Monday. "With (former coordinator) Wade (Phillips) we were on level two with a lot of things and now we are on level three."

The Broncos rocked last season. But they still were rolled in multiple games, experiencing letdowns against Atlanta and at Kansas City. Despite strong statistics across the board, the defense featured flaws against the run and on first possessions. At times, the Broncos were more predictable than a Scooby-Doo ending. Teams ran their first 15 plays with little resistance. The Broncos counter punched, but placing Denver's offense in a sinkhole proved an ineffective strategy.

"We will change things up, disguise things more," Harris said.

The idea remains simple. Force teams to attack the No Fly Zone, exposing quarterbacks to turnovers and the relentless pass rush of Von Miller and crew. For this to transpire, the Broncos must stop the run. They were awful last season, allowing 130.3 yards per game compared to 83.6 during the Super Bowl championship season.

"We will be so much better because of (free agents Domata) Peko and (Zach) Kerr. We didn't have enough beef," said Harris, who was named Denver Athletic Club's professional athlete of the year on Monday. "We weren't big enough."

Harris, entering his seventh season, plans to assume a leadership role on a defense stocked with alpha-personalities. The Broncos lost veteran DeMarcus Ware, but have strong voices in Harris, T.J. Ward, Aqib Talib, Miller and Derek Wolfe.

"We will continue to talk mess to the offense, talk mess to the receivers," Harris said. "We are going to hold everyone accountable. It will be the same mentality."

Following Harris' logic is easy when looking at his production. Harris has been among the league's steadiest performers the past few seasons. However a team cannot win with defense alone. For the second straight spring, the Broncos face questions at quarterback. Confidence in Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch seems more tangible when juxtaposed to last year's uncertainty.

"Trevor had a great year last year. He definitely had some ups and downs, but the dude played injured a lot. He took a lot of hits, and for him to get back up from them, we saw a lot of promise from him," Harris said. "And Paxton, it's going to be a huge year for him. But I think (offensive coordinator) Mike McCoy's offense will help him, the play style. Paxton was in a spread offense. He came in with a tough offense to learn, and I think Mike McCoy's offense will be a lot more like what he ran in college."

And then there is the draft, perhaps the most important in general manager John Elway's tenure as general manager. Emmanuel Sanders said he wouldn't mind if the Broncos landed a left tackle or tight end in the first round. As for Harris?

"I like playmakers," Harris said. "We definitely need a guy that can play running back, receiver and returner. A guy that can do that, I would definitely love him."

When asked if that "sounds a lot like Christian McCaffrey." Harris looked over and smiled. It's spring. No crime in turning up the optimism.

CU's Chidobe Awuzie should join Christian McCaffrey on Broncos wish list

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
April 18, 2017

When I asked Chris Harris Jr. what type of player he would draft with the Broncos' first pick, the All-Pro cornerback and resident voice of reason shifted into GM mode.

"Oooh. (As in) what position?"

Yes, sir. What pick would send Chris Harris into applause from his man-cave couch?

"I like playmakers, man. I want some playmakers, on defense or on offense," he said. "A guy that's going to put up some points or a guy that's going to be able to change the game. We definitely need a guy who can play running back, receiver or returner.

"Any guy that can do that, I would definitely love him."

Someone in the room suggested Harris was describing Stanford handyman and native son Christian McCaffrey. And Harris? His wide smile and eyes screamed, Bingo, that's my guy.

That makes two at Dove Valley. One week after Vance Joseph issued a veiled public plea to move up and draft McCaffrey — teams must "go find those guys, because they won't fall to you," Joseph said, if you listened closely — Harris reserved his seat, next to Joseph's, on the C-Mac Attack bandwagon.

Problem is, McCaffrey won't be around when the Broncos are called to the front of the class with the 20th pick of the first round on April 27. By then, McCaffrey will be going, going, gone.

McCaffrey would be the pick here, too. And I say he's worth the gluttonous trade package it would take for the Broncos to slide up and score the most exciting prospect in the draft. John Elway likes to move up; he did so in the past two drafts, for Shane Ray and Paxton Lynch.

But if they don't? Scrap the list of needs. Forget about the offensive linemen who, in normal drafts, would be had in the second or third rounds. Ignore the 2017 Broncos and focus on the future Broncos. Do what Elway's done when Elway's had his best drafts: Take the best guy.

Yes, that means pass rusher. Or wide receiver. Or cornerback, even.

In fact, the late-first prospect I dig the most is what Denver has the most of: Chidobe Awuzie, cornerback from the University of Colorado. Little-known fact about Awuzie: His last name translates to "one bad dude." If he wasn't turning one side of a Pac-12 field into his personal "No Fly Zone," Awuzie was hustling his backside off to chase down Utah returnman Kyle Fulks for a tackle that saved CU's storybook season and put the Buffs in the Pac-12 championship game. The best player on CU's best team in a decade has earned a spot somewhere in the first round of the draft. Why not right here at altitude?

"Another corner?" Harris said when asked for his reaction if the Broncos add another stud to a secondary that already features him, Aqib Talib and Bradley Roby. "We draft a corner every year. We'll welcome him in. We'll welcome him right in."

Awuzie would fit right in — during his rookie year as he learns from the first secondary to feature a pair of first-team All-Pros; and for many years after 2017, when Talib is scheduled to make \$11 million. Whenever I had the good fortune to watch Awuzie shine at Folsom Field, the guy who came to mind was none other than the Broncos' aspiring GM, Harris. Neither is a physical specimen born to draw an NFL paycheck. But both attack each snap as if the ballcarrier made a move on their lady. If you ask the Buffs coaching staff, it was Awuzie's practice habits and competitive streak that turned him from afterthought into all-league. Sounds familiar.

"I think our run defense is going to be so much better now," Harris said. "They're going to have to throw the ball to us now."

While it's true the Broncos have more corners than a Rubik's cube, snagging another blue-chip defender is never a bad idea. Strengthening your strength keeps the strength strong. Hate to ruin the party, but the Broncos probably aren't going to fix what ails them in this draft. They need an offensive lineman or three, and more than one draftnik has called this one the worst class in a decade. Reaching on a lineman can lead to years of quarterback trouble.

McCaffrey is Colorado's dream. But the Broncos could do far worse than another proud defender who brings Mile High to its feet. Can't you hear it now? Chi-do, Chi-do, Chi-do.

LOOK: Here are 10 things we already know about the 2017 NFL schedule

By John Breech
CBSSports.com
April 18, 2017

Even though the NFL Draft is less than two weeks away, that's not what most NFL fans are thinking about right now. Most fans around the league just want to know one thing: When's the schedule coming out?

To be honest, it would be nice if the NFL would just tell us when it's going to be released so this woman could plan her kids' 10th birthday party.

@imjustbri

When does the NFL schedule come out? I'm trying to plan my kiddo's 10th birthday party

I'd also like to see the schedule released so the bride-to-be below can't start planning for what's going to happen after her wedding on Oct. 22!

@avaiar

Hey @Browns, when does the '17 @NFL schedule come out? Hoping Brownies are at home 10/22 for my post-wedding day festivities!

Well, here's some good news for those two (we think): it appears they might be able to start planning later this week. If you believe Lions team president Rod Wood, who accidentally let the NFL's plans slip while unveiling new uniforms last Friday, the schedule release will be this Thursday. More on that later.

Now, just because the schedule's not out yet doesn't mean the entire thing is a complete mystery.

As a matter of fact, we actually know quite a bit about the schedule. So with that in mind, let's take a look at 10 things we already know about the 2017 schedule.

1. The Patriots will be hosting the first game of the regular season

Not only do you get a Lombardi Trophy when you win the Super Bowl, but these days, you also get the honor of hosting the first game of the following NFL season. Thanks to their win over the Falcons in Super Bowl LI, the Patriots will be hosting the Thursday night opener when the NFL regular season kicks off on Sept. 7.

Although the Falcons are scheduled to play in New England in 2017, don't look for that to happen in the opener. Several recent reports have indicated that Atlanta likely won't be traveling to New England for Week 1. And according to this report, the Chiefs-Patriots 'will almost certainly be' the opening game .

Of course, the Patriots probably aren't worrying about who they're going to play in Week 1, and that's because the team has more pressing things to worry about, like where to put their fifth Super Bowl banner.

They've run out of room at Gillette Stadium.

That's a fun problem to have.

On the other hand, something that's not a fun problem is going to a game when you know you're going to get booed mercilessly, which is almost certainly going to happen to Roger Goodell on Sept. 7. The NFL commissioner has said he'll be at the opener, marking the first time he's been to Gillette Stadium since Deflategate started in January 2015.

2. The Patriots will be playing in Mexico (and no, we won't only be talking about the Patriots here)

One year after sending the Texans and Raiders to Mexico, the NFL has decided to hold another game south of the border in 2017, and this time, the league is sending the Patriots to take on the Raiders. Before heading to Mexico, the Patriots might want to make sure Tom Brady's jersey has its own security team, and that's because Mexico just happens to be the place where Brady's stolen Super Bowl jerseys were recovered after the greatest international manhunt of all-time.

By the way, although he's based in Mexico, I'm guessing the NFL probably won't be giving a media credential to Mauricio Ortega for this game.

According to ESPN.com, this game will likely be played near Thanksgiving, with the Sunday before Turkey Day being the most likely candidate.

3. Four London games are being played in 2017

At the rate we're going, don't be surprised if the NFL moves all 256-games to London at some point in the next five years. Just kidding. I think. For the 2017 season, the league will be holding four games in London, which is the most ever for a single-season.

Two of those games are already officially on the schedule, with the Jaguars "hosting" the Ravens on Sunday, Sept. 24, in a Week 3 game. That will be followed one week later by Dolphins "hosting" the Saints, who will play against each other in London on Oct. 1. Those two games will be played at Wembley Stadium.

The other two games are still up in the air as far as the dates go. The Browns "host" the Vikings and the Rams will "host" the Cardinals in a set of games that will both be played at Twickenham Stadium. Those two games will be played on Oct. 22 (Week 7) and Oct. 29 (Week 8), although the order hasn't been officially determined yet.

4. The dreaded 9:30 a.m. kickoff time is returning this season

If you live on the West Coast (like me) then you'll probably agree that the 9:30 a.m. ET kickoff is the worst thing to ever happen to professional football. As horrible ideas go in the NFL, it's right up there with the single-bar facemask.

I mean, at that point, you're probably just better off with no facemask at all.

Although there had been a report in November that the NFL would be eliminating the 9:30 a.m. kickoffs for the 2017 season, that won't be happening. The league has already announced that the Saints and Dolphins will be kicking off in the early slot in Week 4 (Oct. 1). That should be fun for Saints in New Orleans, where the game will be kicking off at 8:30 a.m.

5. There will be two weeks worth of Saturday games on the schedule

In 46 of the past 47 NFL seasons, there's been at least one Saturday regular-season game on the schedule, and that streak is going to continue in 2017. For the upcoming season, the league will be scheduling Saturday games for different weeks. The first Saturday game will come in Week 15 (Dec. 16), which will be followed by a Saturday game in Week 16 (Dec. 23). Unfortunately, the Saturday schedule won't be as crazy as it was last season when we got spoiled thanks to the fact the Christmas Eve fell on a Saturday, which led the NFL to schedule 12 games that day.

6. There are going to be a lot of holiday games, so plan accordingly

You're probably already well aware of the fact that there will be three games on Thanksgiving -- with two of those involving the Cowboys and Lions -- so let's look at a different holiday: Christmas.

For the first time in 11 years, Christmas falls on a Monday, which means the NFL is going to get to combine the America's two favorite things this season: Christmas and "Monday Night Football." Also, don't be surprised if the league gives us a Monday doubleheader. Back in 2006, the NFL scheduled two games for Christmas Day, which was the last time the holiday was on a Monday.

We'll also be getting a heavy dose of New Year's Eve football this year with Week 17 falling on Sunday, Dec. 31. That news most likely means we won't see an Eastern Time Zone team hosting the Sunday night game that week because that would mean ringing in the new year at a stadium. The last time NYE fell on a Sunday (2006), the Bears hosted the Packers in a regular-season finale game that kicked off at 7:15 p.m. CT and ended less than two hours before midnight.

7. There will be a lot of playoff rematches on the schedule

There's always playoff rematches on the schedule, but this year, there's going to be a ridiculous amount of them. For the first time since divisional realignment in 2002, we're going to get a rematch of EVERY non-wild card game. That means every divisional playoff game from 2016 will see a rematch on the 2017 schedule. That also means the AFC (Patriots-Steelers) and NFC (Falcons-Packers) title games will get rematches, and yup, that definitely means a Falcons-Patriots Super Bowl LI rematch will also be on the schedule.

8. The Broncos have the most difficult schedule heading into 2017

This is the part where we wish Vance Joseph good luck during his first year in Denver. Not only is he the head coach of a team for the first time, but he has to do it in a season where the Broncos have the most difficult strength of schedule . That doesn't mean you should count them out of the AFC West race though: The next three toughest schedules belong to the Chiefs, Chargers and Raiders. Just in case you're wondering, the most difficult schedule in the NFL that doesn't belong to an AFC West team belongs to the Bills. Good luck ending that playoff drought, Buffalo.

9. We know the opponents for all 32 teams

Although we don't know the dates or times of games that are on the 2017 NFL schedule, we do know who each team will be playing. You can check out the list of all 16 regular-season opponents for each team by clicking [here](#) .

10. The schedule will be released Thursday (we think)

Now that you've made it all the way through this list, you're probably wondering when the regular-season schedule will be released. As we already noted, thanks to Lions president Rob Wood, who appeared to spill the beans on the schedule release date last week , we think we have the answer for you. Wood said the schedule will be released on April 20, which means you have three days to get all your 4-20 jokes together before Thursday night's release.

Chris Harris: Joe Woods will take defense to next level

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
April 18, 2017

Some have worried that the departure of defensive coordinator Wade Phillips will set the Denver defense back a step. Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. has the opposite view.

“We like it,” Harris told reporters on Monday regarding the elevation of defensive backs coach Joe Woods. “He knows our strengths, so that is a good thing having a guy that really knows how we play and things like that. Him getting elevated to the [defensive] coordinator, I think it is a perfect fit for us and what we’re trying to do.”

“We’re doing a lot of things that we have done in the past, but we’re kind of adding more wrinkles and taking it to another level. With Wade we were on Level Two on a lot of things, but now we are on Level Three on some coverages.”

Harris actually hopes he won’t be in coverage as much as he’s been in the past.

“Hopefully I am blitzing more,” he said. “Hopefully I get to get some more sacks like I did my first four years. I was very active in the run, getting sacks and playing the ball, so hopefully I’ll be able to do it all this year. . . . I want to be active. I want to be able to show everything that I can do. I can blitz. I can cover. I can play zone and play man. I can do it all. I want to add everything to my game.”

The defense as a whole needs to add something to its game, because the defense found itself giving up too many opening-drive points last year.

“They were coming out with their best first 15 plays,” Harris said. “They were getting us and we started out slow. Now, I think Joe [Woods] and them are going to be way more prepared going into this [season] because these teams keep repeating the same type of plays versus us. Now, we’re going to be well prepared for that. I think we’ll be able to start a lot faster. We’ve got a lot of new stuff, too. They’ve got to be able to disguise what we’re doing now and we kind of make it a little bit harder for them to understand what we are in.”

It remains to be seen whether swapping Phillips for Woods will have that impact on the defense. But the Broncos wanted to elevate Woods now because they feared losing him to another team as a coordinator.

If Woods gets the defense back to where it was two years ago, they’ll have to fear losing him to another team as the head coach.

Broncos, 49ers to hold joint practices for third straight year

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
April 18, 2017

The Denver Broncos and San Francisco 49ers may both have new coaching staffs this season but they will continue a tradition from the past several seasons.

The Broncos announced on Monday that they will have joint practice with the 49ers this August. It's the third straight year the two teams have met up prior to their preseason meeting for practices against each other.

The Broncos hosted the 49ers for practice each of the last two years. This time they'll be traveling to Santa Clara.

It's the fourth straight season the Broncos have held joint practice with another franchise. The Houston Texans also traveled to Denver for preseason practices in 2014.

The 49ers and Broncos are scheduled to play in Week 2 of the preseason.

Making the best even better: How Chris Harris Jr. and the pass defense plan to build off success

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
April 18, 2017

One All-Pro selection wasn't enough for Chris Harris Jr.

The seventh-year veteran finally broke through and earned a place on the first-team All-Pro squad last year after two seasons as a second-team choice. Between those honors and three consecutive Pro Bowl appearances, his credentials confirm his status as one of the game's elite cornerbacks.

But he wants more. He knows that if he continues to receive those honors, Denver's pass defense has a good chance at maintaining its lofty perch as one of the best units of this or any era.

"I want to keep getting All-Pros -- to keep stacking them," he said Monday. "I know if I'm playing at an All-Pro level, our defense is playing [well]. That's really what it comes down to. If I'm playing bad, we're not winning a lot of games and we're definitely not No. 1 in pass defense."

Just two cornerbacks in Broncos history have earned consecutive first-team All-Pro nods: Louis Wright in 1978-79 and Champ Bailey from 2004-06. If Harris is to join them, he might use a different collection of duties to get there.

That could start with increased involvement in the pass rush. From 2012-14, Jack Del Rio, then the Broncos' defensive coordinator, made occasional use of Harris as a blitzing slot cornerback, using his inside alignment to force hurried throws. In 2012, Harris notched 2.5 sacks, including one that brought down Carolina quarterback Cam Newton during a 36-14 win.

Over those three seasons, Harris notched 16 quarterback hurries and deflected two passes at the line of scrimmage according to ProFootballFocus.com. He handled that duty well, and wants to do it again.

"Hopefully I'm blitzing more," Harris said. "Hopefully I get some more sacks like I had my first four years. I was very active in the run [defense] and getting sacks and playing the ball. Hopefully I can be able to do it all this year."

It is not something Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods would ask Harris to do often -- or even once a game. But it is a change-of-pace option that fits in with Head Coach Vance Joseph's stated desire to change up the looks and tactics of the defense, particularly early in contests.

"They [opponents] would come out with their best first 15 plays, and they were getting us. We were starting out slow," Harris said. "Now, I think Joe and [the defensive coaches], they're going to be way more prepared going into the game, because these teams, they keep repeating the same types of plays versus us, so now we're going to be well-prepared for that, and we'll be able to start faster -- and we've got a lot of new stuff, too."

That new stuff will include more disguised looks and coverages, Harris said.

"We're doing a lot of things that we've done in the past, but we've kind of added more wrinkles, taking it to another level," Harris said. "With Wade [Phillips], we were on Level Two on a lot of things. Now we're on Level Three on some coverages."

It helps that the Broncos' top five defensive backs have been together for three seasons. Harris, Aqib Talib, T.J. Ward and Bradley Roby are preparing for their fourth season together, with Darian Stewart joining the group in 2015.

Instead of starting from zero, the group can build off of leading the NFL in pass defense on a per-game and per-play basis in each of the last two seasons. The secondary is ready for doctorate-level concepts.

"We're able to handle that. ... To be able to have that chemistry, we can learn very fast together," Harris said, snapping his fingers for emphasis.

This isn't to say the secondary will abandon what it does best. Its cornerbacks' ability to flourish in man coverage frees up the rest of the defense to attack the quarterback and prevent plays down the middle and the seam; this will not change.

But a few new wrinkles that use the secondary's cohesion and skills can give opponents a bit more to ponder in their game-planning. That can force more passes in the direction of Harris and Aqib Talib. That leads to more opportunities for game-shattering plays ... and a chance for the "No-Fly Zone" to enhance its reputation as the game's best secondary.

No matter who starts at QB, Emmanuel Sanders knows 'pass-happy' offense will give him chances

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
April 18, 2017

Like everyone else around the Broncos, Emmanuel Sanders doesn't know whether the Week 1 starting quarterback will be Paxton Lynch or Trevor Siemian.

What he does know is that the offense will be "pass-happy," no matter which young passer is at the helm.

"I had an opportunity to play in this offense my first year in 2014. I had 1,400 yards," Sanders said, referring to the unit guided by then-offensive coordinator Adam Gase, who carried forward the concepts instituted by Mike McCoy in 2012, the year he worked with then-newcomer Peyton Manning.

"Hopefully we can simulate that some type of way and put up points and score to help our defense. That is our goal."

Too often last year, the offense failed at that task. In a frustrating four-game December stretch that knocked the Broncos out of postseason contention, the offense mustered just three touchdowns and 36 total points.

As a result of the late fade, motivation will not be a problem for Sanders and his teammates on offense.

"It just motivated me to say, 'Last year we fell short, this year we've got to change that. We've got to do something different. We've got to get into the playoffs,'" Sanders said. "We've got to make the playoffs this year and that is the objective."

Before accomplishing that, the Broncos must choose a No. 1 quarterback.

The restoration of the offense doesn't start and end with that position. McCoy's scheme and the changes on the offensive line are the first steps toward fixing the offense's problems. Further fortification of the line and the addition of a playmaker via the draft would also help.

But the reality of the NFL in 2017 is that the quarterback's performance is the biggest factor in determining whether McCoy's offense sinks or swims.

The Lynch-Siemian quarterback competition will be the dominant storyline of the offseason, which yields an obvious initial question: Does extending their duel deep into the preseason help or hinder the efforts to make the offense into a playoff-worthy unit?

"Obviously the earlier that we can get clarity, the better. But do we want to rush that process? No," Sanders said. "We want to have the right guy."

If that is the result, the process will be worth it -- whether it's Lynch or Siemian flinging the football in that "pass-happy" attack.

"It really doesn't matter to me, honestly," Sanders said. "It's about who is going to be the right guy. In due time, we will figure that out. That guy will show up and make the necessary plays.

"Obviously, I've just got to do my job. The ball is going to come, I've got to catch it and make plays."

Chris Harris Jr., Emmanuel Sanders share first-round pick wishes

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 18, 2017

In 10 days, the Broncos will be on the clock for the 2017 NFL Draft.

Barring a trade, Denver will make its first selection with the 20th pick, and fans aren't the only ones anxious to see whom the Broncos select.

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. and wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders spoke to the media for the Monday for the first time since returning for offseason workouts, and both players shared their wish list for the Broncos' top pick.

"I feel like we need help all around the board in terms of, you know, the offensive line," Sanders said. "But as far as my position, I like a lot of receivers. I like [Oklahoma's Dede] Westbrook, I like [Washington's] John Ross.

"The tight end class is just so deep. I mean, look at those guys. A lot of explosive guys. I think it's a good draft and I know [Executive Vice President of Football Operations and General Manager John] Elway and those guys will make the right decision."

Harris is also lobbying for an offensive player, and while he refrained from using names, he seemed to have one particular player in mind.

"I like playmakers, man," Harris said. "I want someone – [whether] it's a playmaker on defense or offense – a guy that's going to put up some points or a guy that's going to be able to change the game.

"We definitely need a guy that can play running back, receiver and returner. Any guy that can do that, I would like. I would definitely love him."

The Broncos' cornerback chuckled toward the end of his sentence, and when a reporter said that description seemed to fit Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey, Harris shot a quick look to the side before he started to laugh.

Busted.

Broncos, 49ers to hold joint preseason practices in Santa Clara

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 18, 2017

The Broncos still have fond memories of Santa Clara, California.

Just over a year ago, Denver won Super Bowl 50 in Levi's Stadium with a 24-10 victory over the Carolina Panthers.

So, they're going back.

For the third year in a row, the Broncos will partner with the San Francisco 49ers for joint preseason practices. Unlike the previous two seasons, however, the Broncos will head to Santa Clara to practice in the days ahead of their preseason contest with the Niners.

The Broncos hosted the Niners at UHealth Training Center in 2015 and 2016. The Houston Texans visited for the same purpose in 2014.

In 2016, the Broncos practiced against the Niners on Wednesday and Thursday, had the day off Friday and played San Francisco on Saturday evening.

The specific dates of this year's practices and game have yet to be set.

This year will represent a change for the Broncos, though. Denver hasn't traveled to an opposing team's facility for joint preseason practices since the team went to Dallas in 2007.

BRONCOS JOINT PRESEASON PRACTICES, SINCE 1995			
YEAR	TEAM	LOCATION	FINAL RECORD
1996	Carolina	Greeley, Colorado	13-3
2003	Houston	Houston	10-6
2005	Houston	Houston	13-3
2007	Dallas	Dallas	7-9
2008	Dallas	Englewood, Colorado	8-8
2014	Houston	Englewood, Colorado	12-4
2015	San Francisco	Englewood, Colorado	12-4
2016	San Francisco	Englewood, Colorado	9-7
2017	San Francisco	Santa Clara, California	TBD