

Broncos' Von Miller selected to Texas A&M's athletic hall of fame

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Von Miller may be in the prime of his NFL career, but he's already a hall of famer.

Texas A&M announced Monday that Miller, 28, is one of six Aggies who will be inducted into the Lettermen's Association's Hall of Fame on Sept. 15.

Miller, the Butkus Award winner as the nation's top college linebacker in 2010, starred for the Aggies from 2007-10 before the Broncos selected him at No. 2 overall in the 2011 NFL draft. In his final year with Texas A&M, Miller led the nation with 17 sacks. The following year, he was named the NFL's top rookie.

The five-time Pro Bowler, three-time all-pro first team selection and Super Bowl 50 MVP has been the backbone of the Broncos' defense since entering the NFL. Despite the Broncos' playoff-less season in 2016, Miller finished second in the league with 13.5 sacks while playing through double- and triple-teams, and fell one vote shy of receiving the defensive player of the year award.

In recognition, Miller was voted by his peers as the second-best player in the NFL in 2017 (behind only Tom Brady) adding to his lengthy and growing list of accolades.

Trevor Siemian takes short view in second Broncos quarterback competition

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Almost daily, a deep voice booms from local sports talk radio telling listeners to “CHOOSE YOUR SIDE! Will it be Team Siemian or Team Lynch?”

National headlines have promoted similar polls and predictions. Local headlines, well, we’re guilty too.

The Broncos’ quarterback competition is the event of the summer has been analyzed and covered from every angle since early January, before the contenders even stepped on the field.

Trevor Siemian says he’s not listening to the hype. He’s not reading the reviews, not listening to the noise, not reading the comments that flow in by the minute — many of which are biting and all of which are opinionated.

“It’s easy because once you’re in the building, in camp, nothing else matters,” he said Friday at a surprise shopping event for a group of children at Dick’s Sporting Goods. “Nothing outside the building is really determining anything. So it’s relatively easy for me to stay focused on the task at hand.”

The fans have no say. Nor do the media. But Siemian knows who does and he knows what to expect. He knew in 2016, when he beat out veteran Mark Sanchez for the starting job. And he knows now, as he prepares to again fight Paxton Lynch, a first-round pick, to retain his starting job.

With a new scheme and new coaching staff, Siemian and Lynch, as well as the entire offense, are starting anew. But the return to an open quarterback competition certainly isn’t.

“Each year is like that and we got a new staff anyhow, so it’s a clean slate for all of us,” Siemian said. “That’s how I’m approaching it. I played last year, so I have some experiences I can lean on and grow from and continue to improve.”

There’s no replicating live reps and at this point. Siemian has more in the tank than Lynch after starting 14 games last season.

Helpful? Sure. But it’s the reps he’ll receive in the coming weeks that will count the most.

At the end of organized team activities, coach Vance Joseph said the prior months of on-field work were about learning Mike McCoy’s new offense, which was fully installed before the players left for break. Those weeks counted “zero to none” toward deciding the team’s starting quarterback, Joseph said.

But that changes starting July 27.

Now comfortable with the new playbook, Siemian said he’s still working toward the mastery level that comes with more time on the field. During his five weeks off, he reviewed tape of every rep from OTAs

and camp, as well as some of the defense's reps, to take mental notes of what needs further tweaking: what he did well and what he can do better.

"I think if I just keep getting better," he said. "I think I did some things I can build on last year and there are some things I want to do better. For me, I'm just focused on improving and I think if I can take care of things on my end then everything will work out."

Last year, former coach Gary Kubiak appointed Siemian the starter after the third preseason game, with mere weeks before the season opener. The late decision was expected as the competition progressed, but it also afforded little time for the offense to work as one with the true starting quarterback before the season began.

"That was really the first time I got a good bit of reps so that was important for me and I wasn't getting too far ahead of myself and I'm still trying to keep that same mentality," Siemian said. "It's not up to me. For me, just staying with that same mentality — I want to be better than I was yesterday — I think that will help me out."

The competition then — and perhaps now — hinges on enough live reps for each quarterback to ensure thorough evaluation. But Demaryius Thomas said he'd like to know his starting quarterback before the second preseason game in California. And fellow receiver Emmanuel Sanders said if he had his way, he'd like to know now. Ambitious?

"It's probably a good thing the receivers aren't coaching the team," Siemian said with a laugh. "But coach Joseph will make the right call for the team and put us in a good spot to win games."

Although the offense's earlier plans to get together in Los Angeles for an informal passing camp fell through, Siemian said he's hoping to corral some of his receivers at a local high school before camp starts.

Because once camp opens, the focus is singular. No noise, no hype. Even if it is the biggest event of the summer.

Broncos not burdened by high expectations as training camp approaches

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

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Jay Kornegay begins his explanation of his Las Vegas-based sports book's underwhelming projection for the 2017 Denver Broncos by saying he hopes he's wrong.

Kornegay is not just a lifelong Broncos fan. He grew up in Colorado Springs, then as a high school kid living in Cheyenne, Wyoming, he was a single, season-ticket holder who used to attend Broncos' games during the Orange Crush era at old Mile High Stadium by himself.

Yet, as the vice president of race and sports operations at the Westgate Superbook, Kornegay has the Broncos tied for 17th in the NFL with an over/under projected win total of 8.

As in, 8-8. Other sports books have the Broncos' projected a little better with an over/under win total of 8.5, which places them in the top 15.

Still, Denver is a long ways from the New England Patriots, who play the Broncos on Nov. 12 and have an over/under win projection of 12.5.

"As a bookmaker I've got to turn the fan light off and bookmaking light on," Kornegay said. "You say (eight) is not an exciting number and unfortunately that's how we view the team – they're just not that exciting."

At least the Broncos won't be burdened with high expectations when training camp opens in 10 days. The Broncos are projected to finish third in the AFC West, behind favorite Oakland and Kansas City and barely ahead of the Los Angeles Chargers.

The Broncos are only a 3 ½-point favorite in their season opener against the Chargers in Denver.

"They were built around Peyton Manning to win a Super Bowl then and there," Kornegay said of the Broncos from 2012-15. "They were putting all their eggs in the basket of Manning and DeMarcus Ware, they were in the win-now mode. Now we're in the fall out of that. Not a problem because they accomplished what they wanted to do. They won the Super Bowl.

"They won that Super Bowl because of a terrific defense. That defense showed some miles last year. They're getting older. So it's not all about the quarterback situation."

But the uncertainty at quarterback – will it be the poise of Trevor Siemian or raw talent of Paxton Lynch? – is another factor in the Broncos not moving the needle in Vegas.

The Patriots' line of 12.5, by the way, is largest Kornegay can remember in all his years in the sportsbook business.

“And it’s not because they’re great but because the rest of their (AFC East) Division is weak,” Kornegay said. “If the Broncos played in the AFC East, we’d be talking about a bigger number.”

The over/under win totals for all 32 NFL teams entering training camp:

Patriots, 12.5

Steelers, 10.5

Packers, 10.5

Seahawks, 10.5

Falcons, 9.5

Cowboys, 9.5

Raiders, 9.5

Panthers, 9

Chiefs, 9

Ravens, 8.5

Giants, 8.5

Vikings, 8.5

Bengals, 8.5

Texans, 8.5

Colts, 8.5

Titans, 8.5

Broncos, 8

Cardinals, 8

Saints, 8

Eagles, 8

Bucs, 8

Dolphins, 7.5

Chargers, 7.5

Washington, 7.5

Lions, 7.5

Bills, 6.5

Jaguars, 6.5

Rams, 6

Bears, 5.5

49ers, 5.5

Browns, 4.5

Jets, 4.5

No. 9 in countdown to Broncos training camp: Rookie returners

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

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In nine days, the Denver Broncos will officially begin training camp with a morning workout.

In nine days, Broncos fans will gather, free of charge, along the grassy berm at UCHealth Training Center to see their 2017 team for the first time.

In nine days, the Broncos must begin addressing 9 question marks, or concerns, or unknowns. Each day we at 9News will give you one aspect of the Broncos for fans to watch for.

We start from the bottom.

No. 9: Isaiah and the returners

The first time Isaiah McKenzie ever returned a football for keeps was his freshman year at American Heritage High School in Plantation, Florida.

It was the season opener against Clewiston High School. McKenzie had played football from sunup to sundown with about 100 kids on the street outside his apartment in a poor, crowded section of Miami. But this would be his first big moment on a football field. He was raw, an oh so small – he was listed at 167 pounds by his senior year, but he appeared even scrawnier as a freshman -- so his coaches didn't let him play receiver or running back much at first. But he made the varsity team as a returner.

"It was the very first kickoff return," he said. "And I took it to the house."

You can look it up, as we did. He went 78 yards for a score in a 26-21 win on Sept. 3, 2010.

Seven years later, McKenzie is a fifth-round rookie out of Georgia, listed at 5-foot-8, 173 pounds, and the favorite to handle the Broncos' return duties this season.

McKenzie is especially stellar as a punt returner. He had five touchdowns off punt returns at Georgia, one off a kickoff.

"I would say kickoff return you have to have a scheme, you have to have a setup, you have to have people in place to get the right timing to hit a hole," McKenzie said. "Punt return, anything can happen. It might be a right return that turns into a left return. They're very different, but they're both good. I like them."

Carlos Henderson, the Broncos' third-round rookie receiver from Louisiana Tech, will also get a chance to handle the kickoff role, as will returning receivers Kalif Raymond and Cody Latimer.

Henderson returned two kickoffs for touchdowns as a redshirt junior last year.

The Broncos desperately need some juice in their return game. One reason is because they haven't had excitement in their return game since Trindon Holliday in 2012. Another is the Broncos' offense struggled to score, averaging just 20.8 points per game to rank 22nd in the league.

The offense could use either the occasional score from special teams, or the chance to start a couple drives a game past their 30.

There are plans to use McKenzie as an offensive weapon, both as a slot receiver and running back, much as Kansas City used fifth-round rookie Tyreek Hill last season. This is a copycat league. But for starters, McKenzie must concentrate on making his mark as a returner.

"Yes. And I try to show them every day I can be a receiver as well," McKenzie said in a sit-down interview with 9News during the Broncos' final offseason week of minicamp. "But I love punt return and I love special teams all together. And then saying I can be the No. 1 punt returner coming in, I take heed to that and do the job the best way I can."

Locker room expects Siemian or Lynch to lead Broncos into playoffs

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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The Denver Broncos will have their first full training camp practice of the new season in 10 days. So consider the countdown officially on for the new season. Here are 10 things to know on the doorstep of training camp:

- Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch will win the starting quarterback job by limiting red-zone mistakes, showing an understanding of the entire offense (and not just the parts they like), and exhibiting the follow-me presence of a guy who can make the right throws at the right time to the right receiver. The bottom line is that the rest of the locker room believes this team is a playoff contender and is waiting to see the quarterback willing to do the work to make it happen.
- Running back Devontae Booker showed the coaches enough good things in the offseason program that he's expected to get some snaps with the starting offense in the camp's early going to see if he can really push for the No. 1 job.
- Overall, the Broncos' division of labor at running back will bear watching all through the preseason. C.J. Anderson, Booker and Jamaal Charles each warrants significant looks in the offense. And rookie De'Angelo Henderson is really their best big-play speed option. It means there is a scenario in which the Broncos, if Charles' knees hold up in camp and the preseason, feel compelled to keep four running backs to go with fullback Andy Janovich. That's because Janovich is one of the team's best special-teams players and he might be one of the two best pass-catchers at the position. Ronald Leary and Menelik Watson -- will need to show plenty of improvement if the Broncos are to get back in the postseason conversation.
- The player whom folks might not see a lot of this summer -- but who could have a far bigger role by the second half of the season -- is rookie tight end Jake Butt. When the Broncos adjourned their offseason program, the expectation was that Butt would open training camp on the physically unable to perform list because of the knee injury he suffered in Michigan's bowl game. However, if his rehab continues to go as the Broncos hope, Butt could carve out a significant role in the offense by November.
- Make no mistake, the Broncos are still a defensive-driven operation. But to be all they can be, the revamped defensive line has to be up to the challenge. It's not quite as effective to have the league's best secondary and the league's best pass-rusher if opponents don't feel all that compelled to throw the ball in the tightest situations.
- Von Miller is annually in the discussion for Defensive Player of the Year, but opponents held Miller without a sack in the last four games in 2016 because the Broncos couldn't defend the run well enough to get into premium pass-rush situations or create enough problems in other parts of the formation to set Miller free. Their work in camp and the preseason will give some indication whether they've repaired those things. No matter what other questions the Broncos have this season, Miller has to be at his elite best for them to have a chance to chase a trophy.

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25. Mason Crosby, K, Packers

Three-year compensation: \$12.5M (30.8 percent over baseline)

Ted Thompson does an excellent job of keeping his contracts at or below market value, as this is the only active Packers extension that even sniffs this list. Aaron Rodgers' contract, which paid out \$60.8 million over its first three seasons, ranks 10th among quarterbacks. The Packers will likely extend Rodgers no later than next offseason, a spring that could also include new deals for Clay Matthews, Jordy Nelson and Ha Ha Clinton-Dix.

24. Kelechi Osemele, G, Raiders

Three-year compensation: \$38M (30.8 percent over baseline)

The Raiders gave Osemele \$58.5 million on his five-year deal during the 2016 offseason, then followed things up by paying Gabe Jackson \$56 million on a five-year extension this summer. Oakland's starting guards will have a combined cap hit of \$24 million this season, which sounds incredible until you realize that the Browns have committed more than \$29 million to their guards. Nobody else in the NFL tops \$20 million.

The MMQB All-Time Draft: The Ultimate Football Fantasy

By Jeff Legwold

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On a steaming, northern Midwestern July morning, Vince Lombardi moves through the middle of a complex of practice football fields at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wis. Grumpily eschewing the fancy, breathable outfit left in his locker that morning by a shoe-and-apparel company representative, Lombardi is wearing wrinkled, pale-yellow football pants and a white T-shirt, with a weathered baseball cap shading his tanned face. On his feet are low-cut black leather football cleats and white socks pulled up to mid-calf. This is roughly the same outfit Lombardi wore when he brought his first Packers team to camp in the summer of 1959, the launching pad for one of the great and most iconic dynasties in NFL history. The campus lies six miles south of Lambeau Field, where nearly 50 years ago Lombardi exulted on the sideline when his quarterback, Bart Starr, sneaked across the goal line to beat the Cowboys in the Ice Bowl, played in minus-15° temperatures. It seems impossibly distant today, not only for the passage of time but also because the mercury is pushing 90°, and it's not yet noon.

Lombardi is back now to helm the as-yet-unnamed team chosen by its general manager and team president, longtime NFL executive Ernie Accorsi, in the first MMQB All-Time NFL Draft. The project, the brainchild of MMQB founder Peter King and executive editor Mark Mravic, created a league of 12 dream teams that would feature many of the greatest names across the spectrum of NFL history. King and 11 other GMs—former league executives, players, football writers and historians—assembled on a conference call in May to draft rosters of 25 players each, constrained only by their imaginations and their peers' previous selections. After their player lists were set, GMs picked coaches. Lombardi, who was taken first, had his final season in Green Bay in 1967; he led the Packers to five NFL titles in nine years and won the first two Super Bowls. Lombardi also coached the Redskins in '69.

Early in this practice Lombardi jumps on the front of a five-man blocking sled, a relic from an earlier time that he insisted be delivered from the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton to his facility. Lombardi has always been at home on a sled, exhorting his linemen; he was a guard himself, one of the Seven Blocks of Granite at Fordham in 1936. Here he is looking to install a version of his Packers power sweep, which utilized early zone-blocking principles. Lombardi has a terrific line, including modern-day Hall of Famers Willie Roaf at left tackle and Russ Grimm at right guard. But the coach is -really excited about his center, Clyde (Bulldog) Turner, an ornery cuss out of Plains, Texas, and Hardin-Simmons College, who played center and linebacker for the Bears from 1940 through '52. At 6' 1" and 237 pounds, Turner is exceptionally quick. "Coach Lombardi thinks I'll be able to make that reach block on the sweep that Jim Ringo used to make," says Turner, fiddling with his face mask, which he's never worn and doesn't like one little bit.

On an adjacent field, middle linebacker Ray Lewis has gathered the Lombardi-Accorsi defense in a circle and is gesticulating wildly, raising and lowering his voice as if preaching to a congregation. At the edge of the group, tackle Artie Donovan, a wisecracking, crewcut hell-raiser who played for the Colts in the 1950s, and Len Ford, a nimble, 6' 4", long-armed end for the Browns in that same era and among the first class of black players in the NFL, are visibly snickering. "Ray is the best damn tackler I've ever seen," says Donovan. "But that young man talks up a storm."

The MMQB Draft has created the most stunning collection of professional talent in history, spread across 12 training camps from San Diego to Boston. The clashing of generations has been remarkable. Early one evening, a dusky haze falls over the fields at Rockwood Lodge—hard by the water north of Green Bay—where Curly Lambeau first pioneered the concept of a remote training camp, and where the Packers' founder and first coach is training the team selected by another former league executive, Ron Wolf. During a special teams segment at the end of practice Sammy Baugh, a quarterback with the Redskins from 1937 through '52 but also a record-setting punter, boots a high spiral into the gloaming. More than 60 yards away Deion Sanders gathers in the kick and launches upfield. Sanders drops 1970s Steel Curtain cornerback Mel Blount to his knees with a hesitation move that also leaves Raiders linebacker Ted (the Mad Stork) Hendricks with armfuls of summer air. Sanders darts to the sideline, a technicolor do-rag flapping from under the back of his helmet, and just as he begins high-stepping, one hand behind his helmet, 1970s Raiders wide receiver Cliff Branch, a near-world-class sprinter, roars up from behind and drags Neon Deion to the ground. The two men rise, eye each other like fighters at the bell, and then embrace enthusiastically.

Earlier in the same practice, quarterback Brett Favre had dropped a swing pass into Bronko Nagurski's breadbasket with perfect touch. Nagurski is one of the game's true legends, a 6' 2", 226-pound fullback and defensive tackle who, the story goes, once barreled into the end zone and pancaked a horse that had been stationed to control the crowd. Here Nagurski had turned upfield and rolled onto a collision course with middle linebacker Tommy Nobis, a snarling, red-haired wrecking machine who came out of Texas in 1966 and spent 11 seasons with the expansion Falcons. Both men are faster than either realizes, and their collision brings a gasp from their teammates. Defensive tackle Mean Joe Greene of the Steelers, the second player taken in the entire MMQB All-Time Draft (after Giants outside linebacker Lawrence Taylor), reaches down to help up Nobis. Mel Hein, the Giants' iron man center-linebacker from 1931 through '45, picks Nagurski up by his shoulder pads, as he did so many times during their heyday.