

# Kickin' it with Kiz: Could have Tim Tebow been a starter for the Broncos ... at tight end?

By Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
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I read your column on Tim Tebow playing baseball. It seems to me the New York Mets are using his celebrity to draw crowds to minor-league ballparks. I believe the word for that is shill. What I don't understand is a question that has nagged me ever since he left the Broncos. At some point, Tebow must have realized he was not going to make it at quarterback in the NFL. Why didn't Tebow try out as a tight end?

– **Peter, turns lemons into ...**

**Kiz:** Yes, Tebow sells tickets. So does Bono, for performing U2 songs that are 30 years old. Customers that pay to watch the former quarterback and old rocker seem to go home happy. Tebow as an NFL tight end? It's not a bad idea, except for two problems: 1) Once you've been a quarterback, there's no other position on the football field worth playing, and 2) I'm not certain Tebow could catch a football as well as Virgil Green, let alone be Rob Gronkowski.

In regards to your story on Tebow and baseball: Once a Tebow hater, always a Tebow hater. Your cover is blown, Kiz.

– **Mary, die-hard Tebow fan**

**Kiz:** On a hot afternoon in a minor-league dugout, I told Tebow what I will always admire about him. When Tebow was a rookie, I spied a Broncos veteran chuckling at how the young quarterback was a Timmy Try Hard that needed to win every wind sprint. A few weeks later, that same vet approached me and confided: "I've never met a football player more genuinely positive every day. I don't know how Tebow does it, but I want me some of that."

Once again, June sinks the Rockies with a big losing streak and they fall out of contention. It doesn't matter who the manager is or what players are on the roster. You're the man, Kiz. Tell it like it is.

– **Tom, swooning in Colorado**

**Kiz:** We have a motto here at Kickin' It Headquarters: There's no reason to cry in a half-empty glass of beer, when chugging it is way more fun. It's true, the Rockies are not going to win the first division title in franchise history. The Los Angeles Dodgers are too good for Colorado to catch. But pardon me for channeling my inner Steve Perry, when I sing these words: Don't stop believing. Manager Bud Black will find a way to keep his team in the playoff hunt all season long.

– I have caught your Saturday morning show on 1340 AM, and you belong on Denver radio more than one program a week.

**A.L., sports-talk connoisseur**

**Kiz:** You want to be my agent? I'm not sure I can afford to pay you. But I will let you eat half my French fries.

And today's parting shot is 90 proof sarcasm. And it's poured on me, because I suggested the Rockies need to make a trade for a relief pitcher.

C'mon, Kiz. We don't need arms. We've got the Rooftop.

**– R.K., snarkmeister**

# Broncos' Cody Latimer writes 'whole new book,' ready to be a 'pro'

By Troy Renck

KMGH

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Broncos receiver Cody Latimer sits at the crossroads of his career with his blinker on.

He owns 16 catches in three seasons, and never more than eight in any of them. He has one touchdown reception, memorable because it happened in Brock Osweiler's starting debut at Chicago, but one nonetheless. Latimer needs no reminder. He understands he must earn a roster spot in training camp.

In an exclusive interview with Denver7, he insisted this season will be different.

"I am very ready. The page has turned," Latimer said last week. "It's a whole new book."

Latimer boasts freakish athleticism. So good at hoops in high school, many thought he would play Division I basketball because of his 39-inch vertical leap. He makes eye-opening plays every August, specifically on 50-50 balls. And yet it has never translated in the regular season, leaving Latimer to carve out a role as a solid special teams contributor. There's value in that spot, but not what the Broncos envisioned when they selected him in the second round out of Indiana in 2014.

A horrible fit with the Adam Gase-Peyton Manning offense -- Manning's intelligence intimidated Latimer -- and an afterthought with the Gary Kubiak-led attack -- Latimer pointed the finger in the mirror when explaining his struggles.

"It was a decent offseason. The (new Mike McCoy offense) helped a lot, but honestly it was more about me helping myself and becoming a pro. I have been focused and changed a lot of things I was doing," Latimer said. "It's head down and eyes up. To tell you the truth, I wasn't being a professional before. I really wasn't. That's the big change. Being a pro. Like staying around here and training rather than going places. Grinding everyday. Getting in the playbook instead of sitting around watching TV, things I shouldn't have done. I ain't afraid to admit it."

Lack of performance motivated Latimer. But becoming a father jarred him, setting the 24-year-old on a new path.

"Really, it was having my little one (1-and-a-half-year-old J.J.). Like I said, now it's different. I know this offense like the back of my hand," Latimer said. "I am studying all the time, and I am making plays. I don't have to think and be nervous or worried about this and that. I can just play and be confident."

Latimer showed well over the past few months. During media viewing periods, he caught multiple touchdown passes. The competition is real. The Broncos return veteran reserves Bennie Fowler and Jordan Taylor, and drafted Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie at his position.

"I believe it's going to happen. The confidence I had in college is back. I have that swagger back," Latimer said. "It's taken longer than expected. But as long as it happens, that's the key. It's going to be a big year."

Veteran Emmanuel Sanders hinted at a breakthrough for Latimer. Talking about the group, he singled out Latimer.

"We've got one of the most underrated wide receiving corps because no one really knows about Cody Latimer," Sanders said. "This guy can play some ball."

The entire offense left June believing improvement will follow. But certainty in the concept remains tricky until the Broncos decide on a winner in the quarterback derby between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch.

"I get asked. Nobody knows. They are both looking good. That's why we have training camp," Latimer said. "I can't wait. That's why I am here training. I want to get in the best work before we get going again."

# **“I’m scared”: Clinton Portis concerned about his future after concussion-filled career**

By Staff

The Washington Post

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Among the many sobering details in Brian Burnsed’s profile of Clinton Portis for Sports Illustrated’s “Where Are They Now?” issue, including an account of the former Redskins running back contemplating the murder of the financial advisers he deemed responsible for losing his life’s savings, the 35-year-old’s reported health problems are especially depressing.

Burnsed reports Portis suffers occasional lapses in memory, struggles to find words and repeats himself during interviews, which has perhaps contributed to his inability to land a regular gig as an NFL analyst for a major TV network. Portis, who has worked as an analyst for ESPN 980 and handled sideline reporting duties for the Redskins Broadcast Network two years ago, also gets lost driving in familiar places.

In 2013, Portis estimated that he had “more than 10 concussions” during his nine-year playing career, the last seven of which he spent in Washington. “I’d take a play off and then go back in,” Portis told CBS Sports’ Mike Freeman then. “Sometimes when I went back into the game, I still couldn’t see straight. This happened all the time. Sometimes once or twice a game.” Portis told Burnsed he’d sometimes walk off the field with no memory of playing a game, but he rarely sought medical help. “You can’t make the club in the tub,” he said.

Now seven years into retirement, Portis, who filed for bankruptcy in 2015, is eligible to receive benefits from the NFL’s \$1 billion concussion settlement. There are awards of up to \$5 million for players with ALS diagnoses, up to \$3.5 million for players with Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s and up to \$1.5 million for players with early dementia. Portis is understandably wary of being evaluated for fear of what the tests might reveal.

“(Expletive) that concussion money,” Portis said. “I’m scared. I’m really scared of the results.”

# Coaching's Generation Y2K

By Robert Klemko

MMQB

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There was once a small closet inside the old One Buc Place that Buccaneers management saw fit to make into an office, complete with a foreign object nobody quite knew what to do with in the mid-90's: the coaching staff's only computer. The hallways were so narrow in that wing of Tampa's 1976 relic of a facility that if the coach across the hall left his door open just so, the man in the closet was trapped. Coaches were still viewing and showing film on beta tapes and drawing playbooks by hand, so they shoved the 24-year-old quality control coach in the smallest office in the building and let him tinker with the new tech.

Then the new millennium arrived, and magical things started taking shape in the closet. Young men who would later become head coaches and coordinators in the NFL lobbied their bosses to ditch the paper and pencil and embrace a host of computer programs that would make their jobs easier. As offensive quality control coach in 2004, Kyle Shanahan, then 25, converted Jon Gruden's playbook into XOS, an early pioneer in football's digital movement. When Nathaniel Hackett arrived in 2006 for his first NFL job—replacing Shanahan as offensive QC coach—he converted Gruden's 17,000-play bible into Microsoft Visio.

Hackett had grown accustomed to introducing new technology to skeptical coaching staffs; in 2003 he arrived at Stanford, a school with one of the foremost computer science graduate programs in the world, expecting to be taught a thing or two about football tech. Instead, he found them still hand-drawing plays.

"We're doing a lot of busywork, card work that they could have made a lot easier with different programs like Excel, Visio, Word," says Hackett, who majored in neurobiology at UC-Davis and is now offensive coordinator of the Jacksonville Jaguars. "I was just using basic programs I used in college and I was doing everything so much faster, and they said, Oh this is awesome, and I ended up doing it for everybody on the staff."

Hackett realized he'd discovered the niche that would propel him through the coaching ranks faster than his famous last name ever could (his father, Paul Hackett, was a longtime college and NFL coach who retired in 2010).

Across the NFL, numerous other young coaches were coming to the same realization. In 2004, a 23-year-old University of Minnesota grad who hadn't played a down of college football found himself in Vikings quarterback meetings with Daunte Culpepper and head coach Mike Tice. Back then, Todd Downing carried the new job title "football systems analyst." Today, Downing is the Raiders' offensive coordinator (Tice, by the way, is now Oakland's offensive line coach). In 2005, a 26-year-old who had previously worked in the finance sector would distinguish himself through film-study efficiency in the Houston Texans' building. Twelve years later, Robert Saleh is the 49ers' defensive coordinator.

For Hackett and a handful of under-40 coaches in the NFL, the tech boom of the early 2000s that streamlined film study, game-planning and play-drawing opened doors to opportunities that might not have been realistic for quality control coaches of a previous era.

“Once those coaches get excited about being that much more efficient,” Hackett says, “they want you around and trust you a little more and give you a little more knowledge. The more knowledge they can give you, then you have a chance to get in their circle. Now, I’ve met a lot of guys who are great with tech and don’t make it. But it’s another avenue to have somebody want you around.”

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In 2001, before Saleh zoned in on a career in coaching, he was a Northern Michigan grad with a finance degree and a new job as a credit analyst for Comerica Bank. His new employer stuck him in the commercial lending department during the height of a real estate market that would crash with tremendous consequence in 2008.

“We tried to get as much business as possible and create as many loans for commercial real estate and higher end clientele as we could,” Saleh recalls.

It was volume work—days spent hunched over a computer, finding reasons to say yes. Four years later, when Saleh got his first NFL shot with the Texans in 2005 as a defensive intern, his mandate was similar. Picking up the computer work that older coaches didn’t want to do had the potential to be mind-numbing drudgery, unless you could speed through high volumes of data and, in doing so, distinguish yourself.

“A QC is asked to do a lot of the computer work, especially back then because of the older generation of coaches,” Saleh says. “Even though I didn’t know much about the technology, I made it a point to figure it out. That skillset helped me create a reputation of being very detailed and efficient because the amount of work I could produce in the amount of time was different.”

The quality control coaches of the previous generation were spending their days literally cutting apart film and taping it together. They’d watch hours of film, searching for a handful of plays that would then be reduced to a line in a scouting report. They’d throw out last week’s playcards and draw all new ones for next week’s opponents. All that was dying, and it took people like Saleh to convince the coaching hierarchy of the shifting tide. In this new world, a task that took an hour in 1995 took five minutes in 2005.

“I would imagine that it helped a bunch of young coaches,” Saleh says. “You could spend more time actually studying and watching rather than creating for other people to watch. You get to actually study tape along with everything you’re being asked to do.”

Saleh began introducing coaches to new ways to analyze and organize film. Former Texans coordinator Richard Smith described Saleh to the Seahawks bigwigs as one of the best quality control coaches he’d ever been around. Gus Bradley, Seattle’s defensive coordinator from 2009-12, brought Saleh to the Seahawks as a QC, then to Jacksonville as linebackers coach. Now Saleh is the ninth-youngest coordinator in the NFL, at 38.

“The technology was growing so fast in the NFL that someone who could come up and understand it and could teach us initially when it all came out could get a leg up,” Bradley says. “A lot of guys who that are coaching now could probably give credit to that. Powerpoint was the extent of my knowledge when I was in Seattle. I was a little bit older. Robert came in and opened our minds up to some of the things we could do.”

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Longtime NFL coaches are quick to point out the Hacketts and Salehs of the world didn't exactly introduce the NFL to computers—they were simply beneficiaries of the second wave.

Oakland Raiders head coach Jack Del Rio, 54, was the opposite of the guy you'd expect to pioneer new tech when he retired as a player in 1996 after 10 seasons as a linebacker for five teams. But when he arrived in Baltimore as linebackers coach in 1999, upon being told the team had one Avid computer system in the building, for coaches to share, he bought his own hardware for personal use in the linebackers room. Avid, which later became XOS, was hard at work in the late-90s installing tapeless film databases in NFL offices.

"That was my choice to invest in myself," Del Rio says. "That's one of the things I've worked hard at; to not become the dinosaur who doesn't know how to use anything."

Before he got the top job in Arizona, Bruce Arians' résumé included a three-year stint as quarterbacks coach with the Indianapolis Colts, under offensive coordinator Tom Moore, beginning in 1998. Arians was the first coach to use Pinnacle, a company later acquired by XOS, which was digitizing film catalogues for NFL teams.

"Tom Moore wanted to watch film with me and I said, Coach, watch this," says Arians. "I pushed a button on the computer and all these plays come up. And he said, Holy s---, that's gonna be really cool if we can use that. But it buzzed. The hard drive made this loud buzzing noise, and Tom said, We gotta' get that f---ing buzz outta here."

Chiefs head coach Andy Reid, 59, describes himself as the "staff guinea pig" for the Avid system when he was an offensive assistant from 1992-94 in Green Bay. His role in teaching the system to the rest of the staff helped him earn the offensive line coaching job in '95, which led to his promotion to assistant head coach in '97 and eventually, the Philadelphia head coaching job in '99.

"Your objective in any business is to become an unexpendable commodity," Reid says. "So you're seeing that with kids today. What I did 20 years ago has changed a great deal, but the idea is the same; you have an opportunity to become unexpendable. There was a surge in opportunities in the early 2000s."

While Reid, Del Rio and others stayed at the cutting edge for two decades and beyond, many other coaches missed the boat. In 2010, when Kyle Shanahan, veteran of the closet at One Buc Place, finally got a chance to coach alongside his Super Bowl-winning father in Washington, he watched Mike Shanahan trudging through gameplans and practice prep without the aid of a computer.

"My dad worked so much, hours-wise, with studying and putting things together," said Kyle Shanahan, now head coach of the 49ers, "and once we were able to teach him things, quicker ways to do it, he saw how much more you can do."

"And then you look at what's available now, a few years later, it blows that away. You could run a play 10 years ago and the whole league didn't see it Monday morning. Now they do. The answers to the test are in a lot of that stuff."

Indeed, advancements in the last several years—including instant video uploads of the weekend’s games and evolving capabilities of computer tablets—have enabled coaches to prepare sooner and in more depth than ever before. Arians’ Cardinals last year were the first to use virtual reality simulations to prepare quarterbacks for the defenses they would face on Sundays. It’s wearable technology, including much-debated and now forbidden GPS data-sharing across the league, that could usher in the third wave.

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A word of caution to would-be NFL coaches: the tech boom of the early 2000s, and the next boom (date unknown) open doors just wide enough to wedge a foot in. Coordinators don’t become head coaches because they can work a mouse.

“The tech gets you the opportunity, but you have to learn how to coach football after that,” Arians says. “Ever had a professor who knew everything but couldn’t teach you s---? That’s the same thing with coaching.”

Most of the coaches who can attribute at least part of their ascension through the NFL coaching ranks to the tech boom learned the finer points of coaching from men to whom they had become invaluable. For one season in Tampa, in 2008, Sean McVay was Gruden’s shadow and digital translator.

“Gruden would be at work at 4:30 a.m.,” says Bill Muir, Tampa’s offensive coordinator from 2002-08. “He requires a guy basically at his fingertips 24 hours a day. Sean was in essence the offensive QC, but more importantly he was John’s personal assistant. Everything that came out of Jon’s mind or mouth, Sean drew it up and put it on the computer. His office was right outside of his door.

“These guys come in and you see their expertise with computers and they become more inclusive in your planning. In previous years the quality control coaches were in another room when you made the gameplan, doing things that weren’t necessarily innovative. Now, I want these guys close to me because as things pop up in my mind, I want this information now.

“Sean, in a short period of time, got a doctorate degree in offensive football, especially as it related to the passing game, and the unique perspective Jon brought to the game.”

McVay, whose career trajectory benefitted from his father’s coaching and a personal relationship with the Gruden family, became head coach of the Rams in January, 12 days before his 31st birthday. A month later, Kyle Shanahan joined McVay as the second alumnus of Gruden’s offensive quality control gig to get a head coaching opportunity. Hackett, 37, hopes to eventually become the third.

There was a chance Hackett would be looking for work this winter when the Jaguars named Doug Marrone head coach after firing Gus Bradley last December. Marrone, who had replaced Bradley as interim coach after serving as the O-line and assistant head coach, interviewed Hackett last winter.

“Nate has that tech background, and then he took that next step and he became an excellent coach. He earned it. His IQ is off the charts,” Marrone says. “He knows the origin of the west coast system. He’s also smart enough to branch out to see where things fit in and develop a system within his own style.”

Hackett, who once labored in the closet with hangers over his head, now has three screens set up in his office, and can be found alternating between the three performing three distinct tasks seamlessly. When introducing new plays to his players, he pulls up digitized copies of Joe Montana or Brett Favre practice and game film, then shows the evolution of the play from the original concept.

“I’ll go as far back as I can go,” Hackett says. “I could tell these guys that we’re installing a play from the Bills that Jim Kelly ran, or I could show them. The millennials get excited about that stuff, and you’ve gotta’ find ways to prepare and motivate them. That’s what it about in the end.”

# Reggie Wayne describes how 'nuts' practice sometimes got with Peyton Manning

By John Breech

CBS Sports

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If there's one thing we learned about Peyton Manning during his 18-year NFL career, it's that he was a perfectionist in every sense of the word.

Not only did Manning watch hours and hours of film each week before facing an opposing defense, but he also expected his teammates to be perfect. For the long-time Colts and Broncos quarterback, that meant keeping receivers after practice to make sure everyone was on the same page with their routes and timing.

Apparently during Manning's time in Indianapolis, things got especially crazy on Fridays during the regular season. According to former Colts receiver Reggie Wayne, the goal during a Friday practice was to be perfect, and to make that happen, sometimes things got a little "nuts."

During a recent interview with the NFL Network, Wayne described what it was like to work with Manning on that particular day of the week.

"Take for example, on Fridays. It was called 'Perfect Fridays,'" Wayne said. "He would come out and he would kind of run the show for the beginning of Friday's practice, and we went out there and he had his cue cards and he went through all the plays that he wanted to run, and, I mean, it was nuts, the way he was prepared [on Fridays]."

The receivers knew that Manning was all about perfection, which is why they almost never made a mistake while working with him.

"We went about seven years before anybody ever dropped a ball [during a 'Perfect Friday' practice]," Wayne said.

Seven years. That's almost as crazy as Manning's work ethic.

Wayne also added that Manning was easily the most meticulous planner that he's ever met.

"There's no one in this world that I know that prepares harder or better than Peyton Manning," Wayne said. "I truly believe each day he has that he wakes up out of bed and [his day] is already game-planned. 'I'm going to wake up at seven in the morning. At 7:03, I'm going to brush my teeth. At 7:05, I'm going to put my shoes on.' Every day is planned."

Manning has the second most wins by any quarterback in NFL history -- behind Tom Brady -- and we can probably safely assume that all that preparation was a big reason why he was so successful during his career.

"There's nothing when it comes to game, and game film, that he's not prepared for," Wayne said. "This guy, he knows what the defense is going to do before they actually do it."

Manning's insistence on perfection might be why he turned down Adam Gase's offer to sign with Miami in December 2016. With Manning's demanding style, it would have been almost impossible for him to show up that late in the season and mesh with Dolphins' offense.

As for Wayne, you can see his entire interview below.

**@NFL**

**How many years without dropping a pass??**

**Manning and @Colts receivers were quite perfect on "Perfect Fridays." (via @NFLTotalAccess)**

# Chad Kelly hopes to start throwing within two weeks

By Max Meyer

NFL.com

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Chad Kelly already is facing an uphill climb in his NFL journey as the NFL's newest Mr. Irrelevant. The Broncos rookie quarterback also is still in the midst of his recovery from right wrist surgery, which has hampered his opportunity to get those early important reps at organized team activities and minicamp.

Kelly, though, is optimistic about his progress and has a timeline set for when he can get back into the fold.

"Hopefully, I should start throwing within the next two weeks," Kelly said Friday on NFL Total Access. "My goal is to get ready for training camp and try to help the team win in any way possible."

For veteran quarterbacks, the offseason is meant to develop rapport with new additions or improve chemistry with returning players. A rookie signal-caller has to start from scratch, making those first few months vital.

While Kelly admits that not throwing to Denver's skill-position players has been a disadvantage, he's still attempting to improve his learning curve by utilizing different methods.

"I think it hinders it a little bit, but until you go out there and make a couple mistakes, you got to learn," Kelly said. "Right now, I'm kind of just visualizing everything, pretending like you're calling out the MIKE even in your hotel room every day. You got to pretend like you're out there doing exactly what those other quarterbacks are doing so when you're out there, you can't miss a beat."

Kelly flashed arm talent at Ole Miss. Injuries, character concerns and inconsistent decision making, however, led to an up-and-down collegiate career. He hopes to learn from his mistakes this time around, and turned to guidance from his Hall of Fame uncle, Jim Kelly.

"Shut your mouth, work extremely hard and be the first one in there, last one to leave, and to lead by example," Kelly said, referring to the advice the former Bills gunslinger told him. "When you're down in the fourth quarter, those guys are going to look to you to make a play. It's up to you to gain that respect and to show them that you're the guy."

While the rookie has a lot of ground to gain on Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch in the Broncos' quarterback competition, if he listens to those words of wisdom, he could catch up quicker than expected.