

# Move over Broncos: A new kind of team takes the field at Mile High

By Miles Moraitis

9 News

July 7, 2017

There's a new team training at Mile High, and it's not the Denver Broncos. Miles, however, did make an appearance.

More than 100 kids with a range of diagnoses came out to Mile High to throw, catch and score some touchdowns with the National Sports Center for the Disabled.

The ability clinic at Mile High on Thursday had six stations where kids could make tackles, catch and throw passes, and, of course, spike the ball when they score.

"Folks might say 'well, football, what child with cerebral palsy or what kid in a wheelchair... would want to play football?" said Beth Fox, the program's education and outreach director. "Because it's embedded in the American fabric."

The activities at Mile High are all about getting kids who are challenged every day to challenge themselves in a sport they might not otherwise play. They come to play and make some friends, but the stories they can tell their families on Sundays are priceless.

"To be able to sit on the couch... and say, 'I was on that field, I caught that ball' - [that] is really something," Fox said.

Sixth-grader Noal Blessing attends the Rocky Mountain Deaf School in Jefferson County. He cuts through cones in the obstacle courses in his wheelchair. This is his first time at the Broncos ability clinic. Usually, he's running track.

"I run in my wheelchair," Blessing said. "I'm like literally the only racer that runs in a wheelchair... I do the mile and shot put."

And when it comes to running and racing, Blessing lets his imagination run wild.

"I think it's pretty fun if you... pretend like you're a drag racer," Blessing said. "I just think racing and exercising is really fun."

Eighty-five volunteers participated. Fox said the event is as much about the kids as it is the volunteers and family members.

"When folks see an event like this... looking at the people on the field, a great takeaway is that we are all people," Fox said. "We're all people. We all have something to add to society."

The National Sports Center for the Disabled has several other ability clinics with the Nuggets, Avalanche and Rockies for people like Blessing and his now many friends at Mile High.

# It will be survival of the fittest for Broncos receivers

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

July 7, 2017

Like their teammates, the Denver Broncos' wide receivers are enjoying their summer weeks away from football.

But when they return later this month, they will find they reside in what is likely the most competitive part of the depth chart. The word coach Vance Joseph has repeatedly used is "crowded." And when all is said and done, it's possible some who had regular roles last season will not be part of the future.

"There are a lot of guys," Demaryius Thomas said. "And some young guys, too. We're all going to have to show it every day when we get back."

The Broncos took the rare step of carrying eight receivers on the 53-man roster in December last season because of injuries and an almost constant search for solutions in the return game. That crowd was created by necessity.

This time around, the Broncos' decision-makers, from executive vice president John Elway on down, were intent on forcing the issue. Elway wants competition, and in the case of the team's wide receivers, he plopped two players from the team's 2017 draft class into the mix.

The Broncos, in search of speed and potential returners, used a third-round pick on Carlos Henderson and a fifth-round pick on Isaiah McKenzie. Not only are they among the fastest players on the team, they also project -- if things progress as the Broncos hope -- as the kickoff returner and punt returner.

And make no mistake, any player who shows he can provide some double-take ability at returner is a must-have for the Broncos, given their largely tepid work in the return game the past three seasons.

"That's a full room," Joseph said. "We drafted two young guys who are going to help us in that spot. It was a good room last year. We added, in my opinion, more speed. We added a guy in Isaiah who can do a bunch of different things for us on the offensive side of the football. When you draft guys that have a shot, it does naturally motivate guys. It should."

So do the math. Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders are the starters and both already have shown in offseason workouts that they are intent on doing more than last season, when the offense struggled to overcome inconsistency along the line.

After the two draft picks -- barring an unexpected array of mental errors and dropped passes -- will mark the starting point of the decisions to be made. The Broncos also have Bennie Fowler, Cody Latimer and Jordan Taylor, all of whom had significant playing time last season.

That's seven right there. And that doesn't include Kalif Raymond, who carved out a look last season with his work as a returner, and veteran Marlon Brown, who looked close to earning some playing time in 2016 until a back injury flared up. Undrafted rookie Hunter Sharp caught the coaches' attention in the offseason program.

"I know Fowler had a hell of a camp," Joseph said as the offseason program drew to a close. "Latimer and Jordan, who was healthy, had a hell of a camp. ... It's going to be a tough decision in terms of who makes our football team, but that's the way it should be."

Last season, the Broncos kept six receivers on their initial 53-man roster before the regular-season opener. Of those six players, only Jordan Norwood is not on the roster this year.

Latimer, a former second-round draft pick, might have one of the hottest seats this time around. Henderson could take the kickoff-return job, and some with the Broncos believe he could even be the No. 3 receiver because of his run-after-catch ability.

Coordinator Brock Olivo's decisions about the personnel in the return game and on the special-teams units will be a big part of the decision beyond the spots on the depth chart behind Thomas and Sanders.

"I look forward to seeing what everybody does," Thomas said. "You just have to show your best every day."

# AFC West Q&A: If you could start a team with one division defensive player, who would it be?

By Adam Teicher

ESPN

July 7, 2017

The AFC West is filled with top defensive talent.

Defensive ends Khalil Mack (Oakland Raiders) and Von Miller (Denver Broncos) finished one-two in last year's Defensive Player of the Year voting. Los Angeles Chargers edge rusher Joey Bosa is also a rising star. However, I would argue that Kansas City Chiefs cornerback Marcus Peters should be a part of the conversation if you were to start a team with one defensive player from the division.

Peters is the NFL's top playmaker at an important position. He either breaks up the pass or records an interception almost 20 percent of the time he's targeted in coverage over two NFL seasons -- a league high. The Chiefs had a weak pass rush last year, and due to injuries and poor play, they fielded an ever-changing cast of cornerbacks other than Peters. They still compiled the third-best opponent passer rating in the league in large part because of the second-year corner, who has a knack for making big plays at the right time. In the final minute of a tie game at Carolina last season, Peters went for a strip after Kelvin Benjamin caught a short pass in front of him. The cornerback was able to knock the ball loose and recover the fumble, and the Chiefs went on to kick a field goal and seal a walk-off victory.

If you could start a team with any one AFC West defensive player, who would it be and why?

**Jeff Legwold, Denver Broncos reporter:** If you're going to start a team, you need an impact player at a foundation position -- edge rusher -- or a standout interior rusher. You could also go with a playmaker at a spot that Broncos VP John Elway considers a foundation position: cornerback. To that end, Mack, Bosa and cornerbacks Chris Harris Jr. and Peters are certainly in the conversation.

But in my view, it's still Miller, who just turned 28 years old in March. He has started at least 15 games in all but one of his previous six seasons. (He tore an ACL in 2013.) He has posted double-digit sack totals in five seasons and topped 13 sacks in three seasons. He has been a Super Bowl MVP and a key player in one of the league's best defenses over the past four seasons. The Broncos have finished No. 1 in pass defense and among the top three in sacks in each of the past two seasons. Much of how opponents align themselves against the Broncos' defense has to do with Miller's position on the field.

Although Miller may have had his best all-around season in 2016, he still has room to grow. He's an elite player who has yet to reach his ceiling.

**Eric D. Williams, Los Angeles Chargers reporter:** I have to go with Bosa here because of his age (he'll turn 22 on Tuesday) and his potential to develop into one of the more dominant pass-rushers in the league for the next decade. Bosa finished with 10.5 sacks in 12 games during his rookie campaign, and many of his teammates felt he should have made the Pro Bowl. He has a chance to earn Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2017. "He's got Hall of Fame potential," Chargers safety Dwight Lowery said. "And that's after seeing him play just a couple games and seeing him practice. Just his size and physical attributes, he can be as good as he wants to be."

**Paul Gutierrez, Oakland Raiders reporter:** The old Mack vs. Miller question, eh? Yeah, I know Bosa might garner some support, as will Eric Berry. But while Miller and Berry might have already cobbled together Canton-worthy résumés, Bosa and Mack's best days are still ahead. And Mack is already a reigning NFL Defensive Player of the Year. So I'm going with Mack, but not simply because of his accolades. Mack showed he could take over a game without receiving veteran treatment from referees. Or did you miss the numerous holding calls that coulda-woulda-shoulda been called on opponents blocking Mack, who still finished the season with 11 sacks and strung together an eight-game sack streak? Mack has also picked up a penchant for closing games with sacks, and had a clutch 6-yard pick-six off quarterback Cam Newton. Now that's performing under duress, as well as laying the foundation for a team.

# Kirk Cousins could make a difference for all NFL players, if he's willing to

By Sally Jenkins  
Washington Post  
July 7, 2017

Leverage is only leverage if you're willing to use it. Kirk Cousins already has pried \$44 million in fully guaranteed cash out of an NFL team owner's pocket, because he was willing to bet on himself. Owners hate paying guaranteed money more than they hate paying taxes. For his next trick, Cousins should show them what a true free agent looks like. He should decline to sign a long-term deal with the Washington Redskins. Bet on himself again, and force the Redskins and the NFL to do what they so seldom have to: deal in an open market.

Cousins is not just negotiating for himself, he is negotiating for every guy in a uniform who has been treated as disposable. The only way there will ever be more guaranteed money in the NFL is if players such as Cousins demand it, and quit signing "long-term" contracts with deceptive numbers in search of a security that doesn't really exist in this league.

NFL players drive \$14 billion in revenue, more than any sports league by several billions. Yet they have the worst contracts and financial participation, and the fewest guarantees of any athletes. All NFLers, regardless of their pay grade or position, should ask a fundamental question: Why are their salaries capped, but Roger Goodell's isn't?

If you want to understand the real tilt and psychology of the league, just consider that NFL owners paid the commissioner \$150 million over eight years – more than Tom Brady by about \$60 million, according to Business Insider. As league analyst and former Green Bay Packers vice president Andrew Brandt said, NFL players "are sitting at the children's table" when it comes to money, career stability and balance of power.

Last week Derek Carr signed a deal with the Oakland Raiders supposedly worth \$125 million over five years – impressive, until you learn that just \$40 million was guaranteed at signing. Meanwhile in the same city, in the same week, Steph Curry signed with the Golden State Warriors for \$201 million over five years, every dime of it guaranteed.

The truth? An NFL quarterback can only envy an NBA point guard's money and doesn't have nearly his career stability. All of the talk around NFL contracts revolves around average yearly salary, but as Brandt pointed out, most NFL deals are only good for the first couple of seasons and then what the contract really says is, "We'll see." Somehow the risk, the variables of performance and injury, wind up coming out of NFL player contracts instead of the owner's pockets.

"The real difference between NFL and NBA/MLB contracts is not so much the total values, but the security involved," Brandt said. "To me it is all about risk allocation: NFL deals allocate risk to the player; NBA/MLB deals allocate risk to the team. As to the standard refrain I hear about lack of guarantees due to the injury risk in football, that is a great argument . . . for the owners. One could easily argue that NFL players are more deserving of guarantees than all other team sport athletes."

NFL players are simply not getting their due. Why is it that NBA players get 51.1 percent of their league's revenue, but NFL players get only 47-48 percent – after the owners have taken \$1 billion off the top? The NBA salary cap is \$99 million for 450 players. The NFL cap is just \$155 million for four times as many players. NFL revenues have grown by about 31 percent since the last bargaining agreement in 2011, yet the salary cap has increased only fractionally. Something is wrong with those numbers.

Guaranteed money is the grail of the NFL. It's what everyone wants and hardly anyone gets – because they're rarely in a position to force teams to pay it. Instead, players chase paper. They sign supposed "long-term" deals that pay a fraction of what they promise and are never actually fulfilled: Colin Kaepernick signed a seven-year-deal with the 49ers, but only 11 percent was sure money, and he was gone after two years. Take a look at the richest NFL contracts of \$100 million or so, and usually only about 31 percent is actually guaranteed, according to Business Insider. There are only the rarest exceptions: Ndamukong Suh got more than 50 percent of his deal in real money. So did Darrelle Revis. There's two.

The league can surely afford greater percentages than this. It's a cultural issue as much as anything: Historically the owners have acted like the ranchers and the players the cattle. The NFL Players Union has had some inherent weaknesses: Short average career length and wide pay differences mean a lack of cohesion and constant membership turnover, and the need to compromise even from within. Meantime the NFL management council is a much smaller group with the clearer goal of controlling their costs, and fewer people to please.

The NFLPA finally won some guaranteed money for elite first-round draft picks in the last bargaining agreement – but with it came an owner-imposed rookie cap. Brandt said that if the children's-table psychology is going to change, if NFL players are ever going to "break the seal on guarantees," it's going to take a combined effort from the union and individual stars such as Cousins to reject deals that are more paper than real money.

Last year it was an easy decision for Cousins to reject a contract offer insultingly beneath his value, and play for one year of guaranteed money under the franchise player tag. This time around, he will need real resolve to reject an offer that is likely to be more generous – perhaps even in the \$50 million - \$55 million range – but still not what he would command by testing the marketplace. Predictions are that if he's willing to become a free agent next season, he might command as much as \$30 million a year guaranteed. And if the Redskins were forced to tag him again, the price would be \$34 million for a single season of his services.

Cousins is an interesting man who just may have the steel in him to raise the ceiling for everyone. Why should he accept \$10 million a year less than his market worth from the Redskins in the name of stability? Stability – for whom? Dan Snyder and Bruce Allen, that's who. Not for Cousins, who easily could be dumped by these people. As Cousins seems to understand.

"Even if it says it's a three- or four-year contract, really the only guarantees are this year," Cousins said recently on Redskins TV. "Many of us are playing on one-year deals. I'm not the only one, and we're not going to have careers if we don't have a great year this year, so we all don't look much further than this season."

Redskins ownership-management dealt with Cousins as a depreciable asset rather than a valued employee, until they decided they needed him. Now Cousins has leverage – but it's only real leverage if

he is willing to decline a contract, to say no to the deceptive "long-term" offer that may be psychologically relieving but is not truly secure without a guarantee of good hard cash money.

# Tom Brady's book, set for September release, focuses on fitness and diet regimen

By A.J. Perez

USA Today

July 7, 2017

Those curious to learn Tom Brady's innermost thoughts about his friendship with President Trump or views on Deflategate likely won't be satisfied when the New England Patriots quarterback makes his debut as an author in September.

The TB12 Method: How to Achieve a Lifetime of Sustained Peak Performance is basically a fitness book. Publisher Simon & Schuster, which announced the title on Thursday, said The TB12 Method will reveal Brady's "revolutionary approach to his training and exercise regimen."

Plenty has been written about Brady's approach to nutrition and sports performance as he has compiled his five Super Bowl titles.

About 90% of his training utilizes resistance bands with higher reps, according to a Bleacher Report story from January. He works out twice and sometimes three times a day.

His meals, which are prepared by a personal chef, are mostly vegan.

"(Brady) doesn't eat nightshades, because they're not anti-inflammatory," his chef, Allen Campbell, told The Boston Globe last year. "So no tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms or eggplants. Tomatoes trickle in every now and then, but just maybe once a month."

Simon & Schuster president Jonathan Karp said the book will peel back the curtain on how Brady has been able to excel at age 39.

"We expect this book to become an essential source for the way athletes of all ages live and train, whether they are in high school or in retirement," he said.

# Ranking divisions by quarterback: NFC South reigns supreme

By Adam Schein

NFL.com

July 7, 2017

They say the NFL is a quarterback-driven league. And "they" are right.

So, which division is driven by the best quarterbacks? That's a fine question. Allow me to provide a divisional hierarchy through the prism of the game's most important position. Which division boasts the finest collection of quarterbacks? The least inspiring? See below!

## 1) NFC South

Atlanta Falcons: Matt Ryan

Carolina Panthers: Cam Newton

New Orleans Saints: Drew Brees

Tampa Bay Buccaneers: Jameis Winston

No debate in the No. 1 spot: The NFC South's QB quartet is in a league of its own right now. Ryan is fresh off a sensational MVP season and is set up for greatness again in 2017. Newton took home the hardware the year before and boasts one of the rarest skill sets in the NFL today. Brees has more 5,000-yard seasons (five) than every other quarterback in NFL history combined (Dan Marino, Tom Brady, Matthew Stafford and Peyton Manning each have one). He's Canton bound ... yet still terrorizing defenses in his late 30s. And with the weapons Tampa Bay added this offseason, Winston is poised for a true breakout as he guides the Bucs back to the postseason. It's not hard to imagine any of these four QBs making an MVP push in 2017.

## 2) NFC East

Dallas Cowboys: Dak Prescott

New York Giants: Eli Manning

Philadelphia Eagles: Carson Wentz

Washington Redskins: Kirk Cousins

You could start a riot debating the individual rankings of these four signal callers, which speaks volumes about the division. Dak was absolutely fantastic in Year 1, winning Offensive Rookie of the Year and guiding Dallas to the playoffs. And the best is yet to come. I still think Wentz is going to be a star. Last

year was about a learning curve. Now, with Alshon Jeffery and Torrey Smith in the fold, Wentz's development will really kick into gear. Eli Manning is Eli Manning. The two-time Super Bowl MVP is tough and clutch and still great. And Cousins has become a big-time, reliable starter in Washington. I've argued for years that the former fourth-round pick deserves a new contract and should be treated like a franchise quarterback.

### 3) AFC West

Denver Broncos: Trevor Siemian/Paxton Lynch

Kansas City Chiefs: Alex Smith

Los Angeles Chargers: Philip Rivers

Oakland Raiders: Derek Carr

Carr received my Associated Press vote for MVP last season. He's a bona fide star who is only going to get better. That \$125 million extension was a no-brainer. I think Carr will guide the Raiders to a home playoff game in Oakland this season. Rivers remains elite, and the future Hall of Famer finally got help from his organization this offseason, with the Bolts boosting the receiver position and offensive line. I love Alex Smith. I know the limitations and playoff record. I also know I'm winning 10 games with him. Denver's the wild card, but I think Lynch -- a former first-round pick -- should start. Siemian was solid last year, but Lynch can provide Denver with the upside and talent it needs at quarterback.

### 4) NFC North

Chicago Bears: Mike Glennon/Mitchell Trubisky

Detroit Lions: Matthew Stafford

Green Bay Packers: Aaron Rodgers

Minnesota Vikings: Sam Bradford

Rodgers is the best quarterback in the NFL today. And Stafford was a true MVP candidate for most of last season. In my opinion, Stafford enjoyed his finest pro campaign by rocking steady and displaying quite the clutch gene in his first year without Calvin Johnson. While injuries are always a question with Bradford, he deserves so much credit for being a really good player (SEE: NFL-leading 71.6 percent completion rate) and quick study last year after Minnesota picked him up on Labor Day weekend from Philly. I like Mike Glennon more than most. And while I loathed the Trubisky trade-up, the rookie has talent.

### 5) AFC East

Buffalo Bills: Tyrod Taylor

Miami Dolphins: Ryan Tannehill

New England Patriots: Tom Brady

New York Jets: ???

The Jets' QB question must be answered by either Josh McCown, Christian Hackenberg or Bryce Petty. Translation: The Jets have the worst quarterback situation in the NFL. On the flip side, Brady is the G.O.A.T. I like Taylor and always have -- and the Bills will function like an actual football team with a new head coach. I'm excited to watch Taylor this year. Adam Gase is a quarterback whisperer in Miami -- and a now healthy Tannehill is understandably excited about the team's weapons and upside in 2017. Gase will continue to bring the best out of his 28-year-old field general.

6) AFC North

Baltimore Ravens: Joe Flacco

Cincinnati Bengals: Andy Dalton

Cleveland Browns: ???

Pittsburgh Steelers: Ben Roethlisberger

Big Ben is a Hall of Famer with a loaded offense -- and yes, he's still at the top of his game. Cleveland, on the other hand, is best served turning to Brock Osweiler -- which says something about something. I do think DeShone Kizer can play -- eventually. Hue Jackson can help both, and so can a vastly improved offensive line. Flacco needs some help at running back and will have a new cast of characters at receiver. I believe Jeremy Maclin can provide a boost. And you trust Flacco in big spots. Dalton always puts up numbers in the regular season. Prime-time Andy is a different story. And over the past few offseasons, Cincy has lost a bunch of talent at receiver and along the offensive line.

7) AFC South

Houston Texans: Deshaun Watson

Indianapolis Colts: Andrew Luck

Jacksonville Jaguars: Blake Bortles

Tennessee Titans: Marcus Mariota

In theory, this group could end up in the No. 8 spot. I love Luck, Mariota and Watson. But Luck currently can't throw a football. That's a problem. Bortles can't throw a football -- and he's completely healthy. Also a problem. I'm not even messing around with Tom Savage here. Watson was rightly drafted to start. And he should. I love the fit. But he's still a rookie. Assuming Mariota's healthy, I anticipate another strong year from the Titans signal caller.

8) NFC West

Arizona Cardinals: Carson Palmer

Los Angeles Rams: Jared Goff

San Francisco 49ers: Brian Hoyer

Seattle Seahawks: Russell Wilson

Hoyer is a nice guy -- but a backup. Yes, he's very familiar with Kyle Shanahan's offense, but he's just not a legit NFL starting quarterback. Goff was dreadful last season. I think Sean McVay can maximize him, but it's a work in progress. Palmer could be close to retirement. And while the Cardinals QB has enjoyed some fine regular seasons in his career, do you trust him in playoff games? Not even Wilson can save this group. Heck, Russ is coming off a down season, at least by his lofty standard. Part of that was injuries and another part was shoddy O-line play, but Wilson posted the worst passer rating (92.6) of his NFL career. He needs the offensive line and run game to step up in 2017.

# Vance Joseph expects tough decisions at wide receiver

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
July 7, 2017

The Broncos drafted two wide receivers this year and both Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie offer the team potential solutions to issues in the return game that plagued the team all of last season.

Their arrival is going to make it tougher for some Broncos holdovers to make this year's team. It's hard to imagine Henderson, a third-round pick, getting cut under any circumstances and McKenzie, a fifth-round selection, would have to be a pretty major flop to fail to make the team, so space gets scarce once you pencil them in along with starters Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

Cody Latimer, Jordan Taylor, Kalif Raymond and Bennie Fowler return from last season's roster and Marlon Brown is back after a back injury put him out of commission last year.

"That's a full room," coach Vance Joseph said, via Jeff Legwold of ESPN.com. "We drafted two young guys who are going to help us in that spot. It was a good room last year. We added, in my opinion, more speed. We added a guy in Isaiah who can do a bunch of different things for us on the offensive side of the football. When you draft guys that have a shot, it does naturally motivate guys. It should. ... It's going to be a tough decision in terms of who makes our football team, but that's the way it should be."

Latimer, a 2014 second-round pick, has caught 16 passes over his first three seasons and his failure to develop as hoped helped make Henderson and McKenzie appealing to the Broncos in April. If the rookies show enough this summer, Latimer could be out of chances to make good on what the Broncos saw in him coming out of college.