

Broncos QBs expected to head west with receivers in preparation for training camp

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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The first step toward winning the starting quarterback job in Denver will be at a passing camp in Los Angeles.

Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch are expected to join their receivers, tight ends and running backs in California soon to prepare for the start of training camp, on July 27. Last year, Mark Sanchez hosted some of his receivers at Southern California for an informal passing camp and in years prior, Peyton Manning flew in his receivers, as well as those of Eli, to Duke for a multi-day passing camp.

Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said organized team activities and minicamp counted “zero to none” toward winning the starting job. The goal then, for the entire offense, was to learn and become acclimated with Mike McCoy’s system.

The goal now is to win a job.

So Joseph left his players with a final message to stay out of trouble, in shape and on top of the playbook.

“The football message was the things that were learned, as far as the scheme on both sides of the ball, let’s not lose that,” Joseph said. “Let’s come back and start from this point, not go backward.”

Receiver Demaryius Thomas told reporters at his youth football camp last week that he’s already seen marked improvement in both quarterbacks and is expecting a heated competition. But he’s hopeful it won’t go down to the wire, as Joseph suggested it might.

“They both had their ups and downs days,” Thomas said. “I remember Trevor had been pretty cool the whole time. Everybody has their days. ... The last couple of weeks, (Lynch) was just out there lighting it up. It was like, ‘Ooh, where did that come from?’ It’s going to be good competition. I’m excited about it.”

But the true test for both QBs begins in 16 days, and what goes down in the preceding weeks could carry significant weight.

The comeback after the break helped Siemian land the job in 2016.

The comeback this year may help him remain the Broncos’ starter or propel Lynch to the No. 1 spot.

Near the end of OTAs, Lynch said he planned to return to Florida to resume training with quarterbacks coach and former play-caller Charlie Taaffe. Taaffe helped Lynch prepare for the draft in 2016 and worked with him again earlier this year to hone his footwork and mechanics.

At the culmination of minicamp, Siemian said he was arranging throwing sessions with some of his teammates to not only strengthen his rapport with the receivers but also to strengthen his left shoulder. Siemian suffered an AC joint sprain early last season and, after playing the year in pain, underwent an elective procedure in January to ease the discomfort while working out and lifting weights.

"I wanted to get healthy first and test out the shoulder, which is good," he said. "I haven't had any problems with that, so I'm pretty pumped."

The Broncos ended minicamp with McCoy's offense fully installed and they will return to the field later this month with coaches expecting players to pick up where they left off.

The earlier the quarterback decision is made, the better for Thomas and his fellow receivers. But the battle won't operate on a set timetable. A victor could be named after the first preseason game in Chicago. Or he could be named after Week 2 of the preseason, following the Broncos' lengthy stay in San Francisco for joint practices and then a game against the 49ers.

Or he may not be named until after all four preseason matchups, like last year.

"It's going to be won on the football field. It's going to be won in the games in the preseason. That's where evaluation starts, in my opinion," Joseph said. "... When I see a clear separation, I'll call it off."

Emmanuel Sanders feels great after ditching fast food

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Athletic freaks come in all shapes and sizes.

When Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders lines up, he is often the skinniest guy playing in an NFL game.

They don't make them much tougher than the 5-foot-11, 180-pound Sanders as he seems to catch more between the seams in traffic as when he's isolated on the outside.

He also has managed to keep his slender frame despite eating like you and I do – in fast-food lines.

"I was eating bad," he said in a sit-down interview Monday morning with 9NEWS during a break from hosting his youth football camp at Northglenn High School. "If I was hungry I would sometimes go through the McDonald's line and grab me a 20-piece (chicken McNuggets). I would go through Burger King, just fast food because I was ready to eat now.

"But now I'm listening to my body a lot more. There's something about being able to understand your body. What you can put in your body that gives you a burst of energy, or what you put in your body that makes you go to sleep. That's what I'm understanding more."

By changing his diet, Sanders said he feels better now as he's 30 years old and about to begin his eighth NFL season than he did coming out of SMU as a rookie in 2010.

"Left that fast food alone," he said. "Left certain things that made my body feel weird. From an energy standpoint, my energy level is high because of what I'm putting in my body. Food is fuel. I started to understand that.

"Not only that my mind has started to slow down. It's something about when you hit 30. You know who you are and you know where you want to go. You have a sense of direction. My destination is to try to get to the Super Bowl, try to win Super Bowls and try to go for 1,200, 1,300 yards and I understand what it takes to get there. And that's through hard work and dedication.

"We've got this new offense with Mike McCoy. We're going to be throwing the ball around so my conditioning has to be up and I've been working on that."

McCoy was the Broncos' offensive coordinator from 2009-12, then left to become head coach of the San Diego Chargers from 2013-16, and is now back running the Broncos' offense.

When McCoy left for San Diego, his system was passed down to Adam Gase, who coordinated enormous passing stats for Peyton Manning in 2013-14, and for Sanders, who in 2014 set career-bests with 101 catches, 1,404 yards and nine touchdowns.

McCoy and Sanders now call Vance Joseph their top direct boss. Joseph is Sanders' third head coach in four years with the Broncos. He had John Fox in 2014 and Gary Kubiak in 2015-16.

“It’s hard to compare because I had a couple years with Kubes and a year with coach Fox and we’ve only had two months with coach Joseph,” Sanders said. “But from being around him those two months: Great guy.

“Great guy and he loves football. He loves his players already and he barely knows us. But you can already tell he loves us. He loves what he does. He’s passionate about it.

“I remember the first time he addressed the team and he talked about winning and losing. He goes, ‘If we do everything we can possibly do with this coaching staff and the players on this roster, nobody can beat us. And the way that he looked when he said ‘Nobody can beat us,’ let us know he hates losing. And that’s the type of guy I want, a guy that hates losing. I hate losing. I’m the most competitive person probably in the world sometimes. That’s good and bad. But I hate losing and I like being around guys like that.”

Although Sanders still eclipsed 75 catches and 1,000 yards each of the previous two years in Kubiak’s offense, he’s hoping the McCoy system will help increase his individual production back to 2014 levels.

As for the quarterback who will help Sanders reach his goals, about all he’s knows for sure is it won’t be Manning. Sanders also believes regardless of whether it’s Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch, he won’t have trouble catching balls from either.

“Both of those guys throw catchable passes,” Sanders said. “When it comes to the deep ball, Paxton loves to throw the deep ball. Big, strong arm. Trevor, he loves to throw the out routes, the in-routes. He’s a checkdown, all-around type guy.”

Sanders will worry about that soon enough. The Broncos will report to training camp June 26 for a conditioning test, then hold their first team practice the next day. It’s the Broncos’ first, pre-camp conditioning test since the Josh McDaniels’ era.

But the more serious, arduous camp can wait. Sanders was fully engaged with his 300-plus kids at his two-day ProCamp that will conclude Tuesday.

“At first I would be surprised to have this much love,” Sanders said. “But they don’t surprise me, anymore, about the turnout I get from Broncos fans and the Broncos’ community and Denver community. I’m forever grateful. This is awesome.”

How Broncos QBs spend summer vacation may decide the starter

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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When the Denver Broncos open their season on Sept. 11, either Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch will be the starting quarterback.

A few things have to happen before coach Vance Joseph makes the call. Each quarterback has some fine-tuning and studying to do to learn the new offense. And each must be careful in how he spends the rest of the summer vacation.

"As I've said to all the players, not just [the quarterbacks]: Learn the system. That's the most important," offensive coordinator Mike McCoy said before the Broncos adjourned for their summer break. "I consistently say, 'When you leave this office, you have to study.' Everybody has talent; the key is learning [the plays] and knowing what to do. Everybody, including [the quarterbacks], has to put themselves in a position to come back here for camp ready to compete for a job."

What Joseph is saying in so many words: "Have fun, but not too much," and "Don't forget the playbook."

To that end, Siemian and Lynch, along with the team's running backs, wide receivers and tight ends, will have a Manning-esque passing camp in Los Angeles in the coming days. Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas said at minicamp last month that "it's a priority for us to get together."

Siemian has said he would use the weeks away from the Broncos' facility to make up for lost time in the weight room because of surgery on his left (non-throwing) shoulder. Lynch said he would once again work with longtime college and CFL coach Charlie Taaffe on footwork and other parts of throwing mechanics.

"Competition is good for everybody," Siemian said. "... We want to be back and forth. ... We're pushing each other."

The Siemian/Lynch decision will be the hottest topic as the Broncos roll into training camp later this month. And while the offseason program is a time for both quarterbacks to learn the offense before opening up the competition in camp, the work of Siemian and Lynch in May and June did not go unnoticed, according to Joseph and McCoy.

To win the job, each will have a key question or two to answer, beyond showing his ability to take what's talked about in the meeting room out onto the field.

Siemian's grasp of the offense and what defenses are trying to do is better than Lynch's at the moment. Siemian won a three-way battle in Broncos training camp last summer because of his reliability and consistent ability to move the offense in practices and preseason games.

McCoy wants to push the ball downfield in the passing game, and Siemian will have to show the willingness to do that. One of the most difficult criticisms for a quarterback to overcome is that he won't make a throw to win a game.

Siemian has done it, but his receivers haven't always helped -- most notably on late-game throws against the Chiefs and Titans last season. If not for dropped passes, both games could have been wins. But Siemian played it safe much of the time during the learning period of minicamp and OTAs, especially in the final days of the offseason program, and the new coaching staff on offense wants a little more.

Mistakes aren't taken lightly, so Siemian can't force the issue, but his chances of winning the job might hinge on his ability to pick his spots downfield. In practice, the offense will face the league's No. 1 passing defense.

"You have to move the offense, move the chains and score points," Siemian said. "Whatever it takes. And take care of the ball. It all has to happen."

Lynch must have a better presence in the huddle, in front of the team -- have the look of "the guy." And he has to avoid consistently leaving the pocket -- he has been too quick to take off -- if his first read is covered.

Lynch's scrambling in noncontact practices has been characterized as a showcase of his mobility rather than a reluctance to work through all his progressions and find a receiver, but he must learn to be patient. He also has to avoid trusting his quality arm too much.

During a red-zone drill in June, a throw he made across his body, all the way across the field into triple coverage, was Exhibit A of the kind of play that loses a quarterback competition.

"I want to stay on top of the playbook," Lynch said. "...I want to come back ready to go."

Joseph said the competition will be decided "when there is separation." It could be made early in camp or just before the regular season begins.

"Those guys have to come back ready to compete and show what they can do," Joseph said. "I'll keep saying it: The goal is to make the right decision, not the quick one."

AFC West Q&A: Who is the rising star in this division?

By Staff

ESPN

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Who is the rising star in the AFC West?

Jeff Legwold, Denver Broncos reporter: Beyond the Raiders' Derek Carr -- a young quarterback on the upswing -- the division has some players with bust-out potential in the season to come. Take a long look at Broncos outside linebacker Shane Ray. Ray finished second on the team last season with eight sacks even though he was a rotational player when DeMarcus Ware was healthy. Ware has retired, so Ray will start and have Von Miller on the other side of the formation to go with an improved interior rush that will include rookie DeMarcus Walker with Derek Wolfe and Domata Peko. Ray played 58 percent of the Broncos' defensive snaps last season, and if things go as Denver hopes, he is expected to graduate to 70 percent or more in his third NFL season. Whether he cracks the 80 percent threshold, which is what Miller topped last season, remains to be seen. But Ray, who had a three-sack game against the Bengals last September, is poised for a double-digit output in quarterback takedowns.

Adam Teicher, Kansas City Chiefs reporter: The play of Kansas City defensive lineman Chris Jones was at least partially obscured last season by the spectacular debut of teammate and fellow rookie Tyreek Hill. But Jones had an impact. He wound up having to play a lot after Kansas City lost starting linemen Allen Bailey and Jaye Howard for the season to injuries. His role should increase as a full-time starter in 2017. The Chiefs expect Jones, a second-round draft pick in 2016, to be solid against both the run and pass; in particular he showed strong pass-rush skills last season. He displayed the knack for being able to split double-teams and get pressure on the opposing quarterback.

Eric D. Williams, Los Angeles Chargers reporter: Don't sleep on second-year Chargers tight end Hunter Henry. The Arkansas product finished 2016 with 36 receptions on 53 targets for 478 receiving yards and eight touchdowns, seven of which came inside the red zone. With another offseason of work with quarterback Philip Rivers, Henry should be even more productive in Year 2, shouldering more of the workload offensively. Future Hall of Fame tight end Antonio Gates will still get his touches; the 37-year-old needs one more touchdown to break a tie with Tony Gonzalez for career receiving scores by a tight end after totaling 111 through last season. Look for the Chargers to continue to use Gates on third down and in the red zone while Henry becomes their top option at tight end.

Paul Gutierrez, Oakland Raiders reporter: As easy as it would be to go with NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year Joey Bosa and his 10.5 sacks in 12 games for the Chargers, keep an eye on Raiders third-year receiver Amari Cooper. Sure, Cooper already has been named to a pair of Pro Bowls and authored two 1,000-yard receiving seasons. But Cooper, who showed up to offseason workouts looking significantly more muscular without having lost any of his world-class speed, had an air about him. Let Carr explain: "That ... dog in him is coming out, that thing that you saw at Alabama where he'll just take things over," Carr said. "DBs better know that he's really taking it serious that he's trying to go attack them this year. He's not going to let them come to him anymore. ... The guy has been going off all camp, all offseason." The Raiders expect it to continue in the regular season.

Mason's Mailbag: Time traveling in the DeLorean, and why a QB competition is not "divisive"

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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You always hear competition is a good thing. However, this quarterback competition between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch seems to be divisive, between teammates, the city, the media, and the quarterbacks themselves. Your thoughts?

-- Joyce Campbell

There's no evidence that it's dividing teammates and the quarterbacks. Everyone in that locker room understands that competition for jobs is a constant part of life as an NFL player, dictated by the simple arithmetic of the sport: There are 90 players on the roster now, but only 53 can be on the primary roster in Week 1, and just 22 of them will be starters on offense or defense. You accept competition from the moment you pursue an on-field career in the NFL.

And as for dividing the city and the media ... if a team is properly constructed with good leadership and the ability to focus and cut out extraneous noise from outside, the chatter from beyond the walls of team headquarters will not matter. Fan discussion of the quarterback position has been part and parcel of the pro-football experience since time immemorial.

Such speculation and debate is part of what makes the fan experience fun. But there is no reason why it should have any effect on the team itself.

Furthermore, if a quarterback can't handle the pressure of competition, how will he handle the pressure of regular-season play? The positives far outweigh the negatives, in my estimation.

With Matt Paradis coming off double hip surgery, and Connor McGovern completely untested as a backup center, wouldn't it be prudent to sign Nick Mangold as insurance? I'm pretty sure he could slide over to the guard position if need be.

-- Rich Ames

First of all, Paradis is on schedule in his recovery. He is expected back for training camp, and there is no indication that he will not be at full speed for the regular season.

As for Mangold, the reality of the market is that he holds all the cards. Given the lack of experience among interior offensive linemen still on the market, the wisest course of action for him or any player with a similar level of experience and accomplishment is to wait until training camp until an injury strikes somewhere around the league -- which is inevitable -- and then settle into a near-certain starting role.

Is it fair to start talking about Chris Harris Jr. as a potential member of not only the ring of fame but also the Hall of Fame, if he keeps on his current trajectory?

-- Ryan Patrick

With one first-team All-Pro nod, three Pro Bowl selections and a key role on the best defense in Broncos history, Harris already has a collection of accomplishments that puts him into the Ring of Fame conversation. Another Pro Bowl selection could make him a lock.

As for the Hall of Fame, he's got plenty of work left before that's a realistic possibility. If this defense can power the Broncos to another Super Bowl win (or at least an appearance) in the next two to three seasons, and Harris can continue collecting Pro Bowl and All-Pro plaudits, he will have a case. Another Super Bowl trip powered by the "No-Fly Zone" would eventually force the Hall of Fame Selection Committee to give sufficient recognition to what would be one of the dominant units in NFL history.

But that discussion is a long way off. Let's just keep the focus on the here and now.

Do you see the Broncos having interest in either player available in upcoming NFL supplemental draft, Georgia Military College DE Tavares Bingham and Western New Mexico RB Marques Rodgers?

-- Rick Sallee

I'm sure the Broncos will do their due diligence on both prospects, but neither seems to have done enough to warrant surrendering a draft pick next year to select either of them.

Who would get in your five-a-side soccer team from the Broncos roster?

I'd go for DT in goal, good with his hands, Aqib Talib and Von Miller in defense for their physicality and awarenesses, Brandon Marshall in midfield for his energy and Emmanuel Sanders upfront for his quick feet and speed.

-- Joshua Nadarajan

(Flips through the calendar, remembers it's early July, then smiles and begins thinking earnestly about the question.)

I can't quibble with any of those choices. However, I'd give a long look at Garrett Bolles on defense. Remember, he played lacrosse in high school, and he still has the ability to cover a lot of ground in a hurry. At his size, he could be an intimidating presence at the back.

A native Coloradoan who will back in the state in the month of September. Is there any way a fan since 1969 can view a Bronco practice during this time?

-- Thomas N. Gormally

Unfortunately, no, sorry. Practices after the second week of the preseason are closed to the public.

My wife (Rebecca) and I celebrate 25 years of wonderful marriage on Tuesday (11th July). I was a Broncos fan before I met Rebecca and she has come to understand my passion for the team during this time. There have been so many changes to football over the last quarter century. When Rebecca and I celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary in 2042, what might we see in the NFL?

-- Martyn Richmond

First of all, happy anniversary!

To look ahead at where the NFL could be in 25 years, I find myself looking back. Where was it in 1992? And where was it 25 years before that, in 1967?

Let's start with the number of teams, and where they play. In 1967, the AFL and NFL were still three years from their formal merger, but were operating together for purposes of the draft, preseason games and the Super Bowl (then operating with the unwieldy official moniker of "AFL-NFL World Championship Game"). The leagues had 25 teams. A quarter-century later, they had 28. Three of the 25 (the Cardinals, Colts and Raiders) had moved.

Another quarter-century later, the NFL has expanded from 28 teams to 32. The Oilers, Chargers and Raiders have moved once, with the Raiders set to move again. The Rams have moved twice. The Browns moved and were replaced. So at those general rates, you can expect three to five teams to move in the next 25 years and four expansion teams to join the fold, bringing the league to 36 clubs. I'm not even going to venture a guess as to which teams end up moving; in 1992, who could have foreseen the Browns ever leaving Cleveland as they did in 1995? The unthinkable often becomes reality. I expect at least two expansion teams to be outside of North America, and I would be stunned if there is not a team playing full-time in London by 2030.

On the field, I expect the game will become more athletic. The emphasis on lowering the impact and frequency of collisions and injuries will continue, resulting in a game that is more finesse-oriented. I could see offensive linemen getting lighter; if sub-300-pound tackles like Garrett Bolles succeed against the agile, quick edge rushers they will face, we could see a new breed of athletic tackles who weigh 280-295 pounds, and we could see a gradual change in body type along the offensive and defensive lines. I could see 300-pound players becoming a novelty, rather than the commonplace sight they are today.

I have occasionally discussed the notion of a seven-on-seven developmental league in this space and on social media, a point to which I returned on Saturday night:

@MaseDenver

Been saying this for a while, in form of a 7-on-7 league. I think you'd get 15-20,000 on a spring Saturday to watch Broncos-Raiders 7-on-7.

While I don't think NFL or college football will morph into two-hand touch or flag football in the next 25 years, I do think that a style that is more open and flowing could become the next step in football's evolution -- something that incorporates concepts from rugby league or rugby sevens. A lower-contact, more athletic game would also translate better to youth football, which is seeing less contact than ever before, with an increasing amount of organizations and parents forbidding tackling before the teenage years.

How we consume the game will change. Nascent virtual-reality technologies have the potential to alter the viewing experience. The at-home experience will continue to improve, and teams will have to continue to push the envelope to draw fans out of their homes (or wherever we watch the game in the coming decades, whether it's in the easy chair or sitting by a mountain stream with the game beamed into one eye and the other eye enjoying the view).

The Jaguars have the Red Zone Channel running constantly on two screens in the stadium bowl; expect to see more of this around the league.

Another possibility, if stadium wireless bandwidth continues to improve, is something like you see on Southwest Airlines, where you use your device to log in to the stadium's network and have access to multiple channels, including Red Zone, specific camera angles from around the stadium, etc. (If you take a Southwest flight on an NFL Sunday, you can use the airplane's wifi to log into the Red Zone Channel for a nominal fee.)

I also think the key juncture for the business of the sport will be the early part of the next decade. The current collective bargaining agreement expires after the 2020 season. The CBS, Fox, NBC and ESPN contracts expire after the 2021 campaign. DirecTV's contract for NFL Sunday Ticket expires after the 2022 season. How will changing consumer habits affect distribution? What will the NFLPA want out of the next deal? What takes place in 2021 and 2022 will have a seismic impact on the economic foundation of the sport for years -- and perhaps decades -- to follow.

Broncos 2017 ticket resale prices jump; 2nd-highest in the NFL behind Patriots

By Ben Miller

Denver Business Journal

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Tickets to Denver Broncos home games are rising 42 percent over last year, and the Broncos are the second-most expensive ticket in the National Football League.

That's according to secondary ticket marketplace Vivid Seats, which reported that average price for a Bronco ticket is \$302 right now, behind only the New England Patriots at \$380.

That compares with the cheapest tickets in the league: the Cincinnati Bengals at \$86 per game.

According to Vivid Seats, NFL ticket prices for the 2017 season average \$172, an increase of 6 percent year-over-year.

The Broncos open the 2017 NFL preseason in Chicago against the Bears on Aug. 10.

The team opens the regular NFL season with a Monday night game on Sept. 11 in Denver against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Former NFL player Terrance Knighton rants about players' salaries

By Scott Gleeson

USA Today

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Former NFL defensive tackle Terrance Knighton went on an impassioned Twitter rant this weekend to stir up the age-old debate on why NFL players should be making more money than their NBA counterparts.

In reaction to some eye-popping deals this offseason, most recently James Harden extending his contract to \$228 million over six years with the Houston Rockets and Steph Curry signing a \$201 million contract over five years with the Golden State Warriors, Knighton fumed about the disparity.

“Aaron Rodgers should be making more money (than) James Harden,” Knighton tweeted, rolling off a laundry list of NFL stars who should be making more than comparable NBA stars. “Tom Brady should be making more money (than) Steph Curry.”

Rodgers is in the fourth year of a five-year \$110 million salary he signed in 2013; Brady is playing under a two-year deal for \$41 million.

@MisterRoast98

Aaron Rodgers should be making more money then James Harden

@MisterRoast98

Tom Brady should be making more money then Steph Curry

Under the NBA’s new labor deal, players get roughly half of all league revenue before expenses — similar to the much more profitable NFL. But despite making more money overall than NBA players, NFL players have their money spread out with nearly four times as many roster spots. The NFL’s 2011 lockout ended after 132 days, and the league’s collective bargaining agreement with players is set to expire in 2021.

“NFL makes billions a year. Time to get back to that negotiation table,” Knighton tweeted. “And this time we need to stay strong and not budge. Make em Pay!!!”

“And I’m not saying NBA players should make less,” he added. “Just that NFL players should be making more.”

@MisterRoast98

I could name another 30 that should be making more then Harrison Barnes

In his playing career, Knighton played for the Jacksonville Jaguars, Denver Broncos, and Washington Redskins before briefly spending time with the New England Patriots last season.

Ranking NFL secondaries: Seahawks still set standard, surprise team cracks Top 5

By Nate Davis
USA Today
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NFL rosters are essentially set until training camps open later this month. USA TODAY Sports has analyzed each team's depth chart and is ranking units throughout the league.

Today's positional group: Secondaries

1. Seattle Seahawks: The Legion of Boom is still legit. FS Earl Thomas and SS Kam Chancellor remain, arguably, the premier players at their respective positions, while Pro Bowler Richard Sherman continues to be one of the league's elite corners. CB DeShawn Sheard, whose prognosis is currently clouded after he tore a knee ligament in the playoffs, had also become a valuable component of a unit that allowed just 16 TD passes in 2016 even though injuries cost Thomas and Chancellor nine combined games. Third rounders Shaquill Griffin and Delano Hill only deepen a talent pool that also includes veteran Jeremy Lane.

2. Denver Broncos: The No Fly Zone features the game's top cover tandem with Chris Harris Jr. (does anyone defend the slot better?) and Aqib Talib listed first and second, respectively, at cornerback, per ProFootballFocus' 2016 league-wide rankings. Bradley Roby comes off a down year but rounds out a dynamic nickel package. Darian Stewart and hard-hitting T.J. Ward are a solid safety combo though not nearly as formidable as the top-ranked pass defense's corners. And it should be noted the pass rush is a big reason Denver posted league lows in TD passes allowed (13), passer rating (69.7) and completion rate (55.4%).

3. New York Giants: S Landon Collins (125 tackles, 4 sacks, 5 INTs) emerged as an impact player, finishing third in voting for NFL defensive player of the year behind Khalil Mack and Von Miller. The arrival of CB Janoris Jenkins was another significant reason for last year's defensive turnaround. He leads a promising trio that includes Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie and 2016 first rounder Eli Apple. But the Giants will need upgraded play at free safety.

4. Jacksonville Jaguars: Surprised? CB Jalen Ramsey proved worthy of the draft's fifth overall pick last year. Now he'll be joined by free agent arrival A.J. Bouye, whose breakout 2016 season earned him a five-year, \$67.5 million deal. Veteran Barry Church is expected to solidify the back line alongside Tashaun Gipson. Jacksonville's DBs, who anchored the NFL's fifth-ranked pass defense, will only get better with experience and better support from the offense.

5. New England Patriots: Newcomer Stephon Gilmore is expected to make an impact after fetching the highest average salary on the team save QB Tom Brady. Gilmore and Malcolm Butler should be an excellent corner coupling for a team that frequently finds itself defending the pass as it protects the leads built by the Brady-led offense. Devin McCourty is first-rate in coverage — his background at cornerback helps — but fellow safety Patrick Chung is far more vulnerable.

6. Baltimore Ravens: Eric Weddle and Tony Jefferson could be the best safety combo east of Seattle. CB Jimmy Smith, who needs a bounce-back year, is joined by free agent Brandon Carr and first rounder Marlon Humphrey.

7. Minnesota Vikings: S Harrison Smith has all-pro ability if he can remain healthy. CB Trae Waynes needs to elevate his play to the level of fellow former first rounder Xavier Rhodes. Ageless CB Terence Newman remains a key performer.

8. Kansas City Chiefs: Three-time all-pro S Eric Berry is as talented as he is inspirational. CB Marcus Peters could eventually blossom into the NFL's top corner. But there's a significant drop-off beyond those two.

9. Los Angeles Chargers: CB Jason Verrett was a Pro Bowler in 2015, but a knee injury scuttled his 2016 campaign. He'll team with Casey Hayward, who led the NFL with seven picks last season. S Jahleel Addae doesn't get enough credit.

10. Arizona Cardinals: Perennial Pro Bowl CB Patrick Peterson is a stud. S Tyrann Mathieu is still trying to get back to that level nearly two years removed from his latest major knee injury. Rookie Budda Baker could be an instant presence in sub packages.

11. Los Angeles Rams: CB Trumaine Johnson has never been a Pro Bowler even though he's being paid like one. But he is the biggest name in an underrated group that could make a quantum leap under new DC Wade Phillips.

12. Atlanta Falcons: The Super Bowl meltdown underscored fact this is not "Legion of Boom East" ... yet. Still, a nice core that includes second-year S Keanu Neal and third-year CB Jalen Collins should get a boost from CB Desmond Trufant's return.

13. Tennessee Titans: After struggling mightily in 2016, they scored CB Logan Ryan and S Johnathan Cyprien in free agency before drafting CB Adoree' Jackson in the first round. Holdover CB Brice McCain was a nice surprise, but lots of parts to meld here.

14. Miami Dolphins: Veteran Byron Maxwell was a better fit here than in Philadelphia, but he needs help from some of his greener teammates. S Reshad Jones is one of the league's unsung stars but missing 10 games last year didn't help him earn acclaim.

15. Washington Redskins: CB Josh Norman might not have lived up to his enormous contract during his first year in Washington, but he's a reliable starter at minimum. Third rounder Fabian Moreau could be one of the draft's steals. New S D.J. Swearinger is a wild card, while Su'a Cravens will no longer moonlight as a linebacker.

16. Houston Texans: CB Kevin Johnson, a first-round pick two years ago, needs to stay healthy and assume a more prominent role after this aging group lost A.J. Bouye in free agency. Last year's second-ranked pass defense looks shaky at safety.

17. Detroit Lions: A poor pass rush hurt them significantly as Detroit was burned for a 72.7% completion rate and 106.5 passer rating — both worst in the league. But with S Glover Quin and CB Darius Slay among their ranks, the Lions should be much better.

18. Tampa Bay Buccaneers: S J.J. Wilcox joins a tough group anchored by veteran CB Brent Grimes. If last year's first rounder, CB Vernon makes a significant step forward, so could the entire secondary.

19. Oakland Raiders: GM Reggie McKenzie has invested heavily, drafting S Karl Joseph in Round 1 last year after signing veteran CB Sean Smith and S Reggie Nelson. This year's rookies include first-round CB Gareon Conley and second-round DB Obi Melifonwu. But will proof be in 2017 pudding?

20. Cincinnati Bengals: Adam Jones, 33, remains their best corner ... not part of the plan given Dre Kirkpatrick, Darqueze Dennard and William Jackson III are all recent first rounders, though Jackson could make a splash after a chest injury wiped out his rookie season.

21. Carolina Panthers: Miscalculation or not, they definitely missed Josh Norman as the pass defense dropped from 11th to 29th. At least rookie CBs James Bradberry and Daryl Worley got valuable experience.

22. Cleveland Browns: Production must match the potential, but there's promise. CB Joe Haden is tight when he's right ... but it's been a few years. Offseason additions Jabrill Peppers and Calvin Pryor both have first-round pedigree. Keep an eye on CB Jamar Taylor.

23. Pittsburgh Steelers: Last we saw, Tom Brady was smoking them in the AFC Championship Game, though the failure could have been schematic more than a dearth of talent. Still, they're suspect, especially at safety.

24. New York Jets: An entirely new look after a (needed) purge that included the departure of CB Darrelle Revis. Enter S Jamal Adams, who might have as big an impact as anyone from this year's draft. He'll likely be flanked by fellow rookie Marcus Maye. CB Morris Claiborne comes aboard after five mostly disappointing seasons in Dallas.

25. Green Bay Packers: No issue at safety, where Morgan Burnett and Ha Ha Clinton-Dix form a potent one-two punch. But the corners were shredded far too often, most notably by Matt Ryan in the NFC Championship Game. Rookie Kevin King and a clean bill of health should help.

26. Dallas Cowboys: Brandon Carr, Barry Church, Mo Claiborne and J.J. Wilcox, who combined for nearly 2,700 snaps in 2016, left in free agency. That leaves CB Orlando Scandrick, S Byron Jones and quite a few questions amid retreat and rookie arrivals.

27. Chicago Bears: Incoming veteran S Quintin Demps helps ... a little. The Bears haven't held opposing quarterbacks to a collective passer rating less than 93.5 for an entire season since 2013.

28. Indianapolis Colts: Former mainstay Vontae Davis had an awful 2016. But it appears his supporting cast has improved with Round 1 S Malik Hooker and Round 2 CB Quincy Wilson.

29. Buffalo Bills: Micah Hyde was a nice signing, and first-round CB Tre'Davious White projects as a solid starter even if he may not have the ceiling of departed Stephon Gilmore. Still, in the midst of a defensive overhaul, expect significant issues.

30. San Francisco 49ers: Former first rounders Eric Reid and Jimmie Ward haven't justified the hype and now have even more to prove as new DC Robert Saleh becomes the latest hoping to replicate Seattle's scheme.

31. Philadelphia Eagles: S Malcolm Jenkins is steady (and versatile) as they come. But this defense appears exposed at corner and can only hope rookie Sidney Jones (Achilles) is able to contribute this year.

32. New Orleans Saints: After surrendering an NFL single-season record 45 TD passes in 2015, the Saints allowed the most passing yards in the league last year. Round 1 CB Marshon Lattimore is the latest sent into the breach.

STATE YOUR CASE: IS THIS PAT BOWLEN'S TIME TO REACH CANTON?

By Clark Judge
Talk of Fame Network
July 11, 2017

When former Denver running back Terrell Davis is inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame on Aug. 5, expect him to make a push for Broncos' owner Pat Bowlen to join him. Davis has said he's convinced Bowlen will be in Canton one day. He just doesn't know when.

And he's not alone.

Look, we all know Pat Bowlen is qualified for the Hall. He came this close to being one of the two contributor candidates a year ago when voters chose Dallas owner Jerry Jones and former commissioner Paul Tagliabue, and he was there for good reason: He has a remarkable history of success on and off the playing fields.

Under his direction the past 33 years, the Broncos won 343 games (an average of 10.39 per season), have 21 winning seasons, captured 13 division titles, appeared in seven Super Bowls and nine conference championship games and won three NFL titles. So what? So, since Bowlen bought the team in 1984, Denver has the highest winning percentage (.612) of any NFL franchise, passing the San Francisco 49ers after the 2015 season.

"(Pat's) management," said the Cowboys' Jones, "is able to put the team in place to win championships, but not at the cost of a major slide. That's the art of the deal right there. How do you position your team year to year to be in it in and year out, yet at the same time in our system not go completely to the bottom? He has shown us how to do that."

The evidence is everywhere. No other owner in NFL history has more Super Bowl appearances than Bowlen, and Denver's 13 division titles since 1984 rank second only to New England. Moreover, the Broncos' 27 seasons with a .500 or better record in that time easily outdistance the field.

Quick now, name the last team — other than New England — to win back-to-back Super Bowls? If you said the 1997-98 Denver Broncos, go to the head of the class. The Broncos are the only franchise in the past four decades (or since the 1976 Oakland Raiders) to win five consecutive AFC West titles, and they did it on Pat Bowlen's watch (2011-15).

But as head of the league's broadcast committee, Bowlen achieved as much ... if not more ... success, helping to negotiate network rights that in 1993 brought in Fox and NBC as broadcast partners, nearly doubling the TV revenue. Five years later he led negotiations in the NFL's \$18-billion TV deal, the largest single-sport contract in history, and in 2006 Bowlen was ... according to former NBC Sports chairman Dick Ebersol ... "the single major force in the creation of Sunday Night Football."

But that's not all. As a member of nine league committees, he played a key role in the 2006 labor extension that kept the peace in the NFL, advocated for the creation of the "franchise tag" that allows

team to protect key players and was a persuasive figure in the growth of international play and stadium construction throughout the league.

“Pat might have been the only owner who had a major role in every one of those four areas (TV revenue, labor peace, international play and stadium construction),” said Tagliabue. “I worked with over 100 owners. I would put Pat in the top five.

“When we had tough issues, I would tell (former NFL Players Association executive director) Gene Upshaw, ‘Go talk to Pat Bowlen,’ and he’d say, ‘Why Bowlen?’ And I’d say, ‘Because he’s realistic. If he says it, you can take it to the bank that it’s something we, as a league, are willing to stand by.’”

OK, so Pat Bowlen is qualified for selection to the Hall and, in all likelihood, on the contributor committee’s short list when it meets in late August. In fact, some people in and around the Denver area, outraged that Bowlen is not already in Canton, insist that he is ... or should be ... “a lock” as a contributor candidate for 2018.

But I wouldn’t be so sure, and here’s why: There’s only one contributor candidate for 2018, and the competition is keen. Former GM Bobby Beathard, oh-so-close in past years, is one candidate. Former Dallas personnel chief Gil Brandt is another. So is Art McNally, the former head of officiating and the father of instant replay, as well as former GM and league executive George Young, former player and team executive Bucko Kilroy and New England owner Robert Kraft.

But here’s another reason to be cautious: Of the first four contributors enshrined in Canton, two have been owners — Jones and former San Francisco boss Eddie DeBartolo Jr. A third straight year with an owner, as one of Hall of Famer put it, makes the contributor category “look more like the owners’ category, and that wasn’t the idea when it was created.”

That doesn’t mean it can’t ... or won’t ... happen. It just means that Terrell Davis was right. Pat Bowlen will get into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. It may not be this year, but it will be soon. And for all the right reasons.

Ranking NFL linebackers by team: Panthers, Broncos lead the way

By Nate Davis
USA Today
July 11, 2017

NFL rosters are essentially set until training camps open later this month. In the meantime, USA TODAY Sports has analyzed each team's depth chart and is ranking units throughout the league.

Today's positional group: Linebackers

1. Carolina Panthers: Nothing has stopped Luke Kuechly save injuries, which have cost him nine games since 2015. But when he's healthy, the man in the middle of Carolina's D is the current standard bearer at the position. Thomas Davis, 34, continues to do it all on the weak side, while youngster Shaq Thompson began showing why the Panthers spent a surprise first-round pick on him in 2015.

2. Denver Broncos: Super Bowl 50 MVP Von Miller was recently voted the league's premier defensive player by his peers in an NFL Network survey. Managing double-digit sacks in five of his six seasons is a major reason, but Miller can do much more than rush passers. OLB Shane Ray doubled his sack total to eight in his second season. Shaq Barrett is another factor on passing downs, but is dealing with a hip injury. Brandon Marshall holds down one inside job, while Todd Davis has proven he can be a three-down player.

3. Seattle Seahawks: Bobby Wagner and K.J. Wright are every bit as good as Kuechly and Davis in Carolina, combining for nearly 2,400 snaps in 2016 — a testament to their all-around abilities. The team hasn't re-signed Mike Morgan, so coach Pete Carroll will hold one of his beloved competitions to fill the strong side spot. Still, it's not a huge issue given how often Seattle is in nickel.

4. Arizona Cardinals: Perhaps the most unsung group in the league. Chandler Jones and emerging Markus Golden teamed for 23½ sacks last year and will be joined by Jarvis Jones, who can handle dirty work outside. Deone Bucannon — he was at the forefront of making safety/linebacker hybrids chic, earning him the distinctive "\$LB" position in Arizona — is an impact player, but ankle issues are presently a concern. Not to worry, first rounder Haason Reddick, who's shifting inside after starring at defensive end for Temple, could be a mismatch, especially on passing downs. Ever-reliable Karlos Dansby returns after he and Kevin Minter (Bengals) switched sides in free agency.

5. Kansas City Chiefs: Notable names and resumes, yet age and injuries have taken a toll. Since his 22-sack 2014 season, Justin Houston has missed half the team's games with knee issues. Dee Ford and Tamba Hali, 34, would form a great all-around player if their talents could be merged. ILB Derrick Johnson, also 34, has ruptured each Achilles over the last three seasons, the most recent occurring in December. Ramik Wilson deserves more publicity. Overall, could be boom or bust.

6. New England Patriots: Dont'a Hightower anchors a deep and adaptive group that provides numerous schematic options. Former Jet David Harris should be a nice addition to the base package, while Rob Ninkovich and Shea McClellin are featured on passing downs.

7. Tennessee Titans: Linebackers tend to garner glory in Dick LeBeau's defense. Derrick Morgan and Brian Orakpo haven't quite done that, though 19½ combined sacks in 2016 were a step in the right direction. The team needs more from Kevin Dodd after a foot injury limited him as a rookie. Inside, Wesley Woodyard and Avery Williamson are dependable.

8. Jacksonville Jaguars: An exciting group for an ascendant defense. Telvin Smith is rangy on the weak side, while sturdy Paul Posluszny shifts from the middle to the strong side. The X-factor is MLB Myles Jack, whom the Jags are ready to unleash in his second season; he seems recovered from knee problems.

9. Atlanta Falcons: All speed, all the time. Vic Beasley led the NFL with 15½ sacks, but you can still run right at him. Rising star Deion Jones rarely left the field as a rookie. De'Vondre Campbell also started in his first year but should be wary of third-round pick Duke Riley.

10. Houston Texans: Whitney Mercilus is one of the league's best-kept secrets, overshadowed by linemen J.J. Watt and Jadeveon Clowney. But aside from Mercilus, the Texans are thin on the edge. Brian Cushing and Benardrick McKinney remain stout inside but could lose snaps in sub packages to second-round pick Zach Cunningham.

11. Washington Redskins: Ryan Kerrigan remains the rock coming off an 11-sack season. But Trent Murphy's four-game suspension opens up the other outside job to rookie Ryan Anderson and Preston Smith, who had a disappointing sophomore campaign. Zach Brown was a deft free agent acquisition. He'll team with Mason Foster and allow Su'a Cravens to revert to safety.

12. Pittsburgh Steelers: James Harrison, 39, continues to defy Father Time. But Pittsburgh would surely like to see Bud Dupree, who came on toward the end of 2016, and/or rookie first rounder T.J. Watt play well enough to reduce Harrison's snap count. Ryan Shazier got his first Pro Bowl nod in 2016 and will be joined inside by Vince Williams, Lawrence Timmons' replacement.

13. Tampa Bay Buccaneers: Lavonte David would probably get a lot more press if he didn't play in Tampa. And get to know Kwon Alexander's name — his arrow keeps trending upward.

14. Philadelphia Eagles: Jordan Hicks and Nigel Bradham quietly excelled in DC Jim Schwartz's 4-3 front. Mychal Kendricks was a less effective fit.

15. Cincinnati Bengals: Vontaze Burfict can be dominant ... when he keeps his cool. Kevin Minter is a solid addition, but second-year man Nick Vigil must prove he's a better option than reliable Vincent Rey.

16. Los Angeles Chargers: Denzel Perryman, Korey Toomer and Jatavis Brown could form a nice trio if they effectively transition to new DC Gus Bradley's playbook.

17. Chicago Bears: OLB Leonard Floyd's seven-sack rookie season should've gotten more attention. Pernell McPhee and Willie Young round out a nice edge rotation. Jerrell Freeman was Pro Football Focus' top-rated inside linebacker in 2016, but a suspension put an asterisk on his performance. A serious knee injury continues to plague ILB Danny Trevathan.

18. Dallas Cowboys: Sean Lee is the linchpin, and Anthony Hitchens has shown he can get the job done, too. The big mystery is whether Jaylon Smith, who fell to the second round of the 2016 draft after

suffering a devastating knee injury during his final game at Notre Dame, can at least partially recapture the magic that made him a superstar for the Irish.

19. Cleveland Browns: Recent investments in Jamie Collins (four-year, \$50 million contract) and Christian Kirksey (four-year, \$38 million extension) are indicative of the club's feelings. Will new DC Gregg Williams share the enthusiasm?

20. Baltimore Ravens: Terrell Suggs is still a presence and has gotten into better shape. Pro Bowler C.J. Mosley is stalwart inside. But the Ravens could be relying on unproven youngsters to replace Elvis Dumervil and Zach Orr.

21. Los Angeles Rams: Performance didn't match ability last year, but perhaps the conversion to new DC Wade Phillips' 3-4 front will make for a better Hollywood sequel. Connor Barwin should be more effective after struggling as a defensive end in Philadelphia. The bigger question may be Robert Quinn, who had 19 sacks in 2013 but only 19½ since. Athletic Mark Barron and Alec Ogletree thrive in coverage, but must improve against the run.

22. Green Bay Packers: Injuries have slowed Clay Matthews, but he still finds ways to wreck game plans. Nick Perry has become the Pack's best backer, hence a new five-year, \$59 million deal. Jake Ryan needs help inside.

23. Minnesota Vikings: Anthony Barr has been a Pro Bowler the last two seasons, though maybe mostly on reputation in 2016. MLB Eric Kendricks is a force. Retired Chad Greenway will be missed.

24. Buffalo Bills: They're switching schemes (again), with new coach Sean McDermott a 4-3 proponent. Lorenzo Alexander had a breakout 2016, but how will he adapt after thriving on the edge? Reggie Ragland is an unknown after a knee injury ruined his rookie year.

25. Oakland Raiders: They got very little production aside from OLB Bruce Irvin (7 sacks). Coming off an ankle injury, Ben Heeney hopes to surprise inside. Cory James and Jelani Jenkins seem like stopgaps.

26. Miami Dolphins: Part of a 30th-ranked run defense, there's a good reason for the facelift. Kiko Alonso will move to the weak side while free agent Lawrence Timmons mans the middle. Rookie Raekwon McMillan may replace injured Koa Misi.

27. San Francisco 49ers: What used to be a signature position for this franchise moves to a scheme designed to replicate Seattle's. First rounder Reuben Foster is expected to be a force — assuming injuries at Alabama don't hinder him. Former Seahawks Malcolm Smith and Brock Coyle know the D but won't scare anyone. Ahmad Brooks and NaVorro Bowman, who's coming off a second Achilles tear since 2014, may struggle to adapt.

28. New York Giants: B.J. Goodson appears to be the new starter in the middle with Devon Kennard, Jonathan Casillas, Keenan Robinson and J.T. Thomas potentially part of a revolving door on the wings.

29. Indianapolis Colts: An almost unrecognizable group. Gone are Robert Mathis and D'Qwell Jackson. Free agents Jabaal Sheard and John Simon should play outside with Barkevious Mingo hoping for a role. Jon Bostic, Sean Spence, Antonio Morrison and Edwin Jackson will vie for inside duties. If nothing else, the Colts got younger.

30. Detroit Lions: Not an effective area in 2016, which is why new MLB Jarrad Davis was the first-round pick. Tahir Whitehead and Paul Worilow will likely be pushed by another rookie, Jalen Reeves-Maybin.

31. New York Jets: They play a hybrid front but could use far more production from the second level, especially with David Harris out. Jordan Jenkins had a better rookie season than first rounder Darron Lee.

32. New Orleans Saints: Whether it's unfulfilled expectations (Stephone Anthony, Manti Te'o), injuries (Hau'oli Kikaha) or limited upside (Dannell Ellerbe, A.J. Klein, Craig Robertson), nothing much to be excited about here.

Why Baseball Has More Money Power than Football

By Andrew Brandt

MMQB

July 11, 2017

Welcome to Baseball Week. As training camp approaches and baseball takes a break for its mid-summer classic, The MMQB presents a week of stories on the crossover between hardball and football.

I recently wrote about the annual rubbernecking at the size of NBA free-agent contracts and illustrated the stark differences between NFL player contracts from those in pro basketball. Now, during The MMQB's Baseball Week, I examine the same structural differences between NFL contracts (insecure) and MLB contracts (rock-solid), followed by an assessment and prediction regarding Kirk Cousins's contractual situation.

It's Not the Money, It's the Security

To me, the critical marker in valuing a business deal—in sports or elsewhere—is allocation of risk. After the early portion of a typical veteran NFL contract is over (one or two years), the assumption of risk shifts entirely to the player with unsecured, non-guaranteed, often illusory monies (essentially team options). Amounts written on paper can turn to dust with a simple phone call to the player and email to the league terminating the contract.

When I was in the Packers' front office, I remember one time when a loan officer from a bank was desperate to find a recently released player who had defaulted on a large loan. I felt so bad for that loan officer who, in looking for a sympathetic ear, told me, "Well, his contract said he was making \$6.5 million this year!" I had to politely tell him: "Sir, that contract no longer exists." The silence on the other end of the phone was deafening; his career as a loan officer may have been flashing before his eyes.

When an NBA or MLB player signs a veteran contract, the money is real (and often spectacular). Derek Carr's \$125 million sounds very similar to Jrue Holiday's \$126 million or Gordon Hayward's \$128 million, but they are very different. Carr has \$40 million guaranteed at signing, with the rest essentially at the mercy of the Raiders. Holiday and Hayward have the total value of the deal secure at signing. And when a player such as James Harden signs an extension, as he just did for an astounding amount (\$228 million), the extension years are simply added to an existing contract that is already guaranteed. NFL extensions have the entire contract reworked; otherwise, with no future guarantees, there would be no reason for a player to do an extension as he could be cut before it kicks in.

Again, it is not the amount of these NBA and MLB deals that distinguish them from NFL contracts (although they are staggering): rather, it is the security.

Capless in Baseball

While MLB owners do have potential limitations on spending, with luxury taxes at certain upper levels of team spending, they are the only owners in major professional sports without a salary cap.

Without a cap to provide meaningful governors on team spending, disparities in team payrolls are much more stark than in other sports. The chart below illustrates high and low team-spending differences for the most recent (or current) seasons, in millions.

League	High	Low	Disparity
NHL	\$81 (Capitals)	\$48 (Coyotes)	\$33
NBA	\$137 (Heat)	\$79 (Nuggets)	\$58
NFL	\$210 (Eagles)	\$113 (Browns)	\$97
MLB	\$252 (Dodgers)	\$78 (Brewers)	\$174

The MLB team spending disparity is \$77 million more than the next closest sport, the NFL. Also, the difference between the Dodgers and Brewers alone is \$20 million over the league spending average and more money spent than all but eleven MLB teams.

Many ask why MLB owners have been unable to impose their will and implement a cap. Well, it is much harder to negotiate new terms than to continue the existing ones, and the Major League Baseball Players Association, under leaders such as Marvin Miller and Don Fehr, has successfully kept the status quo all these years. Indeed, the MLB's CBA negotiations seem to have gone as smoothly as any of the leagues'; the owners' lack of insistence on a cap is a big reason why. Were MLB owners insistent on imposing a salary cap, I would tell them: Good luck with that.

A final word on this topic: with more and more players facing financial distress later in life, I try to present an informed landscape on the financial security of player contracts, or lack thereof.

Yes, I know that other sports have smaller rosters and more games (MLS players do as well, should they make more than NFL players?), but NFL players, many with largely illusory contracts, face the shortest careers, the greatest injury risk and work for the league that has, by far, the most revenues. But when it comes to security and allocation of risk, NFL players are underserved compared to their peers in other major professional sports.

Brandt's Rant: Captain Kirk's Choice

With next Monday's deadline for franchise-tagged players to sign long-term deals, all eyes turn to the Redskins' consecutive (for now) tagging of quarterback Kirk Cousins. Although I have no insider

knowledge of each side's position, I predict that Cousins will ink a long-term deal—and that it will be for considerably less than many have suggested.

There is a reality to this negotiation beyond the theoretical discussion of how much leverage Cousins has, and the massive future franchise or transition tag amounts ahead, etc. Beyond the theory here is the reality: Cousins can 1) play for \$24 million guaranteed this year with an uncertain future, or 2) agree to a long-term deal with guaranteed money far beyond that amount, albeit not at the level that many—including, perhaps, Cousins and his agents—think he should make. Cousins would indeed have the leverage many suggest if he were a true free agent, but he is not, and the Redskins don't have to "pay retail." Does that mean they won't offer a contract that Cousins would accept, if not be over the moon about? No.

My sense all along has been that the Redskins' negotiating position has shown that they very much like, but do not love Cousins. Last year they did not really negotiate with him; a year later there is still some trepidation, but the tag allows them to negotiate on terms they are comfortable with. They also know that Cousins' preternaturally kind disposition would never allow him to show any rumbles of discontent, another advantage the Redskins have.

We are now beyond the noise this offseason about how Cousins was "unhappy"; about how he was going to be traded to San Francisco (one report as part of a three-way deal involving Tony Romo); about how he has as much leverage as any NFL player ever. We are now in the reality phase, and my sense is that the deadline will spur action on both sides. Perhaps a new contract would even allow Cousins to have another bite at the free agency apple at a relatively young age.

Fantasy will soon turn to reality. Stay tuned.

Broncos, 49ers QBs lead voluntary offensive workouts

By Conor Orr

NFL.com

July 11, 2017

Even with a few weeks left of summer break, some players can't stay away.

While the luster has worn off publicized offseason voluntary workouts, glamorized by the Manning brothers during their spring passing sessions at Duke or then-Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez with his sponsored Jets West workouts in California, some new or prospective starting quarterbacks are trying to carve out some time with top targets before the start of training camp.

According to the Denver Post, both Paxton Lynch and Trevor Siemian will soon begin workouts with an unidentified group of receivers, backs and tight ends on Denver's roster during a camp in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, 49ers quarterback Brian Hoyer began a well-attended three-day camp in Dallas on Monday.

From the Sacramento Bee:

All four of the team's quarterbacks -- Hoyer, Matt Barkley, C.J. Beathard and Nick Mullens -- were on hand for Monday's session, according to the 49ers. Also attending were receivers Victor Bolden Jr., Kendrick Bourne, DeAndre Carter, Marquise Goodwin, Jeremy Kerley, Aldrick Robinson, DeAndre Smelter and Trent Taylor; tight ends Cole Hikutini, George Kittle and Vance McDonald; and running back Kapri Bibbs.

The offseason workouts are admirable considering that this is the end of a player's break before a lengthy haul. For someone like Lynch or Siemian, it makes all the more sense in the world with a training camp battle looming. The same could be said for Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz, who has been in North Dakota with a few Eagles wide receivers this week.

For someone like Hoyer, who wouldn't seem to have much competition for the starting role and would also seem to be a bridge option for coach Kyle Shanahan's quarterback of the future, it's a tremendous bit of professionalism.

Study: Broncos tickets on secondary market are second-most expensive, after Patriots

By Anica Padilla

FOX 31

July 11, 2017

Broncos fans hoping to see a game in 2017 will have to turn over some serious money.

Tickets to games are among the most expensive in the league on the secondary market, according to a study by Vivid Seats.

The average Broncos ticket in 2017 will cost \$302, up 42 percent from last year.

The only team with a higher average ticket price is the New England Patriots, at \$380.

Atlanta Falcons fans might get suffer sticker shock when they see how much it will cost to see their favorite team play this season.

The average ticket price jumped 135 percent over last year to \$259. The team is moving into a new stadium this season.

The study also looked at the most expensive matchups of 2017.

The opener between the Patriots and Kansas City Chiefs is the most expensive game, with an average ticket price of \$692.

Fans will also have to drop some major cash to see the Patriots take on the Falcons. The average price of a ticket for the Oct. 22 game in Foxborough, Massachusetts, in a rematch of Super Bowl LI is \$591.

Demaryius Thomas is feeling young again

By Darin Gnatt
Pro Football Talk
July 11, 2017

The 30th birthday isn't the same kind of omen for wide receivers as it has traditionally been for running backs. But Demaryius Thomas said he's feeling young again.

In an interview/staff meeting with the Broncos' official website, Thomas said he's beyond the hip pain that has bothered him throughout last season, and is ready to keep producing.

"I got longer than 30 [years]," Thomas said. "I think I've got a couple good years [left]. Like I've been saying before, this is the best I've felt my whole career. I haven't had the problems I usually have with my hip, because that was one of the things that held me back.

"I wake up now and I don't feel it, and that's a good sign, because usually I wake up in the morning and I'm like, 'OK, my hip's tight. I've got to loosen it up to get it going.' But now it's totally different."

Even though he wasn't 100 percent last year, he's continued to perform at a high level. He's started 90 straight games for the Broncos, and he's topped 1,000 yards each of the last five seasons.

Of course, the question of who will throw it to him remains open, though he was giving second-year quarterback Paxton Lynch high marks during OTAs and minicamp.

Emmanuel Sanders feeling energized as he enters his eighth season

By Chearean Williams

Pro Football Talk

July 11, 2017

Now that Emmanuel Sanders has hit 30 — has he really been in the league that long? — he has had to make some changes. For starters, the Broncos receiver has eliminated fast food from his diet.

“I was eating bad,” Sanders told Mike Klis of Denver’s 9NEWS while hosting his youth football camp. “If I was hungry I would sometimes go through the McDonald’s line and grab me a 20-piece [Chicken McNuggets]. I would go through Burger King, just fast food because I was ready to eat now.

“But now I’m listening to my body a lot more. There’s something about being able to understand your body. What you can put in your body that gives you a burst of energy, or what you put in your body that makes you go to sleep. That’s what I’m understanding more.”

Sanders enters his eighth season energized, feeling like a rookie all over again — at least physically.

“It’s something about when you hit 30,” Sanders told Klis. “You know who you are and you know where you want to go. You have a sense of direction. My destination is to try to get to the Super Bowl, try to win Super Bowls and try to go for 1,200, 1,300 yards and I understand what it takes to get there. And that’s through hard work and dedication.

“We’ve got this new offense with Mike McCoy. We’re going to be throwing the ball around so my conditioning has to be up and I’ve been working on that.”

Broncos quarterback competition will warm up at passing camp

By Darin Gnatt
Pro Football Talk
July 11, 2017

It's become customary for quarterbacks to arrange passing camps with their receivers before training camp starts, the kind of thing that's usually set up by the starter or some trusted veteran.

But in the absence of either in Denver, the camp may help decide the starter, as they're waiting to see whether Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch ends up with the job.

According to Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post, both quarterbacks will join their receivers, tight ends, and running backs in California for a chance to stay polished.

Mark Sanchez hosted the trip last year, reminiscent of his Jets West days, and Peyton Manning used to take them to Duke to work at former coach David Cutcliffe's place.

But now, there's a competition between the young incumbent Siemian and last year's first-round pick Lynch, and coach Vance Joseph has been in no hurry to declare, saying OTAs and minicamp were simply about learning new coordinator Mike McCoy's system.

"The football message was the things that were learned, as far as the scheme on both sides of the ball, let's not lose that," Joseph said. "Let's come back and start from this point, not go backward."

From that standpoint, the passing camp will be a way for the two quarterbacks to stay polished heading into camp, where the true competition will begin.

Eddie DeBartolo hopes to see George Young in Hall of Fame

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

July 11, 2017

Since the Pro Football Hall of Fame added the contributor category, two owners and two general managers have earned election. The four likely otherwise wouldn't have gotten in.

"Let's face it: It's almost impossible for anybody to compete against let's say Brett Favre or Tom Brady or Joe Montana," former 49ers owner Eddie DeBartolo Jr., a member of the Class of 2016, told Pro Football Talk. "How in the hell could anybody compete against them or athletes of their quality?"

General Managers Bill Polian and Ron Wolf earned election in the Class of 2015, DeBartolo in '16 and Cowboys owner Jerry Jones will enter Canton next month in the Class of '17. Former NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue was nominated in the Class of '17 but did not receive the required 80 percent approval from selectors for induction.

The contributors committee meets next month to decide one nominee for the Class of 2018, with the full body of selectors voting on the candidate the day before the Super Bowl. As Pro Football Talk's Mike Florio pointed out, Broncos owner Pat Bowlen is a strong candidate for the spot. DeBartolo would like to see former Giants general manager George Young get consideration.

Young was the Giants General Manager for 19 seasons, with the team reaching the playoffs eight times, winning the division four times and producing two Super Bowl titles. Before Young was hired in 1979, the Giants had not reached the playoffs since 1963.

"There are so many [good candidates]," DeBartolo said. "I had sort of a kinship to George Young. I think he was a very, very talented man. I didn't know him well. But the Giants were such a tough, good organization, so if I had to pick out one person in management, I probably would pick George Young."

DeBartolo also mentioned Bowlen and former Cowboys player personnel director Gil Brandt.

"It's a difficult decision, because there are so many good candidates who are so deserving," DeBartolo said.

The Class of 2019 will feature two contributor nominees, but the Class of '18 will have only one contributor nominee.