

# Broncos' informal passing camp in L.A. not happening anymore

By Nicki Jhabvala

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There won't be a Broncos passing camp in L.A. this week after all.

Receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders had both said the plan was to organize a throwing session with the Broncos two quarterbacks, Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, and their fellow receivers, tight ends and running backs in advance of training camp.

But a source said that's "not happening anymore."

Last year Mark Sanchez hosted some of his receivers and running backs at Southern California for throwing sessions before the 2016 quarterback competition began in earnest.

In previous years, Peyton Manning had his annual camp in Durham, N.C., with his brother Eli, Duke coach David Cutcliffe and some of their receivers from the Broncos and Giants.

Time is running out for one this year. Broncos rookies report to training camp July 23 and vets follow July 26. Camp kicks off July 27.

# Everyone wants to talk about the Broncos' QBs. But another major battle is brewing.

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Everyone wants to talk about the quarterbacks. With good reason, of course. But Emmanuel Sanders has been through this for two years now, and with every public appearance comes a question — or two or three, maybe four — about the quarterbacks and which one will start in Week 1.

Been there. Heard that.

Sanders, half of the Broncos' star wide receiving duo with Demaryius Thomas, knows the routine. But lost in the quarterback chatter is a brewing battle close to home.

Despite Denver's general offensive struggles the past two seasons, Thomas and Sanders have each mustered more than 1,000 receiving yards in 2015 and 2016, along with at least five receiving touchdowns. They've been labeled 1A and 1B on the receiving depth chart and were self-titled Batman and Robin.

If Thomas and Sanders are co-1s, who is No. 3 among the nine other receivers on the Broncos' roster?

"That's a full room. Between '88' (Thomas), '10' (Sanders), '14' (Cody Latimer) and (Bennie) Fowler, plus those two young kids, that's a full room," coach Vance Joseph said. "It's going to be a tough decision in terms of who makes our football team, but that's the way it should be."

For a year and a half now, the Broncos have boasted a lengthy list of receivers but no clear third receiver, no reliable pass catcher behind their Pro Bowl duo. With a new coaching staff and a new offense, the emphasis this offseason has turned to find speed and power and versatility across the board on offense.

Enter rookies Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie, drafted in the third and fifth rounds, respectively, who boast quickness and smarts but also are raw.

"If you were out there at practice the past couple days, you could see the playmaking ability that they have. They're explosive players," offensive coordinator Mike McCoy said during organized team activities. "The most important thing right now — and it's really the whole entire offense — is put yourself in a position come training camp to win a spot on the football team. Don't worry about anybody else; just take care of your own job."

The arrivals of Henderson and McKenzie and the return of Marlon Brown are boosts to McCoy's offense. But they were also nudges for the two players who again figure to lead the way for the No. 3 spot.

Latimer, who enters the final year of his rookie contract, has totaled 16 catches for 158 yards and one touchdown in his three years in Denver.

Fowler, who suffered an elbow injury in preseason last year, failed to follow his breakout year of 2015. He recorded 11 catches for 145 yards, but miscues — including a critical drop in the end zone at Tennessee — overshadowed his pair of touchdowns and big catches.

For both — and for the seven other receivers — the time is now.

“I know Bennie is hungry. I’ve been watching his Snapchats and Instagram, and he’s working out. Cody’s been working out since the end of the last season,” Sanders said at his annual ProCamp on Tuesday at Northglenn High School. “You see Carlos and Isaiah and all those guys, Jordan (Taylor), every single one of the receivers, Marlon (Brown) — those guys are working. They want it.

“Everybody is just for that opportunity to take advantage of it. I see a whole bunch of hardworking guys who understand that the mind-set is not make the playoffs; the mind-set is to bring a championship to Denver. That’s why I love this wide receiver group.”

# Emmanuel Sanders has a preferred deadline for Broncos' QB battle, too

By Nicki Jhabvala

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The quarterbacks would love to know now. Their receivers would, too.

As the Broncos engage in another quarterback competition between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, predicting an endpoint is an exercise in futility. Head coach Vance Joseph doesn't know. And he's not willing to rush the process just to name a name.

"It could be the first week of camp or it could be the end of preseason," he said. "I'm not sure. When I see a clear separation, I'll call it off."

But as the Broncos learn another new system, knowing the starting quarterback sooner rather than later would undoubtedly benefit all to allow for more practice time and more reps before Week 1 arrives.

At his youth football camp last week, receiver Demaryius Thomas told reporters he hoped to learn of the team's starting quarterback before the Broncos' second preseason game, against the 49ers on Aug. 19.

If fellow receiver Emmanuel Sanders had his way, it'd be much sooner.

"I want it to be done now if it's up to me," he said Tuesday. "But at the end of the day it's not my decision. I know (general manager John) Elway and all those guys are going to make the right decision of what quarterback they want to go with. You can't put a timeline on it. We're not in control of that. We don't call the shots. All we can do is when that pigskin is flying in the air, we catch it and get open and do our job."

Last year the competition between Siemian and veteran Mark Sanchez lasted through three preseason games before former coach Gary Kubiak named Siemian the victor. Although Kubiak warned from the outset he wasn't operating on a set timetable, the late decision had the potential to create a ripple effect across the offense.

"I wouldn't say that it affected it, but is there a difference of saying, 'Oh we got our guy and we can sit up here and work out and we know who's running with the first team and who's running with the second team and yeah we can build chemistry a lot easier?' Yeah," Sanders said. "But at the end of the day, a quarterback competition is a quarterback competition. They're trying to find the right guy for the team. The quarterback is the most important guy on the field so they're going to take their time in making their decision, because it's not only thinking about this season. They're thinking about the future. They're thinking about a lot. It's a lot more than this season that they're playing for and they understand that."

# Mark Schlereth leaves ESPN to be NFL analyst for rival FS1

By Nicki Jhabvala

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Former Broncos offensive lineman and current analyst Mark Schlereth announced Tuesday that he is leaving ESPN to join FS1 as an NFL studio analyst. He will remain a radio host alongside Mike Evans on 104.3 The Fan.

According to The Sporting News, the jump to FS1 was in the works for months as Schlereth is close to Jamie Horowitz, the recently ousted Fox Sports boss who worked with Schlereth at ESPN.

Schlereth was an NFL analyst at ESPN for 16 years and made regular appearances on NFL Live, SportsCenter and Mike & Mike. Although details of his role at FS1 have yet to be announced, he made his debut on "Undisputed" Tuesday morning alongside former teammate Shannon Sharpe and co-host Skip Bayless.

@undisputed

Excited to welcome 3-time Super Bowl champion @markschlereth as FS1's newest NFL Analyst!

# 9 reasons why the Broncos can make the playoffs and win a postseason game

By Mike Klis

9 News

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It must be the quarterback. Quarterback and head coach.

Uncertainty at quarterback and a relatively unknown head coach must explain why there's been multiple shots of disrespect fired from outside sources towards the Denver Broncos this offseason.

Pro Football Focus ranks the Broncos as having the 25th-most talented roster. Veteran scribe Rick Gosselin of the Talk of Fame Network has the Broncos No. 24 in preseason rankings.

I don't get it. The Broncos won the Super Bowl two years ago. Start there. It's a precipitous and rapid plunge to go from No. 1 to No.'s. 24-25 in two years.

The Broncos did slip to 9-7 last year but that still left them tied for the 11th-best record. And the quarterbacks from that 9-7 team – Trevor Siemian, who went 8-6 and 1-1 Paxton Lynch – are back. With valuable game experience.

The Broncos' quarterback situation should be better in 2017 for new coach Vance Joseph than it was in 2016 for Gary Kubiak, not worse.

The biggest problems from that 9-7 team were the offensive line followed by the defensive line. Broncos' general manager John Elway fortified both fronts by signing Ronald Leary, Menelik Watson and Domata Peko from free agency and selecting Garrett Bolles and DeMarcus Walker within the first two rounds of the draft.

Yes, there are concerns. Hall of Fame-bound pass rusher DeMarcus Ware retired and significant injuries were suffered this offseason by Shaq Barrett, Adam Gotsis and Kyle Peko that could deplete Denver's defensive depth.

But there is still reason to believe the Broncos will be a tick better than last year. I believe the team is still a year away from making a serious run at the Super Bowl. But they can get in position for 2018 by going 10-6 this year with a first-round playoff win – especially if 10-6 happens to win the AFC West with a tiebreaker against the Kansas City Chiefs.

Here are 9 reasons why the Broncos could finish 10-6 this year and win a first-round playoff game.

## 1. A healthy head coach

Kubiak was a terrific head coach. Smart. Likeable. A strong leader. A quick decision maker on game day. A champion.

But an underrated reason why the Broncos fell from Super Bowl champs to missing the playoffs was how Kubiak's medical episode following game 5 against Atlanta negatively affected the team.

Kubiak missed one game because of his health scare and the Broncos lost that game. By his own admission at his retirement press conference, Kubiak wasn't the same coach the rest of the season.

Specifically, Kubiak had to back off from much of his offensive game-planning responsibilities, dishing off to offensive coordinator Rick Dennison and quarterbacks coach Greg Knapp.

Kubiak also didn't seem to have the strength to halt his locker room from fracturing.

A team can't be defense versus offense. It must be defense and offense.

Joseph may be exactly what the Broncos' needed. He may lack head coaching and game-day decision-making experience, but this group of players – many whom know what it takes to win it all – need a leader with fresh energy and enthusiasm.

What the 2017 Broncos need that the 2016 Broncos lost is the attitude of team before self. Get that back and the Broncos will be better than 9-7.

## **2. Von and Aqib**

If Von Miller and Aqib Talib stay healthy, the Broncos can't be terrible. No team with Miller and Talib, in other words, can finish worse than 7-9.

Miller is considered the best pure pass rusher in the league. Talib is the NFL's best, big-play cornerback.

Miller, Talib, cornerback Chris Harris and defensive end Derek Wolfe give the Broncos one of the league's best four-man defensive cores.

The defense is also solid at inside linebacker with Brandon Marshall and Todd Davis and safety with T.J. Ward and Darian Stewart.

There is also terrific safety depth thanks to second-year players Justin Simmons and Will Parks.

If Shane Ray, Miller's new pass-rushing partner, improves as much this year as he did last year, the Broncos should be a top 5 defense for a fourth consecutive season.

## **3. Jamaal and the running game**

If Jamaal Charles and C.J. Anderson return healthy, the Broncos can go from getting outrushed 180 to 18 in a 13-10 loss last December in Tennessee, to having one of the best in the league.

Charles can still be one of the NFL's most electric backs. If healthy. Anderson can still be one of the league's toughest-to-tackle backs. If he stays healthy.

And even if it's determined during training camp and the preseason Charles doesn't have it anymore, Anderson did seem strong during the offseason and Devontae Booker appeared much more effective a year removed from his knee injury.

As for De' Angelo Henderson, he wouldn't be the Broncos' first, sixth-round pick to have a big rookie year. Just the first since Mike Anderson in 2000. And second since Terrell Davis in 1995.

#### **4.Splendid Siemian**

There were two games last season when Trevor Siemian wasn't decent.

He was great.

In a game three win at Cincinnati and game 11 loss against Kansas City, Siemian combined for 780 passing yards, 7 touchdowns and 0 interceptions.

Not many quarterbacks in their first year of playing have two games like that.

Let's say Siemian beats out Lynch for a second consecutive season as the Broncos' starting quarterback. Give Siemian an improved offensive line, an improved running game, a spread/combo-route passing system, and a second year of experience and he might be able to make the jump from better-than-expected to very good quarterback this season.

#### **5.Provocative Paxton**

Let's say Elway and Joseph go with Lynch, ready or not. The second-year quarterback can still be effective through the play-calling and coaching of Mike McCoy and Bill Musgrave. If Lynch is throwing on third-and-3 instead of third-and-13, he can get it done.

It's also possible Lynch can make a big play when the play breaks down. He moves well for a big man. He has the arm strength to match his 6-foot-7, 245-pound frame.

Even if he should battle with inconsistency and inaccuracy, Lynch might be able to still pull out a win or two late through sheer athleticism.

#### **6. Leary, Watson and improved offensive line**

The Broncos invested \$11 million in 2017 cash alone in free-agent left guard Ron Leary, even if he was asked to switch to the right side before he could set up his new bank account. But Max Garcia is a good guard, too, and if he feels more comfortable on the left side, Leary is doing what it takes to strengthen the Broncos' front five.

Former Raider Menelik Watson is now the starting right tackle and it was clear by how swiftly the Broncos moved Garrett Bolles up the offseason depth chart that the plan is for their first-round draft pick to start at left tackle.

With center Matt Paradis seemingly recovering nicely from hip surgeries, and high-round draft picks Ty Sambrailo, Michael Schofield and Donald Stephenson in reserve, the Broncos could have their best offensive line since the Tim Tebow season of 2011.

## **7. Rookie speed**

Fifth-round rookie Isaiah McKenzie was a prolific punt and kickoff returner at Georgia and third-round pick Carlos Henderson has a chance to stretch the defense in the passing game and possibly help return kickoffs.

The Broncos already have a terrific receiving duo in Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. If Henderson can bring speed to that No. 3 receiver spot – or McKenzie as Joseph has talked about using him in the slot – the passing game should open the run.

The Broncos also already have two of the league's most powerful legs in kicker Brandon McManus and punter Riley Dixon. If McKenzie becomes the team's best returner since Trindon Holliday in 2013, special teams could become a team strength.

## **8. Raiders regress**

It's not uncommon in any sport for a young team that has surprising success one year to take a step back the next. The reason is youth.

One potential problem for the Raiders is Derek Carr no longer has his offensive coordinator. Bill Musgrave, who helped develop Carr into a \$25 million a year quarterback, is now coaching the Broncos' young passers.

At some point in 2017, running back Marshawn Lynch figures to suffer from the effects of his 1 ½-season layoff.

And look at Jack Del Rio's previous coaching record at Jacksonville. A 12-4 season was followed by 8-8. An 11-5 mark was followed by 5-11.

## **9. Improved run defense**

It wasn't Carr or Matt Ryan or Philip Rivers or Tom Brady or Alex Smith that beat the Broncos last year. It was running backs Latavius Murray, Devontae Freeman, Melvin Gordon, Dion Lewis and Tyreek Hill.

The Broncos should be stronger against the run this year, especially if Gotsis returns healthy from his mid-June knee surgery. Domata Peko was brought in to anchor the middle and Marshall should also rebound as a three-down linebacker after battling hamstring issues last season.

# AFC West Q&A: Who is on the hottest seat in the division?

By Staff

ESPN

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Who is on the hottest seat in the AFC West?

**Jeff Legwold, Denver Broncos reporter:** The hottest seats in this division have been created by ownership decisions. The Raiders and the Chargers will be moving to new stadiums, but the openings of both venues are years away.

The current head coaches and general managers will have to perform well enough to still have their respective jobs when the new digs are ready; plenty of owners see new stadiums as a potential honeymoon, and if things aren't right, they often try to go for the big-splash hires at that point. That could be particularly true for the Raiders, who are due to play at least this season in the city they're leaving.

Any owner who has moved a franchise wants everything to be just right when the new stadium is ready. Such moves are typically years in the making, but "official" arrival isn't complete until the new stadium is done. That's the date to circle on the calendar if you work on the football side of things. Owners don't fire themselves, and there will be plenty of season tickets, suites, broadcast rights and signage that need to be sold ahead of the new arena's debut. There is always pressure to win, but a new stadium has an owner looking hard not only at the bottom line but at how much attention the team has grabbed.

**Adam Teicher, Kansas City Chiefs reporter:** The Chiefs put Alex Smith on notice in April when they not only drafted quarterback Patrick Mahomes II but also traded next year's first-round pick for the chance to do so. The Chiefs have a lot invested in Mahomes, and it's only a matter of time before he's their starting quarterback. That time is unlikely to come this season, however, as the Chiefs seem determined to give Mahomes as much developmental time as he needs. So Smith, 33, has at least another season as the starter, meaning he controls part of this narrative. If he ups his game, the Chiefs will have a difficult time moving him out of the starting spot in 2018. But if Smith doesn't find a way to help Kansas City expand its passing game or take the Chiefs beyond the divisional round of the playoffs, where each of their past two seasons ended, the future of Kansas City's starting spot is more about Mahomes and where he is in his development. The Chiefs would realize a salary-cap savings of \$17 million in 2018, the last year of Smith's contract, if he is released. That's another factor in Mahomes' favor.

**Eric D. Williams, Los Angeles Chargers reporter:** Whenever a team drafts a quarterback in the first round, the expectation is he will be on the field sooner rather than later. And with the Chiefs selecting Texas Tech product Mahomes in the first round this year, Smith's days with that team became numbered. Smith has done a nice job managing head coach Andy Reid's offense, but the Chiefs have just one postseason victory over the past four seasons to show for his effort. Mahomes is a more dynamic talent, with an elite arm. But he still needs seasoning, which means Smith will remain Kansas City's quarterback of the present while the Chiefs groom Mahomes as the quarterback of the future.

**Paul Gutierrez, Oakland Raiders reporter:** Smith has won 11 games in three of his four seasons in Kansas City (eight in the other), and yet he is 1-3 in the playoffs. The No. 1 overall pick of the 2005 draft by the San Francisco 49ers is also 33 and might never shed his "game manager" label, though that is not exactly a bad thing, right? Still, the Chiefs used a first-round pick to select Smith's heir apparent, Mahomes. True, it is hard to see Mahomes supplanting Smith this season, but the most popular guy on a team, at least to fans, is almost always the backup quarterback ... particularly when things are going badly and said backup is a high draft pick. Expectations will be high in Kansas City, especially if the Chiefs continue to own the Raiders. So even if the seat under Smith is not blazing, he should be hearing footsteps. The question, then, is this: How will Smith react?

# Emmanuel Sanders offers advice for rookie wideouts as training camp approaches

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
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In just over two weeks, rookie wide receivers Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie will begin their first Broncos training camp amid sky-high expectations.

The two players, who were drafted in April's 2017 NFL Draft, are expected to help jolt the Broncos offense back into form.

But the adjustment from the collegiate level to the NFL game won't be without its challenges.

That's why two-time Pro Bowler Emmanuel Sanders had some advice to offer the pair of players.

"Just relax," said Sanders from his youth football camp Tuesday. "Obviously, don't go in there thinking that you're going to know it all, because you're not going to know it all. Don't go in there thinking that you're not going to make a mistake, because you're going to make a mistake.

"There's going to be fans out there, but stay focused. Stay locked and loaded on your job, your task at hand, and you'll be fine. Coach Vance [Joseph] used to tell us in OTAs: 'If you're a rookie, just come in and be quiet. Just keep your mouth closed, keep your head down and just work.' That's some advice for sure that I'd give them."

Seven years ago, Sanders began his own NFL journey with the Pittsburgh Steelers at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

The third-round pick also arrived to high expectations, and he contributed in 13 games on both offense and special teams.

His experience that August, however, was a fair bit different than the one that awaits the Broncos' current rookies.

"Back in my day ... I'm talking like I'm old," Sanders said. "Back in my day, we had two-a-days. We had two practices. Right now, we have two-a-days, but you practice in the morning with pads and the afternoon you have a little jog-through.

"When I was a rookie, you practiced with full pads in the morning, you practiced with full pads in the afternoon, and that was strenuous. That was tough. And [I was] playing special teams. And I came in and I was the No. 3 [receiver], so I was going both ways. It was a tough rookie training camp for me, but I prevailed.

"I got through it, and it made me the player I am today."

So, too, will Henderson and McKenzie. And the road will be a little easier should they follow Sanders' advice.

# Ranking NFL defensive linemen by team: Have J.J. Watt's Texans been overtaken?

By Nate Davis  
USA Today  
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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 before providing an overall hierarchy of talent.

Today's positional group: Defensive linemen

1. Los Angeles Chargers: Defensive rookie of the year Joey Bosa finished with 10½ sacks in just 12 games. He and newly minted Melvin Ingram, who's converting from linebacker, could give J.J. Watt and Jadeveon Clowney serious competition as the league's top end tandem. Ex-Seahawk Brandon Mebane's reunion with new DC Gus Bradley means he should be more comfortable in the middle. And if a lighter, healthier Corey Liuget rebounds in a scheme players typically love, this could be a special quartet.
2. Houston Texans: Clowney finally played like a No. 1 overall draft pick after settling in at defensive end. Hard to imagine a more destructive or talented D-line duo if Watt reverts to form after missing the first games of his career in 2016. NT D.J. Reader had a solid rookie season but must now fill Vince Wilfork's huge cleats full time. And depth is a drawback, especially if Watt's back flares after multiple surgeries, or if the injury bug returns for Clowney.
3. Philadelphia Eagles: Underappreciated DE Brandon Graham's numbers hardly foretell the sleepless nights he causes offensive coordinators. Vets Vinny Curry and Chris Long plus first rounder Derek Barnett flesh out a deep group of pass rushers. Very few defensive tackles rank with Fletcher Cox, whose presence will create endless opportunities for recently acquired Timmy Jernigan.
4. New York Giants: DEs Jason Pierre-Paul and Olivier Vernon earned their hefty contracts, though DC Steve Spagnuolo would love one more pass rusher for his beloved NASCAR package. DT Damon "Snacks" Harrison, whose appetite for ball carriers is ravenous, was another wise investment. Rookie DT Dalvin Tomlinson should replace Johnathan Hankins.
5. Minnesota Vikings: Pro Bowl DE Everson Griffen remains the backbone, but watch out for Danielle Hunter on the other side. He had 12 ½ sacks last year with nary a start — that will change in 2017. DT Linval Joseph clogs the middle as well as anyone in the league. Veterans Datone Jones, Brian Robison and Tom Johnson provide stellar depth.
6. Seattle Seahawks: DEs Cliff Avril, Michael Bennett and Frank Clark combined for 26 ½ sacks last year, though Bennett does much of his damage inside. DTs Ahtyba Rubin and Jarran Reed don't make much noise.
7. Los Angeles Rams: Aaron Donald may be the NFL's premier interior lineman. It's worth wondering how he'll be deployed in new DC Wade Phillips' three-man front after dominating on four-man lines, but

don't forget that Bruce Smith and J.J. Watt have starred in this defense. Donald overshadows his linemates but plays alongside good ones, notably Michael Brockers.

8. Carolina Panthers: DEs Julius Peppers, Charles Johnson and Mario Addison form an experienced, sawy trio. DT Kawann Short is a monster, hence his new, five-year, \$80 million pact. But Star Lotulelei will need a better 2017 if he wants to hold off Vernon Butler and eventually cash in himself.

9. New England Patriots: If DE Trey Flowers was flying under the radar after a seven-sack season, he announced his presence by bagging Matt Ryan 2 ½ times in the Super Bowl. Reclamation project Kony Ealy and rookie Derek Rivers have arrived to help Flowers. Lawrence Guy bolsters an interior that was already close to impenetrable with DTs Alan Branch and Malcom Brown.

10. Miami Dolphins: The whole was less than sum of the parts in 2016. But the Fins should generate a lot of heat with DEs Cameron Wake and Andre Branch joined by first rounder Charles Harris and free agent William Hayes. Inside, Ndamukong Suh was his typical dominant self, but he needs help after Miami ranked 30th against the run.

11. Jacksonville Jaguars: Calais Campbell's eight sacks in 2016 were most among NFC interior linemen. The recipient of a four-year, \$60 million deal, he'll get more opportunities on the edge while anchoring the Jags' front with DT Malik Jackson. DE Yannick Ngakoue had eight sacks as a rookie, double the total former first rounder Dante Fowler had in his debut season.

12. Tampa Bay Buccaneers: DT Gerald McCoy should love playing alongside free agent addition Chris Baker. Having two players who can stir so much havoc inside makes the jobs for DEs Robert Ayers, Noah Spence, William Gholston and Jacques Smith, who returns from a major knee injury, far easier.

13. Atlanta Falcons: Lack of depth was a major cause for their Super Bowl collapse as Tom Brady eventually ran them ragged. But the Falcons have shored up their ranks. NT Dontari Poe and DE Jack Crawford signed on, and DE Takk McKinley arrived in the draft. Adrian Clayborn is healed, and Grady Jarrett should only improve. This shouldn't be the Achilles Heel any longer.

14. Green Bay Packers: Despite Letroy Guion's suspension, the Pack has a good thing going. Mike Daniels sets quite a tone with his play and his mouth. Kenny Clark, a first rounder in 2016, is ready for more after a solid rookie year. Newcomer Ricky Jean-Francois offers depth and leadership.

15. Buffalo Bills: Reverting to a four-man front designed to apply pressure should better suit DEs Jerry Hughes and Shaq Lawson, who managed just two sacks in Rex Ryan's defense. Veteran DTs Kyle Williams and Marcell Dareus have proven they'll thrive in any scheme.

16. Pittsburgh Steelers: Losing DE Cam Heyward to a chest injury last season was a severe blow to a young defense. His return should have a dramatic effect, especially if fellow linemen Stephon Tuitt and Javon Hargrave continue their upward trajectory.

17. Cincinnati Bengals: DT Geno Atkins and DE Carlos Dunlap are two of the most disruptive pass rushers in the league, their 17 combined sacks in 2016 hardly indicative of their collective impact. Maybe rookie Jordan Willis can become a needed third play maker.

18. New York Jets: Long perceived as the team's strength, 2016 forced a reassessment. Leonard Williams may now deservedly be the face of this franchise. But Muhammad Wilkerson's play cratered after he cashed in, and issues off the field and in the locker room landed Sheldon Richardson on the trade block.

19. Tennessee Titans: Jurrell Casey has been a terror for years and might finally get more recognition for a team seemingly on the cusp of a breakthrough. DaQuan Jones is steady at the other end, and Karl Klug is excellent off the bench.

20. Chicago Bears: DE Akiem Hicks capably holds down his side. And if NT Eddie Goldman can return to form after an abbreviated 2016 season, the Bears could be all right here.

21. Detroit Lions: A bum ankle fueled a hugely disappointing year for DE Ziggy Ansah (two sacks). Super sub Kerry Hyder's eight sacks were a nice surprise. Still, Detroit's porous pass defense can largely be attributed to its shortcomings up front.

22. Oakland Raiders: DE Khalil Mack was highly deserving of his defensive player of the year selection in 2016. Imagine the impact he'd have with a little help. Mack's teammates combined for 14 sacks, giving the Raiders a league-low 25. Oakland should get a significant boost if DE Mario Edwards stays healthy. And it would be a bonus if Aldon Smith can get reinstated. But the Raiders can't keep getting trampled up the gut.

23. Cleveland Browns: The last time they drafted a defensive end No. 1 (Courtney Brown in 2000), it didn't work out. Far more will be expected from Myles Garrett. DE Emmanuel Ogbah had six sacks as a rookie, and DT Danny Shelton is immovable inside. But everyone will be adjusting to DC Gregg Williams' lofty demands.

24. San Francisco 49ers: An intriguing mystery. The Niners have allocated their top pick in the past three drafts on the D-line: Arik Armstead, DeForest Buckner and Solomon Thomas, the No. 3 overall selection this year. Seahawks star Michael Bennett recently predicted Buckner will be defensive player of the year at some point. For now, this group is in the midst of a philosophical shift under new DC Robert Saleh.

25. New Orleans Saints: The loss of DT Nick Fairley (heart ailment) to an already subpar defense is devastating. Imposing DE Cam Jordan remains, but the Saints badly need 2016 first-round DT Sheldon Rankins to step up.

26. Kansas City Chiefs: DE Chris Jones had a fantastic rookie debut. But with NT Dontari Poe gone, Jones' impact could be diluted.

27. Dallas Cowboys: DC Rod Marinelli counts on his line to create pressure without blitz help. DE DeMarcus Lawrence must do more, and first rounder Taco Charlton will be expected to make an immediate difference. But the setbacks have already started with DT David Irving's four-game suspension. DE Randy Gregory won't be available this year and maybe not again.

28. Baltimore Ravens: NT Brandon Williams is a black hole for opposing runners. But the Ravens will be looking for unproven players to emerge alongside him.

29. Denver Broncos: New NT Domata Peko brings 12 years of NFL experience. Contributions from youngsters Adam Gotsis and DeMarcus Walker would help DE Derek Wolfe.

30. Arizona Cardinals: After making one tackle as a rookie, Robert Nkemdiche, a first-round pick in 2016, has the unenviable task of replacing Calais Campbell for an otherwise pedestrian bunch.

31. Washington Redskins: Rookie Jonathan Allen could be a steal with the 17th pick. But the 'Skins seem perilously thin here.

32. Indianapolis Colts: Like the linebackers, the Indy line has undergone a makeover, with behemoth NT Johnathan Hankins and Margus Hunt signing as free agents, while the draft brought Tarell Basham and Grover Stewart. Now, will it actually help?

# AFC West training camp preview: Key issues, players to watch

By Conor Orr

NFL.com

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It might feel like the dog days of summer for football fans, but the 2017 campaign is rapidly coming down the pike. With training camps opening later this month, Around The NFL's Conor Orr, Kevin Patra and Marc Sessler are examining the key issues for each team in this division-by-division series. Here's the AFC West camp primer:

## Denver Broncos

*Training camp report dates: rookies (July 23) and veterans (July 26).*

*Location: UHealth Training Center in Englewood, Colorado.*

**Most important position battle: Trevor Siemian vs. Paxton Lynch.** Head coach Vance Joseph went from saying he was unsure Lynch was ready to stating his quarterback battle is a 50-50 toss-up. While the smart money is on Siemian, who has the respect of the team's two stud wide receivers and a firm grasp of the playbook, Lynch's measurables and arm strength will be hard to ignore for long. But given that Denver's offensive line (more on this unit just below) is relying on a rookie, a star center coming off dual-hip surgeries and a high-upside free agent, the unit might have a hand in deciding the quarterback competition. If protection is shoddy, the nod might automatically go to Siemian, who is already more proficient against heavy traffic in the pocket.

**Newcomer to watch: HC Vance Joseph.** The 44-year-old is the new face of the Denver Broncos at a time when the organization could really go in one of two directions. Gary Kubiak deservedly won a Super Bowl because of his ability to manage the offensive talent and personnel around him with an even hand. Joseph comes in with a fresh set of eyes on a dominant secondary and Von Miller, one of the best pass rushers in football. This is a unique -- but daunting -- proposition for a first-time NFL head coach. If the defense takes a step forward, the Broncos are still very much in contention despite the West being one of the league's toughest divisions.

**Looming camp question: Can Matt Paradis pick up where he left off?** One of the league's premier centers had surgery on each hip this offseason, but according to KUSA-TV's Mike Klis, he should be on the field participating once camp opens. This is huge for an offensive line that should be much-improved from last season -- even if it came together via free agency and is depending on the rapid development of first-round pick Garrett Bolles. Ronald Leary was an overlooked part of Dallas' O-line success and could end up coming into his own with the Broncos -- something that will relieve the significant weight on Paradis' shoulders. This will not become an air-it-out passing team overnight.

## Kansas City Chiefs

*Training camp report dates: rookies (July 24) and veterans (July 27).*

*Location: Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph, Missouri.*

**Most important position battle: Patrick Mahomes vs. Tyler Bray (for the backup QB job).** The Chiefs are obviously not concerned with Mahomes vs. Alex Smith just yet, but they would definitely love to see Mahomes blow the current second-string quarterback out of the water to save them a roster spot. We've seen teams in the past draft a quarterback-in-waiting only to see that player get beat out by a veteran for the backup spot. The problem then becomes taking up an extra roster space that would otherwise be used to aid the club's special teams coordinator. The Chiefs strategically made Bray the No. 2 heading into OTAs and minicamp with the hope that Mahomes would ascend quickly and by the book. Will that be the case?

**Newcomer to watch: DE Tanoh Kpassagnon.** Watching Kpassagnon's Villanova film is like going back to the early Create-A-Player days on "Madden" when you could pump a player's attributes up to something Herculean and set him loose on the mere mortal public. These players are as fun as anything to watch in training camp because, while raw, they are relying on the God-given gifts that brought them to the NFL in the first place. Typically, this results in some thunderous one-on-one drills. In Kansas City, that means premier matchups with talented tackles like Mitchell Schwartz and Eric Fisher.

**Looming camp question: How different might the Chiefs look toward the end of camp?** The club just changed general managers less than two months before the league's first all-in-one cutdown day where rosters will be trimmed from 90 to 53 in the matter of a few hours. This will be chaotic for just about every GM in the league, but could it be even more so for Kansas City on Sept. 2? One thing working in the Chiefs' favor: They hired from within, promoting co-director of player personnel Brett Veach into the GM spot formerly filled by John Dorsey. Still, this new cutdown process will be an immediate test for the first-time GM.

### **Los Angeles Chargers**

*Training camp report date: rookies and veterans (July 29).*

*Location: Jack Hammett Sports Complex in Costa Mesa, California.*

**Most important position battle:** Mike Williams' pursuit of a starting job. For as many rookie wideouts as we've seen over the past few years come in and change a franchise, we've also seen some high-profile busts. The Chargers have been challenging rookie Mike Williams throughout the offseason -- despite his limitations due to a back injury -- and will continue to do so during training camp. Williams doesn't necessarily have a free-and-clear path into starter's snaps, with Keenan Allen returning to health and Tyrell Williams fresh off a 1,000-yard season. Philip Rivers, like most veteran quarterbacks of his ilk, isn't going to waste time at this point in his career. He's going to want players up to speed.

**Newcomer to watch: DC Gus Bradley.** The steal of the offseason. Bradley might not be out of head coaching for long -- and for the moment, he can raise his profile with the reigning Defensive Rookie of the Year (Joey Bosa) and a slew of recent first- and second-round picks across his defensive line. Training camp gives us the first real glimpse of Bradley's base defense in action, with an eye on how mobile he could end up making Bosa across the front. While Bradley's Jacksonville defenses suffered from the injury bug and a still-growing talent base, it seemed like the creativity and attitude were also missing. Can he find his groove in L.A.?

### **Looming camp question: Does Anthony Lynn continue to capitalize on the Us-vs.-World mentality?**

This is where former Rams head coach Jeff Fisher floundered a year ago. Despite a roster peppered with talent in spots, that team squandered its first season in a new city and failed to establish an identity. Lynn has spent his first few months as a new head coach talking up the Bolts' temporary micro stadium

and lauding the challenge of establishing the organization in Los Angeles. The city is very much up for grabs right now, and it wouldn't be surprising to see a sneaky-talented Chargers team draw a bigger crowd of open-minded fans during practices.

### **Oakland Raiders**

*Training camp report dates: rookies (July 24) and veterans (July 28).*

*Location: Napa Valley Marriott in Napa, California.*

**Most important position battle: Austin Howard vs. Marshall Newhouse.** While losing Menelik Watson doesn't seem like a death sentence for one of the best offensive lines in football, it does leave Oakland with some less-savory options at right tackle for the upcoming season. In camp, we'll need to gear up for the Howard-Newhouse battle with plenty at stake. The Marshawn Lynch experiment will work as well as the right side of the offensive line can kick out defensive ends and blitzing linebackers. General manager Reggie McKenzie is balancing a ton on his shoulders and had to make some difficult financial choices that included letting Watson leave in free agency. Now we'll see if his faith in Newhouse and Howard is well-placed.

**Newcomer to watch: RB Marshawn Lynch.** Lynch topped NFL jersey sales for the month of May. To say his presence in Oakland is a curiosity would be a serious understatement. The Lynch-Oaktown reunion will be one of the most heavily anticipated storylines of the season. Training camp will finally give us something more substantive than the Instagram clips and teasers, which have shown a seemingly ageless Lynch whipping through padless defenders. We are starting to imagine how much better Derek Carr could be with a top-five power running game.

**Looming camp question: How Will Derek Carr look in extended action?** By mid-April, he was confident telling reporters that his broken leg would not impact the remainder of the offseason and preseason. However, we've seen serious injuries like this resurface and re-aggravate before. Carr was clearly the lifeblood of the 2016 Raiders, leaving the entire offense punchless in his absence. The hope is to see him at full speed in late July.

# Sanders: McCoy has Broncos 'throwing the ball around'

By Conor Orr

NFL.com

July 12, 2017

Before the summer break, Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said the battle between Paxton Lynch and Trevor Siemian was still even.

From the perspective of wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders, it doesn't really matter which one takes home the opening day start because both quarterbacks lift his game in a specific way.

"Both of those guys throw catchable passes," Sanders told KUSA-TV in Denver. "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."

While Sanders' interpretation of Siemian's game sounds a little more practical, it was interesting to hear Sanders describe the new version of offensive coordinator Mike McCoy's system.

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

The rest of the piece is worth your time and gets into Sanders' personal diet revolution -- something he thinks will aid in his transition to McCoy's pass-happy offense. Like many players around his age, he stopped falling for the convenience of fast food. While every NFL team employs some type of nutritionist or dietician, it would surprise the general public to see how many elite athletes still indulge in a frequent cheat meal or two (Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie told me a few years back that he still had McDonald's pancakes every morning).

An evolved Sanders and a healthy Demaryius Thomas could go a long way toward bolstering confidence in the Broncos' passing game. Like Sanders himself, it could look quite different in 2017.

# Ankle Injury Catapults Watson From Soccer To The NFL

By Michael Spencer

CBS 4

July 12, 2017

Menelik Watson, who is entering his fourth season in the NFL, joined the Broncos in free agency after spending three seasons with the Oakland Raiders.

One of the primary reasons the Broncos acquired Watson as well as right guard Ronald Leary was to help improve the offense line. The Broncos were 27th out of 32 teams in the NFL in rushing yards and 9th in sacks allowed in 2016.

“Coming here now being one of the older guys on the line, it’s great responsibility, but it’s something I look forward to,” said Watson.

“First things first, we got to change the mindset. When we go out there we need to be the most feared group on the field.”

Watson is entering his fourth season in the NFL, but it is just his sixth season of playing American football. As a kid growing up in England he played soccer until an ankle injury derailed his plans on the pitch.

He then turned to basketball and played at a basketball academy in the Canary Islands before receiving a basketball scholarship to Marist (NY). After two years at Marist he transferred to Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, California and began playing football.

After a year in the JUCO ranks, he transferred to Florida State.

“I had a plan. I had a goal in mind which was just to put myself in a situation where I could take care of my family,” said Watson. “That was the first and foremost thing.”

What Watson lacked in repetition and fundamentals he more than made up for with athleticism and dedication.

“My film study was probably the biggest thing that helped me get over the hump. When I got on the field, I just wanted to dominate everybody. It was an opportunity to express myself.”

A year later, with just 16 games of football to his credit, Watson entered the 2013 NFL Draft and was selected with the 42nd overall pick.

Watson has battled injuries throughout his career, but is hoping for a fresh start in Denver.

“Coming here to Denver, it’s the best place. They have a great staff with (Broncos strength and conditioning coach) Luke Richesson, and the guys there. A great nutrition program, so being able to take my game to a whole another level is what I’m really excited about.”

Watson and the Broncos begin training camp on Thursday, July 27.

# NFL player visits Cal-Mum kids at rehab center

By Sally Santora

The LCN

July 12, 2017

Two Caledonia-Mumford area youth – both football fans – likely won't forget the visit they had July 7. Geordan Mitchell, 13, and Matthew McAleavey, 6, met Quentin Gause, a linebacker with the NFL's Denver Broncos, who stopped in at the Golisano Brain Rehab Center at Unity Hospital in Greece.

Geordan and Matthew are undergoing rehabilitation at the center.

Gause, a Rochester native, is a second-year linebacker with the Broncos who will begin training camp this month. He shared football stories with patients at the center and autographed footballs.

"Matthew loved meeting Quentin Gause. He loves to watch football and play with any type of football. Matthew had a huge smile on his face the whole time," said Jasmine McAleavey, Matthew's mother.

"Quentin was a super nice guy who took time to talk with every patient who came to see him and he asked each one about their story," she said. "He called Matthew a soldier who had pushed through."

Matthew suffered a brain injury when he accidentally fell into his family pool at age 2. He continues to receive rehabilitative therapy at the Golisano Brain Rehabilitation Center.

Darcy Mitchell said her son Geordan also loved meeting with Gause. Geordan played Cal-Mum Youth Football prior to a 2016 automobile accident that left him paralyzed. He underwent another surgery on July 10, three days after Gause's visit.

Gause, a 2012 graduate of Bishop Kearney High School in Rochester, told WHAM-TV that his father taught him about the importance of giving back to his community. He hopes to encourage others to follow his lead.

"There are tons of kids here that have ability, academically or athletically," Gause told the television station, "and I want to be able to encourage those kids to go out and do great things, and then come back to their town and give back."

# Emmanuel Sanders cut out fast food to keep up with Broncos' new offense

By Steve DelVecchio  
LarryBrownSports.com  
July 12, 2017

The Denver Broncos are expected to play much faster on offense with Mike McCoy now calling plays, and Emmanuel Sanders has decided to swear off the chicken McNuggets to make sure he can keep up.

In an interview with Mike Klis of 9News on Monday, Sanders revealed that he has cut fast food out of his diet. While his weight and speed have never been an issue, the 30-year-old said he already feels better.

"I was eating bad. If I was hungry I would sometimes go through the McDonald's line and grab me a 20-piece (chicken McNuggets)," Sanders told Klis. "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 said he has eliminated fast food and other things that made him feel "weird" from his diet. He's now ready to embrace the challenges of playing in a what should be a more pass-happy offense under McCoy.

"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," he added. "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."

Sanders managed to eclipse the 1,000-yard receiving mark last season for the third straight year despite a somewhat uncertain quarterback situation. Things may not be all that different for him in 2017, though there have been indications that one QB in Denver is looking sharp. Either way, Sanders should be more prepared than ever now that he has no interest in hitting the drive-thru.

# Local NFL Stars Give Back In A Big Way

By Larry Blustein

CBS Miami

July 12, 2017

It has often been said that when a South Florida high school football player leaves this area – he will always hold with him a special place for the #305 and #954.

That was more than evident as the NFL offseason draws to close – and the athletes return home to see friends and families before the rush of the season. But while they are down in this area, they find a way to give back to those who gave so much to their respective careers – some from as far back as youth leagues.

Dozens of South Florida brothers, bonded by football and playing it at the highest level, returned to give back this past week.

Whether it was one time Killian and University of Miami star running back Lamar Miller, who was part of the Backpack Giveaway; Northwestern and the University of Miami's Sean Spence, who hosted a camp; former Norland Viking Xavier Rhodes, NMB products E.J. Biggers, Johnathan Cyprien & Kemal Ishmael or Monsignor Pace product, Kayvon Webster, who made those promises come true when many left after high school.

"This is what makes it all worth everything," said Webster, who won the 2016 Super Bowl with the Broncos. "We were here not so long ago, in the places of these youngsters, so yes, dreams do come true."

Webster didn't mince words when he and his agent, Drew Rosenhaus, both spoke at his Betty T. Ferguson Sports Complex event in Northwest Miami-Dade. Both he and Rosenhaus laid down the truth of what it takes to make it in the NFL.

"You need to follow a path like Kayvon has – using athletics and academics to pay off for you," Rosenhaus said. "He is a success – in every standpoint of his life – he is making it all come together."

With former high school teammates and coaches on hand to help him get this event off the ground, kids of all ages learned and had fun.

Webster grew up in Miami, and after graduating Pace, he went to attend the University of South Florida. In 2013, he was drafted in the 3rd Round by the Denver Broncos.

In addition to Rhodes (Minnesota Vikings), others that came out to join in included former University of Miami standout Ray-Ray Armstrong (San Francisco 49ers), Will Parks (Denver Broncos), Demarcus VanDyke and Indianapolis Colts' rookie linebacker Anthony Walker to name a few.

Sean Spence, current Indianapolis Colts Linebacker, is hosting a Free Youth Football camp in his hometown of North Miami Beach on Saturday July 8th. Sean grew up in South Florida and attended Miami Northwestern High School and the University of Miami before being drafted to the Pittsburgh Steelers in 2012 in the 3rd round.

Rosenhaus also joined Spence on Saturday at his Northwestern Camp where he had NFL players and UM alum, including, Allen Bailey (Chiefs), Travis Benjamin (Chargers), Davonte David (Buccaneers), Denzel Perryman (Chargers) and more.

### **NMB STARS GIVE BACK**

Once again, Rosenhaus and his tremendous team, including one-time Southridge, University of Miami and NFL standout Robert Bailey, came out to North Miami Beach, mix with a few clients and have the opportunity to talk with Chargers head coach Jeff Bertani.

But this day was about NMB graduates and NFL standouts E.J. Biggers, Johnathan Cyprien & Kemal Ishmael, who all gave back to the Chargers and the City of North Miami Beach.

Biggers (Western Michigan), Cyprien (FIU) and Ishmael (UCF) had dozens of youngsters show up and show out at the camp.

“This is great to give back,” said Biggers. “These kids will always remember it – much like we did.”

Cyprien was also the center of attention – as Bertani and his 2017 team helped to work the camp. This is important for someone who has always wanted to give back to the community.

“Hosting something like this with great guys, Coach Bertani and families is what NMB football has always been about,” Cyprien said. “Today is no different than when we left. That’s a culture for these athletes to follow and enhance.”

Catch the South Florida High Sports Radio Show each Monday night (9-10) on WQAM (560AM). For the past 10 years, the players and coaches who are making the headlines, join the program. You will learn a lot!

# Emmanuel Sanders would prefer an earlier quarterback call in Denver

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
July 12, 2017

When the Broncos held a competition for the starting quarterback job last year, they didn't tab Trevor Siemian as the guy until they were through three preseason games.

The Broncos are holding another competition for the gig this year between Siemian and Paxton Lynch. One player who knows he'll be part of the starting offense would opt for a faster timeline this time around.

Wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders said he wants "it to be done now if it's up to me" and referenced last season while discussing the benefits of more time for the first team to gel leading into the regular season.

"I wouldn't say that it affected it, but is there a difference of saying, 'Oh we got our guy and we can sit up here and work out and we know who's running with the first team and who's running with the second team and yeah we can build chemistry a lot easier?' Yeah," Sanders said, via the Denver Post. "But at the end of the day, a quarterback competition is a quarterback competition. They're trying to find the right guy for the team. The quarterback is the most important guy on the field so they're going to take their time in making their decision, because it's not only thinking about this season. They're thinking about the future. They're thinking about a lot. It's a lot more than this season that they're playing for and they understand that."

Sanders may have to wait a bit longer than he'd like. Broncos coach Vance Joseph said at the end of offseason work that the "true evaluation" of the quarterbacks would come in training camp and that he'll wait to see "clear separation" between the players before making the call for Week One.

# Report: Broncos won't hold pre-camp passing workouts

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
July 12, 2017

Pre-camp workouts for quarterbacks and their receivers have become commonplace around the NFL in recent years and the Broncos have been part of the trend.

Peyton Manning organized workouts at Duke University while he was still with the team and Mark Sanchez did the same in California last year, although that extra work didn't help Sanchez make the team's 53-man roster come September. Wideouts Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders said that they would be back in California with Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch again this month, but those plans have reportedly been scrapped.

Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post reports that the passing camp is "not happening anymore."

That will leave Siemian and Lynch to resume their competition for the starting job at the team's first training camp practice on June 27. The lack of the pre-training camp probably won't alter coach Vance Joseph's timeline for making a call, although it will mean a bit less time for everyone to work together and develop the chemistry Sanders is hoping to see in the passing game.