

# Vance Joseph addresses T.J. Ward's status after preseason game vs. Arizona

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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The Broncos closed out their preseason undefeated, watched an undrafted rookie put on a show at quarterback and found comfort in a defense that remains deep and disruptive.

But the biggest storyline, the biggest news coming out of Denver on Thursday — and all week, really — was about T.J. Ward, the three-time Pro Bowl safety who has been thrust into trade discussions and left a locker room in shock.

“Nothing on that,” coach Vance Joseph said when asked about Ward following the team’s win Thursday. “Again, it is going to be a long weekend of a lot of transactions you know, so I cannot speak to that. At the end of the day, we want the best guys for our football team, and if he is one of them, he will be.”

Two days earlier, Joseph said he hadn’t heard about any trade rumors involving Ward and that, “he’s one of our better players, so I would be surprised if he was, but I have not heard that.”

Ward was among 29 Broncos who did not play against the Cardinals. Because of a hamstring injury, he did not play the enter preseason and only recently resumed on-field activity. The hope of his teammates, still, is that news isn’t true.

“I spent the last three years with him. It can’t be real,” Von Miller said. “He’s such an impactful player on and off the football field, in and out of the locker room for the Denver Broncos. It’s just the nature of the National Football League. You can only control what you can control ... I’m with him. I’m with him 100 percent. I don’t think he should be going. That’s a cornerstone of the ‘No Fly Zone.’”

But the possibility couldn’t longer be ignored.

“It was shocking just to come out of nowhere toward the end of camp,” safety Will Parks said. “But at the end of the day it’s a business. He’s been through it once already, so I’m pretty sure he knows how to handle it.”

The Broncos have made and fielded trade calls on Ward, who is entering the final year of his contract and due \$4.5 million in salary. The team will eat about \$1.3 million should they deal or release him, but the impetus for moving on would be less about the money and more about the future.

Behind Ward is second-year safety Justin Simmons, a third-round pick out of Boston College who was drafted on his athleticism, smarts and potential. In his rookie season, Simmons played 13 games (three starts) and recorded 24 tackles, one sack, two interceptions, four pass-breakups and that blocked extra-point that led to the Broncos’ game-winner at New Orleans.

Where Ward is hard-hitting safety who spent time at weakside linebacker in subpackages, Simmons is a lankier (6-foot-2) safety who can drop back in coverage more.

Ward felt like he turned in his best season in 2016, when he amassed 87 total tackles, one sack, one interception, eight pass-breakups, three forced fumbles and two recoveries. But perhaps indisputable were the intangibles that could be difficult to replace.

He's a leader of the defense, a spark plug for the team and a mentor to Simmons and Parks, the two rising stars behind him.

"The easier question would be, 'What hasn't he done?' That'd be a shorter response," Simmons said. "T.J. has been there for me since Day 1. Coming into last year, he was the first person to text me on draft night. He's just been there for me since Day 1. Like I said, that's why when I heard about this whole trade thing coming out, it's crazy to kind of hear about it. I mean, you're talking about messing with the chemistry of the defense and the chemistry he has with so many guys in this locker room, and so we'll see what happens. It's crazy."

# After rough start, Kyle Sloter finds his rhythm — and the end zone — in Broncos' preseason finale

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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A lot changed for Kyle Sloter in 10 months since his last start on a football field. He got a college degree. He was offered a job as a financial adviser. He went undrafted, signed with the Broncos shortly after, then watched his life turned into the American dream, as a third-string quarterback fortuitously positioned to vie for a backup job in the NFL.

The “nobody” was suddenly on the brink of being somebody and already had a celebrity following.

Thursday evening, he had one more chance to make his dream a lasting reality as the Broncos hosted the Cardinals in their preseason finale — a game meaningless for its score but significant for Sloter and more than two dozen others clawing for roster spots.

“Every job is on the line, obviously,” coach Vance Joseph said. “These guys are playing for their NFL careers.”

And although Sloter's entrance couldn't have been much worse, he found his rhythm — and the end zone — to carry the Broncos to a 30-2 victory and give his coaches plenty of reasons to consider him for a roster spot.

He finished 15-of-23 in passing for 220 yards, one touchdown, two sacks and a 110.8 passer rating.

In his opening drive, Sloter went 0-for-1 and was sacked in the end zone for a safety as Cardinals linebacker Alex Bazzie blew by right tackle Donald Stephenson for the takedown.

A dropped pass by Jordan Taylor forced the Broncos to settle for a 52-yard field goal on the subsequent possession, and then Sloter, slow to get rid of the ball, was sacked again, inches away from taking another safety.

“It was a rough start. I got to be better there, no excuses on that,” Sloter said. “But it's a learning experience and I'm going to hopefully continue to get better.

“Every player has play calls that work in their mind more than others. It's ones that you've run in practice a thousand times where you just want to see it go into their hands. I think it was just a matter of doing that and things got turned around pretty quickly. I got my confidence and we were able to get it rolling.”

After some words of encouragement and a pat on the helmet by Joseph, Sloter regrouped and connected with Anthony Nash for a deep completion, then handed it off for a 27-yard run by Stevan Ridley. Ridley capped the drive by plowing through a few Cardinals defenders for a 3-yard touchdown.

“He had a slow start tonight with the safety and taking a sack backed up, but he came out of it and had three 80-yard scoring drives. So he’s been impressive,” Joseph said. “He’s a young, poised quarterback. He’s very, very intelligent. So I’ve been impressed with Kyle.”

The good got better for Slotter. He led the Broncos to two more scores in the second half, including a 13-play, 96-yard drive in the fourth. Slotter threaded the needle for a 21-yard touchdown pass to tight end Steven Scheu for the final score and further make his case as a backup, at least in the short-term.

Joseph said the team planned to get through the preseason before visiting their options in temporarily replacing injured Paxton Lynch. They could keep Slotter on through Week 1 to get a vested veteran at a lower rate (veterans signed during the season are guaranteed only 25 percent of their salary, whereas those signed for Week 1 are guaranteed the full salary). Or they may seek outside help immediately when the list of free agents swells to some 1,100 players Saturday afternoon.

As the Broncos mull the options at quarterback, however, they must also mull some difficult decisions across the roster. They have a long list of valuable receivers. They finally have help on the offensive line, and plenty more at running back. And they have depth to envy in the defensive backfield, where both veterans and rookies alike may be gone.

The top play Thursday came from that group. Undrafted rookie Dymonte Thomas picked off a pass by Trevor Knight and ran it back 58 yards for the score to give the Broncos a 17-2 lead late in the second quarter. Denver likely won’t have room for him on the 53-man roster. But he might have a shot at the 10-man practice squad.

Cornerback Brendan Langley, however, unofficially joined the Baby No Fly Zone after his performance, when he displayed the speed and power that prompted the Broncos to spend a third-round draft pick on him in May. He was described then as “raw,” as an inexperienced project with the potential to be a great. He showed why with four total tackles and a pass breakup in the win.

The totality of OTAs, and minicamp and especially preseason are weighted. But one good day can sway the judges. And one bad day can end dreams.

“That’s not up to me. I put my best out there and whatever happens I can leave — or stay — with my head high,” Slotter said. “I don’t have any regrets about anything. I felt like I was prepared. I took my lumps here and there, but for the most part I just tried to rebound from those and come back stronger and get a little bit better each day.... I hope I’m here in Denver and things work out.”

# Broncos cornerbacks make cases for roles on roster in preseason finale

By Nick Kosmider  
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Chris Lewis-Harris broke on the pass from Cardinals quarterback Blaine Gabbert on the first drive of Thursday's preseason finale and knocked the ball away, forcing a punt.

On the Broncos' next defensive possession, Lorenzo Doss matched strides down the right sideline with receiver Aaron Dobson, adjusted on an underthrown ball from Gabbert and knocked the pass away, nearly intercepting it.

Rookie Brendan Langley, not to be outdone, closed fast on a third-down play later in the drive and brought down Chad Williams before he could reach the first-down marker, ending another scoreless Arizona series.

Three Broncos cornerbacks entered Thursday's game battling for the fourth spot at the position behind Chris Harris, Aqib Talib and Bradley Roby — and potentially a fifth spot after that. Each made a play within the first four minutes of the game that raised eyebrows and made a case.

Now they wait as the Broncos work to solidify their 53-man roster by Saturday afternoon.

"You see how they played tonight," Langley said of his fellow cornerbacks. "They played just as good if not better than me. It's real tight. It's up to the coaches at this point, but I think everybody's done their part. I don't think it's going to be easy for the coaches at all."

More than two dozen Broncos players, mostly starters and key reserves, participated in a light workout at Sports Authority Field at Mile High three hours before kickoff. That was the extent of their physical exertion for the night. The game was about players further down the roster with something to prove, and the tight competition between the cornerbacks highlighted the last shred of preseason drama.

The Broncos once again displayed depth on defense. The only score for the Cardinals through the first three quarters was registered by its defense when linebacker Alex Bazzie sacked Kyle Slotter in the end zone on the Broncos' first drive.

Denver held the 49ers scoreless in the first half of the second preseason game. And the only touchdown Green Bay scored in the first half last week came after it had returned a Trevor Siemian interception to the Broncos' 2-yard line.

"I've been very pleased with our defense," coach Vance Joseph said. "We've added some wrinkles to our defense and it's been the same dominating force, so that's a good thing."

It was the Broncos secondary that shined brightest Thursday with real jobs on the line, and that went further than undrafted rookie safety Dymonte Thomas' 58-yard interception return for a touchdown in

the second quarter. Thomas, one of a number of players in the secondary battling for a potential spot on the roster or practice squad, said he had 400 texts after he returned to his locker following the game.

Langley added two more impressive tackles later in the first half following his early stop, plays that displayed whip-quick closing speed and sound tackling discipline. His big hits ended drives.

Langley is a third-round pick out of Lamar University who also has worked in the return game. His natural talent has intrigued the Broncos' staff, and his sound playmaking Thursday demonstrated the growth he's made in reading plays since training camp began in July.

"It's really just been my game overall," Langley said. "My press man, I'm learning how to read zones, and that all goes to (defensive backs coach Marcus) Robertson, Aqib (Talib), Chris (Harris), (Bradley) Roby and all them. Those guys help me out every day, fine-tuning stuff and things like that. Even stuff like backpedaling and getting my mechanics right."

Langley has all but solidified his spot on the roster, and he continued Thursday to look like a player who could make a real impact for the Broncos this season.

Who else will join him?

"Every job is on the line," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said at halftime.

The Broncos who played Thursday night will soon find out if they made enough of their last chance to earn one of them.

# Broncos finish 2017 preseason with an undefeated record

By Nick Kosmider & Nicki Jhabvala  
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The 30-2 victory over the Cardinals on Thursday gave the Broncos their fourth undefeated preseason in team history and the first since 2005. The Broncos finished 13-3 that season.

The Broncos were also perfect in the preseason in 2000 (11-5) and 1982 (2-7).

“That’s exciting,” first-year coach Vance Joseph said. “Winning is winning. It doesn’t count, but for our football team to play well four straight weeks and win the football game, that counts. Obviously, next week is the real deal. That should be exciting. I’m looking forward to that.”

This was the ninth time the Broncos had won their first three preseason games, and all but one of those teams finished the regular season with a winning record.

The Broncos have now turned their attention fully to Week 1, a Monday night matchup at home against the Los Angeles Chargers.

“It’s time to go out there and make some plays for real,” safety Will Parks said. “One of the best quarterbacks in the NFL (Phillip Rivers), so go out there and make a name for yourself.”

**Perfect McManus.** Broncos kicker Brandon McManus capped a stellar preseason by making all three of his field-goal attempts and all three of his point-after attempts in Denver’s victory over the Cardinals.

McManus, who is entering his fourth season with the Broncos, finished the four-game exhibition schedule with a perfect 10-of-10 mark on field-goal attempts. He also made all 11 of his PATs.

“He’s missed one field goal the entire summer,” Joseph said, referring to a miss that occurred in practice. “He’s definitely a weapon for us. We get to the 40-yard line, we’re going to give him a shot. Obviously, he’s been 100 percent the entire preseason. He’s definitely a big part of our scoring machine. So I’ve been happy with him. I’ve been impressed with his leadership also.”

**Support for Ward.** Broncos players have been vocal in their desire to keep veteran safety T.J. Ward.

The Broncos have made and received calls this week in an attempt to gauge Ward’s trade value.

Linebacker Brandon Marshall is among those who have made it clear he believes Ward should remain with the Broncos for the final year on his contract, which would pay him \$4.5 million for the 2017 season.

“Letting go of TJ would b a mistake,” Marshall wrote on Twitter on Thursday. “With all the plays he’s made and leadership he’s brought. He deserves to play out his contract.”

**@BMarshh54**

**Letting go of TJ would b a mistake. With all the plays he's made and leadership he's brought. He deserves to at least play out his contract.**

**3:57 PM - Aug 31, 2017**

**121 Replies 751 Retweets 2,100 likes**

**Footnotes.** The Broncos' starting special-teamers were introduced before Thursday's game. ... Captains were Connor McGovern, Zaire Anderson, Jordan Taylor, Shelby Harris and Riley Dixon. ... Defensive end Adam Gotsis suffered a "minor, minor" shoulder sprain, Joseph said.

# Sloter rallies against Unknown QB as Broncos defeat Arizona, 30-2

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Two hours after the preseason game had ended, the hero finally left the victorious locker room.

Kyle Sloter wore a baseball cap, blue plaid, long-sleeve shirt and a smile from here to Greeley when he turned the corner and received a hearty ovation from 15 of his family and friends. His dad was the first to give him a big hug.

What's not to love about Kyle Sloter?

"Very cool story," Broncos starting quarterback Trevor Siemian said of Sloter. "He's a real bright guy. He's been unbelievable, really. He doesn't have a lot of quarterback history and what he's done has been unbelievable. I'm happy for him."

The Broncos' braintrust may spoil this incredible preseason story by waiving the undrafted rookie from Northern Colorado this weekend and giving their backup quarterback position to someone who has yet to step foot in the Denver locker room this year.

But Sloter has earned a happy ending.

Sloter has far exceeded expectations. And after a slow start in preseason game No. 4 against the Arizona Cardinals on Thursday night, Sloter played extremely well in leading the Broncos to a 30-2 victory.

Can he now hack being one play away from replacing Siemian in the Broncos' season opener September 11 against the Los Angeles Chargers?

"That's not up to me," Sloter said in a large media gathering in front of the locker room's white board, a place once reserved for Peyton Manning following preseason games. "I've put my best out there, whatever happens I can leave or stay with my head high. I don't have any regrets about anything. I felt like I was prepared. I took my lumps here and there but but for the most part, I just tried to rebound from those and come back stronger and get a little bit better every day."

One by one, his teammates praised the kid's hard-to-believe ability to play NFL-caliber quarterback, even if at the backup level. This is a former backup receiver at Southern Miss and Northern Colorado before he finally got his chance by default to play quarterback his senior year for the Bears.

He completed 62.1 percent of his passes while throwing for 29 touchdowns against 10 interceptions. A late-blooming natural is what he is.

"I think Kyle has all the potential in the world to play wherever he gets the opportunity," said Broncos' tight end Steven Scheu, who caught a 21-yard touchdown pass from Sloter in the fourth quarter and played with him all offseason, training camp and the preseason with the third-string offense. "As far as

this team goes, we have a lot of good quarterbacks so it's hard to say what his role will be. But he definitely has a lot of talent, and he keeps getting better. His opportunity will come eventually."

But there were also a couple plays of inexperience that will make it a tough call between Slotter or the Unnamed Quarterback as the backup to Trevor Siemian for the opener against the Chargers.

"Well, we'll see," said Broncos head coach Vance Joseph. "Those calls are going to happen tomorrow, tomorrow and Saturday, I should say. He's played very well. He had a slow start tonight with the safety and taking a sack backed up, but he came out of it and had three, 80-yard scoring drives. He's impressive. He's a young, poised quarterback. He's very intelligent. I've been impressed with Kyle."

Before a crowd of 60,136 (75,347 paid) at eventually-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High, Joseph finished his first preseason as head coach with a 4-0 record.

"Winning is winning," Joseph said. "It doesn't count, but for our football team to play well four straight weeks and win the football game, that counts. Obviously, next week is the real deal. That should be exciting. I'm looking forward to that."

If the Broncos do pick up a quarterback off the waiver wire, Slotter may still be on their first, 53-man roster by 2 p.m. Saturday. The Broncos may not know until Sunday whether they are awarded any claims.

Slotter was magnificent later in the first half, completing back-to-back, 32-yard completions that ignited a six-play, 98-yard touchdown drive.

For the final play, Slotter hurried his offense up to the line and got a quick handoff to running back Stevan Ridley, who shouldered his way in easily for a 3-yard touchdown.

A few plays later, Broncos safety Dymonte Thomas, an undrafted rookie from Michigan, picked off an overthrown pass across the middle by Arizona quarterback Trevor Knight and sprinted back up the gut the other way for a 58-yard touchdown return.

Slotter was then cool and impressive while passing the Broncos into field goal position in the final 1:14. Brandon McManus made the 44-yard field goal as the half ended.

Slotter iced the game with a 21-yard touchdown pass to Scheu on a beautifully thrown seam pass.

"I can't say enough about how great Kyle has been playing," Scheu said. "Stepping in there, really maturing a lot and doing it very, very quickly. It's been impressive to watch him and develop into the player he's becoming this offseason. He's making the right reads, making the right checks. He's doing real well."

Slotter was 15 of 23 for an impressive 220 yards and a touchdown. In four preseason games, he was 31 of 43 for 413 yards, 3 touchdowns and zero interceptions for a remarkable 125.4 passer rating. Yes, he played against mostly third teamers but it would be difficult to put up those kind of numbers in the backyard.

The first quarter ended with the Broncos up by the unusual score of 3-2. Arizona picked up a 2-point safety when linebacker Alex Bazzie sacked Slotter in the end zone.

Slotter was attempting to throw a middle screen but running back De'Angelo Henderson was caught up among a scrum of humanity. Slotter had plenty of time to ditch the ball but he held on too long.

"It was a rough start, I've got to be better there," Slotter said. "There's no excuse on that. But it's a learning experience and hopefully I'll continue to get better."

It was the type of play where a quarterback with more experience would have avoided either the sack, or safety, or both. Slotter took another sack deep in his own territory in the second quarter when again he had time to throw the ball away.

Those were moments of indecision that could convince Broncos general manager John Elway he needs to pick up a quarterback with some NFL experience to replace the injured Paxton Lynch and back up Siemian against the Chargers in 12 days.

Slotter did complete passes to Jeff Heurman and Kalif Raymond during a drive late in the first quarter. Another back-shoulder pass to Jordan Taylor was dropped.

McManus, who was the last player to run out of the tunnel during pregame introductions, finished the drive with a 52-yard field goal that put Denver ahead, 3-2.

McManus, punter Riley Dixon and long snapper Casey Kreiter were the only Broncos' first-teamers who played in the game. McManus is 10 of 10 in field goals during the preseason, including 7 of 7 from at least 40 yards.

"Brandon has missed one field goal the entire summer so he's definitely a weapon for us," Joseph said. "I have been happy with him with his leadership, also."

Joseph sat nearly 30 players for the final preseason game.

During the Broncos' offensive touchdown drive, Slotter was backed up to his own 2-yard line when he hit Taylor across the middle on a slant pass for 32 yards. Slotter then scrambled left and threw across his body downfield to Anthony Nash for another 32-yard gain.

Ridley then burst through a huge hole along the right side for a 27-yard gain that set up his touchdown on the next play.

# Broncos notes: Kyle Sloter, T.J. Ward updates

By Mike Klis

9 News

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There is one scenario where Kyle Sloter can complete one of the Denver Broncos' best preseason stories in years and make the season-opening roster.

Let's begin with the Broncos' preferred option in replacing Paxton Lynch, who is expected to miss the first two to four games of the regular season because of a banged up right shoulder. The preferred option would be to sign a quarterback with NFL experience -- but less than four years of service time -- who will be cut from another team's roster come 2 p.m. Saturday.

Why less than four years of service time? Because players with four years of service are considered "vested veterans." As such, these players are guaranteed a full year's salary if they are on week 1 rosters -- even if they are subsequently cut after that game or a few games into the season. That just doesn't make business sense for the long-term good of a franchise.

But let's say the pool of quarterbacks with experience, but less than four years of experience, who become available Saturday is extremely shallow. The Broncos may realize their best bet is a backup quarterback who is also a vested vet.

In this case, the Broncos could keep Sloter as their backup quarterback to Trevor Siemian only for their week 1 game against the Los Angeles Chargers. And then sign a vested veteran quarterback for week 2, when his salary would only have to be paid out on a weekly basis, rather than for a full season.

Sloter is an undrafted rookie from Northern Colorado who has exceeded all expectations so far by first, operating the third-team offense during offseason and training camp practices, and then by performing well in three preseason games. He has posted a 140.2 passer rating entering his start tonight in the Broncos' final preseason game against the Arizona Cardinals.

Still, the Broncos are hesitant to put Sloter in a position where he's one play away from replacing Siemian and taking on the Chargers in the season opener September 11.

Again, signing a quarterback with experience but not that much experience is the Broncos' first choice. But Sloter's surprising ascension has not been halted, yet. He can help himself tonight. Not only will Sloter start, the plan is for him to play the entire game against the Cardinals (pregame show 6 p.m., kickoff 7 p.m., Channel 20).

Simmons ready to replace T.J.

No, Von Miller, it's not fake news. The Broncos are expected to part ways, preferably through trade, with strong safety T.J. Ward by 2 p.m. Saturday.

It's understandable Ward's teammates are expressing displeasure their starting strong safety is about to leave, either through trade or release. But that's why Vance Joseph is paid the big bucks as head coach.

Yes, Ward's non-guaranteed, \$4.5 million salary is a factor. The Broncos can fit it into their salary cap budget, but that money could also be used to help secure restricted free agents Brandon McManus, who has been nails in kicking field goals and 33-yard extra points this preseason, or linebacker Todd Davis to long-term extensions.

But the biggest reason Ward became vulnerable is while he missed the entire preseason with a hamstring injury, second-year player Justin Simmons blossomed.

Simmons and his 2016 draft classmate Will Parks are ready for more playing time. And the Broncos may also want to make room on their 53-man roster for another young defensive back, including undrafted rookie safety Jamal Carter, who is a larger version of Ward in the box.

Trade or no trade, Ward's time with the Broncos may be down to hours.

# Shelby Harris hopes "best preseason so far" lands spot on 53-man roster

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 1, 2017

Coaches tell players all the time the best man will get the job.

If Shelby Harris doesn't get a job on the Denver Broncos' 53-man roster as their sixth defensive lineman, then the motivational sports adage is a fib.

"It's not always true, but most of the time I feel like it is," Harris said in a sit-down interview with 9News. "This is definitely my best preseason so far in terms of production. In this preseason, I feel like I'm comfortable with the defensive scheme."

In preseason game 2 against the San Francisco 49ers, Harris on one play blew up a guard, swatted the football out of the running back's hands as he getting the handoff exchange from the quarterback and fell on the fumble in what was as dominating a play a defensive tackle can possibly make. He also recovered another fumble.

In preseason game 3 Saturday night against the Green Bay Packers, Harris went off with 3 sacks and a stuff on a short yardage play.

Harris is not an undrafted rookie, Broncos fans. He's been around a bit. He was a seventh-round draft pick of the Oakland Raiders in 2014. He played in one game as a rookie, seven in 2015, but otherwise spent most of his professional life on practice teams with the Raiders, New York Jets and Dallas Cowboys.

So why is he having so much success now?

"I'm playing inside now," he said. "When I came into the league I was an end. Part of it is it's the scheme and getting older and wiser when it comes to football. Also, the guys in the room, the D-linemen help out a lot, too. We look for little things that maybe other teams don't necessarily look for to help us key in for the games."

Injuries to Billy Winn for the season, Kyle Peko for training camp and the preseason, and Derek Wolfe and Jared Crick for the preseason helped provide Harris with an opportunity to shine.

He has displayed the rare ability to disrupt the offensive backfield while taking off from an inside position, whether as a defensive tackle or 3-4 defensive end.

The key to penetrating the backfield from the inside?

"Getting off," he said. "From the minute the ball is snapped just getting off. That can determine everything to having success to inside pass rushing. Just getting off and forcing the guards or the center to make a decision."

In his three NFL seasons, Harris has been cut six times.

“It’s not a good feeling,” he said. “It’s very humbling. Especially in times when you’re cut and you don’t feel like you should’ve been cut, but it makes you work that much more.”

How? What keeps him going? The most elemental of manhood reasons.

“I have a family,” he said. “I have wife, daughter and son. They keep me going. Keep me positive, keep me motivated and ... I hate failing. When you get cut it’s kind of like you failed. So, that drives me more and more every time. Three or four of those cuts were with the Raiders. It was cut, and brought back, cut and brought back. It’s not a good feeling. So you do everything to not have to deal with that feeling.”

The NFL has had its share of players who take two or three years to blossom. Harris could become another. Anything besides finding the right system that explains why some players come on late?

“Well, really it is the system if you really think about it,” he said. “Sometimes it takes the perfect player to go to the perfect system and blossom from there. Other than that, it can be as simple as one of the vets teach you one move. And that ends up being your move.”

Wolfe, Crick and nose tackle Domata Peko have all been helping him with techniques.

“Those little things make a big deal when it comes to game day,” Harris said.

Harris has one more preseason game against the Arizona Cardinals at eventually-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High on Thursday night (kickoff 7 p.m., Channel 20) to stake one more claim to the Broncos’ 53-man roster.

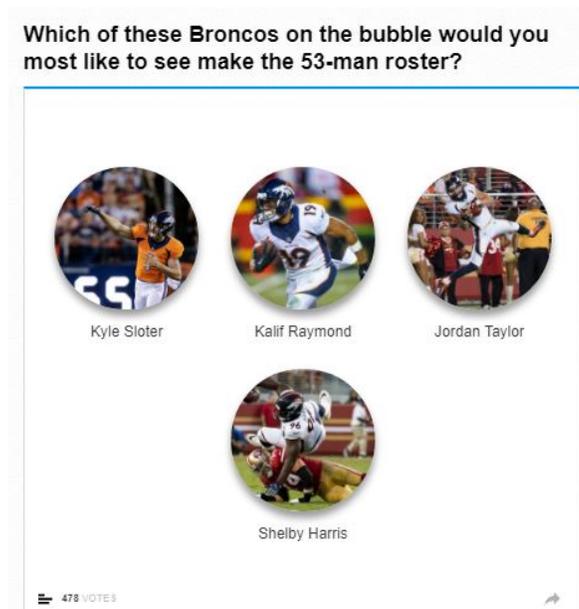
Two days after his big game against the Packers, Kyle Peko returned from his broken foot. The Broncos are expected to explore adding a defensive end once players become available through roster cuts this weekend. So Harris hasn’t made the team, yet, even if his play says otherwise.

# POLL: Which player on the bubble would you most like to see make the Broncos roster?

By Nick Hehemann  
9 News  
September 1, 2017

There's just one more game, and one final chance for several Broncos to prove to the coaching staff that they deserve a spot on the team's final 53-man roster.

Of all those players, there are four big names in particular who are all on the bubble of suiting up with the Broncos in week one of the regular season.



First, there's quarterback Kyle Sloter, the undrafted free agent out of Northern Colorado who has performed better than any other QB on the roster this preseason.

Then, you have Kalif Raymond--a wide receiver and a "special teams specialist".

Don't forget about Jordan Taylor, the reliable receiver who might be known even better for his "Sunshine" nickname from the classic sports film, *Remember the Titans*.

Finally, there's DT Shelby Harris, who's made the most of his opportunity this preseason with all of Denver's injuries on the defensive line. He's already been cut six times in his short NFL career, and is hoping that this season is different.

Now, there's a chance that more than one of these guys makes the final roster. But, if you could only pick one of these guys to suit up for the orange and blue this season, who would you choose?

# Broncos fans: Ticketmaster experiencing issues - use stadium ticket window for help

By Jacob Rodriguez

9 News

September 1, 2017

Ticketmaster is experiencing league-wide issues as fans try to print out their tickets at home for the final Broncos preseason game.

Patrick Smyth, the Executive Vice President of Public & Communications Relations, tweeted just after 5 p.m. that Ticketmaster was having technical issues.

Erich Schubert, director of media relations, released the following statement:

“The Denver Broncos and Ticketmaster are aware of an issue with Account Manager with fans unable to access their tickets to tonight’s game. Ticketmaster is working on the issue, and we expect it to be fixed momentarily. If fans are trying to access tickets at home and plan on attending tonight’s game, we encourage them to come to the stadium. If the site is active by the time fans reach the stadium, they can access tickets on their phones using the Broncos 365 app or by visiting [denverbroncos.com](http://denverbroncos.com) on their mobile browser. If it is not active or there is no way to access the tickets on a smart phone, fans are asked to go to the south box office between gates 9 and 10 where a ticket office representative can assist.”

9NEWS has received several complaints from die-hard Orange and Blue fans trying to print out their tickets saying they had trouble.

E-tickets also appear to be down for some users. One 9NEWS viewer said they weren't able to print a parking pass and wondered to us how they're going to even get to the ticket window. We're looking into it.

The largest takeaway from this: get to the stadium EARLY - if all fans (or more than usual) are having to go to the ticket window, that means the lines are going to be pretty long.

Good luck getting those tickets and GO BRONCOS!

“Ticketmaster is experiencing league-wide technical issues. Fans needing to print tickets can go to any stadium ticket window for assistance!— Patrick Smyth (@psmyth12) August 31, 2017”

# Broncos players hope talk of release, trade of safety T.J. Ward is 'fake news'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 1, 2017

Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph said Thursday night he couldn't say whether Pro Bowl safety T.J. Ward would be on the team after the roster is cut to 53 players by 4 p.m. ET Saturday.

Reports have surfaced that the Broncos will either trade or release Ward by Saturday's deadline. Privately, team sources said no final decision had been made about Ward's future as of Thursday evening, when the Broncos closed out the preseason with a 30-2 victory over the Arizona Cardinals, but multiple options were being considered.

Asked following the game if Ward would be either traded or released, Joseph said: "Nothing on that. Again, it's going to be a long weekend of a lot of transactions. I can't speak to that. At the end of the day, we want the best guys for our football team, and if he's one of them, he'll be here."

Joseph was then asked if he thought Ward would be a part of the team after roster cuts. "I can't speak to that today," he responded. "That's more for [Friday's] conversations and Saturday's conversations."

Ward left the Broncos' locker room shortly after the game -- he was one of 29 players who did not play in the preseason finale -- and did not speak formally to the media. Ward, who took part in a pregame workout with the rest of the sidelined players, missed several weeks in training camp with a hamstring injury and did not play in any of the Broncos' four preseason games.

Ward, who signed with the Broncos in the team's free agency shopping spree in 2014 that also included Aqib Talib, DeMarcus Ware and Emmanuel Sanders, has been named to the Pro Bowl in two of his three seasons in Denver. The 30-year-old is entering the last year of his contract and is a highly respected voice in the Broncos' locker room.

"You're talking about a leader, not only in our defense, but in our locker room," safety Justin Simmons said. "Everyone looks up to him and respects him, myself included. ... It's just crazy hearing all this talk and everything around it."

"I don't know," linebacker Von Miller said. "I hope it's fake news, you know? I hope it doesn't happen."

Linebacker Brandon Marshall took to Twitter Thursday afternoon and offered his opinion:

**@BMarshh54**

**Letting go of TJ would b a mistake. With all the plays he's made and leadership he's brought. He deserves to at least play out his contract.**

**3:57 PM - Aug 31, 2017**

**124 Replies 788 Retweets 2,231 likes**

There are personnel executives in the league who said earlier in the week the Broncos were both shopping Ward and listening to offers for the Pro Bowl safety. However, Ward said after Tuesday's practice he was continuing to get ready for the Broncos' Sept. 11 regular-season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Ward finished what he said was his best all-around season in 2015 with 87 tackles, a sack, an interception and three forced fumbles. He is part of the team's "No Fly Zone" secondary that features four starters -- Ward, Talib, safety Darian Stewart and cornerback Chris Harris Jr. -- who each have been named to at least one Pro Bowl over the past two seasons.

At the root of the Broncos' thinking, to at least some degree, is the emergence of Simmons, who plays safety in some situational packages. Ward moves into the weakside linebacker role when the Broncos go to their six defensive-back look, which they used for 60 percent of their defensive snaps last season. President of football operations/general manager John Elway routinely has taken a hard look at players when they enter the last year of their contracts as he tries to decide which ones will be re-signed before they hit free agency.

The Broncos have signed several defensive starters -- Derek Wolfe, Marshall, Harris and Stewart -- before they finished out the last years of their previous deals.

Ward is scheduled to earn a base salary of \$4.5 million this season and will count \$5.75 million against the salary cap. If the Broncos release Ward, they would have a \$1.25 million "dead money" charge against their salary cap.

# Last chance for some 'to turn a coach' in Broncos' preseason finale

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 1, 2017

The Denver Broncos will get down to the business of closing out their preseason Thursday night against the Arizona Cardinals.

And while the team's starters, as well as some other players who are regular contributors, will get the evening off, coach Vance Joseph said the game could still matter "a bunch" for some players caught in some of the tighter competitions across the team's depth chart.

"Absolutely, one game can make a difference for the young guys," Joseph said. "We have a lot of battles that are really, really close. If a guy makes a great play, that can turn a coach. That can turn John [Elway]. Obviously, a guy making plays for [special-teams coordinator] Brock [Olivo], that could definitely turn myself or John. ... That's a big deal for these young guys."

With that in mind, here are some things to watch for in Thursday's Broncos-Cardinals game:

**Find the roster spot** -- Given Paxton Lynch showed up to the team's kickoff luncheon Wednesday with his right (throwing) arm in a sling, the Broncos will almost certainly have to carry three quarterbacks on the roster for at least the opening few weeks of the season. Joseph has said Lynch will miss at least two regular-season games. And the Broncos have spent much of their offseason planning with the idea they would keep two quarterbacks on the 53-man roster: Trevor Siemian and Lynch. To keep a third -- perhaps a veteran let go by another team trimming its own roster -- will cost the Broncos a spot at another position, and potentially a player they had hoped to keep. The positions to keep an eye on are likely on the offensive line and at wide receiver and linebacker.

**Sort out the offensive line** -- Joseph left open the possibility this week he might not actually pick a winner at the left guard spot, that Allen Barbre and Max Garcia could simply split time at the position during the regular season. However, the bigger questions remain in the second group and more specifically whether two former Broncos draft picks -- Michael Schofield and Ty Sambrailo -- can both make the roster. That's because of the addition of Barbre in a trade early in training camp and the possibility Billy Turner could make the roster as the kind of "big guard" who could play tackle in a pinch. Both Schofield and Sambrailo could each play guard or tackle if needed, but Sambrailo might actually get a look at center in Thursday's game. And if he plays OK there after a crash course this week, it could tip the scales in the decisions that get made.

**On the corner** -- In his tenure as the Broncos' chief football decision-maker, Elway has usually liked the team's secondary to have five cornerbacks and five safeties on the 53-player roster. To do that this season likely means deciding between a player Elway drafted in Lorenzo Doss and a player who has plenty of history with Joseph in Chris Lewis-Harris. Lewis-Harris is more experienced and slightly more versatile -- he worked both on the outside and in the slot with the Bengals when Joseph was his position coach -- but Doss is faster and has consistently been around the ball in training-camp practices.

Assignment consistency could tip the scales to the more veteran Lewis-Harris, but Doss should get plenty of work against the Cardinals to make his case.

**"It's his offense Thursday night"** -- That's what Joseph said about undrafted rookie quarterback Kyle Sloter this week. Sloter, who started all of nine games at quarterback in his college career and had thrown all of one pass before his senior season at Northern Colorado, finds himself in position to start, and finish, the preseason finale because Lynch is hurt and the Broncos don't want to play Siemian, who is the team's regular-season starter. Sloter has found a way to play unencumbered by pressure against reserves; thus far in the preseason he has completed 16 of 20 passes for 193 yards and two touchdowns. He has the team's longest completion in the preseason -- a 47-yard touchdown throw over busted coverage in the preseason opener in Chicago -- and his passer rating is a heady 140.2. It's rare for a quarterback with his résumé to get this kind of playing time, even in an NFL preseason game, but Sloter has a quality chance to have quite the audition as a developmental prospect for the Broncos and anybody else in the league who looks at the game video.

# Possibility of keeping extra QB for start of season will impact Broncos' roster

By Jeff Legwold  
ESPN  
September 1, 2017

The Denver Broncos must cut their roster to 53 players by 4 p.m. ET Saturday, Sept. 2. Here's a final 53-man roster projection:

**QUARTERBACKS (3):** Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch, a player to be named later.

Unless they have a change of heart about Lynch's recovery from a bruised right (throwing) shoulder, the Broncos will probably have to keep three players here when they only intended to keep two. And the third player is likely not on their roster at the moment. Undrafted rookie Kyle Sloter has worked as the No. 3 quarterback in camp, but it would be a lot to ask for him to go from nine career starts in college -- all in 2016 -- to potentially playing against the Los Angeles Chargers and Dallas Cowboys if Siemian were to get injured in those games and Lynch was out the first two weeks of the regular season, as coach Vance Joseph has said.

**RUNNING BACKS (4):** C.J. Anderson, Devontae Booker, Jamaal Charles, De'Angelo Henderson

Booker is not expected to be ready for the start of the regular season as he recovers from wrist surgery, but according to Joseph he is expected back by Week 2 or 3. The Broncos like what they've seen from Charles and it's unlikely Henderson would clear waivers even if the Broncos wanted him on the practice squad. Besides, Henderson is the fastest player at the position.

**FULLBACK (1):** Andy Janovich

Any thoughts that Janovich wasn't going to make the roster were misguided. Offensive coordinator Mike McCoy has plans for him in the offense, and he is a foundation player on special teams.

**WIDE RECEIVERS (5):** Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders, Bennie Fowler, Isaiah McKenzie, Jordan Taylor

This takes into account the third quarterback swallowing a roster spot elsewhere and the possibility rookie Carlos Henderson heads to injured reserve after undergoing thumb surgery following the preseason opener in Chicago. The Broncos have tough calls at this position after Thomas and Sanders to try to keep six -- and they might have six where when Lynch is healthy and they go back to two quarterbacks. In this scenario there likely isn't room for Latimer given Fowler is the No. 3, McKenzie is the punt returner, and despite the occasional bobble in his route running, Taylor has simply made the kinds of plays that should keep him around.

**TIGHT ENDS (3):** Virgil Green, Jeff Heurman, A.J. Derby

This takes into account that rookie Jake Butt could start the season on PUP and return to practice in six weeks if the Broncos believe his knee is up to the challenge. That will require a roster move later if he returns, but the Broncos would like to see him in the offense at some point.

**OFFENSIVE LINE (9):** Garrett Bolles, Max Garcia, Matt Paradis, Ron Leary, Menelik Watson, Allen Barbre, Connor McGovern, Billy Turner, Ty Sambrailo

This group could stay at eight if this becomes the roster spot where the third quarterback causes a change of thinking in the season's first two weeks. The Broncos could also try to trade one of the players with NFL experience they might not have room to keep, like Michael Schofield. Schofield has position versatility, but the Broncos working Sambrailo at center this past week could indicate they believe Sambrailo could play tackle, guard or center in a game if needed. In the end, Denver might need to trade somebody else to have room for both Schofield and Sambrailo on this roster. Both are former Broncos draft picks.

**DEFENSIVE LINE (6):** Derek Wolfe, Domata Peko, Jared Crick, Adam Gotsis, Zach Kerr, Shelby Harris

With Billy Winn's season-ending knee injury, Harris produced when he had to in order to earn a spot. DeMarcus Walker's move to outside linebacker also cleared some room. Wolfe and Crick missed time with ankle and back injuries, respectively, in the preseason but are expected to be ready by the Sept. 11 regular-season opener.

**LINEBACKERS (9):** Von Miller, Shane Ray, Brandon Marshall, Todd Davis, Corey Nelson, DeMarcus Walker, Shaquil Barrett, Kasim Edebali, Zaire Anderson

If safety T.J. Ward is indeed traded or released, the Broncos will be able to keep nine here, and president of football operations/general manager John Elway always has preferred to have a roster split of 25 players on offense, 25 players on defense to go with the three specialists in the kicking game. If they keep eight here, Denver will have a linebacker or two on the practice squad to move up later if needed.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS (10):** Chris Harris Jr., Aqib Talib, Darian Stewart, Bradley Roby, Brendan Langley, Justin Simmons, Will Parks, Lorenzo Doss, Chris Lewis-Harris, Jamal Carter

There is a scenario where Ward is back in the locker room, but the Broncos have sought to trade for the Pro Bowl safety. As of Thursday night, no decision had been made on his future, and he could be released if the Broncos decide Simmons is ready. If the Broncos don't keep 10 here, and they may not be able to with an extra QB on the roster, it likely will be Lewis-Harris or Doss for the final cornerback spot. Lewis-Harris' previous experience with Joseph in Cincinnati as well as his ability to play in the slot if needed could tip the scales. Carter deserves to be the undrafted rookie who makes the roster, as he showed plenty of potential and willingness to stick his nose in the action.

**SPECIALISTS (3):** Brandon McManus, Riley Dixon, Casey Kreiter

No changes here since the start of the offseason program. Both McManus and Dixon have been unchallenged, as has Kreiter, who recovered from a lower leg injury that caused him to finish the 2016 season on injured reserve.

# Sloter rebounds in Denver's 30-2 win over Arizona

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
September 1, 2017

A slow start didn't rattle Kyle Sloter, and he's hoping it doesn't faze John Elway or Vance Joseph, either.

The undrafted rookie from Northern Colorado shook off two early sacks and a safety to lead Denver on touchdown drives of 98 and 96 yards Thursday night that sparked the Broncos' 30-2 rout of the Arizona Cardinals.

That capped a 4-0 preseason for Joseph, the rookie head coach who was peppered with questions afterward about whether Sloter had done enough to earn a roster spot as Trevor Siemian's backup while Paxton Lynch recovers from a sprained right shoulder.

He was also asked if three-time Pro Bowl safety T.J. Ward will be on the team come Saturday.

Joseph wouldn't commit to either one.

On Sloter, he said, "Well, we'll see. Those calls are going to happen tomorrow and Saturday. He's played very well. He had a slow start tonight with the safety and taking a sack backed up, but he came out of it and had three 80-yard scoring drives. He's impressive. He's a young, poised quarterback. He's very intelligent. I've been impressed with Kyle."

As for the rampant speculation the Broncos are ready to move on from Ward, one of the founding members of their "No Fly Zone" secondary, Joseph also demurred.

"Nothing on that," Joseph said. "Again, it's going to be a long weekend of a lot of transactions, I can't speak to that. At the end of the day, we want the best guys for our football team, and if he's one of them, he'll be here."

Ward hustled out of the locker room before the media were allowed in, leaving his teammates to lobby for him to stay in Denver this season.

"I don't want to see T.J. go," said successor-in-waiting Justin Simmons.

Ward missed his fourth game of the preseason while Sloter made his first start and went 15 for 23 for 220 yards and a touchdown.

His 98-yard drive was his best argument to win a roster spot. It came after he was sacked in the end zone on his first series and narrowly avoided an encore in the opposite end zone in the second quarter.

"No matter what happens I had leave — or stay — with my head high," Sloter said.

It looked ominous for Sloter when the Cardinals downed a punt at the Denver 2 following his first two errors. But he connected on consecutive 32-yard passes, one to Jordan Taylor, the other to Anthony

Nash, before Stevan Ridley reeled off a 27-yard gain to the 3. Ridley took it in from there to cap an impressive drive that put Denver up 10-2.

Facing third-and-9 from his 12 on Denver's opening series, Sloter double-clutched with linebacker Alex Bazzie bearing down for the sack and safety that put Arizona ahead 2-0 .

Facing the same down and distance in the second quarter, Sloter again held onto the ball for too long and this time was sacked by linebacker Philip Wheeler inches from another safety. Beaten both times was veteran tackle Donald Stephenson, who recently accepted a second pay cut in a bid to stick around.

Sloter directed a 13-play, 96-yard drive in the fourth quarter that ended with a 21-yard TD pass to tight end Steven Scheu in double coverage.

"Well, like I always say for young players, 'You get exposure or you get exposed,'" Arizona coach Bruce Arians aid. "We had some exposed tonight. It wasn't what we were hoping for to finish the preseason."

Elway and his personnel department also will evaluate all quarterbacks among the some 1,200 players who will be cut this weekend.

**PUNT-OFF:** The Cardinals' punting competition kicked into high gear with an abundance of stalled drives by Arizona's offense. And the battle stayed close.

The highlight came when Krishawn Hogan downed Richie Leone's 38-yard punt at the Denver 2 in the first half. Matt Wile's best punt was a 49-yarder to the Denver 8, but he also badly missed on a 53-yard field goal and had a touchback in the first half along with a punt that Kalif Raymond returned from the goal line.

"Lot of pooch punts, so we'll wait and see," Arians said. "No decisions are made tonight."

**PICK-SIX:** Safety Dymonte Thomas had a 58-yard interception return for a touchdown off Trevor Knight's errant pass. Thomas snared the ball and raced right up the middle for the score that made it 17-2.

**WARD'S WORLD:** Ward is the biggest name on Denver's roster bubble because he missed the entire preseason after pulling a hamstring, and watched Simmons impress the coaching staff. The Broncos might also have found a bigger, younger version of Ward in undrafted rookie thumper Jamal Carter of Miami.

Linebacker Brandon Marshall tweeted before kickoff: "Letting go of TJ would b a mistake. With all the plays he's made and leadership he's brought. He deserves to at least play out his contract."

Ward is due \$4.5 million this season in the final year of his contract and figures to command something similar to the five-year, \$60 million deal that strong safety Reshad Jones, 29, got from the Dolphins.

# T.J. Ward's teammates stumped by reported trade talks

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
September 1, 2017

The notion of the Denver Broncos and strong safety T.J. Ward parting ways isn't sitting well with his teammates.

Von Miller said at the team's kickoff luncheon that he was taken aback by an NFL Network report this week that the Broncos were talking with other teams about Ward, who's entering the final year of his contract.

"I thought it was fake news," Miller said. "I mean, I didn't think — it's serious like that? It can't be that serious. T.J.'s been a great player for us, but it's the National Football League. You always get blindsided by stuff. T.J.'s been great for us so I don't see any reason to (trade)."

Earlier this summer, Elway tweeted that same term "fake news" to rebut a report that the Broncos had talked about acquiring Bengals backup QB AJ McCarron. Elway has remained silent on the Ward report.

Linebacker Brandon Marshall tweeted , "We better not trade the homie," and added the hashtag #NobodyIsSafe.

Ward has been bothered by a pulled hamstring this summer and second-year pro Justin Simmons replaced him in the lineup the last three weeks for preseason games. Ward returned to practice this week but may not play Thursday night against Arizona in the Broncos' preseason finale.

Ward is due \$4.5 million in 2017, the final year of a four-year, \$22.5 million contract he signed in 2014.

# NFL 2017: The AFC West looks like the league's best

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
September 1, 2017

Top to bottom, the AFC West looks loaded this season. It's also up for grabs.

All four teams have sky high expectations of handling a difficult schedule that includes the Eagles, Cowboys, Giants, Patriots and Dolphins when they're not beating up on each other.

The Oakland Raiders are no longer mired in mediocrity thanks to 2016 Defensive Player of the Year Khalil Mack and quarterback Derek Carr , who has newfound security in both a shiny \$125 million contract and in unretired running back Marshawn Lynch with him in the backfield.

The Kansas City Chiefs have one of the league's nastiest, youngest defenses, but also the specter of instability with first-round pick Patrick Mahomes waiting to succeed QB Alex Smith .

Philip Rivers is commuting from San Diego to L.A. as the Chargers , under new coach Anthony Lynn, try to reverse their fortunes following eight close losses last year that led to the exit of Mike McCoy. He landed in Denver for his second stint as offensive coordinator.

McCoy drew up the blueprints for a Broncos offense once again led by Trevor Siemian , who has a better supporting cast as he seeks to lead the rebound from a 9-7 season that ended Denver's five-year reign as division champs.

Some things to watch in the AFC West this season:

**HARRASSING QBs:** The AFC West features a fantastic foursome of pass rushing duos.

Even with DeMarcus Ware retiring, Denver has Von Miller and Shane Ray. Oakland has Mack and Bruce Irvin. Mack edged Miller for Defensive Player of the Year last year, which some of Miller's teammates say drove Miller to train like never before, showing up at camp with thighs the size of watermelons.

The Chargers feature Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram, the Chiefs have Dee Ford and Justin Houston.

Mack was among the high-wattage attendees at Miller's first-ever pass rushing summit he put on at Stanford over summer break.

"It was a unique experience to really sit down and share thoughts and compare pass rushes and take away what you can," Miller said. "For the most part, it was guys really showing you what made them great."

**CHARLES IN CHARGE:** The Chiefs cut running back Jamaal Charles , their all-time leading rusher, this spring to save \$6 million in salary cap space. The Broncos signed him to a one-year deal worth up to \$4 million.

The Broncos, who bolstered their backfield and O-line in trying to bridge the gap between their substandard offense and spectacular defense, are counting on Charles being the player who once seemed headed to the Hall of Fame — not the one who's been slowed by bad knees the last two seasons.

Charles, who insists on calling his cut from the Chiefs a "firing," is itching to show his former team it shouldn't have let him go.

"I'm just happy I get to face them twice a year," said Charles, who also provoked Chiefs fans by declaring he's long admired John Elway and had always wanted to play for the Broncos anyway.

The Chiefs wanted Spencer Ware to take the bulk of their carries, but he blew out his right knee in the preseason, leaving third-round pick Kareem Hunt atop the depth chart.

K.C. KINGS: Running woes or not, the Chiefs have won 11 consecutive games within the division dating to Sept. 17, 2015.

That's when they held a 24-17 lead in the final minute over Denver at home, only to watch Peyton Manning throw a touchdown pass to tie it. Then Charles fumbled the handoff with 27 seconds remaining when Brandon Marshall poked the football away. Cornerback Bradley Roby's scoop-and-score sent the Broncos to a stunning 31-24 win that propelled them to a Super Bowl season.

The Chiefs went on a five-week freefall before winning their final 10 games, half of them against the AFC West.

LONG DRIVE: The Chargers have made the move north to Los Angeles, where the franchise played its first game in 1960. Back then, traffic wasn't the issue in Southern California that it is now.

Rivers didn't want to uproot his wife and eight children, so he's making the commute from his home in Rancho Santa Fe to the team's new headquarters in Costa Mesa, which is about 75 miles and can take 90 minutes or more.

Rivers isn't doing the driving. He'll have someone do that for him so he can use the time wisely, like studying his iPad playbook.

VEGAS, BABY : The Raiders' relocation to Las Vegas won't happen for two more years, so Oakland has a chance to return to its previous glory before fans would have to trek nine hours to attend their games.

The move doesn't appear a big issue yet as Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum is sold out for the season, and the Raiders look primed to give their fans a lot more to cheer about before they leave town.

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH: Raiders, Broncos, Chiefs, Chargers.

# Broncos' Kyle Sloter delivers solid performance in preseason finale

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 1, 2017

A feeling of emptiness and ordinariness envelope fourth preseason games. The starters don't play, and the crowds suffer as a result. Only 60,136 wandered into the stadium on this warm Thursday night. Even in Denver, where football is a way of life, the final exhibition contest -- won easily by the Broncos 30-2 -- fought the optics of a scrimmage.

And when it started with the Broncos leading the Arizona Cardinals 3-2 after the first quarter, well, that didn't help. Deep into the first half, former Northern Colorado star quarterback Kyle Sloter -- the reason for watching for many infected with Slotermania -- stopped noticing the outside noise. The stage, after a safety on an ugly sack and a near interception on his first pass, no longer felt too big.

"It was a difficult start. I can't mistakes like that," said Sloter, who finished 15-for-23 with 220 yards and one touchdown. "But I left it all on the field."

Sloter's signature drive, not to be confused with The Drive, began on the 2-yard line in the shadow of the goal post. Sloter, who narrowly avoided a second safety on the previous possession, rocketed a 32-yard completion to receiver Jordan Taylor. He followed with a 32-yard connection to wideout Anthony Nash. The fans, 15,211 less than normal given the insignificance of the contest, erupted. Stevan Ridley, whose chances of sticking on the team plummeted with running back Jamaal Charles' showing last week, burst for 27 yards. The Broncos rushed to the line of scrimmage, showing hints of the promised uptempo attack under new coordinator Mike McCoy. Ridley trucked in from 3 yards, widening the Broncos' advantage to finish off 10-2 over the Cardinals.

The score meant little, but Sloter had delivered something that mattered, giving the Broncos something to think about as they decide how to fill out the depth chart behind Trevor Siemian.

The defense, as it is wont to do, took over. Dymonte Thomas, a longshot to make the team, put a moment on film, taking an interception 58 yards for the score. Most impressive, Thomas pulled it off by racing through the middle like Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook, with no player willing to stop the ball or step in front to take the charge.

It created an avenue for Sloter to finish with a strong first half, shedding the odor of the forgettable start. He guided an eight-play, 49-yard march that produced a 44-yard Brandon McManus field goal for a 20-2 halftime lead.

In the fourth quarter, Sloter found reserve tight end Steven Scheu in the seam for a 21-yard score, a play illustrating his growth as he looked off the safety before zipping the strike. With 9:13 remaining, the Broncos owned a 30-2 advantage.

Was Sloter's performance enough for the Broncos pause at the most important position? Denver remains poised to add a third quarterback with all options on the table. Paxton Lynch, in a sling with a

sprained shoulder, could miss the first month. The most likely scenario? Landing a player with less than four years experience, thus the salary would not be guaranteed. If this transpires, Slotter could make it as the third quarterback. Denver could also look to use Slotter as the backup for one week, then add a vet in Week 2 when only 25 percent of a salary guarantees.

"I don't know what will happen. That's out of my control," Slotter said. "I have always believed in myself."

Slotter helped himself, if not with the Broncos, where he clearly wants to stay, than another team. At the least, he should be on a practice squad. He boasts NFL measurables at nearly 6-foot-5, 220 pounds with a strong arm. He also can run, seen in his rollouts.

The Broncos are expected to begin cutting a chunk of their 37 players on Friday with an official announcement on Saturday. This serves as a chaotic time in the NFL. There will be 1,184 players cut around the league with roughly 300 stick on practice squads. Roughly 15 spots were up for grabs Thursday -- the final five roster slots and 10 practice squad spots.

Wide receiver Kalif Raymond showed burst on returns, linebacker Kevin Snyder delivered a few big hits and Jamaal Carter, if not already on the team, should have sealed it with a consistent outing.

This game was about backups. One in particular. Can Slotter become the Broncos reserve clause?

"There wasn't one moment I will remember. It's the the time together with these guys," Slotter said. "They accepted me as one of their own."

The clock is ticking. Thursday's game was unremarkable. It did not matter in the standings. But it counted to those players who will be checking their phones through the next 48 hours.

### **Ward's uncertain future**

Safety T.J. Ward walked through the kickoff luncheon Wednesday, laughing and joking with teammates. He is one of the heartbeats of the locker room. Multiple players told Denver7 how unhappy they are about the increasing likelihood of Ward being traded or released. Brandon Marshall tweeted his displeasure. Von Miller insisted it had to be "fake news," failing to see how the team could move on from Ward. And defensive end Derek Wolfe admitted he would be upset.

"It can't be real, right? He's been a Pro Bowler for us. It can't be real," Miller said after Thursday's game. "He's been such an impactful football player on and off the field. That's the nature of the National Football League. I with T.J. I am with him 100 percent. I don't think he should be going."

Coach Vance Joseph provided a telling statement, saying whether Ward would be on the roster was an issue for this weekend. He could have squelched the story, and instead it only further pointed the arrow to Ward's exit.

Ward's situation is a reminder that the NFL is not only a cold business, but a young man's game. He is expendable at 30 because of the emergence of Justin Simmons and Jamaal Carter this preseason. There are enough teams who need a strong safety that a trade could materialize. But suitors are reluctant to move if they feel like Ward will be released. Teams where Ward could make sense include Tampa Bay, Houston, Dallas and Miami.

"It's way beyond what we can control. You look at what teammates have said and the wave on social media. When I was drafted, T.J. was the first guy to text me on draft day," Simmons said. "Just to put into words how much he means to me. What has T.J. done to make me a better player? The easier question would be what hasn't he done. He has been there for me since Day One. "

### **Footnotes**

Zaire Anderson, who is trying to stave off Kevin Snyder for a roster spot, entered the concussion protocol in the first quarter and was cleared to return. ... The Broncos captains Thursday: Anderson, receiver Jordan Taylor, defensive end Shelby Harris, guard Connor McGovern, and punter Riley Dixon. ... Shelby Harris and Adam Gotsis opened at defensive end with Vontarrius Dora and Kasin Edebalu at outside linebacker. Tyrique Jarrett started at nose tackle. Domata Peko will need to be spelled in the opener, making me wonder if Harris can fill that role. Kyle Peko, a candidate for the role, did not play Thursday after re-injuring his foot this week in practice. ... Jamal Carter broke up pass in second quarter. His ability to play in the box and cover is one of the reasons Ward has become expendable. ... Also, an area of concern: special teams. It has been uneven at best on coverage teams and just had punt partially blocked. ... Chris Lewis-Harris and Lorenzo Doss both made their final case for a roster spot. It is a position that could be a toss-up.

# Denver Broncos projected 53-man roster: Troy Renck's early prediction

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 1, 2017

On Monday, as roughly 88 of his teammates paced into the locker room, Kalif Raymond stayed on the practice field. He threw spirals into the back of the end zone to Hunter Sharp, the receivers rifling passes to each other to work on two feet down in bounds.

This is the NFL in late August -- where dreams go to die. Those on the bubble can leave no regrets or reps. So Raymond and Sharp repeated small details, hoping it forces them into the Broncos' picture picture with a play on Thursday night.

"I am going to show them I can ball," Raymond said. "I want to take one to the house."

Raymond exists as one of the last players in or out depending on how injuries and the pursuit of a third quarterback shake out. It once seemed unlikely the Broncos would keep Raymond and Isaiah McKenzie, diminutive players with similar skill sets. However, with Cody Latimer no longer a guarantee to make it -- he's been shopped and could be released -- Raymond could sneak onto the roster as a kickoff returner.

Along with quarterback Kyle Sloter -- maybe you've heard of him, Southern Miss quarterback turned receiver turned quarterback at Northern Colorado -- Raymond represents one of the reasons to watch the exhibition finale.

Few jobs remain. In fact, the starting spots, save for left guard where I believe Allen Barbre beats out Max Garcia, exist. Before kickoff turns into chaos with 1,184 players cut and roughly 320 retained to practice squads Friday and Saturday, let's get to my a-little-too-early 53-man roster projection, noting that trades could muddy the waters, and the increasing likelihood that safety T.J. Ward will be dealt or released.

## **Quarterbacks (3) Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch, Kyle Sloter or Player X**

Trevor Siemian starts and all he has to do is prove to Broncos country he's not a career backup. No biggie. Paxton Lynch walked into the kickoff luncheon Wednesday with his sprained right shoulder in a sling Wednesday. He's not playing anytime soon. As a result, the Broncos could use a third, young quarterback the first 2-to-4 weeks of the season. The Broncos like Sloter, but it is difficult to see them pivoting enough to trust him as their lone backup when they were prepared to cut him 10 days ago. They would prefer not to sign a vested veteran and guarantee the player's salary for the season for two potential weeks of clipboard duty. They could go with a young guy for a monthlong fix. Or wait until the second week of the season to land a veteran whose salary would then not be guaranteed. The latter scenario could open a window for Sloter to make the team initially. Options for young and veteran players on the waiver wire or through trade include: Cody Kessler, Matt Barkley, Connor Shaw, Jeff Driskell and the like.

**Offensive line (9) Garrett Bolles, Allen Barbre, Max Garcia, Matt Paradis, Ron Leary, Menelik Watson, Donald Stephenson, Connor McGovern, Ty Sambrailo.**

The Broncos boast more depth than a year ago, reflected in multiple starters becoming backups. Michael Schofield, who will catch on somewhere, loses out in the numbers crunch. Sambrailo is saved by his draft status, and potential versatility as he has been playing tackle and center. Guard Billy Turner could slip onto the roster under some scenarios.

**Tight end (3) Virgil Green, Jeff Heuerman, A.J. Derby (Jake Butt injured)**

The lack of production from this position remains alarming. Butt represents the best option in the passing game, it appears, but he's recovering from knee surgery. Green sounds like a man ready to take advantage of an opportunity. "I do get excited about my role because I feel that I am way more athletic than (Chargers tight end) Antonio Gates and (Chargers' Hunter) Henry. I just think if I get in the open field, get the ball, I can do a lot of things -- still even six-, seven years in the league."

**Wide receiver (6) Emmanuel Sanders, Demaryius Thomas, Bennie Fowler, Jordan Taylor, Isaiah McKenzie, Kalif Raymond (Carlos Henderson IR).**

This represents a fluid situation. I expect Cody Latimer to be traded or released after he didn't play last Saturday. Can Raymond win a job? The opening is ripe on kickoff return, formerly Latimer's spot. Taylor should be a lock because of the plays he's made and his chemistry with Siemian.

**Running backs (4) C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles, De'Angelo Henderson, Devontae Booker**

The only doubt was whether Jamaal Charles could prove his health. He answered the question last week. He's on. So move on. Booker will be out likely the first two weeks as he recovers from a broken wrist.

**Fullback (1) Andy Janovich**

I wonder what his role will be if the offense continues to tilt toward uptempo, shotgun sets. But he is valued on special teams, and needed with Latimer's expected departure.

**Defensive line (7) Derek Wolfe, Jared Crick, Domata Peko, Zach Kerr, DeMarcus Walker, Adam Gotsis, Shelby Harris**

Wolfe (ankle) and Crick (back) remain on track to play in the opener. Wolfe said this week he would be ready, even if he's not 100 percent. Peko has been solid addition in the middle and in the locker room. Harris earned the spot created by Billy Winn's season-ending knee injury in the preseason.

**Inside linebacker (4): Brandon Marshall, Todd Davis, Corey Nelson, Zaire Anderson.**

This is not definite. I give Kevin Snyder more than a puncher's chance to stick because of his special teams acumen. Marshall and Davis need to make big plays this season if the defense is going to create additional turnovers.

**Outside linbacker (4): Von Miller, Shane Ray, Shaquil Barrett, Kasim Edebali**

The Broncos looked into Ahmad Brooks, but didn't pursue the free agent before he signed with the Packers. This is a spot where they could add a player through the waiver-wire or trade this weekend. There's no guarantee Ray (wrist surgery) will be ready by week three of the regular season. He could require more time to regain strength. There are really five players here because Walker has been working with the backers the entire camp. Vontarius Dora is in the mix, but was unable to capitalize on valuable reps in the first two preseason games.

**Defensive backs (9) Chris Harris, Aqib Talib, Darian Stewart, Bradley Roby, Justin Simmons, Will Parks, Jamaal Carter, Brendan Langle, Chris Lewis-Harris**

No Ward. I am biased. I don't like moving on from players who are accountable in every way to their teammates. Ward's fire will be missed, even while acknowledging Simmons and Carter have made impressive statements this preseason. My hope is for Ward to be traded, leaving him in line to make his \$4.5 million this season. Tampa Bay could be a fit.

**Specialists (3) Brandon McManus, Riley Dixon, Casey Kreiter**

McManus could eventually be a candidate for a contract extension. He's that good.

# What we learned: Broncos 30, Cardinals 2

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
September 1, 2017

The Broncos wrapped up their first undefeated preseason in 12 years with a 30-2 rout of the Arizona Cardinals on Thursday night at Sports Authority Field at Mile High. What did we learn from the game?

## 1. Kyle Sloter is resilient

Denver's offense struggled early; its first four possessions yielded a field goal, one first down and 12 yards on 13 snaps. Sloter was sacked twice -- once for a safety, and on the second sack, he was brought down at the Denver 1-yard line, ending the Broncos' fourth series.

But on the next possession, the offense began to click. Sloter completed back-to-back 32-yard passes to open the next series, finding Jordan Taylor on a slant route and Anthony Nash down the left sideline past two defenders, launching a 98-yard drive that ended in a 3-yard Stevan Ridley touchdown burst.

Sloter led another 98-yard march in the fourth quarter, capped by what might have been his best pass of the game: a 21-yard touchdown strike to Steven Scheu with 9:13 left in the game. Sloter looked off the safety, then spotted Scheu splitting two defenders down the right seam. He placed the pass on the money for the Broncos' second offensive touchdown of the night.

"Hats off to him, he's really done an incredible job," Taylor said. "He's slowly making a name for himself."

Whether Sloter did enough to earn a spot on the 53-man roster is a question now in the hands of the Broncos' coaches and personnel executives. But at the minimum, the undrafted rookie showed the ability to shake off early hiccups. His 15-of-23, 220-yard, one-touchdown performance capped a promising preseason of work.

"Those [roster] calls are going to happen [Friday] and Saturday, but he's played very well," Joseph said. "He had a slow start with a safety and taking a sack backed up [near the end zone], but he came out of it with three 80-yard scoring drives.

"He's been impressive. He's a young, poised quarterback. He's very, very intelligent. I've been impressed with Kyle."

## 2. Secondary depth shows off

The standard set by first-teamers in the "No-Fly Zone" seems to seep down the depth chart, and rookies Brendan Langley and Dymonte' Thomas did a good job of upholding it Thursday night.

Langley broke up a pass and also had some strong work against the run, including one stop of Arizona running back Elijah Penny for a 5-yard loss on a third-and-4 midway through the second quarter that helped knock the Cardinals out of field-goal range.

Thomas, one of a strong crop of rookie safeties, continued his knack for making plays on the football by grabbing an errant Trevor Knight pass, quickly accelerating into fifth gear and returning it 58 yards for a touchdown that put the Broncos in front 17-2 with 1:54 left in the the first half.

"It's crazy how all week the vets were talking about [how] this is the young guys' turn," Thomas said.

By holding the Cardinals to a meager 2.8 yards per pass play, the young defensive backs more than did their part.

### **3. Shelby Harris continued to make plays**

Harris followed his three-sack game against the Packers by posting one hit of Knight and a pair of tackles. Harris and Adam Gotsis started at the two defensive end spots, flanking rookie nose tackle Tyrique Jarrett, who finished with a pair of assists.

### **4. Broncos didn't need Taylor to play QB**

To the relief of everyone associated with the Broncos, the team's emergency option at quarterback wasn't required. Taylor took some snaps during practice this week in cause injuries wrecked the Broncos' complement under center, but he was able to simply stick to wide receiver.

Taylor caught a 32-yard pass on a slant route in the second quarter to get the Broncos out of bad field position at their 2-yard line and launch a 98-yard sprint to their first touchdown of the night.

# Defining Moments: Broncos 30, Cardinals 2

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

September 1, 2017

## 1. From the shadow of their goal posts and into the Sunshine

Emergency quarterback Jordan Taylor can apparently play wide receiver pretty well, too. The second-year receiver out of Rice took a pass from rookie quarterback Kyle Sloter and galloped 32 yards with it, getting the Broncos into a more comfortable position than where the drive began at the Denver 2-yard line.

## 2. Ridley returns to the end zone

Veteran running back Stevan Ridley capped the drive that began with Taylor's big catch by rushing for 34 yards on three consecutive carries, including a 3-yard touchdown, to give the Broncos an eight-point lead.

## 3. Boom goes the Dymonte

Scoring on interceptions is just what happens at Sports Authority Field at Mile High for the orange and blue. Rookie safety Dymonte Thomas showed the "No-Fly Zone's" starters aren't the only ones who can make big plays when he caught an overthrown pass and rocketed through scattered Arizona players before crossing the goal line.

## 4. Sloter to Scheu for the score

After he led four scoring drives, Sloter finally connected on a touchdown pass, finding tight end Steven Scheu to complete another 98-yard drive.

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The Broncos have other promotions here, in addition to following promotions available the day after the game:

- Papa John's is offering the "When the Broncos win, you win!" promotion, which gives fans 50 percent off regular menu price online orders the day after every Broncos win with promo code "Broncos"
- With two Broncos touchdowns, you score \$1 roast beef sandwiches the day after a Broncos game at participating Arby's.
- Download the McDonald's app for free Broncos game-day offers! Additionally, get a \$1 Big Mac sandwich or Sausage McMuffin with Egg the day after every Broncos Game as well as 30 percent off any hat after every Broncos game at Denver Broncos Team Stores with the McDonald's key tag.
- Buffalo Wild Wings: If the Broncos make a field goal, you could win a free sharable at Buffalo Wild Wings!
- At participating Conoco stations, grab a free 12oz cup of coffee between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m. the day after a Broncos win.
- At King Soopers, get a free raised or cake donut -- just swipe your SooperCard the day after a Broncos win.

# From the Pocket: Kyle Slotter's play creates memorable night for him, parents in Mile High City

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
September 1, 2017

Thirty minutes before their son took the field as Thursday night's starting quarterback, Daryl and Michelle Slotter stood near the north end zone.

This wasn't a normal night for the Sloters. Far from it.

Paxton Lynch's mom set the couple up with pregame field passes, and they watched as their 23-year-old son warmed up ahead of a moment that had been dreamed up two years earlier.

When Kyle transferred to the University of Northern Colorado from Southern Mississippi ahead of the 2015 season, he and his parents drove past Sports Authority Field at Mile High on their way to Greeley.

"When we dropped him off at UNC, we drove past here on the way to a restaurant," Michelle said. "And we said, jokingly, 'Kyle, you might be playing there someday.'

"And so it's weird to see he's actually here. It's crazy."

Their evening in Denver came together with some hasty preparation.

The Sloters flew in Thursday from Atlanta, and they met more than a dozen family members in the Mile High City.

Before the game began, they were already overwhelmed. As Thursday's No. 1 took his practice reps as No. 1, his parents could hardly believe the moment in which they found themselves.

"Honestly, very crazy," Daryl said. "To see his face up there and to see him out on the field doing this, it's every kid's dream. We're thrilled to be here."

And that all came before Slotter delivered a 15-of-23 performance for 220 yards, one touchdown and a 110.8 quarterback rating.

His night, which began with two sacks and a safety, was steady — if not spectacular — the rest of the way.

After he led a field goal drive to essentially end the first quarter, he tacked on back-to-back 32-yard completions with just under five minutes remaining in the first half.

The Broncos would end that drive with a Stevan Ridley touchdown run to take a 10-2 lead. The final, with Slotter behind the helm, would be 30-2.

“I think that me and [Quarterbacks] Coach [Bill] Musgrave, he was calling the game today instead of [Offensive Coordinator] Coach [Mike] McCoy,” Sloter said. “I think we both got in a rhythm, we got some plays that I was more comfortable with and then we were able to open it up a little bit once I saw the ball go into the receivers hands a couple times. It was a rough start, and I have to be better there. No excuses on that, but it’s a learning experience. I’m just going to hopefully continue to get better.”

There were highlights, sure. He hit Jordan Taylor down the middle and threaded passes to Anthony Nash and Marlon Brown.

His lone passing touchdown wouldn’t come until early in the fourth quarter, but he led scoring drives of varying lengths: 23 yards, 98 yards, 49 yards, 80 yards and 96 yards.

That's not to say Sloter will make the team. Head Coach Vance Joseph said after the game that decision would be made Friday or Saturday. And in his first answer of his press conference, Joseph maintained the quarterback depth chart had not changed.

But in the minutes after the game, as Sloter spoke about his chances to earn a spot on the Broncos’ 53-man roster, his disposition seemed to mirror his parents’ from before the game.

His performance was impressive. The moment? Even more so.

“I just love playing football,” Sloter said. “I feel like it’s what I was put on this earth to do, and hopefully I get to do it for a long time. It’s been my passion ever since I can remember. Like I said, I hope I’m here in Denver and things work out.”

Whether that happens remains to be seen. There are far too many 53-man roster possibilities to be certain of Saturday’s outcome. His performance Thursday night, though, is concrete.

And that helps both Sloter and his parents, who all met up after the game.

Because the rest of the situation? That’s just too hard to quantify right now for Sloter’s parents.

Even after his performance to date, they can’t get over the social-media response to Kyle’s rise from undrafted training-camp arm to potential Week 1 backup quarterback.

“Unbelievable,” Daryl said. “I mean, come on. It’s just ridiculous.”

“To us, he’s just our little boy.”

Thursday night in Denver, Kyle Sloter was a whole lot more.

# Paul Klee: Despite 4-0 preseason record, Broncos need less "V.J." and more "yes, sir"

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

September 1, 2017

Don't get me wrong. From Instaface to Snapgram, social media can be a real kick in the pants.

Just not when it's used to show up the 23-year-old quarterback for the world to see. Right, Will Parks? And I'm over the moon for Menelik Watson and his lovely bride-to-be. It takes a full heart to propose marriage in front of 76,000 strangers. But during a game when guys on the field are playing for their jobs?

While it's true the Broncos remain a threat to the Patriots because the 'D' is ready and willing to fight Handsome Tom, is it a good thing that Aqib Talib-Todd Davis was the undercard to Mayweather-MacGregor?

Yes, there was too much nonsense and matters unrelated to work in a Broncos preseason that wrapped up late Thursday night against the Arizona Cardinals at Mile High. Too much yada-yada-yada that wouldn't fly in places like Foxboro and Pittsburgh, two cities where the road to Super Bowl LII will travel straight through.

It can't fly here in Colorado if Vance Joseph's first season is going to be a success. The coach who arrived with the reputation as a leader of men has seen too many grown men behave like little kids.

What makes the Broncos dangerous is also what can tear them down. They play with an earned reputation of tip-toeing the line between physical and dirty. They will rip the chain off your neck if it leads to a win. They don't need another friend. They need a coach to show them who's boss.

This version of the Broncos has more positives working in its favor than the Debbie Downers care to admit. It's a team with too many Pro Bowl-caliber players to stink, one that came a dropped touchdown pass shy of making the playoffs despite fielding the franchise's worst offense in over three decades.

Where there's a Von, and a Chris, and an Aqib, and a Wolfe, and a DT, and a Ward (maybe), there's a way.

But when the regular-season schedule is rated as the toughest in the NFL and the health of the offense depends on the health of a quarterback who gets injured a lot, there's zero room for error. Or 45 penalties that led the league through three preseason games. I'm better with words than numbers, but 15 penalties per game is the kind of thing you see from the Raiders.

The old Raiders, not the new-and-improved Raiders.

This locker room would be a tough handle for any coach. It wasn't that long ago that Talib eye-poked an Indianapolis Colt like a stooge. Those Broncos turned out OK and won Super Bowl 50. But it also wasn't that long ago when pretty much the same locker room showed its focus was off in La-La Land and

turned in one of the most embarrassing losses in club history, a home playoff defeat to the Colts, a rare moment of slippage during the all-business Peyton Manning era.

These Broncos don't have a Peyton Manning to keep the locker room in line. The commander-in-charge must be the head coach, Joseph. The Broncos closed the preseason with a 4-0 record. So did the 2008 Detroit Lions, who went 0-16 when the games counted.

On a night for the third-stringers clawing to make the team, backup-to-the-backup quarterback Kyle Sloter showed there will be some anxious moments if Trevor Siemian trips over his dog walking down the stairs. But good luck finding anyone inside Mile High who would prefer Paxton Lynch over Sloter as the backup to Siemian. The best backup option at Dove Valley is Sloter, who completed 11 of 19 passes for 183 yards through three quarters.

This should have been a humbling offseason for the Broncos. They had a seat on the couch while their chief rival, the Patriots, celebrated in the Super Bowl, again. But the offseason ended with the roster emboldened to the point it questioned the brain functions of John Elway and the front office. When news broke that Denver is shopping popular safety T.J. Ward, his teammates put the general manager through the wringer on social media.

"Letting go of TJ would b (sic) a mistake," linebacker Brandon Marshall told his 78,000 followers on Twitter.

Imagine for a second if that happened in New England. I'd pay for a media credential to witness the Bill Belichick press conference.

Hey, it's cool with me if the Broncos want to let the players run the show. Talk about a season full of column ideas. But if the playoffs and beyond are still the goal around these hills, some discipline is in order. The Broncos need less "V.J." and more "yes, sir."

# NFLPA, Ezekiel Elliott file for restraining order to block suspension

By Staff

USA Today Sports

September 1, 2017

Ezekiel Elliott and the NFL Players' Association aren't waiting for a ruling on the Dallas Cowboys running back's appeal of a six-game suspension for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy to take further action.

The NFLPA filed a request in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas for a temporary restraining order on behalf of Elliott, seeking to vacate any ruling by arbitrator Harold Henderson that would fully or partially keep the ban in place.

In the filing, the NFLPA contested that "there was a League-orchestrated conspiracy by senior NFL executives ... to hide critical information — which would completely exonerate Elliott."

The 2016 rushing champion was suspended by NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on Aug. 11 after a year-long league investigation into domestic violence allegations made by a woman claiming to be Elliott's former girlfriend (USA TODAY Sports does not name alleged victims of domestic violence). She accused Elliott of assaulting her multiple times in July of 2016, shortly before the start of Elliott's rookie season. Goodell cited extensive digital evidence and testimony from Elliott's accuser and medical experts when explaining his decision.

Elliott was never arrested or charged.

The NFLPA accuses the NFL's appeal process in the case of being "one of the most fundamentally arbitral processes conceivable," in part because Henderson denied attempts by Elliott's attorneys to have his ex-girlfriend testify at a hearing that wrapped up earlier Thursday.

Elliott's three-day appeal hearing wrapped up Thursday. His suspension was set to begin on Saturday.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

# NFL teams, players donate to Hurricane Harvey relief

By Staff

NFL.com

September 1, 2017

The Cincinnati Bengals and Minnesota Vikings are the latest NFL teams to announce they will be donating funds to Hurricane Harvey relief efforts on the Texas Gulf Coast.

The Bengals will donate net proceeds from tickets sold for their Sept. 14 game against the Houston Texans to the American Red Cross. To kick off the donation effort, WLWT-TV in Cincinnati purchased 50 tickets to the Thursday Night Football game, which will be shown on NFL Network at 8 p.m. ET.

Fans can purchase tickets to the game by going to [Bengals.com/Harvey](http://Bengals.com/Harvey).

The Bengals also are teaming up with the American Red Cross, WLWT-TV, the city of Cincinnati and Hamilton County to host a Help for Houston fundraiser at the Sept. 14 game. Additionally, the Bengals and the Salvation Army are coordinating a goods drive for people affected by the hurricane.

"Our thoughts go out to everyone impacted by Hurricane Harvey," Bengals executive vice president Katie Blackburn said in a statement. "We have several players from the Houston area on our team. We want to help with the relief efforts and show our support to the Texans as we welcome them to Paul Brown Stadium on September 14."

The Vikings and the family of team owners Zygi and Mark Wilf are teaming up to donate \$300,000 to hurricane relief.

The Vikings and Bengals aren't alone in their donation efforts. Several NFL teams have donated to relief efforts and Houston Texans star J.J. Watt has raised more than \$13 million via his relief initiative.

[Click here to donate to Watt's flood relief fund](#), and [here to donate to the Red Cross to help those affected by Hurricane Harvey](#).

Here's a rundown of other teams who are donating to Hurricane Harvey relief efforts:

1. The Houston Texans and owner Bob McNair are donating \$1 million in Hurricane Harvey relief.
2. The Dallas Cowboys initially donated \$100,000 before raising an additional \$2.3 million in a Salvation Army telethon on Thursday. Team owner Jerry Jones called into the telethon and wideout Dez Bryant answered to receive his \$1 million donation.
3. The Detroit Lions and the family of team owner Martha Ford have donated \$1 million to the American Red Cross for relief efforts.
4. The Baltimore Ravens are donating \$1 million to the United Way of Greater Houston, with the funds being distributed to the United Way Relief Fund for Hurricane Harvey, the Salvation Army of Houston and the American Red Cross.

5. Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank, via The Arthur Blank Family Foundation, is matching up to \$1 million in fan donations to the Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund.

6. The New England Patriots and owner Bob Kraft are matching up to \$1 million in donations.

7. The New York Jets and the family of owner Woody Johnson are donating \$1 million.

8. Tennessee Titans controlling owner Amy Adams Strunk donated \$1 million to J.J. Watt's fundraising initiative, which has tallied more than \$12 million in donations.

9. The NFL Foundation is donating \$1 million to the relief efforts.

10. The Los Angeles Rams are giving fans the option to donate a portion of their ticket purchase to the team's Sept. 10 season opener to hurricane relief efforts. In addition, Houston native and Rams defensive tackle Michael Brockers is leading a fundraising effort to benefit the United Way of Greater Houston.

11. The Green Bay Packers are donating \$100,000 to Watt's relief fund and are encouraging fans to donate to the American Red Cross.

12. The Giants have pledged \$1 million to the Houston relief efforts -- Americares, American Red Cross and Houston Food Bank.

# How three local NFL rookies are navigating the league's learning curve

By Brandon Judd  
DesertNews.com  
September 1, 2017

The Floyd Mayweather Jr. fight against Conor McGregor was earning the lion's share of attention — and cheers — in the locker rooms Saturday night at Sports Authority Field at Mile High Stadium, minutes after the Denver Broncos beat the Green Bay Packers 20-17 in preseason play.

That allowed players like Garrett Bolles, Jamaal Williams and Devante Mays to quietly go about their business, answering a handful of reporters' questions as they packed up for the night.

Soon enough, these three rookies could be earning their share of cheers. How they respond to the learning curve at the NFL level and apply it in their development is key.

The trio represents three of the 11 Utah ties who were selected in this year's NFL Draft. Of those 11, Bolles is the only one slated to be a Day 1 starter in the pros. Broncos head coach Vance Joseph has already declared Bolles the team's regular-season starter at left tackle. He was taken 20th overall by Denver in April's draft.

There's still been room for improvement in his game, the former University of Utah lineman readily admits. In the Broncos' second preseason game, against San Francisco, Bolles was whistled for four penalties. In the next game, though, he didn't pick up a single penalty.

"I'm a rookie, so there will always be rookie mistakes. But every single day, I feel like I'm progressing, getting better and better," Bolles said Saturday following the game. "As everything goes on, I'm going to find my rhythm, and when we open up September 11 (against San Diego), I'm going to find my role."

Bolles played a team-high 48 offensive snaps in the win over Green Bay, seeing time on the field through Denver's second series in the third quarter. He helped spring a pair of 10-plus yard runs for running backs Jamaal Charles and C.J. Anderson and played a major role in the Broncos rushing for 125 yards.

Bolles cited a level of familiarity that's helped him acclimate so quickly in Denver.

"That's how it was at Utah, and that's how it is here. I fit in really well with that atmosphere, and I fit in well here. I knew the day I came here that this was the right place for me. The morals and values we have here are very similar to what I am used to," he said.

Williams, meanwhile, has worked himself into the main backup running back position in Green Bay — where five rookies dot the team's backfield — in part due to his strength in pass protection.

Against the Broncos, the fourth-round draft selection led Green Bay with 46 yards on three receptions. All three catches came on check-downs, including receptions of 20 yards and 17 yards (on a third-and-10 play) during one second-quarter series.

"I really think they were really just focusing on the receivers getting down deep and they just forgot about me," Williams said.

BYU's all-time leading rusher was the first backup running back in the game against Denver, spelling starter Ty Montgomery. He rushed for 4 yards on three carries, upping his preseason total to 30 yards on 14 carries.

"I'm really just trying to improve on everything, not just pass protection," Williams said. "Really just trying to make sure I'm an overall, all-around back. Pass protection is No. 1. You've got to make sure No. 12 (starting quarterback Aaron Rodgers) is protected and all the quarterbacks are protected.

"But after that, you've got to make sure that everything else is on the same level. ... Can you catch the ball, run the ball, block, do everything that you can to make sure that we win."

Williams credited backs like Montgomery and fullback Aaron Ripkowski with helping the rookies catch up at the pro level.

"Most of us, besides Ty, it's our rookie years and we're just trying to get into the NFL, get comfortable with it and not be so starstruck," Williams said. "We're all just trying to do our jobs, work hard and have it be a positive, competitive area for all of us."

As a seventh-round pick in a crowded backfield, Mays could be seen as an underdog in the fight for playing time in Green Bay. The former Utah State star was the third running back to enter the game for the Packers against Denver, though, and was listed as co-backup with Williams to Montgomery on the pregame depth chart.

Mays rushed for 12 yards on five carries and added a 5-yard reception while helping the Packers rush for a preseason-best 113 yards, led by 43 yards from fellow rookie Aaron Jones.

Despite the best night from a rookie-laden backfield so far in preseason, Mays wasn't satisfied with the effort when it came in a loss.

"We'll get better, we'll look at the film, we'll work harder, come back stronger," he said.

Green Bay running backs coach Ben Sirmans has emphasized to his young group the importance of reacting to things, and not thinking so much. That advice comes as the team tries to improve its rushing totals, averaging just 90 rushing yards per game in the preseason.

"It's still a process, I'm still learning. The more comfortable I get, the less I'll think," Mays said. "I've just got to keep on working on that and get better at learning everything. Once I get comfortable with that, I'll be able to go out there and play without thinking so much."

Williams and Mays, once former rivals, are enjoying the time together in the backfield.

"Me and Utah State, we don't really get along but I love Devante, though. That's my boy," Williams said.

"We all bring different play styles. But Jamaal, he's good, he's smart. He's good at pass pro, he runs tough. He brings a lot to the table," Mays said.

In Denver, a positive attitude and a determination to grow is helping Bolles as he preps for his first regular season in the NFL.

"Every day, I'm going to get better and fix my mistakes. I don't make the same mistakes and I continue to get better," Bolles said. "I'm excited to see where I am headed."

# Silverman: Von Miller Remains The Best Linebacker In The NFL

By Steve Silverman  
CBS New York  
September 1, 2017

There has never been another linebacker in NFL history that played with as much ferocity as Lawrence Taylor. When Taylor was at his peak in the 1980s, he played with the energy of a waterfall, and nobody had a clue when it came to shutting him down.

The NFL has had several game-changing linebackers since Taylor's time, and they've been able to create Taylor-like plays from time-to-time. However, when it comes to that need to dominate on each play, few have come close to the fear that Taylor instilled.

One who does is the Denver Broncos' Von Miller. Along with J.J. Watt of the Houston Texans, Miller has been one of the game's premier defensive players over the last few seasons. Miller's speed coming around the corner has been a game-changing factor since he entered the league as a rookie in 2011, but he has developed a slew of skills since. Miller heads our class of the NFL's 10 best linebackers, and we present the following for your consideration:

## 1. Von Miller, Denver Broncos

There was a time when Miller seemed like he was good at just rushing the quarterback, but he has developed all of his skills and is now a playmaker in all aspects of the game. In addition to the 14.5 sacks he had for the Broncos last year, he had 78 tackles, three forced fumbles and three passes defensed. Look for Miller to be even more involved when it comes to creating turnovers in 2017. He is capable of tormenting blockers, defeating double-teams and executing strip-sacks. Miller was the Super Bowl 50 MVP, and if the Broncos are going to get back to the playoffs, they will almost certainly need Miller to have another sensational season.

## 2. Luke Kuechly, Carolina Panthers

Nobody has Miller's explosiveness when it comes to putting pressure on the quarterback, but Kuechly is the game's best all-around linebacker. Kuechly is simply always around the ball and is routinely among the league leaders in tackles. Most linebackers excel at stopping the run or playing the pass, but Kuechly does both with equal fervor. Injuries limited him to 13 games in 2015 and 10 games last year, but there's no limit to what he can accomplish if he can stay healthy.

## 3. Bobby Wagner, Seattle Seahawks

There have been so many high-profile players on the Seattle defense that Wagner hasn't always gotten the credit he deserves. But those days are over. When it comes to consistent production, Wagner's value can't be overstated. He is somewhat on the short side at 6-foot and 240 pounds, but he plays like a much bigger man and there is absolutely no fear to his game. Wagner led the NFL with 167 tackles last year, and he could lead the league again this year. Wagner added 4.5 sacks, three passes defensed and one fumble recovery in 2016.

## 4. Dont'a Hightower, New England Patriots

Hightower routinely imposes his will on opposing offenses with his size, strength and explosive hitting power. The 265-pounder is bigger and stronger than most at his position, and he is equally effective in the 4-3 and 3-4 sets. He does not produce the same kind of gaudy stats as Wagner or Kuechly, but opponents know that his hitting ability can turn any game in the Patriots' favor.

#### **5. Chandler Jones, Arizona Cardinals**

Jones was a defensive end during his tenure with the Patriots, but the Cardinals lined him up at linebacker last year and he was a playmaking machine. When it comes to taking over a game, few players are as effective as Jones. He had 11 sacks last year, four forced fumbles and three passes batted down. Once he makes a big play early in a game, opposing offenses become obsessed with stopping him from making another, and they often reveal their weaknesses as a result.

#### **6. Thomas Davis, Carolina Panthers**

The Panthers probably have best linebacker duo in the league in Davis and Kuechly. The 34-year-old Davis, who has overcome serious knee problems, is a relentless performer who combines his explosive talent with tremendous ferocity and instincts. Davis had 106 tackles last year along with three interceptions, four passes defensed, two fumble recoveries and one forced fumble. He should reach that same level of production again this year.

#### **7. Jamie Collins, Cleveland Browns**

Bill Belichick had his reasons for trading Collins to the Browns, and most of them involved finances and the salary cap. Collins signed a \$50 million contract with Cleveland, and if this team does turn things around on defense, it will likely stem from Collins having a brilliant season. He is an every-down defender who had a combined 112 tackles, along with three sacks, two forced fumbles and two interceptions in 2016. The Browns list Collins as a strong-side linebacker, but he can play the inside or middle with equal skills.

#### **8. Sean Lee, Dallas Cowboys**

One of the most technically sound linebackers on this list, Lee would rank even higher if he could just stay healthy for a full season. He came quite close last year with 15 games played, and he was the glue and the best player on the Dallas defense due to his sound positioning and playmaking. Lee ranges extremely well from sideline to sideline as he led the Cowboys with 145 tackles from his weak-side position. He can also play the middle, and excels at helping his teammates position themselves correctly before the snap of the ball.

#### **9. Lavonte David, Tampa Bay Buccaneers**

David has been a consistent performer who can be a playmaker for the Bucs no matter what they ask him to do. He is perhaps the best in the league when it comes to dropping into coverage. He had 13 passes defensed and three interceptions in 2015, and while the numbers were not as impressive last year, he was no slouch. The Bucs seem poised to take a step up this year, with the keys to their defense being David's consistency, along with the continued excellence of Gerald McCoy up front and the all-around prowess of fellow linebacker Kwon Alexander.

#### **10. K.J. Wright, Seattle Seahawks**

While we gave credit to the Panthers for having the best pair of linebackers in Kuechly and Davis, the Seahawks can make an excellent argument with Wagner and Wright. This outside linebacker has the athleticism to go along with size (6-4, 246), and he is coming off a season with 124 tackles and four sacks. Wright also plays with a nastiness that is part of the Seahawks' defensive signature.

# **Broncos' Adam Gotsis: Sprains shoulder in preseason finale**

By RotoWire Staff  
CBS Sports  
September 1, 2017

Head coach Vance Joseph said Gotsis sprained his shoulder during Thursday's preseason finale against the Chargers, Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post reports.

The Broncos are really hoping Gotsis' sprain isn't serious, as starters Jared Crick (back) and Derek Wolfe (ankle) are both on the shelf as it is. He'll presumably undergo further testing and more information should be available in the coming days.

# Report: Broncos expected to cut T.J. Ward if they can't trade him

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
September 1, 2017

Broncos linebacker Von Miller hopes the multiple reports this week regarding trade talks involving safety T.J. Ward are “fake news,” but it continues to look like Ward is in his final days with the team whether or not a swap materializes.

Mike Klis of KUSA reports that the Broncos are expected to release Ward if they are unable to make a trade with another team. The move would clear \$4.5 million from the cap and save the same amount in real dollars, which Klis reports is a factor in the team's thinking because it would provide money that could go toward extensions for players like kicker Brandon McManus and linebacker Todd Davis.

That would be less appealing if the team thinks that they'll be left shorthanded without Ward's services, but Justin Simmons is thought to be ready to step into the lineup after the team got an extended look at him while Ward missed time with a hamstring injury this summer.

The Broncos also have Simmons' fellow 2016 draft pick Will Parks and undrafted rookie Jamal Carter, who Klis calls a “bigger version of Ward,” in a secondary that appears to be taking on a new look this season.