

Kyle Peko added to Broncos' active roster; Kyle Sloter opts for Vikings' practice squad

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
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The Broncos formed their initial 53-man roster Saturday, surprising many by releasing veteran safety T.J. Ward and bringing back quarterback Brock Osweiler, who will sign a one-year deal pending a physical Monday.

On Sunday the team continued to make adjustments, began to form their 10-man practice squad and watched some of the players they hoped to keep land elsewhere.

Kyle Peko, a backup nose tackle who missed most of training camp because of a broken bone in his foot, was re-signed to the active roster, bringing the total to 53. Outside linebacker Shane Ray (wrist) was expected to be placed on injured reserve to clear a roster spot from Osweiler's impending signing Monday. Ray will be recalled midseason, in time for the Broncos' Oct. 30 game at Kansas City, which is Ray's hometown.

"He's only going to miss six games," Elway said of Ray. "We didn't want to use that spot. He's not going to be back any earlier than that. When he does come back, he'll really be ready to go. Having that fall that way for us, it helped us with that extra slot."

The return of Peko provides needed depth on a defensive line that is still recovering from multiple injuries. On the Broncos' latest depth chart after roster cuts, Zach Kerr was slotted as the backup at both nose tackle and defensive end. Kerr, however, is recovering from a knee bruise.

"I think we're fine right now with (Derek) Wolfe getting back on the field this week on Monday along with (Jared) Crick," coach Vance Joseph said Saturday. "Obviously Kerr's injury, I'm not sure how long he is going to be out, but he's getting better at a rapid pace. Shelby (Harris) had a heck of a preseason. I'm excited about Shelby. Shelby has played the five-technique, the three-technique and the nose. I think we're fine right now moving forward."

Kyle Peko, a second-year player who played who played in one game for the Broncos last season, will back up his cousin, starting nose tackle Domata Peko.

"God is so good!" Kyle Peko tweeted Sunday. "Excited to be apart of the Denver broncos! #Year2 #DejaVu"

On Sunday, the Broncos began to form their 10-player practice squad, once the starting point for many on the active roster, including starting inside linebacker Brandon Marshall and receiver Bennie Fowler.

The Broncos had a shortlist of players they hoped to retain, but some, as expected, were claimed or chose to sign elsewhere.

Quarterback Kyle Sloter cleared waivers but opted to join Minnesota's practice squad instead of Denver's or Washington's. Opportunity and money were deciding factors; the Broncos have Trevor Siemian, a recovering Paxton Lynch and now Osweiler. In Minnesota, Sloter will be the third quarterback and receive close to a rookie's salary while on the practice squad.

The practice squad minimum is \$7,200 a week. Sloter will get \$20,000 per week and receive more reps, behind Sam Bradford and Case Keenum; Teddy Bridgewater is on the physically unable to perform list.

Sloter announced his decision on social media Sunday and thanked his teammates and fans who "have accepted me more than I probably deserve. You all have been amazing in making me feel wanted.

"With that being said, I have signed with the Minnesota Vikings! The opportunity, coupled with the best decision for me and my family financially, was too much to pass up."

Michael Schofield, a fourth-year offensive lineman who was both a reserve both guard and tackle for the Broncos, was claimed by the Los Angeles Chargers, whom the Broncos host in their Monday night season opener Sept. 11.

It was unlikely that Schofield would clear waivers, given the dearth of experienced and available tackles. His name was in trade discussions before roster cuts, when it appeared he wouldn't make Denver's 53, but no deal was reached.

"Michael Schofield was a guy that did a tremendous amount of things for us, played very well, and we asked him to do a lot of different things," general manager John Elway said Saturday. "He did everything we ever asked him to do. Those are the ones that are really hard. You know how important they were to the football team. I just try to tell them how much they meant to us. We all know it was a tough day today, but both those guys are still going to be playing football."

Second-year wide receiver/kick returner Kalif Raymond was claimed by the New York Jets, who play the Broncos in Denver on Dec. 10. Although Raymond impressed in training camp, he faced steep competition in earning one of the four receiver slots behind Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

Nine players who were waived Saturday by the Broncos were re-signed to the team's practice squad: center Dillon Day, offensive tackle Elijah Wilkinson, tight end Austin Traylor, wide receiver Hunter Sharp, linebackers Deiontrez Mount and Jerrol Garcia-Williams, cornerback Marcus Rios, nose tackle Tyrique Jarrett and safety Dymonte Thomas.

Broncos' 2017 practice squad so far ...

Dymonte Thomas, S
Tyrique Jarrett, NT
Marcus Rios, CB
Elijah Wilkinson, OT
Jerrol Garcia-Williams, ILB
Deiontrez Mount, LB
Hunter Sharp, WR
Dillon Day, C
Austin Traylor, TE

T.J. Ward to sign one-year deal with Tampa Bay Buccaneers, per reports

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
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Less than 24 hours after being released by the Broncos, veteran safety T.J. Ward is expected to sign with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, according to multiple reports.

NFL Network first reported the impending deal.

His contract, per ESPN, will be for one year and up to \$5 million. Ward was due \$4.5 million in salary from Denver in 2017.

Ward arrived in Denver in 2014 as the first piece of John Elway's defensive overhaul and became a leader on the secondary and team as a whole. In his three seasons with the Broncos, Ward earned two of his three Pro Bowl selections and totaled 225 tackles, five sacks, three interceptions, 19 pass-breakups, five forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries.

Ward had one more year left on his contract and his agent had discussions with the Broncos, but the team ultimately decided to move on and elevate second-year safety Justin Simmons to the starting role. The Broncos never asked Ward to consider a pay cut to stay.

"I think it's a combination of everything. Any time you have a guy like T.J. that was such a big part of the championship year that we had and the last three years that he's been here — he's led that defense and plays with an attitude and a chip on his shoulder," Elway said. "We give him a lot of credit for what we've played defensively the last few years, but it always comes down to football decisions. With the young guys, they were playing well and it really wasn't anything to do with T.J. It was just the fact that the young guys played well and that was the best football move for us."

Broncos lose Sloter, Raymond, work on practice squad

By Mike Klis

9 News

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One of the most hotly discussed topics among Broncos fans this week centers on how general manager John Elway played his backup quarterback situation.

Kyle Sloter, an undrafted rookie from a local college who took the Denver Broncos' preseason by storm, is off to the Minnesota Vikings as a well-paid practice squad member.

In his place, the Broncos brought back Brock Osweiler, who in the past 18 months became arguably the most besieged, if also among the most well-compensated, quarterbacks in the NFL.

Discuss.

The Broncos took two hits to their practice squad Sunday when Sloter weighed offers from the Broncos and Washington before he decided to join the Minnesota Vikings' practice squad, and second-year receiver/returner Kalif Raymond was claimed off waivers by the New York Jets.

Michael Schofield, who started the final 16 games for the Broncos at right tackle in 2015 and all 16 games at right guard in 2016, was claimed off waivers Sunday by the Los Angeles Chargers.

The Broncos were also adding defensive tackle Kyle Peko back to their 53-man roster, one day after he was waived, placing outside linebacker Shane Ray on an injured reserve list that would allow him to return for their sixth game on October 30 at Kansas City. It's the second consecutive year Peko was among the final cuts, yet wound up on the Broncos' week 1, 53-man roster.

Denver also put in a claim on Cincinnati Bengals center J.J. Dielman, but he was awarded instead to the Los Angeles Rams.

The Broncos also filled nine of their 10 practice squad spots Sunday. They are center Dillon Day, cornerback Marcus Rios, tight end Austin Traylor, receiver Hunter Sharp, safety Dymonte Thomas, defensive tackle Tyrique Jarrett, offensive tackle Elijah Wilkinson, linebackers Jerrol Garcia-Williams and Deiontrez Mount. The Broncos might use that 10th spot on a quarterback as with Chad Kelly and Paxton Lynch hurt, they could use someone to run the scout team. Safety Orion Stewart received the largest signing bonus among Broncos' undrafted rookies at \$12,500 so it's mildly surprising he's not on the practice squad yet. Jamal Carter, who made the 53-man roster as a strong safety, received \$20,000 guaranteed.

Exactly one year ago today, Sloter was a senior backup to Northern Colorado quarterback Jacob Knipp. In a season-opening route against Rocky Mountain College, Sloter came off the bench to go 0 of 3 with an interception. A backup receiver his first three years at Southern Miss and Northern Colorado, Sloter's career college passing stats had moved to 0 of 4.

Jump ahead 365 days ahead and Sloter, who replaced the shoulder-injured Knipp in game 2 last season, was the subject of a bidding war involving the Broncos, Washington and Minnesota. He accepted the

Vikings' offer not only because he will receive a robust \$20,000-a-week salary – nearly \$13,000 more a week than is the NFL practice squad minimum – but because their quarterback room is less crowded than the Broncos.

After starter Trevor Siemian, the Broncos on Monday will have Osweiler once he passes his physical, first-round, second-year player Paxton Lynch, who is out for at least another month with a shoulder injury, and seventh-round rookie Chad Kelly on injured reserve with knee and wrist issues.

Sloter during four preseason games for the Broncos completed 31 of 43 for 413 yards, three touchdowns and zero interceptions.

By all accounts – he was not claimed on waivers Sunday – Sloter is not quite ready for first-team, regular-season game speed this year. The question is did he do right by 2018? And did the Broncos do right by signing Osweiler and losing Sloter?

The Broncos were also hoping to bring back Raymond, who finished as their returner in 2016 but was replaced by fifth-round rookie Isaiah McKenzie this year. Raymond nearly made the Broncos' 53-man roster, but was the seventh man out.

The Jets tried to sign Raymond off the Broncos' practice squad last year, but he wanted to stay in Denver and the team reciprocated by increasing his practice-squad pay.

Given another chance, the Jets to pass on Raymond this time as they claimed him off waivers before the Broncos had a chance to bring him back on their practice squad.

Elway: Serving youth forces decisions that 'are not always going to be popular'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 4, 2017

Denver Broncos safety Darian Stewart may still be a 20-something -- barely -- but when the 29-year-old arrives to work Monday morning he will suddenly be the elder statesman of his position group.

Safety T.J. Ward was the most notable player released after the Broncos trimmed their roster to 53, considering his standing in the locker room, his role in the team's high-profile defense and his three career Pro Bowl trips. That leaves Stewart with two second-year players in Justin Simmons and Will Parks as well as rookie Jamal Carter.

"I mean, that's what we're always trying to do and find young guys," said Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway. "Jamal Carter was [an undrafted rookie] that we found this year that's come on, had a great camp. ... You're always looking for that youth and developing them."

Elway is just as tough and determined in making personnel decisions as he was as a quarterback with no timeouts and plenty of field to cover to get a win.

Former Broncos linebacker DeMarcus Ware, who retired earlier this year, put it this way in early February before he made his decision to call it a career: "I want to come back, I love those guys, but as a player you can want that, but John Elway has to want you back too. The Broncos and Elway have been great to me, I love the team, but we all know Elway has to want you back and makes those calls."

That he does. And Ward was another one of those calls.

Ward, who had a year left on his contract, was a popular player among his teammates. He has been productive on the field and part of a defense that has been among the league's top four in either scoring or total defense in four of the past five years. The Broncos have finished with the league's top pass defense in each of the past two seasons.

But the Broncos looked at Simmons, Parks and Carter and decided the three 23-year-olds could equate to Ward, or close to it. Whether that math is right or wrong is for the season to determine.

For his part, Elway has always said the biggest part of his job is "to make sure we were in a position to compete for world championships not just this year, but four and five years down the road." That means managing the draft, the salary cap and the roster with that in mind.

Face it, any team executive who can sit across from a player like Peyton Manning after a 39-touchdown season and not only broach the idea of a pay cut but actually get one is going to look at every contract with a critical eye. Elway admits life as a team executive means he makes decisions that he wouldn't have always endorsed as a player.

"I didn't agree with every move management made," Elway said this weekend. " ... But I can tell you how many friends and people I had, cut over their careers, I didn't agree with all of them. That's hard. ... We had to do what we believe is best for the Denver Broncos. When you make tough ones like this, they're not always going to be popular."

Elway said Saturday that he had spoken to Ward's agent and conveyed the Broncos were not ready to do a contract extension "at that point in time." The Broncos did not ask Ward to take a pay cut, either. Elway and coach Vance Joseph said the decision on Ward "was a football decision."

Simmons, a 2016 draft pick, will play in the base defense. Parks, also a '16 pick, will step in for the Broncos' situational packages. Carter, who made it 13 of the last 14 years in which an undrafted rookie has made the Week 1 roster, is ready to play on special teams and on defense, if needed.

Joseph phrased it as "opportunity leads to promotion." And now the Broncos do what a team has to do after the roster is made: Play the season and see how many of the decisions were correct.

"I think that [the players] understand, at least I hope they understand, we had to do what we believe is best for the Denver Broncos," Elway said,. "This is a situation -- when you make tough ones like this they're not always going to be popular but I think the young guys will step up and play well and fill those shoes very well."

Broncos place Shane Ray on IR, bring back Kyle Peko

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 4, 2017

The Denver Broncos placed outside linebacker Shane Ray on injured reserve Sunday and signed nose tackle Kyle Peko, who was among their roster cuts a day earlier.

Ray is expected back for the Broncos' game against Kansas City on Oct. 30.

He underwent surgery in late July after tearing a ligament in his left wrist at the beginning of training camp.

Peko is a second-year pro from Oregon State who was on Denver's practice squad last season and played in one game. He's the cousin of new Broncos nose tackle Domata Peko, who came over from Cincinnati in free agency this year.

Ray's injury came just as he was set to replace retired pass rusher DeMarcus Ware opposite star Von Miller.

The Broncos initially hoped to get Ray, their first-round pick in 2015, back in action by Week 3. But general manager John Elway said the new timetable wasn't indicative of any setback.

"It kind of falls good for us and here is why we decided to go that way: He has to be on IR for eight weeks. Our bye week (Oct. 8) counts, and then our (seventh) game is on a Monday night," Elway said. "With that being on a Monday night, the eighth Sunday counts as a game. ... He's only going to miss six games."

The Broncos also re-signed nine players to their practice squad Sunday: C Dillon Day, WR Hunter Sharp, TE Austin Traylor and T Elijah Wilkinson on offense and LB Jerrol Garcia-Williams, DT Tyrique Jarrett, LB Deiontrez Mount, CB Marcus Rios, DB Dymonte Thomas on defense.

Kyle Sloter heads to Vikings practice squad; Kyle Peko added to Broncos roster

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 4, 2017

The Kyle Sloter experience is now a mist of Purple Haze.

The people's choice to serve as the Broncos backup quarterback, Sloter accepted a practice squad spot with the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday. The Vikings nearly tripled the standard \$7,200 per week practice salary to land Sloter, who attracted interest from multiple teams, including the Broncos. Denver made a strong push. There's no maximum salary for practice squad, allowing Minnesota to outbid suitors for Sloter. The former Northern Colorado star had hoped to stay in Denver because of the familiarity with the system, but also recognized the changed landscape.

With Trevor Siemian starting and the Broncos adding Brock Osweiler as a veteran, Paxton Lynch returning in a few months from a shoulder injury and Chad Kelly (knee, wrist) on the injured reserve, Sloter would have faced an uphill climb to the active roster.

In Minnesota, there is a clearer path to the 53-man roster, and more money, which increases a team's patience in development.

The Broncos added a player to their 53-man roster Sunday, with Kyle Peko tweeting, "God is so good! 🙏 excited to be apart of the Denver Broncos." Peko provides depth at nose tackle behind his cousin Domata Peko.

The Broncos will continue to fill out their 10-man practice squad Sunday. Receiver Kalif Raymond joined the New York Jets practice squad. Those who are candidates to return to Denver's squad include: defensive lineman Tyrique Jarrett, and receiver Anthony Nash.

T.J. Ward heads to Buccaneers on one-year deal after shocking Broncos release

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 4, 2017

From Ugh to Arrrgh!

T.J. Ward's unemployment lasted 13 hours. The former Broncos Pro Bowl safety agreed to a one-year deal that can reach \$5 million with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Reached by text Sunday morning, Ward confirmed the deal to Denver7 and again thanked all of those who have supported him. Ward became expendable with the development of Justin Simmons, his replacement, Will Parks and undrafted rookie Jamal Carter.

Ward, 30, was due to make \$4.5 million in the final year of his contract with the Broncos. However, none of it was guaranteed. In going to Tampa Bay, Ward can recoup his money, while adding a physical element and leadership to a team looking to reach the next level. Seven teams expressed interest, including the Steelers.

"It's going to work out for me, you can believe that," Ward told Denver7 earlier in the week as he braced for his exit.

Broncos general manager John Elway explained Sunday that parting with Ward was difficult, but a football decision. The Broncos never approached Ward about a paycut. They trusted what they saw from Simmons, especially his improvement in the run game, to part ways with Ward. It didn't go over well with teammates, something Elway can relate to.

"I was in that locker room. I didn't agree with every move that management made," Elway said. "You create those relationships in that locker room. That's important. And T.J. was a big part of that. I could tell you how many friends and people I had cut over the course of my career, and I didn't agree with all of them. But, you know, that's part of it. They understand, at least I hope they understand, that we've got to do what's best for the Denver Broncos."

Broncos re-sign Kyle Peko to active roster

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

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The Broncos re-signed nose tackle Kyle Peko to the active roster on Sunday, bringing the Broncos' active roster to 53 players.

Peko's return provides depth along the defensive line, which has been beset with injuries at both ends of the line. Starters Derek Wolfe and Jared Crick are recovering from a sprained ankle and back spasms, respectively, but they are both expected to return for the season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers.

However, Zach Kerr, who is listed as a backup at both defensive end and nose tackle, could be out for the first week as he heals from a knee bruise. Peko will help provide depth behind his cousin, starting nose tackle Domata Peko Sr.

Peko spent much of his first season on the practice squad after initially making the first 53-man roster as a college free agent. He played in the season finale against Oakland and recorded two solo tackles.

Broncos announce initial practice-squad roster

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

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President of Football Operations/GM John Elway and the Broncos signed nine players to their practice squad Sunday.

All nine players were on the Broncos' 90-man roster ahead of Saturday's roster cuts.

They are as follows:

DB Dymonte Thomas, Michigan

DT Tyrique Jarrett, Pittsburgh

CB Marcus Rios, UCLA

T Elijah Wilkinson, Massachusetts

LB Jerrol Garcia-Williams, Hawaii

LB Deiontrez Mount, Louisville

WR Hunter Sharp, Utah State

C Dillon Day, Mississippi State

TE Austin Traylor, Wisconsin

Each of the nine players were new additions to the Broncos in 2017, with the exception of Day, who spent the previous two seasons on the practice squad.

The Broncos have space to sign one more player to their practice squad.

Woody Paige: Brock Osweiler, Denver Broncos have reluctant reunion

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 4, 2017

We've stayed true to our philosophy of building a team with players who want to be Denver Broncos and want to be here." - John Elway on the departure of Brock Osweiler

"He's going to need a little football rehab. ... We will welcome him with open arms and give him some love." - Elway on Osweiler's return

Brock is back; T.J. is not; Kyle is in limbo, and Paxton is not feeling so good himself.

Where have you gone, Timmy, Jake The Snake and Jay?

Say, some strange Saturday at Dove Valley.

What else is new?

Hold onto your seats; it's going to be a bumpy ride. I've sort of gotten used to such stuff over 44 Broncos seasons. You just never know.

The Broncos of Elway, Peyton Manning and eight Super Bowls now possess three quarterbacks who ranked toward the bottom of the NFL barrel in 2016 (although two were on the roster when the franchise last won a championship).

There have been some epic breakups in history: Martin and Lewis, Elvis and Priscilla, Lucrezia Borgia and Giovanni Sforza, Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe, Simon and Garfunkel, John and Paul - and Jay Cutler and the Broncos, Jake Plummer and the Broncos, Tim Tebow and the Broncos, Tiger and Elin, LeBron James and the Cavaliers, the Rams and Los Angeles, and perhaps the most notorious - Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn (who lost her head over the split).

Then, there have been classic reunions - Taylor and Burton (who broke up), the Cavaliers and LeBron, the Rams and Los Angeles.

The Elway-Osweiler relationship may not be equal to that extreme, but when Brock scorned The Duke of Denver and the Broncos almost 18 months ago and signed a four-year, \$72 million contract with the Texans, it seemed that the close connection was done, deleted, dead as a doornail.

Osweiler had been Elway's prized pick in the second round of the 2012 draft, the roommate and best friend of John's son Jack at Arizona State, the Air Apparent to Manning, the guy who took over for a lame, elderly Peyton in 2015 and beat the Patriots and three others, and the young man who was offered \$16 million a year, with \$30 mil guaranteed. But Ossie-Ossie-Ossie left in a very messy goodbye.

But The Prodigal Quarterback, assuming he passes a formality physical, is on the roster again - at a price \$15 million less than what he wouldn't accept before.

There seemed to be a better chance that Patriots assistant Josh McDaniels would take over the Broncos again, or that Tim Tebow would give up baseball and rejoin the Broncos, or that Jay Cutler would come out of the broadcast booth and become the Broncos' quarterback. (Oh, he did with the Dolphins.)

Elway, who has hard bark, had issues with others beside Osweiler - Frank Kush, Robert Irsay, Dan Reeves, Mike Shanahan, Cutler, John Fox, Jack Del Rio, Wade Phillips, Tebow, even Manning (when the GM asked the QB to take a \$4 million cut). But he sincerely was with chagrined over Osweiler's disloyalty. And Osweiler wasn't enamored with the Broncos and their fanatical following - after he was benched and replaced with Manning for the final game, the playoffs and the Super Bowl, by the lack of a proposal he felt not befitting of his future and by the reaction when he had to confront the Broncos last season in a regular-season game at Mile High Stadium.

Both Elway and Osweiler had to take a very deep breath over the past 30 hours.

Osweiler needed a job, at any cost. The Browns didn't want him as a starter or a reserve, and no other teams were thrilled to take on a guy who was a failure with the Texans, and had to be given away to Cleveland.

Elway needed a quarterback, at a cheap cost. His newest high draft choice, Lynch, had been beaten badly for the starting quarterback position, then suffered a shoulder injury - early in the second half of the third exhibition - that will keep him out probably until the bye week (after the fourth game) or beyond. Despite the slobbering in the community over undrafted free agent Kyle Slotter, the coaching staff and the front office were not impressed when he had to play against the Broncos' defense in practices.

"We need a veteran (backup) quarterback," coach Vance Joseph said Saturday night. He was not being jovial.

Meanwhile, safety T.J. Ward is released, and that important announcement was pushed to sidebar status.

Because of The Reluctant Reunion.

David Ramsey: Signing Brock Osweiler a fantastic move by John Elway and Denver Broncos

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 4, 2017

Of course you're mad at Brock Osweiler.

Yes, he was greedy. He abandoned the Broncos when he embraced \$37 million in guaranteed cash from the Houston Texans.

Sure, he was arrogant and clueless, always a bad combination. He believed he was ready to leap to elite status as an NFL quarterback. Instead, he's in danger of being remembered in 25 years as one of the NFL's all-time big money busts.

But let's be real. Signing Osweiler for a mere \$775,000 was a fantastic move by John Elway and the Broncos. Osweiler was a precious piece of the Broncos' run to Super Bowl supremacy a mere 19 months ago.

He showed flashes of immense potential as a Broncos starter. He's still 6-foot-8 with a mighty arm. These are blessings that can't be taught. His football mind has been a mess, but maybe he can, with Elway's help, mend his psyche and his tattered career.

He's worth the risk, and if he can return to the Brock of 2015, he will conquer Trevor Siemian and reign as Broncos starter.

Let's travel back to two Sundays late in the 2015 season when Osweiler, thrown into the starting job by Peyton Manning's failing body, led the Broncos to crucial victories over the Patriots and Bengals.

In the snow against the Patriots, he lofted a pass down the sideline to Emmanuel Sanders that seemed guided by radar. The pass remains one of the best thrown this decade by a Broncos QB. He outplayed Tom Brady while pushing the Broncos to 17 fourth-quarter points against a defense designed by Bill Belichick, one of the top minds in football history.

A month later, the Broncos were teetering against the Bengals, who boasted the AFC's top scoring defense.

With 90 seconds left, Osweiler scanned the Bengals secondary and saw tight end Owen Daniels sprinting in a crowd. With pressure building in the pocket and the Broncos trailing, Osweiler had to make a play.

And he did, ripping a fastball into Daniels hands. Linebacker Emmanuel Lamur barely missed the pass, and slammed the ground in anger. The throw rescued the Broncos, who won in overtime.

That throw, and that win, turned out to be Osweiler's final hurrah. Manning returned to the starting job and a miffed Osweiler soon departed.

He departed to a total disaster. He quickly became a bust in Houston, tossing interceptions, missing open receivers, squabbling with coach Bill O'Brien, alienating fans.

He was cut Friday by the Cleveland Browns. He could fall even farther, but that would be exceedingly difficult. The man has hit bottom. Hear that noise? It's Brock, shouting from the bottom of a football well.

What happened?

There are two possibilities.

NFL defensive coordinators might have found big flaws in Osweiler's arm and mind. It happens. Quarterbacks look promising on their first few starts, but as opposing coordinators collect video the flaws are revealed.

In November 2015, Osweiler shredded Belichick's brilliantly designed defense. Only 10 months later, Belichick was ready after studying Osweiler's tendencies. Belichick, ever the genius, started Osweiler's long fall.

On Sept. 22, 2016, while facing essentially the same Patriots defense, Osweiler badly lost his return chess match with Belichick. The Texans were shut out, and whispers began.

Was Brock worth all that money?

But there's another possibility for his collapse. Maybe Osweiler can still make the throws of 2015 if he regains belief in his right arm. A quarterback requires ridiculous faith in his arm and his ability to make instant decisions. Once that faith is broken a quarterback has no chance against the snarling marauders who inhabit NFL defenses.

Maybe it's a mind thing. Maybe Brock can recover his faith and his lost promise.

This, I realize, is a big if.

Let's be clear: I'm surprised by Osweiler's tumble. I believed he would trot off to Texas, where a superlative group of defensive teammates awaited him, and prove himself as one of the NFL's top 15 quarterbacks.

I wasn't alone in my belief.

Remember, Elway offered \$30 million in guaranteed money to Osweiler. Elway had closely watched four seasons as the young quarterback matured. He believed in Brock, believed so much he was ready to hand him the future of the offense.

That seems a long time ago, even though it wasn't. It's been a short, strange trip, and it ends with a broken Brock returning to a state where many wish he had stayed away for, say, forever.

You're mad at him. I get it.

But you won't stay mad at him if he returns to being the Brock of 2015.

Monday Morning QB: Roster Cuts, Surprising Trades and a Super Bowl 52 Prediction

By Peter King

MMQB

September 4, 2017

I'm not saying New England and Seattle are smarter than everyone else in the NFL. Time will tell if they've made the right moves after each team made a league-high five pre-cutdown trades in the NFL, on a weekend when more than 1,100 players got cut/traded/waived, the biggest transaction period in NFL history.

I am picking a New England-Seattle Super Bowl. The weekend put the exclamation point on that. But this weekend wasn't the end of it.

"It never stops," Seattle GM John Schneider said four minutes before stepping into a 6 p.m. Pacific Time meeting Saturday to see which of the 1,100 players on the street the Seahawks might be interested in claiming or bidding for. "This is a non-stop building of the roster now. We're not smarter than anyone else—I can guarantee you that—so we're just going to keep working."

Briefly, I am picking a Super Bowl 49 rematch because—though each team has flaws—I like the quarterbacks, I like each coach's imagination, I like the offensive weapons (even the new and strange weaponry in New England) and I like the Seattle defense. A lot. The acquisition of three-technique defensive tackle Sheldon Richardson by Seattle on Friday clinched it for me; I look at a Michael Bennett/Richardson/Jarran Reed/Cliff Avril front, with Frank Clark the nickel rusher or more, as the best in the NFC. Just about unblockable.

With the NFL's 98th season starting Thursday in Foxboro (Chiefs at Patriots), the unprecedented roster churn less than a week before puts significant pressure on the coaching side and the player-acquisition side to fold in new players quickly. The Patriots and Seahawks, under Bill Belichick and Pete Carroll, have track records of getting new players up to speed quickly. They'll have to, with Week 1 challenges for New England from Kansas City's pass-rush and its excellent special teams, and for Seattle from Green Bay's passing game. But it's going to be a competitive and typically mysterious season, and if you'd predict a Steelers-Giants Super Bowl, or Chiefs-Falcons, or Raiders-Packers, that's no worse than my pick.

Let's start with the weekend, and the most stunning trade, and then I'll get to the two teams that fascinate me the most entering the NFL's 98th season.

It was a text message from New England at 7 p.m. Friday that started the trade that, when it was complete at midday Saturday, knocked people off their beach chairs on this Labor Day weekend. On Friday evening, a Patriots operative texted the Colts and asked, and I am paraphrasing: Any interest in Jacoby Brissett for Phillip Dorsett?

In the previous five pre-cutdown periods, NFL teams averaged 10.2 trades per year. This year, there were 25. "There was a lot of trolling, because there were going to be so many players out there," said one AFC GM, who was active in the week leading up to the 4 p.m. ET cut deadline Saturday. "There was

a lot of, 'Any interest in this guy? He's not gonna get to you on the waiver claim system. You're too low.'" In other words, if a young player, a rookie or impressive undrafted free agent getting cut, hit the market, a team with a low waiver priority (a high-finishing team in 2016) would likely get undercut for the guy. That was a propellant for deals like the Patriots dealing a sixth-rounder for Cincinnati special-teams ace Marquis Flowers.

But that doesn't account for what the Patriots did with the Colts in the stunning trade of the weekend. There was not a whisper of a rumor that the Pats would deal number three (but a rising prospect) quarterback Jacoby Brissett this weekend, particularly with the absolutely unknown quarterback situation the Patriots have in 40-year-old Tom Brady and looming 2018 free agent Jimmy Garoppolo ahead of him on the depth chart. And though Indy had talked to teams (Rams, Patriots, several others) this summer about trading the underachieving Dorsett—two years, 51 catches since being the 29th overall pick in 2015—most around the league thought the Colts would get a mid-round pick, or a pick plus a swap of higher picks.

So after the Patriots reached out, the Colts did their due diligence, watching tape of Brissett, especially liking his poise against a hard Houston rush in a September 2016 start. By noon Saturday the Colts decided to do the deal. Interesting, really, to see how quickly deals developed on this weekend: When Indy staffers were at dinner Friday, they had no thought of doing anything significant at the quarterback position. By lunch Saturday, they had upgraded their backup quarterback position—significantly, they thought. Brissett will be an upgrade over Scott Tolzien, who still will likely play at least the opener next week while incumbent Andrew Luck continues to heal from offseason shoulder surgery. The Colts did not make this trade out of a fear for Luck's health. They did it to get a three-year solid backup/developmental quarterback at a manageable average salary of \$735,000 through the end of 2019.

Dorsett is undervalued now. Brissett had a good two-year run in the Patriots' system, and New England probably maximized his value in part by his four-TD preseason game Thursday night. Trading Brissett is risky, but the way New England looked at it, I'm sure, is they'll worry about the quarterback of the future in 2018, not now. Now is time to maximize a malleable receiver group. "If you want to get something, you've got to give up something," Bill Belichick said Sunday.

A week before the season, New England found itself suddenly in big trouble on special teams with arguably the best kicking-game units in football, Kansas City's, coming to Foxboro this week. Thus the trades for special-teams aces Marquis Flowers and Johnson Bademosi before final cuts. I don't expect Dorsett, who is not a good returner, to be in play as a punt-returner; if he plays Thursday night, I expect it to be in the regular offense, and I expect him to be used exclusively as a receiver this season.

What the Patriots have done on offense since the end of the season, even with the ACL tear suffered by reliable Julian Edelman, is bolster their desire to play position-less football. This is probably the fastest receiver group Belichick has ever coached. Dorsett and Brandin Cooks, both sub-4.4 guys in the 40-yard dash, could line up wide, stretch the field and open up the intermediate areas like never before. Chris Hogan is a 4.45 guy and figures to be in the slot with Danny Amendola a lot. I doubt Rex Burkhead, who is capable of playing the slot, will play much if at all there; I figure he's going to be a versatile presence in the backfield only. Rob Gronkowski could be more of a move player than he has been, now that a solid blocking tight end Dwayne Allen is in the house—we'll see.

New England has the ability to be so much different on offense than the explosive team that put 34, 36 and 34 points up on three playoff foes. Who knows what they'll do. This is a team that has the potential to be much better on offense later in the season than in September ... and I take you back to my conversation with Brady in February to explain why. I marveled at the precision of the timing routes to first-year Pats Hogan and Malcolm Mitchell at crucial times in the Super Bowl, and this is what Brady said: "That's a lot of throws. That's 111 practices that we had. That's however many games. Films, meetings. It's got to be like clockwork. You're throwing it to a spot, he's turning, those are the ones the DBs have been covering all year too. It took great execution."

Cooks, Dorsett, Burkhead. Allen, Mike Gillislee. When I think of folding in so many new guys to the New England offense, I think of 111 practices. It could take a while before it all fits together. The Patriots' could change more than any offense in football between today and December. That's not a bad thing.

MORE CUTDOWN WEEKEND THOUGHTS

- **On the Sheldon Richardson trade.** (Richardson and a seventh-round pick from the Jets to Seattle for wideout Jermaine Kearse and a second-round pick.) Good for both teams. Might be great for Seattle. The Seahawks plan to try hard to sign Richardson beyond this year, and it'll cost quite a bit; Richardson will be supremely motivated to play great in Seattle. Next March, at 28, could be the last chance he'll have to do a mega-NFL deal. The Jets can use the low second-round pick they'll get for a player or as ammo to help them move up for their quarterback of the future next April. And Kearse is a good placeholder with a great worker-bee rep.

- **The Seattle pre-cutdown haul.** Six trades, with the biggest chip dealt their second-round pick in 2018. When the picks that flew back and forth cancel out, Seattle might have gotten marginally better on the offensive line (Matt Tobin from the Eagles, Isaiah Battle from the Chiefs) but Richardson is the big key, particularly with the future of the rookie the organization loved, three-technique tackle Malik McDowell, in doubt after an ATV accident. One thing that GM John Schneider does with his scouting staff is stress that, yes, he knows the offensive line needs help. But Anthony Munoz is not walking through that door, so let's not cry about it. Let's find bodies better than the bodies we have.

- **Brock Osweiler's a Bronco.** John Elway wanted to sign Osweiler as Denver's quarterback of the future in March 2016 for about \$16 million a year. He signed him Saturday night for 4.8 percent of that. But Osweiler's better suited as a third-stringer or backup now; his accuracy is not NFL-effective. Elway made it clear Osweiler will be the backup to Trevor Siemian till Paxton Lynch returns from a shoulder injury in about a month. After that? That's in Siemian's hands. If he plays well in the first month, the Broncos may be inclined to cut Osweiler and use the roster spot on another position of need. If not, Osweiler could have an on-field second act in Denver. Man, how weird it's going to feel for Osweiler this week, back in that locker room after he made it clear he was happy to leave there 18 months ago.

- **Dot dot dot ...** I like Sammie Coates in Cleveland—a big, imposing receiver who got trumped by Martavis Bryant's return. Coates and Kasen Williams (waiver claim from Seattle) are intriguing weekend catches for the Browns ... One of my favorite waiver claims: running back Alex Collins, by Baltimore. The Ravens' backfield is the land of opportunity, and Collins runs hard ... Like the T.J. Ward signing by the Bucs. Good leader, hard hitter. Julio Jones will know where he is on downfield throws, to be sure ... The Eagles' offensive line got better with the one-year extension for Chance Warmack, who's having a good second act with the Eagles after flopping in Tennessee ... Interesting the Texans choose to go with Tom Savage and Deshaun Watson and no number three quarterback—though I'm sure Brandon Weeden will

keep his phone handy for a call if Savage goes down ... And the Niners kept only two quarterbacks, with Iowa rookie C.J. Beathard, camp star, being number two.

Ezekiel Elliott Case: There Are No Winners

Whatever happens Wednesday—by which time the league should hear the results of the Ezekiel Elliott appeal of his six-game suspension for abusing girlfriend Tiffany Thompson in 2016, and by which time we should know if a Texas court will grant Elliott a restraining order so he can play Sunday against the Giants—both Elliott and the NFL will not look good after this case.

We know now Elliott admitted having rough sex with girlfriend Tiffany Thompson, admitted using illicit drugs (“in college,” was his proviso), could not stay away from a relationship with a woman he says got pregnant by him on purpose (the woman who alleges his drug use included “doing a bunch of coke”), and says he had sex with a woman (not Tiffany Thompson) whose breasts he exposed in public.

We know now the NFL, which should have learned from prior errors in sex-abuse investigations, did not allow the investigator—who interviewed Thompson six times and reportedly had problems with her credibility—to report her findings directly to commissioner Roger Goodell. In fact, Goodell should have demanded to speak with lead investigator Kia Roberts. Her findings were reported to Goodell, but not personally by Roberts. She should have been allowed to tell him exactly what her concerns were, since she was the investigator who would have the most informed opinion on Thompson’s credibility. The NFL must at all costs in cases of abuse do everything right. Everything. Because the league knows the microscope of appeal will delve thoroughly into every aspect of their case. And the aspect of Roberts knowing the accused better than anyone in the league and not conversing with Goodell about that is a blatant error, even if the chain of command in this case does not require Roberts to report to Goodell.

I don’t know if Elliott is guilty, or worthy of a six-game ban. But from reading the reports of this case, I sincerely hope the Cowboys do not simply fight for his freedom so he’ll be able to play the maximum number of football games this year. This guy needs to grow up. He needs to go to the Dak Prescott school of maturity. I am reminded of my conversation with coach Jason Garrett in training camp, when Garrett told me of his offseason admonitions to Elliott.

“I’ve had a number of talks with him,” Garrett said. “I’ve asked him, ‘What do you want to be?’ My point to him is, ‘If you maximize your abilities, you might be able to make \$200 million off the field, like LeBron. Or you could make a million.’ I mean, say you’re AT&T, or you’re Pepsi. You’re looking for a spokesman for your product. What would you do right now? You’d probably say if you’re one of those companies, ‘Oh, we’ll go with Dak. Or we’ll go with Jordan Spieth.’ But that’s in his control.”

It’s not just about the money. It’s about Elliott’s career, and about his life.

For now, it’s also about his fate. Kia Roberts raises enough doubts about the case, and the veracity of Thompson’s testimony, that unless the metadata is crystal clear that Elliott abused Thompson, a six-game suspension seems excessive. That’s why the evidence, and the forensic examination of the data, is so vital in this case. And the appeals officer in the case, Harold Henderson, has to determine in very short order whether the metadata can be trusted. And if he thinks it can, then Elliott will have to convince a Texas judge the data is flawed—and quickly.

It's hard for me to imagine Henderson erasing the suspension. But the sheer volume of conflicting stories between Elliott and Thompson make it realistic to think Henderson could knock the suspension down a couple of games. And though you never know what could happen in a court of law, it's also hard to believe Elliott could win this case on its merits. But there's so much conflicting evidence in this case that any predictions you make on it are done at your own peril.

Matt Ryan: The Competitor's Mindset

I hadn't spoken with Atlanta quarterback Matt Ryan in the off-season till I saw him mid-August in training camp. In fact, the last time I saw him prior to camp was in the post-game mosh pit of the Super Bowl interview room, where he handled himself well after the worst loss of his life.

I'd heard the Falcons had zipped their lips about the Super Bowl, but I wanted to find out for myself. As usual, Ryan, sitting on a bleacher in the shade in back of the of the Falcons' training complex, didn't disappoint. I didn't have to ask a lot of questions. Here's Ryan, stream of consciousness...

"When you hear Michael Jordan talk about a big loss, or J.J. Watt, Peyton or Eli Manning, Serena Williams—it's one of those things, it's always there a little bit," Ryan said. "It's always the thing that burns or makes you want to get up and do the work that you have to do in order to be successful. It's not all-consuming. I think that is probably the best way to describe it. For me I knew I had moved on when I started training again and working towards what I wanted to accomplish this year and I was able to answer questions and talk about it and really not go back to that place of being frustrated or disappointed with the outcome. That's really where I felt like I could move on. I feel good now. It's in there somewhere and you use it as motivation to get up out of bed to go to work.

"[Coach] Dan Quinn was really good about it following the game. His attitude was, 'Hey, let's watch this thing. Let's deal with it now, when the wound is still fresh.' Really smart, rather than to wait and wait and wait to watch it because you're so angry. So we got back Monday and I was in here Tuesday, watching it and going through it. His advice was, 'Flush it from your system as fast as you can and start getting focused on what is in front of you as fast as you can.'

"I watched it here at the facility, on my own. I watched it three times.

"When it doesn't go your way, everybody is going to second guess how you went about it. I thought we went about it the way we went about it all year. From that standpoint, you have to feel good about yourself in some way. We went out, we attacked, we made some plays, they made one or two more at the end of the game than we did, and that's kind of the way it goes. It was a weird game offensively for us, because I don't know how many snaps we had in that game but it wasn't a lot. With them having so many offensive plays, we didn't have that many and we created a ton of explosive plays offensively. We fell a little bit short, deal with it and move on."

I asked him how hard it was to be civil 20 minutes after a game like a Super Bowl loss when your team blows a 25-point lead.

"Obviously you are disappointed and angry and frustrated and pissed, all those things. But you know, I have always been taught and learned from a lot of different people, that there is a right way and a wrong way to do everything. I felt like it was the right way to handle it at the time. It's not always easy to do the right thing, but it's part of our job, right? That's part of what we do. Usually you are better off just

dealing with it and moving forward. That's how I think. Rip the Band-Aid. Go do it, and be done with it and then get out of there.”

Around the Falcons, there was change on both sides of the ball, with new coordinators Marquand Manuel on defense (very familiar with the Dan Quinn defense) and Steve Sarkisian on offense (an imaginative sort who will meld his philosophy with the Kyle Shanahan way that was not broken). There has been a steadiness of approach emanating from Quinn, who hasn't ignored the Super Bowl but hasn't harped on it either.

Quinn believes there are ways to get incrementally better each year—which every coach should believe, of course. He also believes that football players are not necessarily like the public or the sports media, in that losses don't haunt players the way those in the outside world think they might. When I think about this, I think about Julio Jones, for instance. Great player. Also not a big football fan. When he goes home, he doesn't relax by watching two college games on Saturdays. He just lives. So will there be a hangover? There could be; we'll see. If I'm Atlanta, I like my opening month: at Chicago, Green Bay at home (to open the new \$1.6-billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium), at Detroit, Buffalo at home, bye; and I like four of the last six at home.

Ryan thinks the balance between reflection on the loss and why it happened, and not obsessing over it, has been the right thing. Around the team, the players seem to have moved on.

“It happened, you deal with it, you learn from it and then you move on,” Ryan said. “I think we have the right group of guys to move forward, as opposed to keep looking back at what could have been. It might not be normal for people to think that. I think that everybody might think we keep hanging onto these things. We're not like that.

“What I've been more about, especially as I get along in my career, is finding a way to get 1 percent better. It's harder to do, the longer you play, to get those incremental improvements. But for me, it was going back to the same things. As the year goes on and you get hit, and you move more, you kind of get out of position a little bit with how you throw and your mechanics and getting your feet underneath you. And I think when you get back to work, I went out to California again and worked with [quarterback mechanics gurus] Adam Dedeaux and Tom House and just got back to the fundamentals. It's amazing that in all sports, regardless of what it is, however long you play, when you get the fundamentals correct and you get everything going from the ground up, how quickly you get back to your best form. And, that was it for me, trying to get back to where I was and trying to get a little better. And sleep. One of the things that I have gotten more and more into, in all honesty, is being anal about getting enough sleep. I'm like a 9-to-6, super-early-to-bed guy now.”

I told Ryan I recalled Jim Kelly, at training camp after Buffalo's fourth Super Bowl loss, looking at me incredulously when I asked if he'd considered walking away from football because the pain of losing was so acute. Kelly said, basically, You're kidding, right? I love this game. I couldn't think of doing anything that's a tenth as fun, even when you lose Super Bowls.

“That's the competitor's mindset, right?” Ryan said. “My thing is, what else would you rather be doing? This is a pretty good gig if you can get it.”

Stats of the Week: Cleveland Browns Continue to Hoard NFL Draft Picks

Before we get to the stats of the week, let me preface by saying I have come to (semi-) praise the Browns, not bury them. That is because of the man at the top, Jimmy Haslam, who along with co-owner and wife Dee Haslam, have practiced patience through some more lean times in the past year and a half. I mean, they haven't fired a major player in the football hierarchy for a whole 20 months, and reports are that coach Hue Jackson and football architects Sashi Brown, Andrew Berry and MLB alum Paul DePodesta are getting along pretty well in making the football calls.

Jenny Vrentas and I met with Jimmy and Dee Haslam in Cleveland in August, and I asked them what was the most important lesson they'd learned. Dee Haslam brought up something she'd heard the COO of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, say: "Hire for where you want to be, not for where you are."

Jimmy Haslam said about the challenges of the NFL versus the truckstop business: "It's a lot harder than you think. Having been in business and having done at least okay there, to come into the NFL and think that's necessarily going to transfer to running a pro sports franchise, it doesn't work that way. The important thing is to get the right people in place, and ... leave them there for a long time. And, in this league, you gotta have a quarterback.

"The group is working very well together. We have very healthy debate. If you and I went to dinner, I would predict we would have a lot of good and vigorous debate on subjects, which is good. If we agree on everything, there's something wrong. We've put together a diverse group of skill-sets—smart, work hard, bring a lot to the organization. This year, I don't think we'll be 15-1, but we'll be better. We spend time talking about small victories."

My biggest problem with the people who run the Browns—and it surfaced again last week with the cutting of Joe Haden—is they continue to build for the future by again and again letting go of good players. Not saying Haden was great (he's fallen off from his two-time Pro Bowl status), and not saying he was worth his scheduled \$11 million a year over the next three seasons. But the list of good players sent away is long, and these are not cancers—they're good football players. Taylor Gabriel, Alex Mack, Mitchell Schwartz, Terrelle Pryor, Tashaun Gipson, Andy Lee since New Year's Day 2016 ... players who would contribute to a winning team; Gabriel, Mack and Schwartz were key guys in the NFL playoffs last January. One contributing player was acquired Saturday, when the Browns got the better end of a deal, trading a sixth-round 2018 pick to Pittsburgh for a 2015 third-round receiver from Auburn, Sammie Coates, plus Pittsburgh's seventh-round pick in 2019.

Part of the constant churn of the roster comes from the constant churn of club architects. The Browns have employed six GMs since 2008. Haslam's most significant words in this interview: get the right people in place and leave them there for a long time. I'm hoping for the sake of Browns fans and the sheer misery of nine straight losing seasons (4-32 the past two years) that Sashi Brown gets the significant team-building time Ray Farmer and Mike Lombardi and Tom Heckert and George Kokinis and Phil Savage didn't.

Now for the Stats of the Week.

I

In the eight drafts between 2008 and 2015, Cleveland had five general managers and five head coaches who made nine first-round draft choices.

Eight of those nine first-round picks, who would now be between 24 and 32 and theoretically be in the prime of their careers, forming the backbone of a team for the long haul, are gone: Alex Mack, Joe Haden, Phil Taylor, Trent Richardson, Barkevious Mingo, Justin Gilbert, Johnny Manziel and Cam Erving.

One, defensive tackle Danny Shelton, is still on the team.

II

The Browns are drafting enough players over a 37-month period to field a full game-day roster, and have two players left over. The Browns' draft haul, annually, from 2015 to 2018:

Year	Total Picks
2015	12
2016	14
2017	10
2018 (As of Sept. 3)	12

Total: 48 (after the Sammy Coates acquisition Saturday). Average NFL team's picks over those four seasons: 32. (Teams get seven draft choices per season, and in the NFL, another 32 picks per year, approximately, are awarded as compensatory picks for teams that lose moneyed free agents.)

III

Assume the Texans finish with a better 2017 record than the Browns, and this will be true, if nothing changes about the 2018 draft between now and late April next year:

Cleveland will pick six players before Houston picks one.

IV

None of the eight quarterbacks and wide receivers on Cleveland's roster as of this morning was on the roster in March 2016.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

I

"I'm kind of chasing him around. You know, like chasing a girl in high school."

—Rams coach Sean McVay, as the team continues to deal with the holdout of its best player, defensive tackle Aaron Donald, who wants to be the highest-paid defensive player in football.

II

"We did the study and the research and we weren't interested. No, I'm not explaining it."

—Jacksonville executive VP of football operations Tom Coughlin to the Florida Times-Union, on whether the team would sign Colin Kaepernick as a backup quarterback.

III

“There’s nothing that compares to it. You need a great starting pitcher, a great closer in baseball. You need a great point guard in basketball. But there’s not one position that comes anywhere close in sports, I don’t think, to quarterback in football. If you ask any one of our football people, they’d all say getting the quarterback right is number one. I can tell you this: It’s on the top of our list daily. Once you get that, the game’s much easier.”

—Cleveland co-owner Jimmy Haslam, to me and Jenny Vrentas, on the search for a quarterback to lead the Browns out of the wilderness. They’ll give 2017 second-round pick DeShone Kizer his shot starting Sunday against the Steelers.

Haslam, later in the same interview: “Who knows? We could have him on the roster right now.”

IV

“Roger [Staubach] gave me something one time, it was great. He goes: ‘They are going to try and coach you out of making plays. Coaches are always going to try to coach that out of you, don’t let them. What makes the best quarterbacks is always the ability to go above and beyond what the coaches ask. The coaches are going to coach it out of you, but the guy who can makes plays, that is a rare gift. Just make sure you don’t stop being aggressive.’”

—Tony Romo, to Kalyn Kahler of The MMQB, in her “Talking Football” interview.

FACTOID THAT MAY INTEREST ONLY ME

Eleven years ago, a 12-year-old Korean boy named Younghoe Kim moved with his family to New Jersey. He didn’t speak English. He thought one way to make friends would be to take up football, and he began placekicking. He kicked well enough at Ridgewood High to get a scholarship to Georgia Southern, and then he got signed as a free agent with the Chargers for training camp this year. Kim out-kicked incumbent Josh Lambo, and now Kim is going to start his NFL career on Monday Night Football, Chargers at Broncos, Week 1.

Monday Night Football in Korean:

- 월요일 밤 축구

or

- Wol-yoil bam chuggu

MR. STARWOOD PREFERRED MEMBER TRAVEL NOTE

Hope He’s a Delta Frequent Flyer Dept.: In the past 11 months, Bene’ Benwikere has gone from a starting cornerback in Carolina to the bench in Miami, to the practice squad in Miami, to the post-

season practice squad with Green Bay, to Cincinnati as a free agent, and, on Saturday, to Dallas, which sent a conditional draft choice to the Bengals for him.

TWEETS OF THE WEEK

I



Bill Barnwell ✓
@billbarnwell

[Follow](#)

The NFL is going to turn this 90->53 day into a major event within five years.

8:15 AM - Sep 3, 2017

41 76 505

II



Stephen Holder ✓
@HolderStephen

[Follow](#)

One thing I will say on Dorsett: you could tell Pagano was getting annoyed w his muscle strains and pulls. Missed too much practice time.

1:06 PM - Sep 2, 2017

20 37 133

III



Andrew Hawkins ✓
@Hawk

[Follow](#)

Browns down to just 4 players on the roster from 2014 season. Cray.

5:15 PM - Sep 1, 2017

18 44 247

Hawkins was on that 2014 Cleveland team.

IV



V



POD PEOPLE

From the new season of “The MMQB Podcast With Peter King,” available where you download podcasts.

This week: a special podcast with tributes to Titans defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau, as well as a conversation with LeBeau. The Hall of Fame former Detroit defensive back turns 80 on Saturday, a day before he'll become the first 80-year-old coordinator in NFL history.

- LeBeau on the best wideout he ever covered: “Paul Warfield was as good as any of them ... I covered Bob Hayes, who was a great player and an Olympic 100-meter champion. When he ran, half the stadium shook because he was so powerful. As a guy trying to run with him, you just had to watch and feel, and you knew when he was opening up, and you knew damn well you better give him some room. But Paul, you couldn't do that with him, because if you took your eye off him for a second, he was already five yards somewhere else and there was never any physical exertion, seemingly, that this guy is really trying to run hard. Paul was like Fred Astaire in football cleats, man.”

- LeBeau, who imported the Zone Blitz to the NFL in 1984, on how he found it: “I was ... out on a scouting mission for the Bengals in the early eighties ... and I was probably only talking to [LSU assistant coach] Bill Arnsparger for 15 minutes, but I admired what he had done as a defensive coach and some of the various movement patterns that he had started, and I'll never forget this, but he said, ‘All I was looking for was a safer way to great pressure.’ And that sentence was the atom that split for me, because I was going to Texas and I had an airplane flight and I got the gal to give me a supply of cocktail

napkins and I started drawing right away on a safer concept of pressure. Blitzes up to that time were all what we call zero coverage, where everybody had a guy and you overloaded the protection by sending an extra guy ... I thought, Wouldn't it be nice to be able to get that pressure at least from one half of the defense and still keep a free safety where if something went wrong, he could tackle the guy and we could play the next down? I'm not sure that's what Bill meant, but that's how it focused into my mind right away."

- LeBeau on calling plays at 80: "I never think about it. I'm just a football coach and I'm going to try to do my job. I never think of stuff like that. The secret for being able to work this long is I have had some wonderfully good players. I could name a ton of them that have played well for me and kept me working. I have great genes. My mom was 96, my dad was 88, my dad's sisters all went way into their nineties. LeBeaus are hard to get off the planet."

10 Things I Think I Think: On Su'a Cravens, Adrian Peterson, the Dr. Z Memoir and More

1. I think the Su'a Cravens story, is, as one person close to the Washington hierarchy said Sunday, "just plain weird." But also, as people begin to dig deeper on it, not as much of a shock as you'd think at first glance. Cravens, drafted at age 20 by Washington out of USC in the second round of the 2016 draft, told the organization Sunday morning he planned to retire. The Washington Post reported club president Bruce Allen talked him out of it, and the team placed him on the exempt list, which will allow him one month to decide whether he'll come back to football. Still, this was the projected starting strong safety, walking into the office of the team president seven days before the opening game of the season, saying he was retiring. A stunner to the public, to be sure.

But as our Albert Breer reported in March, some teammates were skeptical that Cravens, who missed the final three games of last year with a biceps injury, was injured to the point that he couldn't play. And his absence was a factor (one of many) in the team losing to the Giants in Week 17 and missing out on the playoffs. So even if Cravens chooses to come back to football, it's fair to wonder how he would be received in the locker room by his teammates, some of whom may feel Cravens picked an inopportune time to quit.

In a revealing story about the Cravens departure Sunday, Mike Jones of the Post reported an eerie detail about how he told those in his defensive backfield group: "Saturday night, Cravens informed his fellow defensive backs in a group text message that he was retiring, a second person familiar with the situation said. Cravens, in the group message, praised each of his teammates for their skills and expressed gratitude for them and their role in his life. He said that he had enjoyed playing with them, but was retiring on Sunday and ended the text message with, 'Peace out,' and then removed himself from the group chat. Members of the group chat were both shocked and angered by Cravens's decision, players said. Some felt like in a sense, Cravens had let them down." Good reporting by Jones ... and in the culture of a locker room, it explains how it could be difficult if Cravens wants to come back to the team a month from now.

2. I think you can't underestimate the kind of damage a player quite important to the welfare of a team can do by walking away after all the hay is in the barn preparing for a game. I don't know if the Washington defense had been given the game plan yet for Philadelphia (usually that happens on Wednesday morning before a Sunday game, but with the last preseason game having been played on Thursday, the defensive coaches surely had most of the plan already prepared), but defensive

coordinator Greg Manusky was surely planning for Cravens—a physical run-support player at 6-1 and 222 pounds—to be a major part of the plan.

3. I think the Jets can say whatever they want. Every action since the end of 2014—shedding Sheldon Richardson, Brandon Marshall, David Harris, Eric Decker, Breno Giacomini, the diminished Darrelle Revis and Nick Mangold, and adding a second-round pick in 2018—says this team is all about 2018 and '19, with 2017 being only a bridge to happier days. They hope.

4. I think the Vikings punctured one of the feel-good stories from the 2016 draft. You remember wide receiver Moritz Boehringer, the German kid who blew away a U.S. pro day prior to the draft and got lots of draftniks fired up about him ... and he was one of the Vikings' cuts over the weekend. Turns out he just didn't make the adjustment to the pro game in terms of receiving mechanics and instincts.

5. I think the best response to the recent news about the release of the Paul Zimmerman book, "Dr. Z: The Lost Memoirs of an Irreverent Football Writer," came from an old journalism friend of his and fellow Hall of Fame voter, Frank Cooney from San Francisco. I'll share some of it: "Paul and I shared a lot of similar perspectives, and probably disagreed on just as many others. We each saw football a bit differently than our journalistic brethren, who he once referenced as 'semi-pro,' which I thought was hilarious. We both played minor league football and cherish those memories and the perspective offered by the experience. We both love the game, our game, and passionately care about preserving the realities of history, despite not always agreeing on those realities. Paul reduces an impassioned antagonist to a mere foil. But it was as much fun as it was frustrating. Paul was THE VOICE in our Hall of Fame selection meetings.

Paul: 'Dave Casper is the greatest tight end ever to play in the NFL.' Done.

Paul: 'Howie Long re-invented how to play on the defensive line.' Done.

Although he often beat me up in those meetings, I miss THE VOICE. I was lucky to be able to disagree and agree with him face to face from the middle 60s until we were prematurely robbed of his unique self expression. So, thanks for bringing back a flood of memories."

My pleasure. You can find the book several ways: through Triumph Books, Amazon, IndieBound, or Barnes and Noble.

6. I think Mark Craig of the Minneapolis Star-Tribune got Adrian Peterson to talk some truth Sunday. There's no way (and the Vikings know this) that Peterson was going to take his exile from Minnesota well, when the Vikings wouldn't pay him his option-year salary with a cap cost of \$18 million. Who could blame the Vikings with a 32-year-old running back? I can't think of one GM in the league who would have carried Peterson for that money, or anything close. But it has provided motivational fodder for Peterson this off-season, as he told Craig. The Vikings host New Orleans and Peterson in Week 1, and the Vikings are the host team for Super Bowl 52 as well. "In my mind, we're starting and ending the season in Minnesota," Peterson told Craig. "Of course I want to stick it to them. I want to stick it to everyone we play. But going back to Minnesota, playing the Vikings? Yeah, I want to stick it to them."

7. I think the one under-the-radar acquisition I loved over the weekend was the Giants dealing a low-round pick for Steelers cornerback Ross Cockrell. New York gets a feisty and physical insurance policy at a vital position. Watch the Steelers practice, as I did one day in August, and Cockrell really stands out for

his run-support and fearlessness. He'll come in handy at a position that always needs reinforcement during a 16-game season.

8. I think Dallas has the most interesting quarterback roster in football. Imagine 13 months ago if you'd told anyone with the Cowboys that the 2017 opening-day Dallas depth chart at quarterback would read: 1. Dak Prescott; 2. Cooper Rush. End. Just amazing how fast things change in the NFL. Rush, by the way, is a Central Michigan Chippewa who completed 32 of his last 36 passes in the preseason and made Kellen Moore instantly obsolete.

9. I think I'm glad we can be done with all speculation to the contrary. One weekend of college football tells us Josh Rosen is the top pick in the 2018 draft. At least that's what Twitter informed me late last night/early this morning. Good to know. Kidding, sort of. Hats off to Rosen for a ridiculous comeback performance (292 passing yards, four touchdown passes in the fourth quarter) to beat Texas A&M. Seven more months to determine who's going number one to the Jets. Or Browns. Or Niners. Or whichever team.

10. I think these are my non-football thoughts of the week:

a. Story of the Week: by Scott Simon of National Public Radio, reporting for CBS News, entitled "When disaster relief brings anything but relief." It's a little cruel-sounding, but read or watch this (both possible), and you'll understand why at times of disaster such as the Texas flooding, money is precisely what you should send—not food or drink or clothing.

b. Amazing But True Story of the Week: by Mark Arsenault and Jessica Rinaldi of the Boston Globe, about the man who set the record for quickest hike of the Appalachian Trail, Joe McConaughy.

c. The numbers on McConaughy's hike: 2,190 miles on the trail from Georgia to Maine, 45.6 days, an average of 48 miles a day, walking/running through seven ankle sprains, seeing 16 bears, avoiding four rattlesnakes, being stung by wasps twice, consuming 8,000 to 10,000 calories a day.

d. McConaughy did the trail nine days faster than anyone in recorded history. (He did an unsupported hike, which is with no aid of food or water along the way from others waiting at pre-arranged spots on the trail. McConaughy stopped in towns to get supplies, and pre-mailed himself care packages of things like Oreos and shoes that he picked up at delivery sites along the way.)

e. Now that's what I call the Player of the Week.

f. C. C. Sabathia is ticked off that the Red Sox's Edwin Nunez bunted on him Thursday. Sabathia is a mediocre fielder, very heavy, doesn't move well, and has a bad knee. Why wouldn't you bunt on this guy! That is one of the dumbest things I've heard an athlete complain about. As you know, I am a Red Sox partisan. But if Chris Sale said it, I'd grill him too.

g. RIP Shelley Berman. Many roles, but the one I'll recall him for is Larry David's father on "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

h. Larry shows up to visit his father at the family place in Los Angeles after being in New York for a few weeks. His father (Berman) greets him. Pleasantries are exchanged. Larry wonders: Where's Mom? This ensues.

i. “She didn’t want to bother you! Don’t bother him! He’s in New York.”

j. “Curb” returns Oct. 1, and believe me, I’ll be plugging that the way the internet has plugged “Game of Thrones.” In other words, you’ll be annoyed.

k. Coffeenerdness: Matt Ryan on coffee: “I’ve cut back. Like, I don’t have any in the afternoon. For me, I’ll have a little bit of coffee in the morning, but no caffeine in the afternoon. I’m a venti Pike guy, and I probably drink about three quarters of it, so I should move to the grande. Black. I’ve been black with coffee for probably seven or eight years. I try to get away from sugar. As much as you can. I don’t care who you are, everybody cheats once in a while, right? I try and not have a ton of sugar.”

l. Beernerdness: From The MMQB executive editor Mark Mravic, pinch-beering for me this week, after a group of Colorado brewers sent along a bunch of beers to The MMQB: “I swung by Peter’s apartment Thursday for a grab bag of 10 beers; literally, he had them in a big plastic bag. So far I’ve tried eight, ranging from a “Helluva Caucasian Stout” from Living the Dream in Littleton, brewed with peanut butter, chocolate, coffee and vanilla (tasted like a delicious pudding) to a Salted Scotch Ale from Mockery Brewing in Denver (rich, caramel, hint of brininess) to a an Imperial Kentucky Common from Factotum Brewery, aged in Kentucky bourbon barrels (way too big for me, and should be poured in a shot glass). My favorite, surprisingly, was the gluten-free Fat Randy’s IPA, from Holidaily Brewing in Golden. I don’t have the need and hence the call to drink gluten-free beers, but this one—made with millet, buckwheat, rice and Belgian candy syrup—was full-bodied, crisp and easy drinking. Not as challenging a beer as some of the others in the grab-bag, but a refreshing and fulfilling quaff. Note to The MMQB’s Matt Gagne and Jenny Vrentas: There are good gluten-free beers around.”

m. Good to see Michael Irvin’s son catch passes for Miami.

n. Good to see Michigan’s unis. They’ll be able to play night games without the lights on with those.

o. Great to see USC give long-snapper Jake Olson, who is blind, the chance to fulfill a lifelong dream—playing in a game for the Trojans. Olson snapped the ball for the final extra point in a 48-31 victory over Western Michigan. “Something I’ll remember forever,” Olson said afterward. Kudos to USC coach Clay Helton for making it happen, to Olson for having the resolve and sticking with a lonely pursuit, and also to Western Michigan coach Tim Lester for having his team not rush on the PAT when the game was out of reach. Very cool moment.

p. It is Sept. 3, and an injury-ravaged Matt Harvey was embarrassing Saturday in Houston, and is 4-4 with a 5.97 ERA. That is so grim.

q. RIP, Walter Becker. Thanks for founding Steely Dan. You continue to give me lots of listening pleasure.

THE ADIEU HAIKU

Dorsett for Brissett.

It’s a trade that almost rhymes.

Labor Day haiku.

Awkward! Brock Osweiler is returning to the Denver Broncos.

By Cindy Boren
Washington Post
September 4, 2017

In what incontestably is the weirdest move since NFL teams cut their rosters to 53 players this weekend, the Denver Broncos picked up quarterback Brock Osweiler after he was released by the Cleveland Browns.

That would be the Brock Osweiler, the guy who was their second-round draft pick (57th overall) in 2012 and the guy who bolted from Denver when the Houston Texans dangled a gigantic, \$72-million, free agent contract in March 2016. The Broncos are getting him at the bargain basement veteran's minimum deal of \$775,000 for one year with his \$15.222 million salary to be paid by Cleveland. Who could pass up such a deal for a backup quarterback who already is familiar with the schemes and ways of offensive coordinator Mike McCoy?

Still, there's damage to be repaired.

"He's going to need a little football rehab. We know that," John Elway, the Broncos' general manager, told reporters Saturday night. "We'll show him that and give him a little love."

Osweiler was a key component of the Broncos team that won Super Bowl 50 in Peyton Manning's last season. With Manning's skills in decline and nursing a foot injury, Osweiler started seven games, going 5-2. However, Manning returned to health in time for a postseason run, and Osweiler went to the bench.

"Without Brock that year, we don't win the Super Bowl," Elway said, "but I'm sure it's been a long 18 months for him."

Lucrative and long. After one mediocre season with the Texans, Osweiler was traded in March to the Browns, and when they named DeShone Kizer their starting quarterback, he was released. His return to Denver will be a bit strange because, as USA Today's Lindsay Jones writes, he "distanced himself from Broncos teammates in the aftermath of Super Bowl 50" and he skipped the Broncos' trip to the White House as well as the team's Super Bowl ring ceremony, a move that "irked some of Osweiler's former teammates."

Some of Elway's old words are important, too. For instance, he said he would put together "a team with players who want to be" here and cornerback Aqib Talib told USA Today after a victory over Houston last fall, that losing Osweiler was a "win-win," because the Broncos saved money and found a "better quarterback" in Trevor Siemian.

Now, Osweiler will back up Siemian with Paxton Lynch out at least a few weeks with a shoulder sprain. It's a little weird, but a lot of time has passed and if Osweiler can prove a capable backup, then the situation in Denver becomes more interesting.

“When Brock made the decision [to go to Houston], he made the best decision he thought was best for him. It’s just kind of funny how these things worked out with our situation and Brock being available. It’s a bit funny how everything aligned,” Elway said (via the Denver Post). “We know Brock can win football games with us. He’s got a lot of experience. That was one glaring hole we had at that point in time, in my mind, when Paxton hurt his shoulder. We were able to get it fixed.

“We were going to go with a veteran quarterback and Brock made the most sense for us.”

Knudson: Broncos need some more Elway Magic

By Mark Knudson

Coloradoan

September 4, 2017

Back in the day, Denver Broncos fans felt like no game was ever out of reach, because we had ol' No. 7, John Elway, at the controls. We could always count on some "Elway Magic" to save our Sundays. In his 16-year Broncos career as Denver's quarterback, Elway engineered 35 comeback wins in the fourth quarter and overtime. He led the Broncos to five Super Bowls.

When Elway moved on from his playing days and into the front office, he proved he still had some of that magic left. With the Broncos stuck in neutral with the very limited Tim Tebow at quarterback, Elway returned to the organization and took control. He reached back for something special and delivered future Hall of Famer Peyton Manning to Denver to take the reins at QB. Together they earned two more Super Bowl trips and won SB 50. Then Manning smartly retired.

Two years removed from that magical post season, the current Denver Broncos are in need of some additional Elway Magic right about now. Unlike the Manning days, Denver currently sports a Super Bowl caliber defense, but on the other side of the ball they're squarely back in neutral.

Will the return of former Broncos backup (and second-round draft pick) Brock Osweiler make a difference? Is this a bold move or one made in panic? Since Osweiler doesn't figure to play much, at least at the outset, it's probably more of a safety-net kind of thing.

This was supposed to be the season that Elway's prized first-round draft pick from 2016, quarterback Paxton Lynch, stepped up and became the next big thing in Denver. It hasn't worked out that way. It might be too early — or maybe not — to call Lynch a "bust" after a lousy 2017 pre-season, but in no way does he appear ready to become a big-time NFL quarterback. He's been a major disappointment to Elway and the Broncos brain trust, who are now left to play the severely limited Trevor Siemian under center. The Broncos, kings of the AFC West for a half dozen consecutive seasons, now have the weakest QB situation in the division, even after bringing Osweiler back ... and it's not close.

For those who think the vaunted Broncos defense can lead them back to the promise land, consider this: In their storied history, Denver has been to eight Super Bowls. In seven of those years, they were led by a Hall of Fame quarterback. And wily veteran Craig Morton, who led the first Super squad in 1977, was no slouch either. Yes, Manning had a poor season in 2015 when the Broncos won SB 50, and the vaunted defense was the main catalyst. But he was still Peyton Manning, and opposing coaches respected him and game planned accordingly. They don't do that now.

The NFL is a "quarterback-driven league," as we hear so often. Those drinking orange Kool-Aid are quick to shout, "What about Trent Dilfer? Or Brad Johnson?" Off the top, both were far better players than Siemian. Aside from that, when they led Super Bowl winners more than 15 years ago, the game was played far differently. There's far more emphasis and demands on quarterbacks now.

When was the last time a team with a bottom 10 QB — and that's what Siemian is — even played in the Super Bowl? Here's the list of the starting quarterbacks on the last dozen Super Sundays: Tom Brady, Matt Ryan, Cam Newton, Peyton Manning, Russell Wilson, Joe Flacco, Colin Kaepernick, Eli Manning,

Aaron Rodgers, Ben Roethlisberger, Drew Brees, Kurt Warner and Donovan McNabb. No slouches (and six Hall of Famers) in that bunch.

Bottom line: The Broncos are not getting anywhere near the Super Bowl — the organization's stated goal every year — until they get a significant upgrade at the most important position on the field. Elway knows this. So what better time than now for some more Elway Magic?

But what can he do? It certainly appears the Broncos are stuck with what they have to start the season Sept. 11. The options are limited. Yes, Kaepernick is a free agent, and he's clearly still a far better player than any Broncos QB currently on the roster. The signing of Osweiler was a departure for Elway, who typically doesn't forget when he believes someone has been "disloyal." Elway values loyalty above all else. Remember, Kaepernick turned down a chance to come to Denver in the spring of 2016 because Elway needed him to take a (temporary) pay cut to make a deal work. That slammed that door shut, regardless of the National Anthem protest stuff.

Other options? Wait a year and try to sign free agent Kirk Cousins or 39-year-old Drew Brees? Maybe. Or ... play out the season and ... dare we say it ... "tank" to get a shot at another high draft pick? Both of those options are hard to swallow given Elway's competitive nature. It's nearly impossible to see Elway participating in any sort of "tanking" plan.

Yet if he doesn't make any significant other moves sooner, it will be next April before we see what the future could bring. Elway loves the draft process, yet it's been his Kryptonite as an executive. Waiting for the next Broncos star QB to arrive via an Elway draft is not a comforting thought.

As for Cousins or Brees ... that might work. For a while. Waiting for that would involve living through a long, difficult season in 2017 first. That's not Elway's style, is it?

The unreal timeline of Brock Osweiler's departure and return to the Broncos

By Zac Stevens
BSN Denver
September 4, 2017

Brock Osweiler is a Denver Bronco.

18 months ago this statement would not only have been logical, it was expected. After starting seven games with Denver in 2015, on their run to being crowned Super Bowl 50 champions, Osweiler was the Broncos' quarterback of the future.

That was until he shocked the world, most notably John Elway, and bounced town to sign with the Houston Texans before the Broncos could make him their franchise quarterback.

Almost exactly a year and a half later, Brock is back with his original team under much different circumstances and after a very, very strange journey.

It all started Mar. 20, 2012 with the most notable free agent signing in NFL history; Peyton Manning inked a five-year, \$96 million deal to become a Bronco. Meanwhile, Osweiler was in his final year at Arizona State, and although he wasn't a Bronco yet, this move had significant importance in Brock's journey.

Over a month after Manning's introductory press conference when Elway notably said, "We're going Plan A" when asked what the team's backup plan to Peyton was, Elway addressed the question by drafting the 6-foot-7 quarterback in the second-round, 57th overall, of the 2012 draft, officially making Brock a Bronco.

On Sept. 30, 2012, Osweiler made his NFL debut with a lone kneel down in a 37-6 victory over the Oakland Raiders. Brock's anticlimactic NFL debut was reminiscent of things to come during his first stint in Denver.

Two years, and an entire 21 regular season pass attempts later, Osweiler sat in the same position he did during his rookie year: behind a sure-fire first-ballot Hall of Fame quarterback. Brock only saw the field with the second-string unit during practice—mostly as the scout team quarterback—and when the mighty Broncos were destroying teams. Like seriously destroying.

Heck, even then it was hard for ol' Brock to see meaningful reps. During a Week 10 matchup with the Oakland Raiders in 2014, the Broncos had a dominating 41-10 lead with 26 seconds left in the third quarter. There was no way Denver was going to blow the game in the final quarter to the then 0-9 Raiders.

Just as Brock grabbed his helmet anticipating to take over the Broncos' offense, he turned around to run onto the field only to find No. 18 had gone back on the field. A visibility distraught Osweiler to throw his hands in the air, disappointed that he would continue to find himself on the bench, even with a 31-point lead. The five seconds were not only caught on camera during the live game feed, they also went viral.

However, Brock's luck changed just over a year later during his fourth year in the league. At home against the Kansas City Chiefs in Week 10, then-Broncos head coach Gary Kubiak did the unthinkable; he benched Peyton Freaking Manning. Osweiler was the man that Kubiak turned to after Manning threw his fourth interception of the game, and while Denver lost 13-29, it was the most notable playing time Brock had up to that point in his career.

The following week, Osweiler made his first career start in place of the injured Manning, his first of seven consecutive starts. No. 17 exceeded all expectations, too, throwing for 250 yards on 74 percent completion with two touchdowns and no interceptions for a 127.1 passer rating in a 17-15 victory over the Chicago Bears.

After going 4-2 in his first six starts, Osweiler was Benched for Manning midway through his seventh start after he threw two interceptions in the first half during a much important Week 17 matchup against the San Diego Chargers. Manning led Denver to a 27-20 win, clinching the No. 1 seed in the AFC and never looking back. That would end up being the last time Osweiler stepped on the game field as the Broncos' signal caller.

Although Brock didn't play in the playoff run, Elway had high praise for his former second-round pick, saying, "He went 5-2 as a starter for us. Without Brock that year, we don't win a Super Bowl. He had a lot to do with that year."

On Mar. 7, 2016, a month after the Broncos secured the franchise's third world championship, Manning officially called it quits from the NFL, holding his retirement press conference in the team room at the Broncos' headquarters. With capacity maxed out with reporters, family, coaches and numerous teammates, the 14-time Pro Bowler captivated the room, much as he did throughout his entire career.

The most noteworthy absence at the historic event was Manning's fellow quarterback the previous four years. It only took two days to find out why Osweiler wasn't present.

On Wednesday, Mar. 9, Osweiler shocked the country, signing a four-year, \$72 million contract with the Houston Texans seemingly out of nowhere, choosing the Texans over the Broncos' offer of \$16 million per year to stay in Denver. Brock chose to sign with a team where he hadn't met the head coach in person, leaving Denver with only one quarterback on its roster: Trevor Siemian.

Despite being burned in the national spotlight, Elway said there were no hard feelings between he and Osweiler, adding, "When Brock made that decision he made the best decision that he thought was best for him."

As Denver moved on—eventually drafting Paxton Lynch in the first-round of the 2016 draft and acquiring Mark Sanchez in a trade with the Philadelphia Eagles—Osweiler settled in with his new team. So much so in fact, he skipped the Broncos' trip to the White House to celebrate their Super Bowl 50 championship with President Barack Obama and then missed the team's private ring ceremony, citing a scheduling conflict as the Texans had OTAs around the time of both events.

On Sept. 11, 2016—one year before Denver's opening game of the 2017 season—Osweiler made his first start with his new team, throwing for 231 yards, two touchdowns and one interception for an 89.1

passer rating in a 23-14 victory over the Bears. Brock's luck wouldn't last nearly as long as his four-year contract, however.

14 starts into his Texans career, he was benched in favor for then-backup Tom Savage after throwing two interceptions on 48 passing yards. Savage would be named the starter the following week for Houston's regular season finale, but after suffering an injury early in the game, Osweiler was called to step in.

Much like he did in a relief role in Denver, Osweiler was solid—throwing for 253 yards with one touchdown and no interceptions. He would keep his starting role for Houston's two playoff games as Savage was out due to injury. Osweiler finished his first, and only, year in Houston 8-6 as a starter with 15 touchdowns and 16 interceptions.

On Mar. 9, 2017, exactly one year after signing with the Texans for \$37 million guaranteed, Osweiler was traded to the Cleveland Browns. Houston gave Cleveland Osweiler and a 2018 second-round pick in exchange for the Browns 2017 fourth-round compensatory pick, essentially doing everything they could to get Osweiler out of Houston.

Months later on Aug. 26, during Denver's third preseason game, Broncos' backup quarterback Lynch sustained a shoulder sprain to his throwing arm, sidelining him for multiple weeks, extending into the regular season. Lynch's injury left Denver with only one healthy quarterback behind starter Siemian: undrafted rookie free agent Kyle Sloter.

The following day in Cleveland, Browns' head coach Hue Jackson named rookie second-round pick DeShone Kizer their starting quarterback for 2017 season, officially ending Osweiler's chances of winning the starting job. Osweiler finished the preseason 12-for-22 for 67 yards with no touchdowns and one interception for a 41.3 passer rating in his two games with the Browns.

Desperately needing a backup quarterback with a veteran presence and experience in the NFL, according to Elway, the Broncos' were forced to look outside of their building for a backup quarterback.

Days later, on Sept. 1, Cleveland ended Brock's short stint with the team, cutting the 26-year old even while still owing him \$16 million guaranteed for the season, a contract they took on in the trade with Houston.

On Saturday, Sept. 2, the Broncos cut undrafted free agent and fan favorite Kyle Sloter to leave only one healthy quarterback on their roster, Siemian, opening the door for a possible Broncos—Osweiler reunion.

As dusk hit the relatively empty UHealth Training Center Saturday night, the two sides did just that, bringing Brock back to where he started, in the same role as he was in originally when he first joined the team: as a backup quarterback.

"It's just kind of funny how these things worked out with our situation and Brock being available—funny how everything aligned," Elway said. "We know that Brock can win football games with us, he's got a lot of experience, and that was one glaring hole we had at that time in my mind when Paxton hurt the shoulder. We're able to get it fixed... Brock made the most sense for us."

With the nod of approval from Elway, offensive coordinator Mike McCoy—who coached Osweiler in 2012 during his rookie season—and current Miami Dolphins head coach Adam Gase, offensive coordinator to Osweiler in Denver, who “loves Brock,” the Broncos made the call.

Brock Osweiler’s past year and a half is the perfect example of just how much can change in the NFL in 18 short, or very, very long months. With \$37 million more in the bank, however, it hasn’t been entirely bad.

“I’m sure it’s been a tough one for him. I know that obviously, we thought a lot of Brock,” Elway—the former quarterback that only played with one team in his entire NFL career—said. “I’m sure it’s probably been a long 18 months for him. He’s been through a lot, I’m sure. I haven’t had a chance to spend a lot of time or speak to him.”

As Brock reunites with the team that brought him into the league seven years ago, it will be a homecoming for the ages, surrounded by familiar faces and an emotion not typically associated with NFL franchises: love.

“I’m sure with everything he went through in Houston and then going to Cleveland; I’m sure he’s going to need a little football rehab. We know that,” Elway said. “We’ll welcome him with open arms and give him some love.”

NFL will allow the players to celebrate good times this season ... up to a point

By Sam Farmer
Los Angeles Times
September 4, 2017

The NFL still takes itself pretty seriously, but at least it's loosening the tie a bit.

Beginning this season, the so-called No Fun League will be a little less uptight when it comes to doling out penalties and fines for on-field celebrations. The change was made in May after league executives spent the spring talking to players, coaches, officials and fans about ways to best relax the rigid policy on what players should be allowed to do to express themselves.

Group celebrations will be allowed now, and players will be able to use the football as a prop — as Washington tight end Vernon Davis did last season when he was fined \$12,154 for simulating a jump shot after scoring a touchdown.

But it isn't anything goes.

"We want to make sure that sportsmanship is a big factor here in the way that we implement this," Commissioner Roger Goodell said. "And of course nobody wanted to see anything that was either violent or sexually offensive to people, and everybody has a little different line there."

That means receiver Brandin Cooks, now in New England, probably won't be able to resume his practice of pantomiming an archer who shoots an arrow into the crowd. That is, after all, a weapon.

However, New York Giants receivers Victor Cruz and Odell Beckham Jr. will be able to take imaginary snapshots of each other — that cost them \$12,154 each last season — and players all over the league can do snow angels (although San Francisco's Rashard Robinson was premature with his last fall, doing one when he mistakenly believed a teammate had scored).

When interviewed by the league, several veteran players said the line for them is when celebrating becomes taunting.

"We'd speak to a long-tooth, an older veteran, and they were very clear," said Troy Vincent, a former player turned NFL executive. "That younger player standing over the top of him, challenging him in any kind of way with the finger pointing ... They were very direct: 'Don't point at me. Don't point at the bench area. Don't stand over the top of me. Don't flex in front of my face.' But we don't mind you enjoying the play."

Rich McKay, chairman of the competition committee, said the original intent of curtailing celebrations was a good one, but the pendulum had swung too far in that direction.

"There's so much emotion in the game," McKay said. "I think sometimes what happens is, just like in rules, you see a play and you say, 'That play is not acceptable.' And then all of a sudden you develop a

rule to make that play unacceptable and the rule you develop is just too broad. It starts to catch things you really didn't anticipate."

McKay said there were 33 celebration penalties last season, and "11 or 12" that involved taunting, so it wasn't an epidemic.

"When it happens, we just need to be reasonable in our expectations and our explanation," he said.

Players have more freedom to celebrate, but there is a time issue too. After a touchdown, the 40-second clock starts, and the ball has to be snapped on the extra point or two-point conversion before that expires.

"We're not going to look up and say, 'OK, six seconds [for a celebration]? It's over. Flag,'" said Al Riveron, the league's new head of officiating. "The players themselves will realize, 'I've got to get on to the next play.'"

Vikings claim Blake Bell, sign Kyle Sloter to practice squad

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 4, 2017

Quarterback Kyle Sloter was waived by the Broncos on Saturday as they made the cut to 53 players and cleared space for the return of Brock Osweiler, but he wasn't claimed by any other teams in the league.

That's not because no one was interested in having him around, however. Sloter announced on Twitter that he has signed to the Vikings practice squad and Mike Klis of KUSA reports that the Vikings offered him \$20,000 a week to come to Minnesota. That's almost three times the \$7,200 minimum for players on the practice squad.

Sloter started the Broncos' final preseason game and went 31-of-43 for 413 yards and three touchdowns across four appearances this summer. The Vikings have Sam Bradford and Case Keenum on the active roster with Teddy Bridgewater on the physically unable to perform list.

The Vikings also claimed tight end Blake Bell off of waivers from the 49ers. Bell had 19 catches for 271 yards in 27 appearances over the last two seasons.

Chargers claim Michael Schofield, Jeff Richards

By Josh Alper

Pro Football Talk

September 4, 2017

The Chargers signed tackle Russell Okung as a free agent this offseason and they added one of his former Broncos teammates on waivers Sunday.

Guard Michael Schofield will make the move from one AFC West team to another after being cut by the Broncos this weekend. Schofield was a third-round pick by the Broncos in 2014 and started 29 games, including Super Bowl 50, for the team over the last two seasons. The Broncos overhauled their offensive line this offseason, however, and there was no longer a place for Schofield in the group.

The Chargers also claimed defensive back Jeff Richards after he was let go by the Panthers.

Carolina signed Richards in January after he spent the last couple of years playing for Ottawa in the CFL. Richards has also spent time playing arena football since wrapping up his collegiate career at Emporia State.

Joe Lockhart chides NFLPA for its Ezekiel Elliott defense strategy

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
September 4, 2017

Much will be posted in this space over the next two days as the first — and arguably most important — hearing in the Ezekiel Elliott lawsuit approaches. For now, here's a leftover nugget that underscores the tone and tenor of the P.R. battle that will emerge from a process that ultimately is rooted in P.R. considerations.

During last week's appeal hearing, attorney Jeffrey Kessler's challenge to the six-game suspension included a point about the failure of Commissioner Roger Goodell to mention in any way the possibility of mitigating circumstances that would reduce the baseline punishment, in the same way that Goodell reduced the baseline punishment of Giants kicker Josh Brown last year from six games to one.

"[W]hile it's our position that you must reverse this discipline in its entirety, I can't help but note that the Commissioner did not explain in his letter why he did not find any mitigating circumstances in this case," Kessler argued to arbitrator Harold Henderson, via Mark Maske of the Washington Post. "He didn't find any aggravating [circumstances (which would increase the punishment beyond six games)], but he doesn't explain why there are no mitigating circumstances. Even if one were to conclude improperly that there were credible evidence that some act occurred that would violate the [Personal Conduct] Policy, it is clear, given the extortionate threats given by [Elliott's accuser], her harassing nature, her violative nature, her drug and alcohol abuse, her penchant for rough sex, there certainly would have been provocation involved that would be a mitigating factor for two young people like this.

"Now, we're not asking you to do that. We're asking you to overturn it all because there's no credible evidence, but it's hard to see how the full six games would be warranted even if you believed everything said, which you can't possibly do."

It's a reasonable point for Kessler to make, given the broader realities of the case. While Goodell may not believe any of those circumstances justify a reduction, his failure to address the possibility of suspending Elliott less than six games makes the decision arguably seem arbitrary and capricious — which supposedly is the standard that applied on appeal.

NFL spokesman Joe Lockhart responded to Kessler's argument regarding Goodell's failure to address the issue of mitigation circumstances with this, via Maske: "The union has single-handedly turned back the clock and trampled on the rights of victims by saying it's okay to commit violence against women as long as you're provoked."

But that's not what Kessler was doing. He was merely pointing out that the rules allow for the six-game suspension to increase with evidence of aggravating circumstances and to decrease with evidence of mitigating circumstances, and that Goodell's decision doesn't address the issue of mitigation at all, despite the existence of evidence that would suggest possible mitigation.

The rhetoric from Lockhart, who served as White House Press Secretary in the Clinton Administration, isn't surprising. As one league source explained it, that's one of the practical realities of hiring political operatives to handle P.R. in a public-facing business. The notion of win-win goes about the window when it comes to politics, where it's always about a winner and a loser and about twisting every situation to make your adversary look like a loser.

If nothing else, Lockhart's effort to spin Kessler's point about one of the potential flaws in the Elliott decision underscores the fact that the NFL's in-house system of player justice is fueled primarily by P.R. considerations, and not by ensuring the existence of processes and procedures that give players a full and fair opportunity to present their cases when accused by the league of misconduct for which they have not been arrested, charged, or sued.

When lawyers makes arguments on behalf of clients who are facing formal accusations, there's no P.R. department at the courthouse that chides the lawyer for having the audacity to zealously represent his or her client. At a minimum, the quasi-courthouse the NFL has created as a supplement to the justice system should operate the same way.

Conflicting reports on value of T.J. Ward deal

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

September 4, 2017

When it comes to disseminating information about the value of NFL player contracts, an awkward dance still occurs, to the beat of half-truths and flat-out falsehoods perpetrated by those who want the deals to look better than they are. That same-old song may be playing when it comes to the contract given to former Broncos safety — and new Buccaneers safety — T.J. Ward.

The initial report from ESPN was that it's a one-year, \$5 million deal. Presumably, that's how Ward or his agent or someone else on the inside characterized the value of the contract. And that's an important number because Ward was supposed to make \$4.5 million this year in Denver.

The perception that Ward will make more in Tampa creates the impression that the Broncos screwed up. More importantly, it begins the process of repairing the damage done to Ward's ego.

The problem is, however, that someone may have overstated the deal. NFL Media says the contract is worth "up to" \$5 million. Which implies that the base value is lower than that (likely lower than \$4.5 million), and that Ward will make the full \$5 million only if he hits whatever incentives have been loaded into the deal.

When it comes to incentives, sometimes they're easily earned and sometimes they require Herculean efforts, like winning a Super Bowl or being named defensive player of the year. With Ward, the details aren't known. They possibly won't be known until the contract is filed with the NFL Players Association.

For those who push inflated numbers to the media, the thinking is that, by the time the truth comes out, everyone will have moved on. But not everyone; the fact that the truth wasn't told should impact the credibility of the source in the future.

Of course, for that to mean anything reporters would have to be willing to jeopardize the opportunity to get the next scoop from the source by taking a stand against the last scoop that was misleading. Some will instead leverage the lie told on the last scoop as a way to get the next scoop.

Broncos re-sign Kyle Peko to active roster

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

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The Broncos re-signed nose tackle Kyle Peko to the active roster, the team announced Sunday.

Injuries have taken a toll on the Broncos in the defensive line with starters Derek Wolfe and Jared Crick both hoping to return for the season opener against the Chargers. Wolfe has a sprained ankle and Crick back spasms. Backup Zach Kerr has a knee bruise that could keep him out this week.

Peko spent much of his first season on the team's practice squad after initially making the 53-player roster as a college free agent. He made two tackles in the season finale against the Raiders, his only game action as a rookie.

The Broncos also announced nine signings to their practice squad: center Dillon Day, linebacker Jerrol Garcia-Williams, defensive tackle Tyrique Jarrett, linebacker Deiontrez Mount, cornerback Marcus Rios, receiver Hunter Sharp, defensive back Dymonte Thomas, tight end Austin Traylor and tackle Elijah Wilkinson.