

# Brock Osweiler has returned to the Denver Broncos. But first he made a stop in Idaho.

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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More than two months before he would return as a Bronco and nearly two weeks before he would vie to become the Cleveland Browns' starting quarterback, Brock Osweiler went back to high school.

His snapper/coach was a 42-year-old former quarterback wearing a bucket hat and sunglasses. Osweiler's receivers were nearly two dozen local high schoolers who did their best to be Kenny Britt and Corey Coleman.

For three days — two hours each time — during the week of July 4, Osweiler went to Coeur d'Alene (Idaho) High with Jake Plummer, a fellow Arizona State and Broncos alum, to spray pass after pass to young and eager receivers.

"We worked on a few things — footwork, and I kind of helped him on some play-action and booting out and some things like that just to help with his big body to be a little more compact," Plummer said. "At that stage, I wasn't doing a whole lot, trying to change his mechanics. The guy has his mechanics. That's what he's been doing for years. I just tried to help him quicken things up a little bit."

And the advice was heeded.

"He has always been someone who will be very honest and really tell me how it is and if there are things I need to improve upon," Osweiler said. "A good friend is going to tell you what you need to clean up, and that's what Jake does."

Osweiler was born in Coeur d'Alene and often returns in the summers to vacation. Plummer, an Idaho native, does too. So does Broncos general manager John Elway, owner of a lakefront property, who ran into Osweiler there this summer.

But little did any of them know that Osweiler would soon be back in Denver, sporting his navy blue No. 17 practice jersey as a newly minted backup quarterback. Monday morning, Osweiler passed his physical, signed his one-year, \$775,000 contract and took to the Broncos' practice field, swapping reps with starter Trevor Siemian and spending much of his morning in the ear of quarterbacks coach Bill Musgrave.

"It's hard to really describe it in words, but being back here today, practicing as a Bronco and being here at Dove Valley," Osweiler said. "It's probably a top-five, if not top-three, day of my life. Today's been incredible."

Brock is back, after leaving nearly 18 months ago for \$72 million and a starting role in Houston. When he accepted the Texans' offer in free agency, the perception was that he left with hard feelings. That he was upset about being benched for Peyton Manning in the 2015 regular-season finale. That he and Elway were at odds. That the parting of ways was an ugly divorce.

Elway said Saturday that wasn't true. Osweiler said Monday he didn't leave on bitter terms.

"I want people to know that decision didn't come lightly," he said. "I didn't sleep for about a week. I was sick to my stomach every single day. I was a mess. At the end of the day, I tried making the best business decision for myself and my family. Whether I made the best one or not, that could be argued, but the fact of the matter is that it was made. I'm not going to live in the past, but I've always had nothing but love and appreciation for the Denver Broncos and the city of Denver."

Osweiler's grand plans didn't go as he hoped in Houston. He completed 59 percent of his passes, posted more interceptions (16) than touchdowns (15), went 8-7 as a starter, temporarily lost his job to Tom Savage, regained it in the postseason, turned in one of the worst outings of his career in the divisional playoffs against New England and was then dealt to Cleveland.

The jeers followed him every step of the way.

"A lot of people, it's funny, they're mad at him for signing a huge contract," Plummer said. "I just think it's such a funny twist that a team signs him to a contract and they don't give him much coaching, or very little coaching at all, and he doesn't do well and now he's a bust. I think that those guys are busts. Rick (Smith), great guy, but no one says anything about him being a bust as a GM to bring in and pay a guy that much, but it's all on Brock because he didn't perform. I just think it's funny."

Osweiler said he left the Broncos with no regrets and that the experience helped him on the field and off. When he cleared waivers Saturday, he instructed his agent to turn down competing offers and agree to Denver, no matter the money.

"It's kind of like that old deal when you're a little kid and your mom tells you 'Don't touch the hot stove,' so what do you have to do as a curious kid? You have to go touch the hot stove and you learn real quick how nice that stove is when it's not hot," Osweiler said. "Needless to say, I'm very thankful to be back here."

And so he's back — back as a backup and back to a place he calls "home."

There's familiarity with the town, the front office, even the playbook designed by Mike McCoy, Osweiler's offensive coordinator in 2012. The Broncos will have an offensive package for Osweiler for the opener should he have to take the field after only a week's worth of practice.

But the Broncos have redecorated quite a bit in his brief absence. The staff has changed. The circumstances have, too.

Siemian, once Osweiler's backup, is now the starter. But the future for both is no longer as clear as it was weeks ago.

"I do see myself as a starter in the National Football League. I feel like I proved that back in 2015," Osweiler said. "However, in saying that, this is Trevor Siemian's team, and right now my job is to be the backup of this football team and do it to the best of my ability. Get the scout team running, get our defense ready to go, and I'm going to embrace that role with everything I have because like I said, I'm so happy to be back here, and there's no greater place in the NFL."

Siemian handily won an open competition for the second consecutive offseason and will remain the starter. Osweiler fills in for an injured Paxton Lynch, who could miss at least the first few weeks of the regular season, and probably more. The team will not add another quarterback to the practice squad. When healthy, Lynch is expected to return.

But he'll do so amid a room with two quarterbacks who learned behind Manning and who have more game experience.

The quarterback competition in Denver intensified just when it seemed to find a resolution.

But no one could have seen this coming, especially not two months ago when Osweiler was just a quarterback, taking pointers from Plummer as more than a dozen high schoolers ran routes on demand.

# T.J. Ward, now a Tampa Bay Buc, says Broncos were “completely unprofessional”

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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T.J. Ward signed a one-year contract with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Monday and opened up to local media about his departure from the Broncos.

“It’s unfortunate the way they handled that situation,” Ward said. “But it is what it is. They got to live with it. I got to live with it, and we’ll see what happens. But I’m going to make sure I land on my feet. That’s just me. And whatever happens to them, happens to them. That’s on them.”

Asked about Ward’s comments, coach Vance Joseph said Monday afternoon: “T.J. was a great player for this franchise. We won a lot of games with this guy. We’re going to miss having T.J. Good person, good man. But we’re on to the Chargers. That’s behind us and we wish him luck.”

The Broncos released Ward on Saturday after he had spent three seasons with the team, earning a pair of Pro Bowl selections and a Super Bowl 50 ring as a leader of the No Fly Zone secondary. His exit left many of his teammates in shock, as expected by Elway and Joseph.

“He was obviously a valuable teammate for these guys,” Joseph said. “They won a lot of games together. It’s natural. It’s expected. It’s a close-knit locker room. I wasn’t surprised to see guys saying, ‘Hey, we’re going to miss T.J., we don’t want to him to go.’ That’s natural. And it should be that way in a locker room. If it’s not, that would be concerning.”

Ward had one season remaining on his four-year deal and Elway said he spoke to Ward’s agent during the offseason and informed him they weren’t going to do a contract extension then.

“I talked to his agent, but knew that we weren’t going to,” Elway said. “We weren’t going to do that at that point of time.”

The Broncos, according to a source, hadn’t reached a final decision on Ward until last week. Among the factors considered by the team were the rise of second-year players Justin Simmons and Will Parks, and Ward’s recent injury history. Ward finished second on the team with 87 total tackles and had what he believed was the best season of his career. He did not play the final two games of the season and missed all of preseason because of a hamstring injury.

“I think it’s a combination of everything,” Elway said. “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. 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.”

Ward will make up to \$5 million this season as a Buccaneer. And it seems he'll begin his time in Tampa with a bit of extra fuel.

"I mean, you could have let me know what was going on," Ward said. "You had a full offseason. I know it's a business, but when you have good employees you're supposed to treat your employees a certain way. I think they just handled it completely unprofessional. That's just my opinion."

# Broncos defensive ends Derek Wolfe, Jared Crick return to practice; WR Demaryius Thomas held out

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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The banged-up Broncos defensive line got a dose of good news Monday when first-string defensive ends Derek Wolfe and Jared Crick returned to practice on a limited basis.

Wolfe suffered a sprained right ankle during a practice Aug. 12. Crick exited practice the next day with a troublesome back spasm. Both players participated in individual drills Monday that took place during the media's viewing period but were limited in team drills, coach Vance Joseph said.

"They looked fine and hopefully we can progress with those guys on Wednesday," Joseph said.

Asked if he was confident Wolfe and Crick would be ready for the Broncos' Sept. 11 opener against the Chargers, Joseph said: "Absolutely."

Defensive end Adam Gotsis, who suffered a minor shoulder sprain during Thursday's preseason finale, also practiced. As did nose tackle Kyle Peko (foot), who was held out of the final preseason game but was added to Denver's 53-man roster Sunday.

"We're definitely peaking at the right time and getting healthy at the right time," inside linebacker Todd Davis said.

Still missing from the defensive line was Zach Kerr, who suffered a bruised knee during the Broncos' preseason victory over Green Bay on Aug. 26.

"We don't know what the timeline is on Kerr," Broncos general manager John Elway said Saturday. "We'll keep watching him and see what happens there."

**DT held out of practice.** Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas did not practice Monday as a precaution, Joseph said.

Thomas, who did attend the workout as a spectator, suffered a groin injury during Denver's game against the Packers on Aug. 26 and has been a limited participant in practices since.

Joseph said Thomas would return to practice Wednesday.

"He's fine; it's just precautionary for him," the coach said. "Just more rest and recovery."

Business of the NFL. In reacting to T.J. Ward being released by the Broncos on Saturday, a little more than a week before the regular-season opener, Denver cornerback Aqib Talib shared a story about how he was once blindsided by the business end of the NFL.

Talib said he was in a hyperbaric chamber, used by athletes to aid in speedier recovery, in 2012 when he found out the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were trading him to the New England Patriots.

“It’s part of our job,” Talib said. “You could put us anywhere and we can adapt and adjust. We all did it. I did it. I got traded before. I found out I was getting traded in the hyperbaric chamber. The next day, I was in New England. That’s what makes us professionals. T.J. is going to do a great job out there (in Tampa). He’s still the same T.J. He’ll bring that energy and he’s going to be successful out there.”

**Footnotes.** Joseph said he’ll name team captains for the season Wednesday. ... The Broncos added nine players to their practice squad Sunday, leaving one spot available. Joseph said Monday that adding a 10th player was still being explored.

# Same as it ever was: Osweiler happily returns as Broncos backup QB

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Maybe, what the Denver Broncos have in Brock Osweiler is the NFL quarterback version of Ed Whitson.

Whitson is a former Major League Baseball pitcher who parlayed a breakout 1984 season for the San Diego Padres into what was then a substantial, five-year, \$4.4 million contract with the New York Yankees.

Burdened with the pressure of big money and New York City, Whitson started 1-6 and became a frequent target for the Bronx jeer. The abuse got so bad, he eventually resorted to only pitching games on the road.

Scenery matters. It didn't work out for Osweiler in Houston last year. Maybe, Brock and Denver go together like Whitson and San Diego.

"Being back here today, practicing as a Bronco, being here at Dove Valley, it's probably a top 5 if not 3 day of my life," Osweiler said Monday following his first practice with the team since Super Bowl 50 week in February, 2016 in Santa Clara, Calif.

Osweiler was general manager John Elway's second-round draft pick in 2012 who sat 3 ½ seasons behind Peyton Manning before finally getting a chance to play in the second half of his fourth season of 2015. Osweiler parlayed a 5-2 record into an \$18 million a year contract with the Houston Texans.

Whether it was the expectations that can burden a hired gun, or difficulty getting on the same page with head coach Bill O'Brien, Osweiler threw 16 interceptions against 15 touchdowns for the Texans last season while finishing 29th among the 30 quarterbacks who qualified for the passing title.

He was then traded after the season to the atrocious Cleveland Browns in exchange for a second-round draft pick. Cleveland only acquired him in hopes of trading him away again. After Osweiler didn't light it up in two preseason games, the Browns released him.

If Osweiler could go back 18 months and do it over again, would he have accepted the Broncos offer (which was \$15.5 million a year) to stay? He said he had no regrets. But he also admitted, in so many words, he got burned by his decision.

"It's kind of like that old deal when you're a little kid and your mom, she tells you don't touch the hot stove, so what do you do as a curious kid?" Osweiler said. "You go touch the hot stove. And you learn real quick how nice that stove is when it's not hot. Needless to say, I'm very thankful to be back here."

Osweiler is not only a Bronco again, he has returned to his more familiar role as backup. Only instead of sitting No. 2 to one of the greatest quarterbacks of all-time in Manning, Osweiler is the understudy to Trevor Siemian, who was a seventh-round rookie backup to Osweiler in the second half of 2015.

“It’s Trevor’s team,” Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said Monday. “He feels that way. We feel that way. He’s ready to have a great year for us. It’s his football team.”

Looking back on the Broncos from his Houston perch last year, Osweiler said he was not surprised Siemian emerged as old team’s No. 1 quarterback.

“It goes back to the very first preseason game of 2015 when we played in Seattle,” Osweiler said. “Most rookie quarterbacks step into the game their first time, whether it’s the first quarter or the fourth quarter it doesn’t matter, and they have a little bit of jitters and you see a little bit of rookie quarterback play.

“Not in Trevor. Trevor stepped in from Week 1, that first drive that he went out there against the Seahawks and played great. From that time, I knew that he could be special and he’s certainly proving that right now.”

Both nationally and locally, football followers are questioning Elway’s wisdom in bringing back Osweiler. Inside the Broncos’ locker room, though, Osweiler’s return seemed to lift the spirits of those who were part of that Super Bowl 50 team in 2015.

“I’m glad to have him back,” said Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders. “We’ve got chemistry (as a quarterback-receiver). Brock gave me the best game of my life versus Pittsburgh (10 catches, 181 yards in a 2015 loss). It’s cool to see him back. His first day out there today, everybody was like, ‘Welcome home.’

“Now we know if our starting quarterback goes down, Brock’s going to come in and do the job. He’s been in this position before. He’s really good at it. The year we won the Super Bowl, he was one of the main reasons why.”

# Brock Osweiler posts adorable photo about Broncos return

By Allison Sylte  
9 News  
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Sure, you can still have some hard feelings toward Brock Osweiler, but can you really be mad at a cute, smiling baby?

The former Denver Broncos backup quarterback who left for a \$72 million contract with the Houston Texans – and has since been cut from the Cleveland Browns – has agreed to a one-year deal in Denver and will back up Trevor Siemian, assuming he passes a physical.

Sure, he's probably glad to have a job anywhere right now, but Osweiler posted a photo of his daughter on Instagram in response to the Denver Broncos news that's pretty adorable.

**@bosweiler17**

**7,671 likes**

**460 comments**

**That feeling you get when you find out you're going to be a Bronco!!! #beyondgrateful #sothankfultobehome #broncocountry**

"That feeling you get when you find out you're going to be a Bronco!!! #beyondgrateful #sothankfultobehome #broncocountry," the caption reads.

Osweiler and his wife Erin welcomed their daughter Blake Everly Osweiler in April.

**@bosweiler17**

**5,575 likes**

**143 comments**

**What else needs to be said? #nailedit**

# You can get as much of a bargain on Osweiler trading cards as the Broncos got on his contract

By Victoria Sanchez

9 News

September 5, 2017

Brock's back with the Broncos. For fans who can forgive Brock Osweiler for breaking up with Denver, it's time to dust off those No. 17 jerseys.

For collectors who couldn't unload Osweiler trading cards after he left for the Texans, don't expect a big payday now that he's returning. However, cards will start showing up in stores again, just in case he proves himself as the player that helped lead the team to the Super Bowl.

The number of trading cards at Mike's Stadium Sportscards in Aurora is a little overwhelming.

"We've got about 4.1 million, but I don't want to brag," said owner Mike Fruitman, as he stood by a stack of boxes.

Sports fans spend hours digging through boxes trying to find collectables or items that just have sentimental value. But someone walking in asking for an Osweiler card hasn't happened in a while.

"What year is it?" asked Fruitman with a laugh. "Conservatively it's been at least 365 days."

Now that the prodigal son is returning to Denver, Fruitman started looking for an Osweiler needle in a very large haystack.

"Boom! Motherload. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven," he counted.

In total, Fruitman found 21 Osweiler cards. He thinks there could be up to 100 pieces of sports memorabilia he thought he wouldn't sell again.

In 2015, Osweiler gear was a top seller.

"They were flying off the shelves to the point where it wasn't hard to keep them in stock because they were just all gone," he said.

When Osweiler left, he broke a lot of hearts.

"I was shocked that they actually brought him back because I think that there was some hard feelings," said card collector Troy Livermont.

Those hard feelings aren't soon to be forgotten. It's almost like fans are the scorned lover in the football relationship.

"Nobody wants to be broken up with," said Fruitman. "I've had one woman break up with me and she's always the one where it's kinda like, 'Hey, wait a second. What's up with that?'"

Pushing football emotion aside, what's Osweiler stuff worth?

"We sold cards of his well into the triple digit range," explained the store's owner.

But that was two years ago. Now at the card shop, you can pick up an Osweiler card from \$1.50 to \$15 for a signed one.

For card collectors who couldn't get rid of Osweiler stuff, the quarterback's return is bittersweet. Livermont still has 15 signed cards from the former Bronco, turned Texan, turned Brown and back to being a Bronco again. He's glad Brock's back, if only to make a few bucks.

"Only for that. Other than that I was like, 'Why are we doing this again, we've already done this,'" said Livermont.

It's a second chance for Osweiler and according to fans, he'll have to do one thing to get the Mile High City's love again.

"If he gets out there and he's throwing touchdowns and we're getting 'W's' all is forgiven," said Fruitman.

The terms of rekindling of the relationship are in the hands of the Broncos. Osweiler will make the league minimum for veteran players which is a mere \$775,000. He will still get \$15.2 million from the Browns as his contract with Cleveland guaranteed him \$16 million.

# As Broncos approach regular-season opener, it's 'Trevor's team'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 5, 2017

For the bulk of the last two weeks of the preseason, and yes, even until roster cut-down day, much of the conversation that surrounded the Denver Broncos' quarterbacks has excluded one of them.

And that's the starter.

But as the Broncos, with a freshly minted 53-man roster, formally began their preparations on Monday for the Sept. 11 regular-season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers, all involved say there is no question Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian is the guy behind center.

"It's Trevor's team," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said following Monday's practice. "He feels that way. We feel that way. He's ready to have a great year for us. It's his football team."

The Broncos players will show where they stand on the issue on Wednesday morning, when they elect team captains. It would be one of the biggest upsets of the season if Siemian, who was voted as one of the captains last season, is not selected again.

In a topsy-turvy preseason, Siemian has been the only constant on the depth chart since he was officially named the starter last month. Since then, Paxton Lynch suffered a right shoulder sprain that will keep him sidelined for at least four weeks, the Broncos cut training camp hero Kyle Slotter and Denver signed Brock Osweiler to a one-year deal.

Slotter was the people's choice of the preseason, as he led the AFC in passer rating -- 125.4 -- while completing 31 of 43 passes for 413 yards and three touchdowns. There were many among the Broncos' faithful who, because of Lynch's injury, had hoped the team would pick Slotter to be the backup quarterback to start the season.

However, with Slotter having just nine career starts at Northern Colorado, the Broncos saw him as a developmental prospect they wanted on their practice squad. The other 31 teams agreed, as Slotter passed through waivers on Saturday, before he took an offer, for \$20,000 a week, to be on the Minnesota Vikings' practice squad.

Then came Osweiler's signing, an improbable return, given his somewhat bumpy departure in free agency 18 months ago. Osweiler said Monday that not only was he ecstatic to be back with the Broncos, but that he fully understands his role this time around.

Asked if he believed he could be a starter once again in the NFL, Osweiler said:

"I do see myself as a starter in the National Football League. I feel like I proved that back in 2015. However, in saying that, this is Trevor Siemian's team, and right now, my job is to be the backup of this football team and do it to the best of my ability. Get the scout team running, get our defense ready to

go, and I'm going to embrace that role with everything I have because, like I said, I'm so happy to be back here and there's not greater place in the NFL."

For their part, Broncos players had quietly said throughout the team's quarterback competition between Siemian and Lynch in training camp that Siemian would emerge as the starter. And since Siemian was declared the winner, those same players have been vocal in their support.

On Monday, they welcomed Osweiler's arrival, as well.

"Nothing surprises us in the league," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "Sloter played good in the preseason, but you want to go into the season confident in your backup quarterback. We know Brock knows this system. We've seen him in this system before. We know, worst scenario, if something happens to Trev, we know we're confident in our backup quarterback now."

Siemian and Osweiler don't need an introduction, given Siemian was a rookie No. 3 quarterback behind Peyton Manning and Osweiler in the Super Bowl season of 2015. The Broncos felt good enough about Siemian at the time that he was the team's No. 2 quarterback in the seven games Manning didn't start that season because of a foot injury.

Osweiler was asked Monday if he could foresee Siemian's career arc at that point.

"You know what, I could," Osweiler said. "It goes back to the very first preseason game of 2015, when we played in Seattle. Most rookie quarterbacks step into the game their first time, whether it's the first quarter or the fourth quarter, it doesn't matter, and they have a little bit of jitters and you see a little bit of rookie quarterback play. Not in Trevor. Trevor stepped in from Week 1, that first drive that he went out there against the Seahawks, and played great. From that time, I knew that he could be special, and he's certainly proving that right now."

# Broncos stick to what they know in building practice squad

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 5, 2017

The Denver Broncos kept things in-house when they constructed their practice squad.

All nine of the players they signed were with the team at least some during the preseason. And most of the nine had spent the entire offseason with the team, including center Dillon Day, who will be on the practice squad for his third consecutive season.

President of football operations/general manager John Elway said those players already know the team's playbook and "we like them as players and that's why we brought them in initially."

The Broncos still have one practice squad spot open, but here's a look at who has signed:

**C Dillon Day:** He spent the previous two seasons on the Broncos' practice squad -- both 2015 and 2016 -- and continues to be a player the Broncos want to see progress a little more on the developmental curve. He has never been promoted to the active roster.

**LB Jerrol Garcia-Williams:** The rookie played in 45 games at Hawaii -- starting 26 -- and the Broncos liked what they saw in limited duty in the preseason. His father, Jerrol, played for four NFL teams.

**NT Tyrique Jarrett:** The 335-pound Jarrett was a frequent subject of commentary for defensive line coach Bill Kollar this summer. With the injuries to defensive linemen in training camp, Jarrett got plenty of snaps to show what he could do and the Broncos like his upside.

**LB Deontrez Mount:** He was a sixth-round pick of the Tennessee Titans in 2015 -- he played in four games for the Titans that season -- and spent most of the 2016 season on the Indianapolis Colts' practice squad until he was signed to the Broncos' roster in December.

**CB Marcus Rios:** Rios missed some time in training camp with a groin injury, but the Broncos like how the rookie handled himself in day-to-day battles with the team's receivers.

**WR Hunter Sharp:** Sharp caught six passes in the preseason, including a 21-yard touchdown. He also flashed some quality work in the return game and got noticed in a crowded depth chart at the position.

**S Dymonte Thomas:** Thomas returned an interception for a touchdown in the preseason finale, but the Broncos saw the 6-foot-2, 199-pounder as a prospect to watch even before that. The rookie started 21 games at Michigan in his college career.

**TE Austin Traylor:** Traylor got signed to the Broncos' practice squad in December last season and then was retained as a "futures" player through the offseason. He caught two passes in the preseason and repeatedly made plays in practice throughout training camp.

T Elijah Wilkinson: The 6-foot-6, 329-pound rookie was one of the biggest offensive linemen on the roster during training camp. When he was waived Saturday the Broncos hoped he would clear because they wanted to keep him around for the practice squad.

# Brock Osweiler says first day back with Broncos 'incredible'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 5, 2017

After a tumultuous 18-month football odyssey through Houston and Cleveland, Brock Osweiler is back in Denver, where his career started. He said Monday he has no regrets about his decision to leave last year, but he is "ecstatic" to return to the Broncos.

"It's hard to describe in words, but being back here [Monday], practicing as a Bronco, being here at Dove Valley, probably top five, if not three, day of my life," Osweiler said after practice. "Today has been incredible."

Osweiler signed a one-year contract Monday morning, passed his physical and took part in the team's meetings and practice.

**"It's kind of like that old deal when you're a little kid and your mom, you know, she tells you, 'Don't touch the hot stove.' So, what do you have to do as a curious kid? You've got to go touch the hot stove and you learn real quick how nice that stove is when it's not hot."**

Brock Osweiler, on his decision to sign with the Texans

His departure last year in free agency, to sign a four-year, \$72 million deal with the Houston Texans just weeks after the Broncos had won Super Bowl 50, was a bumpy one. The Broncos offered the structure Osweiler was familiar with, along with a pretty hefty contract, but the Texans offered more money.

Osweiler's comments during his first news conference in Houston -- which included his belief that the Texans gave him the best "chance to compete" -- ruffled some feathers at the time, as did his decision to skip the Broncos' trip to the White House. Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway fired back when he said the franchise wanted players "who want to be Denver Broncos."

But time appears to have healed those wounds. On Saturday, Elway said the Broncos would welcome Osweiler back "with open arms." Osweiler was equally eager to return.

"I have no regrets on my decision," Osweiler said. "... I would say I'm ecstatic to be back here. It's kind of like that old deal when you're a little kid and your mom, you know, she tells you, 'Don't touch the hot stove.' So, what do you have to do as a curious kid? You've got to go touch the hot stove and you learn real quick how nice that stove is when it's not hot. ... My wife and I, we miss Colorado every single day."

When Paxton Lynch suffered a right shoulder injury in Denver's preseason victory over the Green Bay Packers, the Broncos were on the hunt for a veteran quarterback who could be Trevor Siemian's backup during Lynch's recovery. When the Cleveland Browns released Osweiler on Friday, everyone was ready to let bygones be bygones.

Osweiler signed a one-year deal with the Broncos for the veteran minimum for a player with his experience level: \$775,000. The Browns will pay him \$15.225 million.

The Broncos had hoped to find a backup with knowledge of offensive coordinator Mike McCoy's playbook. Osweiler played for McCoy in 2012, when McCoy was in the last year of his previous stint with the team.

"He looked fine, he looked tall," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said with a laugh about the 6-foot-7 Osweiler. "... But he's been with Mike before, so the terminology wasn't that different for him."

Elway said the Broncos would give Osweiler a chance to go through "football rehab," after a difficult year with the Texans last season that led to Osweiler's trade to Cleveland. Osweiler did not play in the Browns' last two preseason games as rookie DeShone Kizer won the Browns' starting quarterback job.

"I have nothing but love and appreciation for this organization, for John Elway, for Joe Ellis, for the Bowlen family, just for this community," said Osweiler, who went 5-2 in the games he started in 2015 in place of Peyton Manning, who had an injured foot. "Our old neighbors have reached out. ... I want people to know that my decision [to leave] didn't come lightly ... I was a mess.

"At the end of the day I tried making the best business decision for myself and my family. Whether I made the best one or not, that could be argued, but the fact of the matter is it was made. I'm not going to live in the past, but I've always had nothing but love and appreciation for the Denver Broncos and the city of Denver."

# Broncos expect Derek Wolfe, Jared Crick and Demaryius Thomas to be ready for opener

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 5, 2017

Denver Broncos defensive ends Derek Wolfe and Jared Crick, who each played in just one preseason game because of ankle and back injuries respectively, were back on the practice field Monday.

The Broncos open the regular-season Sept. 11 – the final game of the opening weekend with a scheduled kickoff of 10:15 p.m. ET -- so they have some extra time they intend to use to not only prepare for the Chargers, but to make sure they have as healthy a depth chart as possible.

Wolfe and Crick haven't practiced since mid-August, but the Broncos have intentionally pegged their return to this week throughout the preseason. The two took part in individual drills with the defensive linemen in Monday's practice and will steadily ramp up the workload throughout the week.

Wolfe suffered a sprained right ankle on Aug. 12 in the Broncos' morning practice, and initially there was at some fear Wolfe had done even more damage until X-rays showed Wolfe had not suffered a fracture. Crick was taken off the field two days later after he suffered back spasms during drills.

"They looked fine and hopefully we can progress with those guys on Wednesday," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph on Monday. Asked if he expected Wolfe and Crick to play next Monday night against the Chargers, Joseph said: "Absolutely."

Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, who left the Broncos' preseason game against Green Bay with a groin injury, was held out of practice as a precaution. He will return to practice later this week.

"He's fine, it's more precautionary for him," Joseph said. "He'll go Wednesday."

Asked if he expected Thomas to play against the Chargers, Joseph said: "Absolutely."

# T.J. Ward: Deserved better treatment before Broncos cut

By Jenna Laine

ESPN

September 5, 2017

New Buccaneers safety T.J. Ward had some sharp words for his former Denver Broncos team and the way the front office handled his departure.

"I just think they handled it completely unprofessional," said Ward, who had been among the Broncos' final roster cuts. "They could have let me know that was going on. You had a full offseason, ya know? I know it's a business, but when you have good employees, you're supposed to treat your employees a certain way."

A three-time Pro Bowler, Ward was one of the most well-liked players in the Broncos' locker room. He missed all of the preseason with a hamstring injury but had recovered and was preparing for the season opener.

Ward was entering the final season of a four-year, \$22.5 million deal. He wanted a new contract and talked about hoping to finish out his career with the Broncos.

Broncos general manager John Elway indicated that the play of 2016 draft picks Justin Simmons and Will Parks allowed them to part ways with Ward.

"My thoughts are that T.J. was a great player for this franchise. They won a lot of games with this guy," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said when asked to respond to Ward's comments. "We're going to miss having T.J., good person, good man, but we're on to the Chargers. That's behind us, and we wish him well."

Ward said he wishes they would have let him know sooner. Instead, he flew into Tampa, Florida, late Sunday night, got three hours of sleep and is scrambling to learn a new defense with less than a week until the Buccaneers' opener against the Miami Dolphins.

"It's just unfortunate the way they handled that situation, but it is what it is," Ward said. "They've gotta live with it, and I've gotta live with it. I'm gonna make sure I land on my feet. Whatever happens to them ... happens to them."

Several teams had expressed interest in signing Ward, but he chose Tampa Bay because of the locker room. He liked what he saw in quarterback Jameis Winston last year when the Broncos beat the Bucs 27-7. It may have been one of Winston's worst games statistically, but Ward loved that the young quarterback didn't quit and "kept his team fired up."

Ward also is a big fan of cornerback Brent Grimes, whom he met at the Pro Bowl a few years ago, and second-year cornerback Vernon Hargreaves, who he thinks handles his business like a veteran.

He has met about half the team so far after one practice. "It's been open arms," Ward said. "Guys are welcoming me here and letting me know that they [share] the same vision that I [have]: a championship. That's the goal."

# Brock Osweiler is thrilled to be back in Denver as backup QB

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
September 5, 2017

Brock Osweiler was so excited to be back in Denver he swore he would have signed for a buck, played in bare feet or even been the Broncos' water boy.

Of course, he's getting \$16 million this season, all but \$775,000 of it from the Cleveland Browns, so he's good for a round of drinks, and he had his pick of shiny white cleats in his locker next to starter Trevor Siemian .

The Broncos brought back Peyton Manning's longtime backup 18 months after he bolted to Houston in free agency because Paxton Lynch sprained his throwing shoulder four days after losing the starting QB job to Siemian for the second straight summer.

After passing his physical, signing his contract, diving into the playbook and hitting the practice field, Osweiler held an extraordinary nine-minute news conference Monday stuffed with honesty, humility and humor — but no heartache.

He said he has no regrets for leaving Denver in the first place but "I'm ecstatic to be back here" after an odyssey that included a playoff win, a benching, a blow-up, a trade, the birth of his daughter and a release to go with all those fat paychecks.

Well, maybe he'd think better of declaring the Texans gave him the best opportunity to win. But Osweiler's not one to look back.

He is one to take stock, though.

"It's kind of like that old deal when you're a little kid and your mom tells you don't touch the hot stove," Osweiler said. "So, what do you have to do as a curious kid? You have to go touch the hot stove and you learn real quick how nice that stove is when it's not hot.

"Needless to say, I'm very thankful to be back here. My wife and I, we miss Colorado every single day. This is a special place, special organization and a special city."

Osweiler was once Manning's heir apparent, but it was Siemian who rose up the depth chart last year when Osweiler signed with the Texans for \$37 million in guarantees the same week Manning retired a champion.

After just one season, the Texans traded Osweiler to Cleveland, which cut him over the weekend.

Osweiler said he told his agent he didn't care about any other teams "but if there's an offer from Denver, I don't care if it's a dollar, that's where we're going."

Showing he held no grudges, general manager John Elway brought Osweiler back and declared Denver never would have won Super Bowl 50 without Osweiler, who went 5-2 when Manning was sidelined with a foot injury in 2015.

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

That's exactly what happened.

"I've got 100 percent confidence if anything happens to 13, 17 will be ready to go because he knows the system," running back C.J. Anderson said. "He was drafted into this system, got to play in it. He's super smart. So, I'm all the way in on the decision."

The Broncos' other option was going with undrafted rookie Kyle Sloter, who led the league in passer rating in the preseason but was undressed by Denver's No. 1 defense in practice and is now on the Vikings' practice squad.

"Sloter played good in the preseason but you want to go into the season confident in your backup quarterback," Aqib Talib said. "We know Brock knows the system. We've seen him in this system before. We know worst scenario if something happens to Trev, we're confident in our backup quarterback now."

Osweiler agreed with Elway's assessment that Denver's nurturing environment with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy and QBs coach Bill Musgrave was the best place for him to get right so he can be a starter again in the NFL someday.

"John Elway knows what he's doing and I trust everything that he's doing, the coaches he puts in here and the decisions he makes," Osweiler said.

So, Osweiler is going to be a loyal backup QB again and isn't worried about how long this second stint will last.

"I'm prepared and ready to support Trevor with whatever he needs," Osweiler said. "Shoot, I would come back here to be the water boy. It's funny, I went in to go get cleats today and they asked what cleats I wanted and I said, 'I don't care, just give me something. I'll go out there in bare feet today.'

"This is Trevor's team and I'm the backup."

He understands not all Broncos fans are as excited as he is about his return.

"I want people to know that decision didn't come lightly," Osweiler said of his departure last year. "I didn't sleep for about a week. I was sick to my stomach every single day. I was a mess. At the end of the day I tried making the best business decision for me and my family. Whether I made the best one or not, that could be argued."

Like the Broncos, he just hopes they'll give him another chance. "I'm so happy to be back here," Osweiler said. "There's no greater place in the NFL."

# Broncos' Brock Osweiler returns; but onus on Trevor Siemian to improve

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 5, 2017

Brock Osweiler spurned the Broncos 17 months ago, defecting to the Houston Texans as a free agent. Monday, he threw passes at practice wearing No. 17 again. Brock is back, a move which incited remarkable vitriol from fans who view him as a traitor. Osweiler returns rich -- he received \$37 million on his deal, paid by the Texans and his last employer, the Cleveland Browns -- but broken and humbled.

"I would have come back as the waterboy," Osweiler said. "I am ecstatic. I told my agency, if there's an offer from Denver, I am taking it."

Requiring a veteran to back up Trevor Siemian with Paxton Lynch out at least a month, if not longer, with a right shoulder injury, the Broncos welcomed back Osweiler for "football rehab," as general manager John Elway put it.

Osweiler's return incites emotions -- who knew the most controversial decision at quarterback would be choosing Osweiler over Kyle Sloter?

"I understand the anger frustration from the fans," said Osweiler, who had options as backup, but wanted to be in Denver. "I hope in time the fans let me earn back their trust."

Teammates welcomed him with open arms. The NFL is a business. Nobody expected him back this soon. Having won with Osweiler matters.

"Sloter played well," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "But we know what Brock can do."

In a perfect world, Osweiler figures zero in Monday's outcome against the Los Angeles Chargers. That's right. Lost in the burning rage of the weekend's roster moves, in particular cutting Pro Bowl safety T.J. Ward, the Broncos play for reals this week.

For all of the handwringing over the summer, the reality is this: Trevor Siemian needs to capitalize on this opportunity.

"This is Trevor's team," coach Vance Joseph said.

"Trevor is the starter. This is his team," Osweiler added.

Siemian, make no mistake, is the man. Osweiler returns as the No. 2. For Siemian, this platform is and should feel different. He's no longer the feel-good story -- the first Northwestern product to start an NFL opener since Otto Graham in 1955. He represents a second-year quarterback with an 8-6 record who owns the respect of the locker room. Even with Ward gone, the Broncos' defense looks sturdy, if not nasty. For the Broncos to return to the playoffs, it begins with a more aggressive, uptempo offense.

It starts with Siemian. He distanced himself from Paxton Lynch, who is not practicing, in the third preseason game, winning the quarterback derby for the second straight year. But, the Broncos need improvement.

"It's a quarterback friendly offense," Siemian said last week. "I am excited about what I can do."

While Osweiler will meet the press Monday, the story this week goes beyond his reunion. The focus should be, and as the week progresses, will be on Siemian. The Broncos believe in this defense. The offense, with potentially four new starters along the offensive line when Allen Barbre plays at left guard, has to show vigor. Receiver Emmanuel Sanders hinted at an attack that will be fast, and bold. The idea is sound. But what about the execution? Demaryius Thomas did not practice Monday as he heals a thigh injury. Who will be the third weapon in the passing game (Jamaal Charles, a random tight end?).

Brock is back. What the Broncos don't need, however, is a return of last year's offense.

### **Wolfe, Crick return**

As promised, Derek Wolfe (ankle) and Jared Crick (back) practiced on Monday. Wolfe injured his right ankle on Aug. 12, and had not practice since. Crick suffered back spasms the next day, and Monday marked his return. It's impossible to overstate Wolfe's importance to the Broncos' rush defense. Crick, who should start opposite of Wolfe, provides a situational pass rusher. He also expects to be better against the run after adding 15 pounds this offseason. Zach Kerr, who injured his knee in the preseason, did not practice. There's no guarantee he will be ready for the opener. That could leave reps for Kyle Peko as Domata Peko's backup. ... Thomas will return to practice on Wednesday.

# Petition to change 'Denver Broncos' to 'Colorado Broncos' has only 36 of 76K needed signatures

By Blair Miller

KMGH

September 5, 2017

It doesn't look like you'll see the "Colorado Broncos" playing in Denver anytime soon, as the petition to rename the state's most-popular team has so far gathered only 36 of the 76,000 signatures it needs to be brought to Broncos' management.

Michael Scanlon of Commerce City started the petition last week, and has admitted in recent days that he knows the petition is non-binding and would have a tough time garnering the thousands of signatures necessary.

"Frankly, I think the Broncos front office is taking the right approach. They should ignore us at least until we get 76,000 signatures. Because if we don't 76,000 signatures, we're essentially boxed in," Scanlon wrote on the petition's website on Saturday. "Which is why I set the bar so high to begin with. If this was only a publicity stunt, I would have picked a low number, like 5,000. I want this to have a degree of legitimacy to it. So we need enough signatures to fill Mile High."

But as of Monday, it still had only 36 signatures, so it looks like the slimmest glimmer of hope for the "Colorado Broncos" is fading quickly.

It seems like most of Colorado agrees with Broncos great Ed McCaffrey, who tweeted last week: "Thought about the whole CO Broncos name change thing. Interesting at first, but Naaahhhh! Broncos fans are Global! Denver will do."

# Happy to be back 'home,' Brock Osweiler settles into backup role with Broncos

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
September 5, 2017

Brock Osweiler knew exactly where he had to go Monday afternoon after practice, even without anyone to guide him in the right direction.

Case in point: the post-practice question-and-answer session with local media. Osweiler knew the phalanx of cameras and reporters gathered at UCHealth Training Center on Labor Day was primarily there to talk with him, and he knew that the briefing would take place on the practice field.

As the media began walking into the locker room, presumably to talk to other players, Osweiler bounded through the automatic sliding doors and was on his way out. He already knew exactly where to go and when to be there. He didn't need anyone to point the way.

That's what it's like when you come back to a place where you felt at home -- a place that you thought you might never see again, at least not this way.

"I don't think many people could have seen this situation taking place, but I will say I'm beyond excited that it did take place," Osweiler said. "This is home."

It was a home that he left for a chance that didn't pan out. He returned Monday with "no regret" about opting to join the Houston Texans in March 2016, which led to a frustrating season, a trade to the Cleveland Browns and, finally, the completion of the circle -- albeit one that now has him back behind his former understudy, Trevor Siemian.

"It's kind of like that old deal when you're a little kid and your mom tells you, 'Don't touch the hot stove,'" Osweiler said. "So what do you do as a curious kid? You touch the hot stove, and you learn how nice that stove is when it's not hot."

Monday, the only hot thing was the on-field temperature, which soared into the 90s not long after the Broncos' two-hour practice ended.

"It's hard to really describe it in words, but being back here today, practicing as a Bronco and being here -- it's probably a top-five, if not top-three, day of my life," he added. "Today's been incredible."

There was little time to savor the moment. He has a system to re-learn, and he must be ready to run it on a moment's notice.

Osweiler has a grasp on some tenets of the scheme from the first three years of his previous stint with the Broncos -- including the 2012 season under Mike McCoy, who was concluding his first term as Denver's offensive coordinator. But the system isn't exactly the same as the one Osweiler learned then; it has "a lot of new things," he said.

"We'll have a package for Brock if he has to go into a football game," Head Coach Vance Joseph said. "It won't be the entire offense that we installed from the spring, but it would be Brock's package."

Eventually, he expects to grow more comfortable in the offense, but he knows the situation: He's with the team because Paxton Lynch is recovering from a sprained right shoulder. His status is about the present situation and the team's need, not the long term.

But that didn't give him pause about signing with the Broncos.

"I wasn't even worried about that," Osweiler said. "I was living in the moment. I've had some great experiences in the past 18 months and some not-so-great experiences that I've learned from."

"There were other offers and I basically told my agency, 'Listen, I love and respect you guys and I love what you guys do, but if there's an offer from Denver, I don't care if it's a dollar, that's where we're going.'"

Osweiler returns with 16 more starts -- including two in the postseason -- on his resume. He's a father now; he and his wife welcomed a daughter five months ago. His jersey number is the same, but so much else has changed, including most of his teammates; 28 of the 52 other players on the active roster were not with the team for Super Bowl 50, his last game in a Broncos uniform.

Someday, Osweiler believes he will be an NFL starter again. But not right now. He knows his role.

"I do see myself as a starter in the National Football League. I feel like I proved that back in 2015," he said. "However, in saying that, this is Trevor Siemian's team, and right now, my job is to be backup of this football team and do it to the best of my ability."

Osweiler knows his way around the building better than almost anyone could. That's a good first step.

# Where Are They Now: Karl Mecklenburg

By Jim Saccomano  
DenverBroncos.com  
September 5, 2017

When Karl Mecklenburg was drafted in the 12th round in 1983, he was such an afterthought that I can remember no members of the media even wishing to ask him a question.

Despite being the 310th player selected in the draft, he made an immediate positive impression in training camp, and it is now impossible to think of “Meck” as anything less than a part of the fabric of the Mile High City.

It was very early in his first camp when the young man from Minnesota made his mark. Broncos coach Dan Reeves was trying to put in his offense, lining them up and running plays against the very end of the defensive depth chart, which included Mecklenburg — except Meck was playing like a guy who would not be spending very long at the end of the rotation.

After three or four straight plays in which Mecklenburg seemed to reach the quarterback with ease, Reeves called defensive coordinator Joe Collier over and joked, “Can you do something about that kid? I’m trying to put my offense in, and every play he keeps coming in and touching the quarterback like, ‘Tag, you’re it.’”

He became one of the most outstanding defensive players in franchise history during his 12-year career from 1983-94.

Meck once told me, “I’m a lousy football watcher. I like to play.” Indeed he did.

Noted for his versatility, he played all seven defensive line and linebacker spots but became a starter at linebacker by his third season and went on to start 141 games for the Broncos. His 180 career games played with Denver still put him in the top 10 in franchise history.

Mecklenburg was voted to play in six Pro Bowls, tied for the fifth-highest total by any player in team history.

He was named All-AFC and All-NFL four times and was tabbed as the 1986 AFC Player of the Year by Football News.

Mecklenburg helped Denver to seven postseason appearances (1983-84, ’86-87, ’89, ’91, ’93), five division titles (1984, ’86-87, ’89 and ’91) and three Super Bowl berths (XXI, XXII and XXIV).

The soft-spoken and gentlemanly star finished his career with 1,145 tackles as well as a franchise-record 79 sacks. He had 11 multiple sack games and is the only player in team annals to record four sacks in a game twice in a career.

Mecklenburg was selected to the Denver Broncos Ring of Fame in 2001.

He remained in Denver after his playing career ended, having found a great match in climate, lifestyle and comfort level.

“I took a lot from pro football for my future — the challenges of preparation, playing injured, going beyond where you thought you could go or where anyone else thought you could go, physically, mentally and emotionally,” Mecklenburg said.

He now runs his own motivational-speaking business in the Denver area and finds that there are challenges similar to football.

So instead of rushing the passer before 75,000 screaming fans, Mecklenburg now meets 500 to 1,000 members of the public at a time.

“I get the same rush from this as I did before a game against the Raiders. I love it,” he told me.

His talks focus on several themes: Teamwork, courage, dedication, constant learning and refusing to quit.

Mecklenburg has worked with a number of corporate clients for his speeches, and he occasionally has served as a spokesman for some local firms.

“The thing I miss the most about football is the adrenaline rush that the competition provides,” he said, “and once I learned how to transfer that to the motivational speaking world, it was a tremendous help to me.

“I don’t know why some guys make it so hard. They don’t understand that when they retire from the game, their resume is basically the goodwill they developed in the community.”

He had class, perspective and balance as a player, and Mecklenburg still has that today even outside of football.

“There is such a value in making a commitment to the community, it is not a burden in any way,” Mecklenburg said. “I encourage all players to take advantage of it as much as they can.”

# Derek Wolfe, Jared Crick return to practice

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
September 5, 2017

The Broncos aren't yet in game-week mode, but the team practiced Monday as its "Monday Night Football" date with the Chargers looms.

During this unofficial bridge from the preseason to regular season, the Broncos saw defensive ends Jared Crick and Derek Wolfe return to individual drills.

Neither players participated heavily during team drills, Head Coach Vance Joseph said after practice.

"They didn't go much [in] team drills, but [individual] drills, they went," Joseph said. "They looked fine, and hopefully we can progress further with those guys on Wednesday."

Joseph said he expects both players to be ready one week from Monday against Los Angeles.

Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas did not practice Monday, as he continues to recover from a groin injury he suffered during the third preseason game.

"He's fine," Joseph said. "It's just precautionary for him. Just more rest and recovery. He'll go Wednesday."

The Broncos will release their first official injury update Thursday.

# Broncos in need of some more Elway magic

By Mark Knudson  
Larry Brown Sports  
September 5, 2017

Back in the day, Denver Bronco 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 Bronco 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, winning one. Then Manning smartly retired.

Two years removed from that magical postseason, 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.

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 preseason, 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...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.

Today, the NFL is a quarterback-driven league. 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. And 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 QBs 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 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 Bronco QB currently on the roster. However, those who know him well will tell you that Elway values loyalty above all else. So when 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 door was slammed shut.

Kaepernick's well-documented National Anthem protests have clearly been the deciding factor for other NFL teams that have banned together to blackball the former 49ers starter, but he was persona non grata with Elway well before he took that seat.

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 John Elway participating in any sort of "tanking" plan. Yet if he doesn't make any significant other moves sooner, it will be 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, ya, that might work. For awhile.

Either way, waiting for these opportunities would involve living through a long difficult season in 2017 first. That's not Elway's style, is it?

Does No. 7 have a magic trick up his sleeve?

# Ranking NFL's backup quarterback situations: Patriots' Jimmy Garoppolo tops list

By Nate Davis

USA Today

September 5, 2017

Many NFL backup quarterbacks rarely see the field. Still, it can be argued they are the second-most important player on a given roster, whether they're needed to temporarily replace the No. 1 quarterback or perhaps revitalize a team by supplanting a struggling starter.

There are various approaches across the league to managing the quarterback depth chart. Perhaps the ideal situation is illustrated by the New England Patriots, who have a star (Tom Brady) first stringer but have developed a promising understudy (Jimmy Garoppolo) within their philosophy over the course of several years. Some clubs will carry a totally unproven player behind an established veteran, others are grooming a future face of the franchise until he's ready to take the reins from a place-holding starter. Some franchises have two QBs on their 53-man roster, others will carry up to four.

After a flurry of roster moves over the weekend, USA TODAY Sports has ranked the NFL's backup QB situations as they stand Monday morning:

1. New England Patriots: Jimmy Garoppolo has only started two NFL games and thrown 94 career passes. Nevertheless, he's a highly regarded player (106.2 career passer rating) who's sure to draw extensive interest on next year's free agent market ... if the Patriots allow him to test it. He could probably start for at least 10 teams right now.
2. Tampa Bay Buccaneers: Unflappable. Fearless. Smart. Underrated athlete. (Will unnecessarily force the ball at times.) Those labels could apply just as easily to Ryan Fitzpatrick as Bucs starter Jameis Winston. Fitzpatrick most definitely lacks Winston's arm talent, but he'd likely keep this team competitive for a protracted period given its offensive arsenal.
3. Minnesota Vikings: Case Keenum has wandered the league but managed to collect 24 (often decent) starts over the past four seasons. He's among the NFL's better insurance policies. However if the Vikes get Teddy Bridgewater back this year, they should have little trouble surviving an injury to Sam Bradford.
4. Philadelphia Eagles: It's not easy to purge the thought of how overmatched Nick Foles was as the starter for a bad St. Louis Rams squad in 2015. But let's not forget his stellar 2013 campaign (27 TD passes vs. 2 INTs) in Philly or the nice job he did in relief for Kansas City last year. He could be a nice handcuff to Carson Wentz for a long time.
5. Denver Broncos: Paxton Lynch, who won't be ready for the start of the season after spraining his shoulder, has enviable physical skills. He did fine in two spot starts in 2016 but has failed twice to surpass Trevor Siemian and has yet to prove he's more than a product of the college spread system. For the interim, at least, Brock Osweiler has made a stunning return to Denver after spurning this club in free agency a year ago. He has a deserved pack of detractors, but he did help both the Broncos and Texans to division titles over the past two seasons and has worked with OC Mike McCoy before.

6. Chicago Bears: Rookie Mitchell Trubisky has spent the past month winning over skeptical Bears fans. The question now is, how long will it take him to win over crusty coach John Fox, who remains behind Mike Glennon at the moment. Mark Sanchez has transitioned from franchise quarterback to franchise quarterback mentor after providing Dak Prescott helpful support last year in Dallas.

7. Cincinnati Bengals: Garoppolo may be the only second-string QB who generates more buzz than AJ McCarron. Renowned as a winner at Alabama despite limited physical tools, he stepped in for injured Andy Dalton in 2015 to lead a march to the postseason — where he would have earned a win had his defensive teammates not imploded against Pittsburgh.

8. Miami Dolphins: Matt Moore is capable of winning a few games in a pinch, which is exactly what he did in helping Miami into the playoffs last season after Ryan Tannehill injured his knee. But clearly the team didn't regard Moore as a viable option over 16 games this year, hence the August arrival of Jay Cutler to replace Tannehill.

9. Carolina Panthers: Derek Anderson is beginning his seventh season as Cam Newton's backup. The club wouldn't have won its 2014 division crown if Anderson hadn't stepped in to win two games on short notice. However he didn't play well in five appearances last year.

10. Arizona Cardinals: Drew Stanton is entering his sixth season alongside Bruce Arians, so you know he's earned the demanding coach's confidence. Stanton has also gone 6-3 in Carson Palmer's absence over the years. Still, his decision making and inaccuracy make it worth wondering if Blaine Gabbert might be a better option.

11. New York Giants: Third rounder Davis Webb is a football junkie and was highly regarded in many pre-draft circles. He might be Eli Manning's heir apparent down the road. For now, he's got time to sponge knowledge from Manning and current Plan B option Geno Smith.

12. Kansas City Chiefs: The franchise was so excited by Patrick Mahomes that it traded up in the draft to make him the first quarterback selected by the team in the first round in 34 years. Despite an unfamiliarity with a pro-style offense, Mahomes wasted little time fueling his hype by turning in stellar preseason performances that won't be forgotten by the fan base if Alex Smith experiences even mild struggles in 2017. Tyler Bray has never seen the field but managed to hang around this team for four seasons already.

13. Washington Redskins: Colt McCoy has 25 mostly unimpressive NFL starts on his resume, but he's actually been pretty reliable since settling into a reserve role with Washington in 2014. His intangibles are off the chart, and familiarity with Jay Gruden's playbook should inspire confidence if he's needed for a limited period.

14. New Orleans Saints: Chase Daniel is back for a second stint in New Orleans after being well paid as a backup in other cities. Still, despite his lofty reputation, he's played sparingly (78 career pass attempts) — though it's probably not a huge issue given Drew Brees' durability.

15. Green Bay Packers: Brett Hundley has been busy building his stock in recent preseasons and could fetch a nice draft pick one day since he won't be around long enough to take over for Aaron Rodgers. But Hundley largely remains an unknown commodity when it counts, throwing 10 passes in mop-up duty during his first two pro seasons.

16. Houston Texans: Rookie Deshaun Watson was drafted in Round 1 to be this club's future under center. With a better showing this preseason, he might have been the present also. But despite showing flashes, he hasn't proven quite ready to leapfrog incumbent Tom Savage.

17. Tennessee Titans: Since his only Pro Bowl season in 2010 with the Chiefs, Matt Cassel has seemingly been in a steady decline. But his lengthy track record does suggest he can succeed when surrounded with a solid supporting cast, which the Titans certainly possess in 2017.

18. Buffalo Bills: Rookie Nathan Peterman might never be a regular starter in the league but may have the skills to develop into a long-term backup. T.J. Yates has been exactly that in his career. He's familiar with Buffalo's offense and thus a valuable resource. Neither can replicate starter Tyrod Taylor's mobility or deep ball — however Joe Webb, who just signed Monday, might.

19. Jacksonville Jaguars: Chad Henne has 53 NFL starts to his credit over the course of a career entering a 10th season. But his inability to unseat struggling Blake Bortles in recent weeks isn't likely to inspire much hope inside the locker room or out.

20. Cleveland Browns: Cody Kessler went 0-8 as a rookie starter last year, but he held his own despite his inexperience and middling talent around him. He could carve out a nice niche as a career backup. The Browns' young trio behind rookie starter DeShone Kizer also includes Kevin Hogan and Josh Woodrum.

21. Oakland Raiders: Neither former first-round flameout EJ Manuel nor Connor Cook, who was clearly overwhelmed when pressed into service as a rookie last year, are likely to assuage panic in Raider Nation if Derek Carr goes down again for an extended period.

22. Pittsburgh Steelers: Landry Jones hasn't done a whole lot to justify the team's continued commitment to him. But rookie Joshua Dobbs didn't show during preseason that he was ready — yet — to take over as the primary alternative to oft-injured starter Ben Roethlisberger, who's openly mulled retirement.

23. Seattle Seahawks: Austin Davis, who's started 10 NFL games since 2014, was sterling enough in preseason to overtake Trevone Boykin, who seemed to have many of Russell Wilson's physical traits but never translated them sufficiently to game action.

24. Atlanta Falcons: Matt Schaub was once a Pro Bowl-caliber starter. But ever since his career spiraled in 2013, the last time he was a regular No. 1, he's shown little to suggest he's physically able of recapturing his former glory. But maybe he can get by on guile and leadership in a pinch.

25. Indianapolis Colts: As good as Andrew Luck is, he's lacked predecessor Peyton Manning's durability, a lesson the team apparently hasn't absorbed. The Colts will learn if Scott Tolzien (and maybe Stephen Morris) is capable of keeping them afloat in the short run, though confidence doesn't appear especially high after Saturday's trade for Jacoby Brissett, who was at least serviceable in two starts as a rookie for New England last year when Garoppolo was hurt and Tom Brady suspended.

26. Baltimore Ravens: Ryan Mallett has a huge arm. But the seventh-year vet has never displayed dependable accuracy, decision making or even maturity. Nevertheless, despite more spotty play during Joe Flacco's absence this preseason, the Ravens remain comfortable with Mallett as their No. 2.

27. Los Angeles Rams: Sean Mannion exited the Pac-12 in 2014 as the conference's all-time leader in passing yards. His results in preseason this year were encouraging, but he still lacks meaningful NFL experience.

28. New York Jets: Josh McCown has experience, solid physical tools and an unselfish approach when helping younger teammates — an ideal blend of traits for a backup. Unfortunately for the Jets, the 38-year-old journeyman is their starter because youngsters Christian Hackenberg and Bryce Petty couldn't rise to the occasion.

29. San Francisco 49ers: The Niners may have scored a steal by snagging C.J. Beathard in the third round of this year's draft. He outshone Matt Barkley enough in August that the veteran wound up on the chopping block. If the Niners struggle as expected this year, don't be surprised if Beathard and Brian Hoyer swap roles at some point as GM John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan map their 2018 plans.

30. Los Angeles Chargers: They traded for Cardale Jones this summer, and he's got the talent to develop into a noteworthy prospect. He could also be out of the league five minutes from now. Still, he did enough last month to force the ouster of veteran Kellen Clemens, a bosom buddy of starter Philip Rivers but a stopgap performer.

31. Dallas Cowboys: A remarkable preseason allowed undrafted Cooper Rush to relegate Kellen Moore, who intimately understands this offense, to the unemployment line. Still, if Dak Prescott is knocked out of action for an extended period, expect the Cowboys to immediately contact Moore ... and that Romo guy.

32. Detroit Lions: In a spirited competition, Jake Rudock beat out fellow sixth rounder Brad Kaaya (he was later scooped by Carolina) to make the roster. But there's no guarantee that the Lions might not turn elsewhere if Matthew Stafford goes down.

# T.J. Ward blasts Broncos, calls timing of his release 'completely unprofessional'

By Will Brinson  
CBS Sports  
September 5, 2017

There is no love lost between new Buccaneers safety T.J. Ward and his old team. Ward, who was released by the Broncos on Saturday afternoon, inked a one-year deal with Tampa Bay on Sunday, quickly finding work after being released.

One of the members of Pete Prisco's All-Cut Team, it was not a surprise to see Ward snatched up quickly. It also was not a surprise to see him released: the Broncos were reportedly shopping him the week prior, always a good indication that a veteran is close to getting squeezed out.

But that does not mean Ward was happy with how it all went down. On the contrary, in fact -- the safety is pretty mad about things and referred to the situation as "completely unprofessional."



Ward's main beef, as you can see, is that the Broncos were planning to release him almost all offseason. Denver really likes Justin Simmons and is willing to gamble on youth and his talent in order to avoid paying Ward, who has slipped a little bit in coverage over the past two years.

Prisco mentioned on the Pick Six Podcast -- subscribe here on iTunes -- that there was a good chance Ward's release would result in some folks in Denver being unhappy. It appears to be the case with Broncos cornerback Chris Harris, Jr.

**@ChrisHarrisJr**  
**Ima miss my dawg @BossWard43**  
**9:57 AM - Sep 2, 2017 · Colorado, USA**  
**135 Replies 1,415 Retweets 4,481 likes**

That's at least something to watch when you talk about this team gelling together. The "No Fly Zone" has been a dominant group for a while and now won't feature Ward along with Harris and Aqib Talib.

If you want to turn your attention to the future, let's talk about the upcoming opponent for the Bucs, the Miami Dolphins. With a hurricane potentially bearing down on the Florida coast, the game could be moved. But it will eventually involve Ward going against Jay Cutler, who apparently is a favorite punching bag for the safety.

Asked about going up against Cutler, Ward pointed out he beats him "every time."

**@PSchrag**

**"I beat him every time. It's true. Even in Cleveland, we beat him." -- T.J. Ward, new Buccaneers safety, on Jay Cutler. @gmfb**

**11:01 AM - Sep 4, 2017**

**18 Replies 37 Retweets 103 likes**

The juxtaposition here is gold. "These jerks are unprofessional!" Ward screamed before pointing out that he whips Cutler up and down.

The Buccaneers are actually 2.5-point favorites against the Dolphins for Week 1's matchup, so Vegas agrees with Ward and expects him to handle the new Miami quarterback.

# Ward: Broncos 'unprofessional' with timing of release

By Marc Sessler

NFL.com

September 5, 2017

Broncos players weren't thrilled to see Denver cut ties with T.J. Ward.

The popular Pro Bowl safety wasn't happy about it, either, to say the least.

"It's unfortunate the way they handled that situation," Ward told a gaggle of Bucs reporters after signing with the team shortly after being cut by the Broncos on Saturday.

"But it is what it is. And they got live with it. I got to live with it. And we'll see what happens," Ward said. "But I'm going to make sure that I land on my feet. That's just me. And whatever happens to them, happens to them. That's on them."

There are a handful of ways a person could choose to talk about their former employer. Ward has opted for the rather daring seek-and-destroy method, calling Denver's timing "unprofessional."

"You could have let me know what was going on," Ward said. "You had a full offseason. I know it's a business, but when you have good employees, you're supposed to treat your employees a certain way. And I think they handled it completely unprofessional. That's just my opinion."

The Broncos have their side of the story here, too, but don't expect Ward and his former team to settle this over tea and crumpets any time soon.

# He's back: Brock Osweiler signs one-year contract with Broncos

By Chuck Hickey

Fox31

September 5, 2017

Quarterback Brock Osweiler returned to the Broncos on Monday, signing a one-year contract for the veteran's minimum of \$775,000 to back up Trevor Siemian.

Osweiler spent his first four seasons with the Broncos after being drafted in the second round in 2012. He was the backup to Peyton Manning, but started seven games in 2015.

He was yanked at halftime of the regular-season finale and replaced by Manning, who engineered a comeback against the San Diego Chargers that secured home-field advantage through the AFC playoffs.

Then-coach Gary Kubiak stayed with Manning in the playoffs that culminated in a Super Bowl 50 win over the Carolina Panthers.

One month later, Osweiler spurned the Broncos and signed a four-year, \$72 million deal with the Houston Texans as an unrestricted free agent.

He flopped with the Texans, throwing 16 interceptions and getting benched in the final game of the season, but returned to lead a playoff win over the Oakland Raiders.

He was traded in the offseason to the Cleveland Browns, who cut him over the weekend after deciding to go with DeShone Kizer as the starter.

"When we look at it, he knows our system. He was here with (offensive coordinator) Mike (McCoy), and knows the system," Broncos general manager John Elway said Saturday.

"He'll adapt that with the experience that he has. ... Trevor is our starter. We want him to be that starter. We have confidence in that, and feel like if something were to happen that Brock has the experience. We've got some people around him that will be able to help. He fits the system."

Osweiler passed a physical on Monday morning and will practice with the team later in the day as it prepares for the season opener on Sept. 11 at home against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Osweiler will be the back up to Siemian as Paxton Lynch, the 2016 first-round draft pick, recovers from a sprained shoulder.

The team announced outside linebacker Shane Ray, who is recovering from wrist surgery, was placed on injured reserve to clear a roster spot for Siemian.

# Domata Peko The Antidote For Broncos' Biggest Bugaboo

By Staff

Fox31

September 5, 2017

A much better supporting cast awaits quarterback Trevor Siemian in his second season as Broncos starter and Mike McCoy in his second stint as Denver's offensive coordinator.

The Broncos bolstered their backfield by bringing in youth — Coastal Carolina touchdown machine De'Angelo Henderson — and experience — Jamaal Charles . They replaced four-fifths of their O-line, and center Matt Paradis had both hips surgically repaired. Rookie Isaiah McKenzie adds speed to the wide receiving corps.

The biggest offseason fix, however, came on defense, with 32-year-old nose tackle Domata Peko coming over from Cincinnati to plug a line whose breach last season defanged Denver's strengths that had propelled its Super Bowl run.

With the Broncos' run defense compromised down the stretch, opposing quarterbacks didn't have to worry about testing All-Pro cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr., or about pass rusher Von Miller wrecking their day.

Peko appears to have plenty of game left in his 32-year-old legs. He remains passionate, too.

"I'm on Year 12, but I feel good. My body is feeling great," Peko said. "God has been keeping me strong and keeping me healthy, but I still have that hunger. I want to get a ring. I want to win a championship. That's what keeps me going. Also, my family, I'm playing for my children and for my wife. Those are motivations for me.

"I think that's what keeps me young and alive. I think you see guys when they get a little older, they start losing their love for the game. But, for me, I still love the waking up in the morning and coming out here to hit O-linemen and hitting running backs. That's fun to me. I love that stuff."

The Broncos love having him on their side now, too.

## ADVERTISING

As usual, there are several sub-plots with the Broncos as they navigate the tough AFC West:

**NO FLY ZONE** : GM John Elway decided young safeties Justin Simmons, Will Parks and rookie Jamal Carter were good enough that he could cut three-time Pro Bowl strong safety T.J. Ward, who signed with Tampa Bay.

Talib said the moniker "No Fly Zone" stays, even minus one of its founding members.

"Yeah, ain't nobody flying still. They can't fly. The name don't change," Talib said. "But we love him."

Simmons will start, and Parks moves into Ward's old role in the dime defense.

**MOTIVATED MILLER:** Without the busy jet-set schedule that followed his Super Bowl MVP performance, Miller was able to focus on his physique in the offseason. The results are a buffer body and thighs that look like watermelons.

Shane Ray said he was disappointed when Oakland's Khalil Mack edged Miller by a single vote for Defensive Player of the Year honors. But Ray said he now believes that was a camouflage blessing.

"Von being Von, I didn't have to feel bad for him," Ray said. "Von pushes himself. He said OK, last year what I did wasn't good enough, as great as his season was last year. So he's pushed himself all offseason to come back and be even better. So, now you can't deny him. Be so good that they can't deny you."

**INJECTING VENOM:** New offensive line starters include free agents Ron Leary and Menelik Watson and first-round draft pick Garrett Bolles. The common denominator: they all bring a nastiness to the field the front office felt was lacking.

"I think he brings a great mentality to that offensive line that needed a jolt, and I think he's a perfect fit for what we've done in free agency," Elway said after selecting Bolles with the 20th overall pick. "If Garrett turns out to be who we think he is, he solves a big problem for us for a long time."

**OSWEILER RETURNS:** All summer, Denver's airwaves were filled with incessant talk about "The Decision" as Siemian and Paxton Lynch competed for the starting QB job. It wasn't really ever close, and not long after Siemian got the nod, Lynch sprained his throwing shoulder. He will miss at least the first month of the season.

The real choice came down to bringing back Brock Osweiler rather than keeping camp sensation Kyle Slotter, who left for Minnesota's practice squad and a \$20,000 weekly paycheck, nearly three times the minimum.

Eighteen months ago, Osweiler also took the money and ran, signing a \$72 million deal with Houston, about \$8 million more than Elway offered him. Now, he's the backup again and the Broncos are only paying \$775,000 of his salary, with the Browns paying the other \$15.25 million.

**TIGHT END HELP:** The Broncos return the same trio of tight ends that combined for just 33 yards a game last year and scored a single touchdown. But there's hope that rookie Jake Butt will be back from a torn ACL by November to give the Broncos a big boost.

"When he gets healthy, he can help us," Joseph said.

# Vance Joseph says Broncos are Trevor Siemian's team

By Darryn Albert  
Larry Brown Sports  
September 5, 2017

Vance Joseph is leaving no doubt about the pecking order of his team as kickoff nears for the 2017 season.

Speaking with reporters on Monday, the Denver Broncos head coach said the team was Trevor Siemian's, per Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post.

**@NickiJhabvala**

**Vance Joseph: "Its Trevor's team. He feels that way, we feel that way. He's going to have a great season for us."**

**12:21 PM - Sep 4, 2017**

**1 Reply 15 Retweets 50 likes**

The third-year quarterback Siemian had Paxton Lynch on his heels for much of the offseason, and the Broncos also just brought back Brock Osweiler. But Siemian had a respectable 8-6 record as a starter in his age-24 season in 2016, and the team will give him every opportunity to capitalize on that this season.

# Brock Osweiler calls returning to Denver one of the top-five days of his life

By Charean Williams  
Pro Football Talk  
September 5, 2017

Brock Osweiler doesn't regret signing with Houston during the 2016 offseason, but he made it clear he's happy to be back "home." The quarterback went from Denver to Houston to Cleveland and back in Denver in 18 months.

After being released by the Browns this weekend, Osweiler said he told his agent he wanted to return to the Broncos. Osweiler signed his contract and rejoined his old team Monday, saying "being back here today is probably a top five, if not three, day of my life."

Osweiler left Denver as a free agent to sign a four-year, \$72 million with the Texans, but Houston moved on from him after only one season.

"I want people to know that decision didn't come lightly," Osweiler said, via Nicki Jhabvala of The Denver Post. "I didn't sleep for about a week. I was sick to my stomach every single day. I was a mess. At the end of the day, I tried making the best business decision for myself and my family. Whether I made the best one or not, that could be argued. But the fact of the matter is it was made. I'm not going to live in the past. But I've always had nothing but love and appreciation for the Denver Broncos and the city of Denver."

Despite two teams giving up on him, Osweiler, who has a 13-8 record as a starter with 26 touchdowns and 22 interceptions, still believes in his ability. But Osweiler's role for now is to back up Trevor Siemian, at least until Paxton Lynch returns.

"I do see myself as a starter in the National Football League," Osweiler said. I feel like I proved that back in 2015. However, in saying that, this is Trevor Siemian's team, and my job is to be the backup of this football team and do it to the best of my ability. Get the scout team running, get our defense ready to go. And I'm going to embrace that role with everything I have because, like I said, I'm so happy to be back here, and there's no greater place in the NFL."

Osweiler skipped the Broncos' trip to the White House and the Super Bowl ring ceremony in the 2016 offseason, irking some former teammates, but he insists he has no hard feelings.

"If you look back at all my interviews from the time that I signed with Houston and then [was] traded to Cleveland, I spoke volumes about this organization; I spoke volumes of this city," Osweiler said. "I have nothing but love and appreciation for this organization, for John Elway, for Joe Ellis, for the Bowlen family, just for this community itself. Our old neighbors have reached out. This is just such a special place and there's nothing but love, and that's how it's always been, especially from my end."

# Shane Ray goes on injured reserve as Brock Osweiler returns to Denver

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
September 5, 2017

Brock Osweiler's long, strange trip around the NFL has officially taken him back where he started.

General Manager John Elway said on Saturday that the Broncos would sign Osweiler as long as he passed a physical and the team announced on Monday that he's done just that. It's a one-year deal for Osweiler, who was drafted by Elway in the second round of the 2012 draft and spent four years in Denver before opting to sign with the Texans as a free agent in 2016.

Osweiler spent one disappointing year in Houston before being traded to the Browns along with a second-round pick this offseason. The Browns released Osweiler over the weekend and remain on the hook for \$16 million minus whatever the Broncos will be paying him.

To make room for Osweiler, the Broncos have placed linebacker Shane Ray on injured reserve. That was also a move Elway said the Broncos would be making as Ray is still recovering from offseason wrist surgery. They hope he spends the minimum eight weeks on the list and returns for a Week Nine Monday night game against the Chiefs.

# T.J. Ward: Broncos were “completely unprofessional”

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

September 5, 2017

The now-former teammates of T.J. Ward reportedly weren't happy with the team's Saturday decision to cut him. Ward wasn't, either.

“It's unfortunate the way they handled the situation,” Ward told reporters on Monday, via James Palmer of NFL Media. “But it is what it is. And they got to live with it. I got to live with it. And we'll see what happens, but I'm going to make sure I land on my feet. That's just me. And whatever happens to them, the [expletive] happens to them. That's on them.”

So how should they have handled it?

“You could have let me know what was going on,” Ward said. “You had a full offseason. I know it's a business, but when you have good employees, you're supposed to treat your employees a certain way. And I think they handled it completely unprofessional. That's just my opinion.”

It's hardly the first time a team squatted on a player's contract for all of the offseason, training camp, and the preseason before cutting him loose at a time when most teams already have their rosters set. That's why so many contracts include roster bonuses or other triggers that force an early decision — and it's why plenty of teams don't like including that clause.

Ward lost as much as \$500,000 in the transition, given reports that his supposed \$5 million contract has a base value of \$4 million and \$1 million in incentives. If he'd been available in March, he quite possibly would have gotten a better deal. He'd definitely be better prepared to make an impact from Week One.

# On the issue of T.J. Ward, Vance Joseph is on to the Chargers

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
September 5, 2017

It's been nearly three years since Patriots coach Bill Belichick created a new avenue for football coaches by using the phrase, "On to Cincinnati." On Monday, Broncos coach Vance Joseph borrowed it when he was asked about former Broncos safety T.J. Ward.

"My thoughts are that T.J. was a great player for this franchise," Joseph told reporters. "We won a lot of games with this guy. So we're going to miss having T.J. He's a good person, a good man, but we're on to the Chargers. That's behind us. We wish him well."

Cornerback Aqib Talib had a bit more to say, but he was pragmatic about the situation.

There was kind of a buzz, so I'm not going to say it was surprising," Talib told reporters. "The buzz started a couple of days before. So we had an idea it was going to happen. We talked about it. Him and I talked about it. We just hoped he made more money there than what he was going to make here this year. He did that, so I'm happy for him."

But he didn't do that. He could do that, but the base package is less than the \$4.5 million the Broncos owed Ward.

For the Broncos, the question is whether they'll at least be the same without him. Specifically, will the "No Fly Zone" still exist?

"Ain't nobody flying," Talib said. "They still can't fly. The name doesn't change. [Ward] knows we love him. We're going to miss him. It's part of our jobs. That's what makes us professionals. You could put us anywhere. We can adapt. We can adjust. We all did it. I got traded before. I found out I was getting traded in a hypobaric chamber. The next day I was in New England. That's what makes us professionals."

Talib regards Ward's replacement, Justin Simmons, as a professional.

"You see it," Talib said. "You see his production in OTAs. You see his production last year. He's a smart kid. It's not like we have to worry about him knowing his assignments or knowing what the other team is doing. He is professional. He is mature. He's married. He's going to go home and study like a vet. This should be an easy transition for him."

If it's an easy transition for him, it'll be an easy transition for a championship-caliber defense that somehow missed the playoffs a year ago.