

A glimpse into the mind of Von Miller: How the Broncos' pass rusher plans to be more dominant in 2017

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Grab a seat, because Von Miller is about to divulge one of his pass-rushing secrets, and when Von Miller does this, it's detailed and honest and, to be frank, you should be taking notes, too.

This lesson is on his spin move to sack quarterback Aaron Rodgers, a move that left two 300-pound linemen flat-footed and one of the game's top quarterbacks curled up in the fetal position during the Broncos' preseason win over the Green Bay Packers.

Take it away, Von:

"I started off on the right, going against (tackle David) Bakhtiari, and I tried to switch it up," Miller begins. "I like to move around, so I started on the right side, went over to the left and I had a rush, came around, I had the edge, but the right tackle, he kind of ... because when you get a sack, it's not just that play you get a sack. You kind of set the sack like a couple of plays in advance.

"So I was rushing on the outside a couple plays before, and he kind of dragged me down. So I was thinking to myself, 'When I get another opportunity, I'm going to try to bull rush.' He came again, but I got a chip (block), so I didn't get a clean bull. Another play after that, I lined up outside, and I rushed. I got the chip, and I came and I spun underneath and was like, 'Oh, he's free. I can spin underneath on this guy.' Because I didn't get a lot of film on (tackle Jason) Spriggs.

"So I spun underneath off a chip, and if you can spin off a chip, if you have an open rush, you can get it. So the very next rush I was like, 'I'm going to spin again.' Spun again and it was open. The center was too late, and Aaron Rodgers just gave it to me. I thought he was going to try to scramble, but he just gave it to me.

"Appreciate it, Aaron."

The postsack dance — the "Sexy T-Rex," Miller calls it — was planned too, clipped from his book of choreographed celebrations.

A one-minute glimpse into the mind of Miller is a window into his world, his five-steps-ahead thinking, his computer-like processor, his unique physical ability, his attention to detail and his rare transparency as one of the NFL's pre-eminent players.

Over the summer, Miller held a pass-rush summit on Stanford's campus for a meeting of the minds among the game's leading and up-and-coming defenders. He shared his famed moves and techniques, just as he shared the one he pulled on Rodgers.

The vision was derived from the passing camps Peyton Manning held annually with his receivers and his quarterback younger brother, Eli, at Duke.

“You know, if you’ve got Khalil (Mack) on the board and he’s showing how he just had his sack, none of the guys in the room can just run through an offensive tackle the way he does and so forth,” Miller said. “We were just in there sharing knowledge. Quarterbacks do it all the time, and I had the summit so we can start that type of culture as pass rushers.”

Weeks later, Miller returned for Broncos training camp to hold many more informal summits, with rookie linebacker DeMarcus Walker during evening walkthroughs, with rookie offensive tackle Garrett Bolles in between team drills, with veteran linebacker Shaquil Barrett during one-on-ones.

Miller has said — usually in the third person and often with a mention of the full National Football League — he’s “the same Von Miller” and that he’s still just “trying to be the best Von Miller he can be.” But each season, he raises the bar, and his role has clearly expanded to include that of a teacher.

After practice Wednesday, coach Vance Joseph validated Miller’s latest leap from starring defender to team leader. Miller was voted by his teammates as one of five season captains, alongside cornerback Aqib Talib, quarterback Trevor Siemian, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas and kicker Brandon McManus.

As Miller looks ahead to his seventh season, he’s also searching for new ways to leave his mark, even as opponents search for new ways to contain him.

“In the National Football League, if a team doesn’t want you to get a sack and that’s like top on their agenda, that’s their primary goal — ‘Don’t let Von get a sack, don’t let him wreck the game.’ — 90 percent of the time it’s not going to happen. You got to find other ways to change the game. You got to find other ways to impact the game, and that’s what I try to do.

“You know, we talked about sack numbers and all that stuff earlier in the preseason. For me, I never really set goals like that. I just try to go out there and be a dominant football player. I try to affect the game in whatever way I can, whether that’s coverage, playing the run, rushing the passer. Whatever chance I can get to wreck the game, that’s what I’m going to try to do. If they stop one area of the game, you got to be able to adapt and overcome and achieve in another area.”

Welcome to the mind of Miller: Pass rusher, teacher, captain.

Broncos RB Devontae Booker expecting to be cleared for return soon

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
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Broncos running back Devontae Booker, out since undergoing surgery to repair a broken wrist in July, believes he'll soon be cleared to return to practice.

"I just got to get a CT scan Friday and then I'll be ready," Booker said.

Booker suffered the injury during organized team activities in June but initially believed he had sprained the wrist. It wasn't until he reported for training camp that an X-ray revealed a fracture.

The Broncos moved Booker to the active roster last week, pointing to a return early in the regular season. But the second-year running back out of Utah hasn't pinpointed an exact return date.

"I'm not sure yet," he said. "It all depends on how much I'm doing out there with my running backs coach (Eric Stutesville) and getting back into football shape."

Booker's rehab moved slowly at first. While he still had stitches, he had to prevent sweating to allow the area to heal. Booker said he has picked up his conditioning during the past two weeks and is pain free.

The Broncos showcased their depth at running back during the preseason in Booker's absence. C.J. Anderson and Jamaal Charles sit atop the depth chart and rookie De'Angelo Henderson also had strong moments during training camp and made the roster. The Broncos also added former Bills running back Jonathan Williams to their practice squad Tuesday. Broncos head coach Vance Joseph called Williams "very explosive" after Wednesday's practice.

"We got a bunch of dangerous guys in our room," Booker said. "I just can't wait to get back there on the field with them and help our team out."

Defensive line update. Defensive ends Derek Wolfe (ankle) and Jared Crick (back), who suffered injuries during back-to-back days in the middle of August, participated in their second straight practice.

Joseph on Wednesday provided an update on their status for Monday night's opener against the Chargers.

"It looks OK so far," Joseph said. "Obviously, it's a long week. It's an extra two days so I'm not sure how the week is going to end. Right now, they look fine."

Defensive end Zach Kerr, meanwhile, still has not returned to practice. He suffered a bruised knee during the Broncos' preseason game against the Packers on Aug. 26.

"I'm not sure there," Joseph said when asked if Kerr would play against the Chargers. "He's pushing along. He's getting better every day. I'll know more Thursday and Friday."

Broncos name captains. Joseph announced that linebacker Von Miller, cornerback Aqib Talib, quarterback Trevor Siemian, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas and kicker Brandon McManus were elected captains in a vote by their teammates.

“To be a captain is a lot of responsibility,” Joseph said. “I expect great leadership, work every day. I want those guys to be on every day.”

Footnotes. Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas (groin) returned to practice after missing Monday’s workout and “looked great,” Joseph said. ... Quarterback Paxton Lynch attended Wednesday’s practice and was still sporting a sling to protect his injured right throwing shoulder. ... Joseph said he still hasn’t decided whether Max Garcia or Allen Barbre will start at left guard against the Chargers.

Broncos QB Trevor Siemian: “I’m more comfortable going into Year 2”

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
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Trevor Siemian did not allot much time for nerves heading into his debut as the starting quarterback for the Broncos last season.

Denver opened its season with a Thursday night game against Carolina — a 21-20 Broncos victory — and Siemian had too much cramming to do ahead of his first start to spend much time chomping on his fingernails.

New players for the Broncos aren’t as lucky this season. The Broncos don’t kick off until 8:20 p.m. Monday against the Los Angeles Chargers. Denver played the first game of the NFL season last year. Now, it will play in the last in Week 1.

“It’ll be a long week watching all those games Sunday,” Siemian said. “But we’ve got plenty of work to do, so we’ll stay busy.”

The extra wait isn’t likely to get to Siemian this week. While he may not be “10 times better” as a quarterback than he was last season, as teammate Von Miller said during an appearance on Pro Football Talk’s PFT Live on Tuesday, Siemian does feel a greater level of calm as he prepares for his second season as an NFL starter.

“That first game there is a lot of anticipation,” Siemian said. “You’ve got a lot of time to think about it, go over the game plan and all those things. I’m definitely more comfortable going into this year, going into Year 2. The first year I felt good about everything, but at the same time you are still holding on to the seat of your pants a little bit. Like I said, I like where I’m at, like where we’re at. I feel really good about it.”

Miller raised eyebrows Tuesday when he drew comparisons between Siemian and former Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning. The linebacker provided a clarification Wednesday. Miller knows as well as anyone that he’ll never play with another Peyton Manning, but that doesn’t mean Siemian, who studied Manning carefully throughout the 2015 season, hasn’t picked up some of his mentor’s leadership qualities.

“As far as their vibe, the energy that Peyton had, that’s what Trevor has,” Miller said. “You can never replicate Peyton Manning or who he was on the football field or any of that stuff, the type of leader he was, but it’s kind of like a vibe that Trevor has that’s similar to Peyton’s.”

The bottom line is the Broncos can feel confident their quarterback, voted a team captain for the second year in a row, won’t be affected by the weekend’s long wait. Coach Vance Joseph expects others to follow the quarterback’s lead.

“As I’ve kind of grown and developed, my role has kind of evolved,” Siemian said. “From day one, I’m just trying to be a good teammate, be the best player I can be and help guys out wherever I can.”

Broncos' back Williams wants more than a well-paid practice squad player

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Jonathan Williams became the beneficiary of a multiteam bidding process.

The former Arkansas Razorbacks' running back had just been cut prior to the start of his second NFL season by the Buffalo Bills and the bidding began for his practice squad services.

The Williams War came down to Kansas City, Minnesota, the New York Jets and the Broncos. Williams was leveraged into receiving a whopping \$30,000 a week practice-squad salary – more than four times the usual pay – from Denver.

"I wasn't mad about it," Williams said in front of his locker following his first practice Wednesday with the Denver Broncos. "It is nice, definitely. I don't want to be known for that. I'm just trying to come in and learn this offense. Get used to it. It's a lot different being in Buffalo one day and a couple days later being with a whole new team, so just trying to get my feet underneath me."

The Chiefs had let go of star running back Jamaal Charles during the offseason and lost starter Spencer Ward to a season-ending injury in their first preseason game. They needed Williams.

The Vikings for the first time in years aren't building their running game around Adrian Peterson. They had a need for Williams.

The Jets, whose top rusher, Matt Forte, turns 32 in December, were in on Williams.

Practice squad salaries start at \$7,200 a week. The Broncos might have spent more than they would have liked for a practice-squad player. But not only did they get Williams, the Chiefs didn't.

Win, win.

"I just felt like this could be the best fit," Williams said. "They have a great history. They have really good guys in the front office. I like coach (Vance) Joseph, he was a really good guy to talk to. I looked at this roster and knew this was going to be a good team and I wanted to be a part of a winning team."

At Arkansas, Williams and Alex Collins, who is now on the Baltimore Ravens' practice squad, were a terrific rushing duo in 2013-14. Williams rushed for 900 yards as a sophomore and 1,190 yards as a junior when he decided to return for his senior year for the noblest of reasons.

"I was about to come out after my junior year but I decided to stay and graduate," Williams said. "And increase my draft status as well. I stuck around my senior year and wound up with an injury."

He got his degree in communications in just four years at Arkansas – no small feat given the full-time rigors of major-college football. But in an August, 2015 preseason scrimmage, Williams suffered a Lisfranc injury to his left foot.

“Trying to get a first down, somebody stepped on my foot kind of weird when I planted,” he said. “I stayed in a couple more plays. I tried to push off on it a couple plays later and it just gave out on me.”

He needed surgery to repair the injury and his draft stock fell to the fifth round and Buffalo. He made a full recovery but the people who drafted him – namely head coach Rex Ryan and general manager Doug Whaley – were fired after last season and the new leaders left Williams vulnerable after a rookie season in which he rushed for 94 yards on 27 carries.

Before the Broncos signed Williams, their tailback group was full with C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles, Devontae Booker and De’Angelo Henderson. Given Williams’ salary, the arrangement figures to change by season’s end.

Although Williams is in football shape after rushing for 121 yards on 5.8 yards per carry in the preseason, he will likely need at least two weeks to get up to speed on the Broncos’ playbook.

But he will do all he can to get promoted to the Broncos’ 53-man roster in time for their week 3 game at Buffalo against the team that just cut him.

“Everything I can,” he said. “Definitely. We’ve got a lot of good coaches. Coach E (Eric Studesville), the running backs coach here is a really good coach. A guy that’s been working with me already, even though this is my first day so I’m excited to see what the future holds.”

Broncos elect NFL's most unique set of captains

By Mike Klis

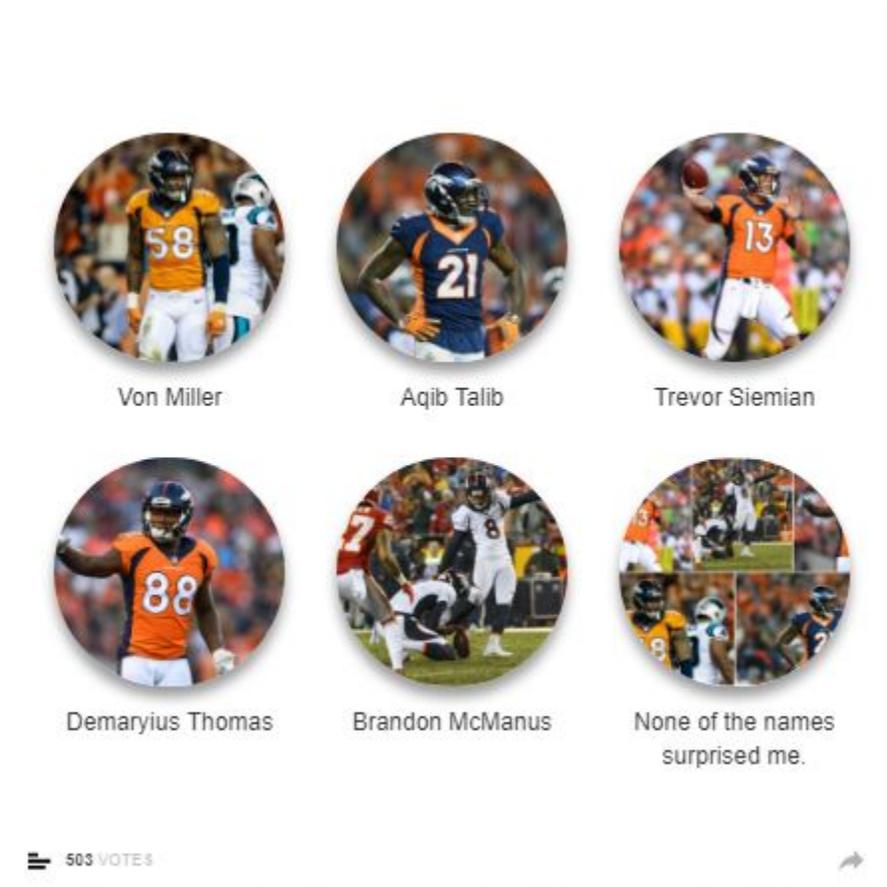
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No one is sure if the Broncos are going to be any good this year.

But it's quite certain they have the most unique set of captains in the National Football League.

Which player being named a Broncos captain surprised you the most?



On the defensive side, there is Aqib Talib and Von Miller.

Everybody loves Aqib. Everybody loves Von. They are wonderfully, one-of-a-kind guys. But neither exactly has the prototype captain personalities.

"I didn't even vote for myself," Miller said Wednesday after getting the nod in a vote by his teammates. "Just came in and tried to be the same Von that I've always been and it opened up for me."

Miller's captainship, by the way, is an enormous marker for how far he's come since 2013. Besides a six-game suspension to start that season, Miller discovered the hard way speeding tickets are to be taken seriously.

"After my first year and second year I think I know everything," Miller said in an interview for the book, "The 50 Greatest Players in Denver Broncos History," which will be available in November. "And then 2013 happened and I go from being the next Golden Boy to a totally different position.

"When I got suspended, where I was at in my career, nobody could help me right there. It was dependent on me. I had been on teams and I had been in situations that had stuff happen, but I had never been in a situation where it was totally dependent on me.

"It's different in college but in the National Football League and you're suspended, it's like a death sentence. It was like, 'He's done.'

"You look at the history and to be injured (torn ACL) and suspended in the same year, it doesn't really pick back up like it should. I wasn't going to let that to happen to me."

The Broncos' 2017 captains are far reserved on the offensive side. Demaryius Thomas is as quiet as they come. Trevor Siemian is the quarterback so of course he's the leader.

But he's a calm, collected sort whose idea of a rah-rah speech would be, "What daya say guys."

"Unreal honor," Siemian said. "It's really cool. With the respect that I have for the locker room, it's cool to see they have some respect for me. We're just a couple of guys that got named but we have so many leaders in the locker room it's really cool to be a part of."

And finally, the captain of the special teams is a kicker, Brandon McManus. All the football players in the room and a kicker is voted captain. That doesn't happen too often.

McManus is really good, though, and that's what these captains have in common: They're the best at what they do. Therefore, the others will follow.

Rex Ryan knows what Elway is finding out: QB prospects not easy to judge

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Rex Ryan knows that when it comes to evaluating college quarterbacks for the NFL, there are no geniuses, not even John Elway.

As head coach of the New York Jets, Ryan went to two AFC Conference Championship Games with Mark Sanchez at quarterback – a feat that becomes more impressive with each passing year. But inadequate quarterback play eventually helped take Ryan down as head coach with the Jets and then the Buffalo Bills, to the point he is now an ESPN color analyst who will call the Broncos' opener Monday night against the Los Angeles Chargers.

During a conference call Wednesday, Ryan was asked about the Broncos' quarterback picture now that first-round, second-year quarterback Paxton Lynch failed to, first, win the starting job, and then injured his right throwing shoulder.

Lynch has not come along as hoped. It's too early to call him a bust, but Elway, the Broncos' general manager, said after he traded up to get Lynch with the No. 26 overall pick in the first round 17 months ago, his prospect would be "ready sooner rather than later."

Ambiguous as that may be, it's safe to conclude sooner is gone. Whether Elway missed on his evaluation, or two offensive coordinators and two quarterback coaches in two years couldn't unlock Lynch's potential, or it was the player himself, first-round draft picks are supposed to be playing by now.

"As everybody has said it's probably the toughest position to evaluate," Ryan said. "I know for many years I've tried, and failed. But you've got to keep taking throws at it because if you get a franchise quarterback like a John Elway – and they come from different ways, look at Tom Brady, a sixth-round pick. So, you've got to keep taking throws at it till you hit one because if you get one, if you get a franchise quarterback, then you're pretty much set. It's hard not to make the playoffs with a franchise quarterback. I think that's why the demand is so high. But it's got to be the hardest position there is to find.

"You always say he has the 'it' factor. Well, really? Well, go ahead with all the analytics and everything else that you have out there, go find that guy with 'it' thing. It's much (easier) said than done."

However, it does sound like Trevor Siemian is growing on Ryan. After Siemian beat out Sanchez and Lynch for the Broncos' starting quarterback job last year, Ryan publicly stated it was time for Lynch this year. Instead, it's once again the seventh-round draft pick from Northwestern.

"The thing about Siemian is, look, I was the guy who was saying Paxton Lynch will be the quarterback," Ryan said. "You invest that first-round pick he will automatically be the quarterback. But you forget about the other guy. Well, there's competition at that position. This is the second time that Trevor

Siemian's won the job. Nothing was given to him. If anything, he was probably the underdog in both those scenarios but he wound up winning the position.

"So, that'll tell ya about him. He's got grit, he's got command of the offense. And the biggest thing I see is the players believe in him. He was voted team captain last year. So, that's a huge thing for him. The guys buy in, they believe in him. They know he believes in himself and I think that's what you have to have at that position."

The Broncos are voting on team captains today. It would be a surprise if Siemian is not elected an offensive captain.

"Obviously, he doesn't have the measurables that you look for when you say this is what you want as a standard with the height and all that stuff," Ryan said. "But this is a game based on production. And that's all people need to know. He's had success in the league when he's been healthy. And let's face it, it's pretty good when you have a great defense behind you and he certainly has that."

Rex Ryan on Von Miller: Success about speed and finish

By Mike Klis

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As a former head coach and current TV analyst, Rex Ryan slants toward defense.

His father, Buddy Ryan, was one of the most greatest defensive coordinators of all time thanks to the Forty-Six system employed by the mighty 1985 Chicago Bears.

Like dad, Rex was an aggressive, blitz-heavy defensive coordinator before he became head coach. He believes strongly in the value of applying pass-rush pressure on the quarterback.

Yes, Ryan said Monday during a conference call with Denver and Los Angeles media, the AFC West has the best collection of pass rushers in the NFL. The Chargers have Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram. The Raiders have Khalil Mack and Bruce Irvin. The Chiefs have Justin Houston, Dee Ford and Tamba Hali.

The Broncos have Von Miller and hopefully Shaq Barrett and eventually Shane Ray.

Meaning no disrespect to Mack, the best of them all is Miller.

“His speed is unmatched,” said Ryan, who will broadcast along with Beth Mowins the Broncos-Chargers game Monday night on ESPN and Channel 20. “There’s something else about him that is really unique and what I was going to talk about in the broadcast, I think, the great pass rushers have a sense on when to release off a guy. Do I release inside, outside, those are things elite pass rushers have.

“It starts with his get-off. He has tremendous get-off. He’s got great, God-given speed with body-lean and that type of stuff which all the rushers have. But finishing rushes is something he does probably better than anybody.”

Pick a back, any back: Broncos plan to use them all

By Jeff

Legwold

ESPN

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The math is what it always is. There is only one football to go around, after all.

But if things go as the Denver Broncos hope they will in the weeks and months to come, they will take that football and hand it to big group of running backs as the mood strikes. So much so that even with five running backs on their first 53-man roster of the season, they were still looking for more in reserve as their opener approached; they ponied up some big practice-squad money to add Jonathan Williams to their developmental group.

Offensive coordinator Mike McCoy did offer a preview of where he stands on the matter early in training camp when he said, "You can never have enough. You want to have enough guys out there, like we've said from 2002 on, we've always played with multiple backs back there. The tempo of the game, the flow of the game, we're going to play a number of guys."

And while that will undoubtedly fluster those in the fantasy football world who will want to know if one of the Broncos' backs will emerge with a consistent number of carries, one of the biggest items on Denver's offseason to-do list was the team's run game. And if it takes a committee to fix it, then a committee it shall be.

Because in 2016, the Broncos were 27th in the league in rushing yards per game (92.8), tied for 28th in yards per carry (3.6), tied for 20th in rushing touchdowns (11) and had just one 100-yard game from a running back all season.

"It's absolutely something we want to do better," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "That was something we needed to address."

The Broncos did sign guard Ron Leary and tackle Menelik Watson on the first day of free agency, then used their first-round draft pick on tackle Garrett Bolles. They also added Jamaal Charles in free agency and drafted De'Angelo Henderson in the sixth round to add to the running-back mix.

C.J. Anderson has worked as the No. 1 back during training camp and the preseason. Devontae Booker was poised to split carries with Anderson when camp opened, but his physical turned up a wrist fracture, and the second-year pro won't be ready to play until after the start of the regular season.

But the Broncos like what they've seen from Charles -- who has played in eight games in the past two seasons combined because of knee troubles -- and Henderson showed some big-play potential during the preseason. McCoy has routinely involved backs in the passing game, which that is where Charles figures to get some of his snaps as well. So when Booker returns, that's four backs the Broncos would feel just fine about handing the ball to.

"We like where we're at," Anderson said. "... We have a lot of ways to come at a defense."

Anderson missed nine games in 2016 after suffering a season-ending knee injury in the Broncos' Oct. 24 victory over the Houston Texans; his 107 yards rushing in that game was the only time a Denver back hit triple digits. Anderson made cycling a big part of his offseason work and has said he feels "like my conditioning is the best it's been because I had something in my workouts this offseason and stuck with it."

But the four-year veteran is still coming back from knee surgery, Charles is something of a question mark and Booker is still recovering from that wrist surgery. That's why the Broncos will pay Williams \$30,000 a week on the practice squad -- a total that, if he stayed there all 17 weeks of the regular season, would be more than the rookie minimum on the roster.

Joseph said it was an opportunity to acquire a just-in-case player the Broncos had liked both before the 2016 draft and after seeing him this preseason with the Bills.

"We were adding a good player," Joseph said. "If you watched him [Wednesday] in practice, he is very explosive. He is a young, healthy back."

The Broncos have kept much of the new offense under wraps in the preseason, so at least some of any new wrinkles will be revealed in Monday night's opener against the visiting Los Angeles Chargers (10:20 p.m. ET, ESPN/WatchESPN).

"I've said all along, we'll go as far as our O-line goes," Anderson said. "We could win games with 60 passes, but if we need to run the ball to get it done, we want to be able to do that. And we feel like no matter who's out there carrying the ball, we can get that done."

In selecting captains, the Broncos show who they believe will lead the way

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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The Denver Broncos took another step in the post-Peyton Manning and post-DeMarcus Ware era with their choice of team captains. The team's decision reflects an attempt to recapture the sense of unity that prevailed in 2015 in the midst of a changing roster.

The Broncos voted on Wednesday and quarterback Trevor Siemian and wide receiver Demaryius Thomas were elected captains on offense. Linebacker Von Miller and cornerback Aqib Talib were elected on defense while kicker Brandon McManus was elected as the special teams captain.

For Miller, Talib and McManus it was the first time they were selected as captains with the Broncos. Siemian and Thomas were captains on offense last season.

"To be captain is a lot of responsibility," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph. " ... I want those guys to be on every day."

"I think, as I've kind of grown and developed, my role has kind of evolved ... " Siemian said. "From Day 1 I've just tried to be a good teammate."

The core of the Super Bowl roster remains, with players such as Miller, Talib, cornerback Chris Harris Jr., running back C.J. Anderson and safety Darian Stewart still in leading roles. But when Manning retired after the 2015 season, it removed an enormous presence from the team's locker room and day-to-day football life. Then Ware, who was a captain last season even as he battled back troubles, retired after 2016.

Miller said in training camp how the Broncos dealt with those departures, beyond the basic Xs and Os of a game plan, would determine how well the Broncos will cope with the inevitable ebb and flow of a season.

"Without DeMarcus and Peyton in back-to-back years means a lot of us have to be leaders," Miller said. "No one player can replace those two guys, no two players. You can't replace Peyton, you can't replace DeMarcus, but we can all do everything we can to fill that space in."

Wednesday's vote shows Miller's teammates believe that he is now one of those players to show the way.

"Since my time here Von has been a great leader," Joseph said. "As far as how he's worked, how's he helped the young guys. He's a different guy according to coaches who have been here. I'm not surprised."

Siemian's selection, his teammates say, shows where he fits in the team's locker room beyond having won a quarterback competition for the second season in a row. Miller, in making the rounds on some

promotional interviews Tuesday, had gone as far as the say that Siemian had "some of the same vibe" as Manning.

"Our team, our coaches, our building here, we all know how special Trevor is," Joseph said. "It happened organically."

Miller expounded on his Siemian-Manning comparisons after Wednesday's practice. Siemian spent his rookie season on the roster when Manning was in his final season.

"As far as their vibe, the energy that Peyton had, that's what Trevor has," Miller said. "You can never replicate Peyton Manning or who he was on the football field ... but there's kind of like a vibe that Trevor about him that's similar. You get the vibe when you talk to him, the way he handles conversations, the way he handles people."

Broncos want to make the most of extra time before opener

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 7, 2017

Time is often one of those things NFL coaches want but can't have.

But this week Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph finds himself not trying to find more time, but having to manage the extra time the Broncos have as they gear up for what will be his first regular-season game for the team. The Broncos, with a 10:20 p.m. ET kickoff against the Los Angeles Chargers, will play the final game of the opening weekend.

It will be the latest kickoff on a gameday the Broncos have had in the franchise's history. And now Joseph has had to walk the line somewhere between making the most of that time and maintaining the team's edge as the regular-season opener approaches.

"You don't want the gameplan to get stale," Joseph said after Wednesday's practice. "We've taken these two days ... very slowly, being very detailed with our assignments and our gameplan notes."

The Broncos' practices on Monday and Wednesday this week were essentially "extra" days when compared to what would be the usual schedule. The Broncos won't really begin what looks like the normal game-week schedule for the players until Thursday.

"[We're] taking it slow being more detailed," Joseph said.

Monday, too, could require a little adjustment to the Broncos' schedule, given the kickoff for the game against the Chargers will be almost two hours later than what the Broncos would have for a night game at other times during the season. Monday's game is part of the Monday Night Football doubleheader with the New Orleans Saints-Minnesota Vikings game scheduled for a 7:10 p.m. ET kickoff.

"When you wake up the day of the game you just want to get going," said quarterback Trevor Siemian. "It'll be a long week, especially watching all those games on Sunday. We have plenty of work to do, we'll stay busy."

Von Miller heaps praise on QB Trevor Siemian

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
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Von Miller says Trevor Siemian has "that Peyton Manning vibe ."

"The energy that Peyton had, that's what Trevor has," Denver's superstar linebacker said.

Siemian also has Brock Osweiler as a backup.

Osweiler is getting a crash course in Mike McCoy's new offense following a whirlwind weekend in which he made a beeline for his old home after getting cut by Cleveland.

"This is Trevor's team, and I'm the backup," Osweiler said upon his return to Denver, where he was Manning's understudy from 2012-15.

That's a role reversal for the quarterbacks.

Siemian picked Osweiler's brain as much, if not more, than Manning's when he got to Denver as a seventh-round draft pick in 2015, then forced his way onto the 53-man roster of a Super Bowl-bound team.

Now, he's the one helping Osweiler digest the playbook.

"He's got exposure to this system, so he's done a really good job of picking things up on the fly. A little change in verbiage, but he's gotten a lot of it, for the most part," Siemian said. "So, I'm helping him out when I can. And shoot, he's helping me out, too. So, it's good."

So, no, Manning's successor isn't looking over his shoulder at the man who was, for so long, Manning's heir apparent.

"I'm excited to have him back," Siemian said. "I was good friends with Brock when he was here. He's was an unreal teammate, and I speak for a lot of the guys in the locker room when I say that. So, if you've met Brock, you know how sincere he is, how helpful he is. So, we're just lucky to have him."

Siemian was the Broncos' third quarterback in 2015 but was one snap away from starting for the seven weeks Osweiler replaced an injured Manning.

He rose to the top of the depth chart the following season when Manning retired a month after the Super Bowl and Osweiler signed with the Texans in free agency.

On the same day Miller earned his first captainship of his seven-year NFL career, Siemian's teammates named him a captain for the second straight season Wednesday.

"It's an unreal honor for me," Siemian said. "It's really cool. The respect I have for the locker room, it's cool to see they have some respect for me. We're just a couple of guys that got named. But we have so many leaders in the locker room. It's just cool to be a part of."

Miller also had high praise for Osweiler .

"That was my guy. I didn't want him to leave in the first place," Miller said. "So, to have him back like that, to have his energy back, we won a lot of games with Brock. Some of the stuff that Brock did for this team was unbelievable. So, to have that energy back on the football field, back in the locker room, it kind of feels like 2015. And we did a lot of great stuff in 2015, so we're sure to have a great year this year."

The Broncos needed a veteran backup QB after Paxton Lynch sprained his throwing shoulder against Green Bay on Aug. 26 in his first game after Siemian officially beat him out again.

The Broncos are only on the hook for \$775,000 of Osweiler's salary this season with the Browns paying the other \$15.25 million.

An even bigger bargain is Siemian, whose \$615,000 annual salary doesn't come close to Osweiler's weekly paycheck of \$941,176.

Rex Ryan, who makes his debut as an ESPN television analyst Monday night when the Broncos host the Chargers, suggested over the summer that Lynch — who's making \$880,741 this season — should be named the starter so the Broncos see what they have in their first-round investment.

He's come around on Siemian, however, suggesting Wednesday that winning the quarterback competition two years running shows the former Northwestern QB has the requisite grit and his teammates' trust.

"The players believe in him and they know he's believes in himself," Ryan said. "And that's what you have to have at that position. Obviously, he doesn't have the (prototype size) that you look for ... But this is a game based on production."

Notes: The Broncos signed former Arkansas RB Jonathan Williams to their practice squad. ... The other captains are CB Aqib Talib, WR Demaryius Thomas and K Brandon McManus. ... Thomas (groin) practiced for the first time since getting hurt against Green Bay. "He looked great," coach Vance Joseph said.

Broncos add Jonathan Williams, former Bills running back, to practice squad

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 7, 2017

Consider it an expensive insurance policy. Or view it as a threat to another reserve's job security. Regardless of how you see it, the Broncos added depth and possibly more with the signing of running back Jonathan Williams to their practice squad.

Typically, practice squad signings create shrugs. This one, however, is different because of the money involved. The Broncos outbid suitors to land Williams at \$30,000 per week. The standard practice squad salary is \$7,200. For perspective, the Broncos offered quarterback Kyle Sloter in excess of \$10,000 per week to keep him before he departed for twice the amount with the Minnesota Vikings. It illustrates how badly the Broncos wanted Williams.

The sheer amount of Williams' salary suggests he's a strong candidate to land on the 53-man roster at some point soon. As it stands, the running back stable includes starter C.J. Anderson, who missed the final nine games last season after tearing meniscus in his right knee, Jamaal Charles, who has missed 24 of 32 games over the past two seasons because of knee injuries, rookie De'Angelo Henderson, who had fumbling issues in the final two preseason games, and Devontae Booker, who broke his wrist and is expected back the third week of the season.

Read back through that last sentence and it's easy to understand why the Broncos might want a reserve clause on the practice squad. The Bills made Williams a surprise cut last weekend, releasing him in favor of veteran Mike Tolbert. Williams, who played at Arkansas with Broncos tight end A.J. Derby before becoming a fifth round draft choice in 2016, rushed for 94 yards on 27 carries and one touchdown as a rookie.

Broncos Von Miller, Trevor Siemian among five captains

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 7, 2017

You can't give yourself a nickname. It sprouts organically, the result of an action, appearance, defining moment or hilarious misstep. In similar fashion, a captain honor must be earned. It reflects not only production, but more importantly leadership and commitment.

Wednesday, the Broncos named their captains: outside linebacker Von Miller and cornerback Aqib Talib (defense), quarterback Trevor Siemian and receiver Demaryius Thomas (offense) and kicker Brandon McManus

It marked the first time for Miller.

"It's incredible feeling," Miller said. "I've always felt like I was a captain, but it's official now."

Miller began taking on added responsibility, in earnest, two seasons ago. Following teammate DeMarcus Ware's lead, Miller began tutoring players during practice, sharing diet habits, while adding them to his maniacal workout routines. He had long been a glue guy in the locker room, a binding force for team gatherings, often at his house. This spring, with the leadership void obvious a year removed from Peyton Manning and Ware retired, Miller approached coordinator Joe Woods about an expanded role.

"He wanted to do more," Woods said.

Miller has been an active presence in meetings, and a motivating force at practice. It is hard to take it easy in a drill when you see arguably the league's most talented defensive player pushing like he's trying to make the team.

"He does everything right. He's a true professional," said veteran defensive lineman Domata Peko, who is in his 12th NFL season. "Everyone looks up to him."

As Peko was explaining Miller's value, Von sat at his locker helping a young rookie. This is who he has become. Miller's ability demands attention.

Siemian, meanwhile, received a captain stripe the second time -- he was half-season captain a year ago - through his toughness, hard work and dedication.

"It's an unreal honor for me. We have so many leaders in the locker room, it's just cool to be part of it," Siemian said.

There is no stuffing the ballot box. Either guys see you as The Man, or they don't. No arguing the point. Siemian, in his third season and his second starting, wins over teammates with consistency and reliability.

"When you are a good human being that goes miles. For instance, I come in here early in the morning and Trevor's already been in here working. That tells you he's a quarterback with a lot of potential," right tackle Menelik Watson told Denver7. "I love the way this team is coming together."

The defense could have gone any number of directions for captains with defensive end Derek Wolfe, cornerback Chris Harris Jr. and linebacker Brandon Marshall among those who set the daily tone. In Miller's case, however, it is fitting. When your best player is also your hardest worker, it typically creates a we-not-me vibe that forms strong roots.

Shaq back?

Outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett knew he would be ready when he rushed the passer in training camp during his first week back. He made contact with the tackle and had to put weight on his left hip and leg. When there were no issues, he believed he was home free. He sees no reason for a play count on Monday. He is prepared to do whatever the Broncos ask in the season opener.

"I feel really, really, really good. I am ready to be out there playing." Barrett told Denver7.

Even if Barrett is available for 30 plays, it can help Miller. Miller will get double team. That never changes. But the opposite side outside linebacker needs to win one one one matchups to force the offense to react. Another thing that is likely: look for the Broncos to find ways to move the outside linebackers around to create pressure as Denver did last year with its NASCAR package.

Lynch updates health

I talked to Broncos quarterback Paxton Lynch today. He continues rehabbing his right shoulder. He donned a sling as he walked off the practice field, but not in the locker room. Lynch told me there's no plan yet when he will resume throwing. He is letting it heal, and following the trainers' blueprint. Lynch has some experience with this as he injured his AC joint in college.

"But in that case, I never missed a game," Lynch said.

Lynch's return is uncertain -- it could be a month, two months or longer -- leading the Broncos to reunite with Brock Osweiler.

Footnotes

Thomas returned to practice, and is expected to be full go for the Chargers. ... Defensive lineman Zach Kerr (knee) did not work out, leaving him in a race to be ready for the opener. ... Broncos Vance Joseph made it simple on why the Broncos added running back Jonathan Williams. "He's a good player. He's explosive," Joseph said of Williams, who is wearing No. 30 on the practice squad. ... Siemian said his family is preparing to attend Monday's game. They might leave south Florida sooner than expected because of Hurricane Irma. ... Safety Will Parks credits T.J. Ward for serving as a mentor. When he described the defense's strength, he accidentally listed Ward as a member. "I appreciate the intensity he brought, and when he delivered a big hit and stand over the player like it was a dead body," Parks said.

Broncos Injury Report: Demaryius Thomas returns to practice

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 7, 2017

As expected, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas returned to practice Wednesday as the Broncos resumed preparations for their Week 1 game against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Thomas, who suffered a thigh injury Aug. 26 against the Green Bay Packers, was held out of work last week and again on Monday for what Head Coach Vance Joseph termed "precautionary" reasons.

Defensive ends Derek Wolfe and Jared Crick also practiced Wednesday. Both returned to the field Monday after missing three weeks of practice because of a sprained ankle and back spasms, respectively.

Joseph said Monday that Wolfe and Crick would "absolutely" play against the Chargers.

Quarterback Paxton Lynch (sprained right shoulder), running back Devontae Booker (fractured wrist) and defensive end Zach Kerr (knee bruise) were the only players on the 53-man roster who did not practice Wednesday.

Booker was on hand for the session, taking mental repetitions as the running backs went through their individual drills at the start of practice.

Broncos sign RB Jonathan Williams to practice squad

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 7, 2017

The Broncos rounded out their 10-man practice squad Wednesday by signing running back Jonathan Williams.

Williams was drafted by the Buffalo Bills in the fifth round of the 2016 NFL Draft and played in 11 games as a rookie.

The Bills waived Williams on Sunday, which Buffalo coach Sean McDermott attributed to a crowded backfield.

The second-year player out of Arkansas carried the ball 27 times for 94 yards and a touchdown during his season with the Bills.

Williams joins C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles, Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson in the Broncos' running back room.

Von Miller named one of five Broncos captains for 2017

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 7, 2017

Ahead of the Broncos' opener against the Los Angeles Chargers, Head Coach Vance Joseph announced his five captains for the 2017 season.

All-Pros Von Miller and Aqib Talib will represent the defense, Demaryius Thomas and Trevor Siemian were voted as the offensive captains and Brandon McManus will be the lone special teams captain.

Joseph outlined his expectations for the five players after Wednesday's practice.

"Well, great leadership," Joseph said. "To be a captain is a lot of responsibility. So I expect great leadership, work every day. I want those guys to be on every day. That's what I expect from those guys."

Miller, who was named a captain for the first time in his career, has taken on an advanced leadership role this offseason.

"Since my time here," Joseph said, "Von has been a great leader as far as how he's worked, how he's helped the young guys. He is a different guy according to the coaches that have been here. So I'm not surprised that Von was voted a captain. I'm not."

But although the honor didn't arrive until this season for Miller, he said he's always tried to operate in a manner that's consistent with a captain's behavior.

"It was cool," Miller said. "I've always felt like I was a captain, it's just official now. It's a great honor. It's voted on by your teammates — the guys that you spend all your time with each and every day. It's an incredible feeling."

Thomas enters his third season as a team captain, while Siemian will begin his second season as a captain. Siemian was voted a captain at midseason in 2016.

"It's an unreal honor for me," Siemian said. "It's really cool. The respect that I have for the locker room, it's cool to see they have some respect for me. We're just a couple of guys that got named, but we've got so many leaders. It's just really cool to be a part of."

McManus and Talib will each represent the Broncos for the first time.

Earlier in the preseason, McManus said one of his goals for the season would be to serve as a captain. That goal became a reality Wednesday as his teammates voted him into the role. As the Broncos head into the season, he said he's ready for the demands of the job.

"Obviously there's multiple types of captains: ones that are vocal and some that [lead] by example," McManus said. "I'm not the biggest speaker. Obviously I'm friends with a lot of these guys, but I will speak up if I need to and there's an issue. I show up to work every day with a great attitude and willing

to work and lead by example on the field. I hope they kind of see me as that leader and kind of feed off of me."

The Broncos voted Wednesday ahead of practice on who would represent the team.

Von Miller's step-by-step guide to sacking a quarterback

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 7, 2017

For those who complain that NFL press conference are too boring, contain too many talking points and don't offer any real insight, one thing is clear:

They haven't listened to a Von Miller press conference.

On Wednesday, the Super Bowl 50 MVP and newly crowned team captain traded his jokes and metaphors for a serious schematic breakdown. Even without a video screen behind him, Miller made it easy to understand how he's able to make sacking the quarterback look so easy.

If you want to replicate Miller's success, just follow his step-by-step guide:

(Be warned, there's no money-back guarantee.)

1. Start off on the other side of the line of scrimmage, and lull your opponent to sleep.

"I started off the [third preseason] game on the right going against [Packers OT] David Bakhtiari. Then I tried to switch it up on him. I like to move around, so I started on the right. Then I went over to the left and had a rush."

2. Feel the offensive tackle out and plan your next move

"I came around and I had the edge, but the right tackle, he kind of — when you get a sack, it's not just that play you get a sack. You really set the sack up a couple plays in advance. I was rushing on the outside a couple plays before. He kind of dragged me down. I was thinking to myself, 'When I get another opportunity, I'm going to try to bull rush.'"

3. Use information from each play to help your cause

"I came again, and kind of got a chip so I didn't get a clean move. Another play after that, I lined up outside and I rushed. I got the chip and I came in and spun underneath. I was like, 'Oh, he's free. I can spin underneath on this guy.' I didn't get a lot of film on [offensive tackle Jason] Spriggs that week. So I spun underneath off of a chip—if you could spin off of a chip, if you have an open rush, you can get it. The very next rush, I said I would spin again."

4. Take advantage of your opportunities

"[I] spun again, [and] it was open. The center was too late, and Aaron Rodgers just gave it to me."

5. Be grateful

"I thought he was going to scramble, but he just gave it to me. Appreciate it, Aaron."

David Ramsey: Can Von Miller, 'one-of-a-kind talent,' carry Denver Broncos to another AFC West crown?

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 7, 2017

Shaquil Barrett spends much of his time examining football video. It's part of his job as linebacker for the Denver Broncos.

He sits there, closely watching the screen. He sees hundreds of plays and thousands of players.

On Wednesday morning, Barrett was again watching video, this time from a Broncos battle last season against the Chargers. For some reason, he locked into the image of Von Miller and watched as No. 58 delivered a supreme effort to sack Philip Rivers.

Miller shrugged off a block from the tight end and then performed a dazzling spin around a tackle. He was bearing down on Rivers, who released the ball just before he fell into Miller's clutches.

Barrett marveled at Miller's quickness and power and imagination and determination. He said "wow" out loud, the same kind of "wow" many of us speak in press boxes and bars and living rooms when we watch Von at work.

"Normal guys don't do stuff like that," Barrett said. "He still wows me all the time. He's really a one-of-a-kind talent."

This is a strange start to a Broncos season. A year ago, the Broncos were strutting along as defending champs. Today, they are generally, if not unanimously, seen as mediocre, a long shot to rule the AFC West.

Maybe a one-of-a-kind talent can push the team to surprising heights. For the Broncos to emerge as a team that can win a playoff game, Miller must soar once again as one of the NFL's most destructive forces.

On Wednesday, Miller was named one of the Broncos captains, joining Aqib Talib, Demaryius Thomas, Brandon McManus and Trevor Siemian. He shrugged when talking about the honor and the responsibility.

"I've always felt like I was a captain," he said. "It's just official now."

Not everyone shared Miller's view of himself. For years, Miller struggled to make peace with his potential, and that includes his leadership potential. At times, he was in danger of becoming one-dimensional – sensational while rushing the pass but lackadaisical against the run.

But he never stopped growing, never stopped reaching for more. He's started 52 straight games. He collected 62 solo tackles in 2016, his best total ever.

We were blessed with our best look at Peak Von in the 2015 AFC title game. He devoured the Patriots' offense, inspiring Bill Belichick to frown with even more fervor than usual. He sacked Tom Brady three times, seized an interception and pushed the Broncos to the Super Bowl. No Bronco has ever played better in a big game.

But he might – and this is a staggering thought – be ready to climb even higher. He spent the offseason working on his stamina. He wants to be on the field for 95 percent of snaps.

He declined to talk about specific goals for the 2017 season. He realizes some offenses will obsess over slowing his pass rush. He plans to “wreck” games by alternative, less-glamorous means.

“If a team doesn’t want you to get a sack and that’s top on their agenda, if that’s the primary goal, ‘Don’t let Von get a sack’ then you got to find other ways to change the game,” he said. “I just try to be a dominant football player.”

Miller’s on-field act – the dancing, the posing, the shouting – can hide a dedicated craftsman. As he grows older, he relies less on his talent. He’s grown into a diligent student, a striver who yearns to be known as the NFL’s finest defender.

The Broncos could surprise this season, largely because of Miller’s hunger. Monday night, he’ll be chasing Rivers once again. It should be quite a battle. Rivers and Miller rank near the top of the list of the NFL’s nonstop talkers.

But Miller declines to play favorites in his backfield chasing.

“You know, I like playing them all,” Miller said. “I like sacking them all. Every single game is a huge opportunity, a huge blessing.”

Yes, a blessing. For him, and for us. Get ready: More “wows” await.

Von Miller says Brock Osweiler's return brings back sweet memories of Broncos 2015 supremacy

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 7, 2017

For Von Miller, Brock Osweiler's unlikely return to the Broncos brings back sweet memories.

Memories from the 2015 season, when the Broncos ruled the NFL.

Osweiler served as the Broncos' relief pitcher/quarterback, stepping in for Peyton Manning, who was struggling, and failing, to defeat the aging process. Osweiler won five of seven starts.

Miller forgives Osweiler for departing the Broncos for more money and a fresh opportunity in Houston.

"To have him back, to have his energy back," Miller said. "We won a lot of games because of Brock. Some of the things that Brock did for his team were unbelievable. To have that energy back on the football field and back in the locker room, it's kind of feels like 2015 and we did a lot of great stuff in 2015."

When Osweiler departed, Miller was disappointed, largely because he expected No. 17 to craft a long and happy career with the Texans.

"When he left, I thought he was going to have a phenomenal year and phenomenal career there, but it didn't work out like that," Miller said.

That's an understatement. Osweiler lost his starting job in Houston and was shipped in the offseason to the lowly Cleveland Browns.

The Browns cut Osweiler on Friday, leading to his unlikely return to Denver.

The Decline of the NFL's Read-Option Offense

By Albert Breer

MMQB

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The idea, in the minds of the Titans' coaches, was to build on the zone-read option concepts that helped make quarterback Vince Young a star at Texas. After all, if Tennessee was going to move the ball, while also getting its young field general the game reps he needed, it would need to be creative; making Young into a reliable drop-back passer would be a long work in progress. Young's people had other ideas.

"Vince's agent refused to let us use it because of the injury factor," says Norm Chow, the Titans' offensive coordinator for Young's first two NFL seasons. "When Jeff Fisher came to me, I said, 'Coach, you gotta be kidding me.' I was flabbergasted. We had no chance, unless we utilized his skill."

For decades, conventional wisdom was that the option would never work in pro football. And then, starting with Young in 2006 and peaking a half decade later, option offenses not only worked but also thrived, highlighting the dynamic gifts of quarterbacks who had become household names at the college level: Tim Tebow, Robert Griffin III, Cam Newton and, yes, Colin Kaepernick. It seemed an offense for the 21st century had arrived.

In the wake of the request from Young's camp, the Titans curtailed his role as a runner, but their implementation of the zone-read proved the high point of Young's professional career. Chow was right to insulate him schematically—Young wasn't ready to run a traditional pro-style offense then, or ever. He lasted only six NFL seasons, making 22 starts in his final four years after making 29, including one in the playoffs, over his first two.

As the stories of Young and others over the past decade illustrate, the option's place in the NFL has always been complicated by the flexibility of modern defenses and the importance and economics of the quarterback position.

Collegiate stars like Tommie Frazier and Scott Frost, national-title winning QBs at Nebraska in the 1990s, never got a shot in the NFL, shut out due to doubts about the option's viability in the pros. But one thing that has always worked in the option's favor is simple math: Making the quarterback part of a run play turns what had been a 10-on-11 game into 11-on-11.

Among the NFL's issues with running the wishbone that Darrell Royal pioneered at Texas, or the triple-option Nebraska mastered under Tom Osborne: The quarterback took snaps from under center. "The problem at the pro level," says longtime NFL coach Mike Shanahan, "is that the defensive linemen are so strong and sturdy, you could never run the option a yard removed from the line of scrimmage." The solution came from college coaches such as Chip Kelly, Urban Meyer and Rich Rodriguez, who in the late 1990s and early 2000s began running the zone-read out of the shotgun and spread sets.

Still, even though that tweak helped give quarterbacks more room to operate, NFL teams were reluctant to risk the health of, often, the most important and most well-compensated player on the roster. That's why the Wildcat came first. It was a way of implementing creative, defense-stressing concepts without putting the franchise in harm's way.

The Dolphins' version grabbed headlines when running backs Ronnie Brown and Ricky Williams carved up the Patriots for 211 rushing yards in Week 3 of 2008. But the truth is, they weren't the first to do it. The Panthers had the "Memphis" and "Tiger" formations behind DeAngelo Williams (who'd run it at Memphis) and Jonathan Stewart (an option back for Kelly at Oregon). And the Browns had the "Flash" for former Kent State QB and return specialist Josh Cribbs. Those packages helped pave the way for the read-option.

"[The Wildcat] worked for a minute," Bears coach John Fox says. "When you started getting more athletic quarterbacks, you could just implement it [full-time]. The line blocked the same, the extra blocker blocked the same. And then teams [were running the Wildcat] with their quarterback."

Meanwhile, the college football pipeline was bursting with passers from spread offenses. Unlike the smallish option QBs of the past, these prospects had pro-style size and arm strength. Alex Smith was the top pick in 2005, Young went No. 3 in '06 and Tebow was the 25th choice in '10. And in 2011 there was an explosion: Five quarterbacks from spread offenses with option elements (Newton, Jake Locker, Blaine Gabbert, Andy Dalton and Kaepernick) went in the first 36 picks. A year later Washington took Griffin second overall. It was a trickle-up effect: As the scheme began to yield top quarterback prospects, NFL offenses began borrowing more heavily from the college game.

Tebow's first start in 2011 came in Week 5 at Miami, and it took 3½ quarters for concerns about his readiness to arise. The Broncos trailed 15–0, and Tebow was 4 of 14 for 40 yards. Broncos p.r. chief Patrick Smyth texted the team's new football czar, John Elway: "FYI, we have the second-longest scoring streak in NFL history entering today."

Little did they know a furious comeback that day would end in an 18–15 Denver win, launch #Tebowmania and turn Fox's staff room into a think tank. The Broncos got blown out the next week by the Lions, but the week after that, in Oakland, a few big first-half option plays led to more in the second half. Denver wound up with 299 yards rushing, then a week later went for 244 at Kansas City. The offensive staff scrambled for ideas to keep the momentum going.

"[Line coach] Dave Magazu, I remember him bringing his Boston College playbook," says Adam Gase, now the Dolphins' coach and then Denver's quarterbacks coach. "I started watching tons of West Virginia, Navy, Air Force. I mean, I'm watching triple-option, I'm watching this old stuff. I call [Tebow's coach at Florida] Urban Meyer at one point and say, 'Give me Tim's three favorite passes, what would you call in a critical situation?' And he gave me those. We got in this mode where we'd try anything."

It didn't last. Detroit's successful strategy that October—putting an eighth man in the box to cover Tebow as a runner and using softer, off coverage to exploit his inaccuracy and elongated delivery as a passer—was copied by New England, Buffalo and K.C. in December, leading to a season-ending three-game losing streak. The Broncos still backed into the AFC West title; for the playoff opener against Pittsburgh they had a plan (later scrapped) to have Brady Quinn replace Tebow in third-and-long situations.

"We literally had a separate game plan for third down," says Quinn. The problem, as Quinn recalls, was that while the option caused conflicts for defenses in the run game, Tebow's shortcomings as a passer prevented them from beating opponents through the air. As a result, Quinn says, "We were awful on third down." The other issue: Denver's defense needed to be great; the Broncos couldn't allow an opponent to jump out to a lead and force them to pass. "We were like Navy," says Gase. "If we got behind, we were in trouble."

Denver beat Pittsburgh on wild-card weekend, with Tebow throwing for 316 yards thanks to a plethora of big plays—he was 10 for 21 that game. A week later he went 9 for 26 for 136 yards in Foxborough, a 45–10 loss to the Patriots.

A larger point was made in the process: There was only so far the option alone could take a team. It could buy a quarterback time to develop as a passer. But eventually he needed to do that; Tebow didn't. The Broncos signed Peyton Manning before the 2012 season, and Tebow never started another game as a quarterback.

During the '11 season the Panthers were also drawing up a blueprint for Newton, the No. 1 pick. Carolina used the option and their rookie's off-the-charts athleticism in the run game to force defenses to play straight-forward, simplified coverages, making life easier for offensive coordinator Chudzinski and his quarterback. And Newton could cash those checks with his arm in a way that Tebow couldn't.

“You utilize his ability and talent that way,” Chudzinski says of Newton. “And in the process, also transition him. It really was a combination of how special we thought he was, and then, ‘What can we do offensively to give him time to adjust and to get him time to develop as a passer in a traditional pro-style system?’”

The other thing that didn’t hurt: Newton’s 6’ 5”, 260-pound frame allowed him to take a pounding that many other quarterbacks couldn’t endure.

Though an agent instructing a coach about play-calling certainly qualifies as a faux pas in the NFL, Young’s people did have a point. The biggest problem with the option is that teams can’t afford to have their triggermen taking extra hits.

That’s why Kelly’s rules for his quarterbacks went like this: touchdown, first down, get down. In other words, if you can score, go; if you can get to the sticks, go; otherwise, hit the deck. Chargers coach Anthony Lynn held Buffalo’s offensive coordinator job for most of 2016. His guidelines for Tyrod Taylor, who rushed for more yards (1,148) than any NFL quarterback over the last two seasons, were even simpler: “Get down, get down, get all you can and get down,” he says with a smile.

During his comet-across-the-sky rookie season, in 2012, Griffin tweaked his right knee in Week 14 and sat out the following Sunday’s game in Cleveland. Kirk Cousins stepped in and threw for 329 yards. What struck Griffin’s family that game was how the Redskins’ coaches relied on Cousins’s arm rather than his legs.

Like Young’s agents, Griffin’s relatives envisioned him as a drop-back passer. And so seeing Cousins line up under center and throw—even though he ran many of the same plays Griffin had, just dressed up differently—prompted a call to ownership, who ordered coaches to stop risking Griffin in the run game. Griffin blew out his knee and needed surgery on his ACL and LCL three weeks later. Shanahan was fired one season after that.

What happened in between illustrates how the development of these quarterbacks was complicated by their early success.

A rehabbing Griffin became the toast of D.C., his return expected to ring in a new era of Redskins football. There was nothing the team’s staff, who knew how far Griffin had to go, could do to contain the hype, but his circumstances were changing.

Defenses were catching up in the game of cat and mouse. For instance, some started sending the unblocked defender crashing down the line to take out the back, with a linebacker scraping outside behind him assigned to the quarterback. Others chose simply to knock the quarterback (who is not protected by roughing the passer rules when running the option) into Tuesday whether he kept the ball or not.

And, because of his knee injury, Griffin wouldn’t be able to run it as much or in the same way as he had in 2012, which put him in the position of having to be what he and his family desired him to be: a more traditional quarterback.

“We knew we could implement [the option] with Robert,” Shanahan says. “What we didn’t know was how long it would take him to learn the drop-back passing game, because he’d never done it. We knew it’d take time, just like it always does. And a lot of it has to do with how a person wants to study it, wants to be involved with it.”

It was difficult for Griffin, after his ’12 heroics, to grasp how difficult the path ahead would be. And as he struggled through a coaching change Cousins lapped him developmentally, which contributed to his 2015 benching and ’16 release. An injury in the opener effectively ended his ’16 season in Cleveland, and he’s now out of football.

Meanwhile, in a similar way, Kaepernick’s 2012 and ’13 stardom for the 49ers hid his need for similar incremental progress. During the Jim Harbaugh era in San Francisco, Kaepernick was surrounded by a running back, offensive

line and defense that were among the NFL's best, insulating him from the sorts of third-and-long situations and big deficits that once felled Tebow's Broncos.

What those on the outside saw: Kaepernick took Alex Smith's job in mid-2012, posted a 98.3 passer rating, had a transcendent playoff game against the Packers (263 yards passing, 181 rushing) and got the Niners to within a few yards of a championship. He followed that with another solid season.

What those on the inside knew: Kaepernick had a long way to go, since the coaches built complexity into the option run game rather than building it into the passing game. That led to big plays on the ground, with defenses trying to catch up to coordinator Greg Roman's run concepts, and more manageable situational football. And when defenses became more adept at stopping the option, Kaepernick's fortunes shifted.

Another problem: Kaepernick was playing for a contender, and the best way for the Niners to keep winning was to continue using him the way they had. By 2014 the team was 8--8 and Harbaugh was on his way out. And as the option began to yield fewer 70-yard runs and more seven-yarders across the league, teams relied on it less and less. That, in turn, meant fewer suitors for quarterbacks who once majored in it.

Griffin, Tebow and (while there are other factors at play) Kaepernick, once seen as potential stars, are out of football. But contrary to popular belief, the option is not dead. Per Pro Football Focus data, NFL teams ran 2,022 plays classified as read-option in 2016 for 8,884 yards and 63 touchdowns. Clearly it still has its place.

"It really just depends on what your personnel is," says Kelly. "Obviously, if you have Cam or RG3 or Kap or Russell Wilson—Blaine Gabbert did a nice job for us on it last year—it's another tool in your toolbox. It's not something you feature all the time but it's something you can make the defense spend more time on."

When Saints coach Sean Payton studied the Bills' offense last year, he saw the side benefits of involving the quarterback in the run game "because it can reduce what you see defensively. When you watch Buffalo offensive film, man, you're getting a similar look [on defense every week], because [the option is] something you have to contend with."

Yes, the explosion early on was, in part, due to defenses scrambling to catch up to it. (Bill Belichick called Nick Saban for help the day after Miami sprung the Wildcat.) But it is now most effective as a changeup pitch. "It's not like it's a gimmick or some sort of thing that can't last or you can't continue to do," Chudzinski says. "[Defenses] definitely know how to play it better, and have learned to play it better. But it's sound."

One of the NFL's elite teams has been at its forefront over the past five seasons. "The team that does it best is Seattle with Russell [Wilson]," Kelly says. "You always have to be conscious of it. They're not gonna run it a ton. He's as good as I've ever seen at not taking the hit. There's nothing more frustrating than the quarterback out in the open field, then he hook slides after the first down, flips the ball to the official and lines back up again. You just can't get to him."

Wilson played through ankle, knee and pectoral injuries for most of 2016, logging only 17 keepers on zone-read plays as a result. Yet, the Seahawks persevered. Wilson persevered. They won a postseason game for the fifth straight year.

And perhaps the success Seattle has had over Wilson's five seasons is due to the simple fact that it didn't use the option as a starting point with the young QB. Wilson's background coming into the NFL was pro-style rather than spread. That gave him other tools in his toolbox to reach for when he lost the metaphorical wrench he and Seattle were so apt at throwing at defenses.

In short: The option is part of what Wilson can do; it's not who he, or Seattle, is.

Who wins defensive player of the year?

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

September 7, 2017

Tuesday's PFT Live presented a question of the day that focused on the eventual MVP winner, which barring a miraculous performance on defense (or a bunch of crappy performances on offense) goes traditionally to an offensive player. So in the interests of equal time (and given the need to fill each show up with a question), Wednesday's question of the day asks who will be defensive player of the year?

Make a choice in the comments, defend that decision, call out others for their choices, and then tune in for the show, which begins (began) on NBC Sports Radio at 6:00 a.m. ET and slides over the NBCSN at 7:00 a.m. ET.

Chris Simms is in studio, Von Miller joins the program via interview taped on Tuesday, and we otherwise get you prepared for the NFL season, which begins on Thursday night.

Jonathan Williams lands on Broncos practice squad

By Darin Gantt

Pro Football Talk

September 7, 2017

Nobody wanted to put in a waiver claim on Jonathan Williams.

That does not mean there wasn't a market.

According to Ian Rapoport of the NFL Network, Williams signed with the Broncos practice squad, and will make \$510,000 for the season.

Normally, practice squad players make \$7,200 per week, or \$122,400 for the season. The fact they shot so far over that scale indicates that there was some degree of competition, or that they have immediate plans for him.

If anyone had claimed him off waivers, they could have assumed his existing contract, which would have paid him \$540,000 for the season.

The Broncos are going into the season with C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles, Devontae Booker and rookie De'Angelo Henderson on the depth chart, though Booker has a wrist injury at the moment.

Von Miller says Trevor Siemian is looking like Peyton Manning

By Michael David Smith
Pro Football Talk
September 7, 2017

Broncos pass rusher Von Miller has already played with one great quarterback in Denver, and he thinks he's now playing with another.

Miller said on PFT Live that he thinks Trevor Siemian is playing like Peyton Manning, whom Siemian backed up when the Broncos won the Super Bowl in the 2015 season.

"We've been saying it for a long time, we said it last year," Miller said. "Him seeing the way it's done, he just has that Peyton Manning vibe — he kind of looks like Peyton Manning too. It's great to have that energy from Trevor in the locker room and on the football field. I trust him in everything, our whole organization trusts him. He's looking 10 times better than he did last year and he did a lot of great stuff for us last year."

That sounds like a bit of a stretch, but it points to the confidence Siemian's teammates have in him. John Elway didn't have much confidence in Siemian when he traded up in the first round of the draft to select Paxton Lynch, but now that Siemian has beaten Lynch out, the team is rallying around its starter.

Demaryius Thomas back at practice Wednesday

By Josh Alper

Pro Football Talk

September 7, 2017

It looks like the Broncos will have their top wide receiver in the lineup when they host the Chargers on Monday night.

According to multiple reports from Denver, Demaryius Thomas was on the field for Wednesday's practice. Thomas hurt his groin in the team's third preseason game and was removed from the contest in what was called a precautionary measure.

The Broncos' caution extended to their final preseason game and all of their practices before this week, although there never seemed to be much concern that Thomas was at risk of missing Week One. Assuming all remains well, Thomas will be in the lineup and on his way toward not missing a game for the sixth straight season.

Defensive lineman Zach Kerr did not practice for the Broncos, who will release their first injury report of the season on Thursday.