

Kiszla: No Broncos player is under more pressure in 2017 than C.J. Anderson. Here's why.

By Mark Kiszla
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It's time for Broncos running back C.J. Anderson to put up or shut up.

What's a realistic goal for Anderson this season?

"I definitely want to run for over 1,000 yards," Anderson said Thursday.

OK, let's grab a pen, put Anderson down for 1K rushing yards and call it good. Or else.

Or else what?

Either Anderson rushes for 1,000 yards this season, or it's probably time for him to skedaddle out of town.

There are no more excuses. Anderson is healthy, after a knee injury ended his 2016 season in October. The Denver offensive line has been overhauled. New coach Vance Joseph is committed to getting physical by pounding the rock.

With a must-win game for Denver against the Los Angeles Chargers just around the corner, some knucklehead asked: If Anderson stays healthy for 16 regular-season starts, can he be a special NFL running back?

"Yes ... that's an easy question," Anderson replied with a grin, as if he would expect nothing less than a no-respect question from me.

What else was Anderson supposed to say, right? Anderson believes in himself. Big time.

But would any NFL pro scout worth his salt put Anderson in the same category as Le'Veon Bell, David Johnson, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy or any of the top 10 running backs in the league?

No way. No how.

At age 26, Anderson has much to prove. If he cannot carry the load for a team that wants to run first, control the clock and lean on its championship-caliber defense, then Broncos executive John Elway will have to think long and hard about bringing Anderson back to Denver next year. With a contract structured in the team's favor, Anderson could well be the T.J. Ward of 2018.

Since joining the Broncos with fire in his belly and a chip on his shoulder as an undrafted free agent in 2013, Anderson has won a Super Bowl ring and earned a berth at the Pro Bowl as an injury replacement. But he has never started more than seven games during any of four pro seasons or gained more than 849 yards rushing in a year.

The Broncos are understandably weary of hearing how their offense not only stinks, but sinks any realistic chance to win the Super Bowl. You know offensive coordinator Mike McCoy wants to light up the scoreboard against the Chargers, who dumped him after four years as their head coach.

“He was head coach of the Chargers and he got fired. He’s playing them on Monday night. What would you want to do? I’d try to put up 100, if I could. I know it’s impossible. But I’d try,” wide receiver Demaryius Thomas said.

“If we can go out and score like we want to, that would be a big statement, starting off Monday night, for the rest of our season. Especially with having a defense like we’ve got, if we can average 28 or 35 points, it will be tough to beat us.”

Forget averaging 30 points per game. The only place that will happen is in Thomas’ dreams.

What I fear could prevent the Broncos from significantly improving on the 20.8 points they averaged per game in 2016 is a lack of playmakers. Emmanuel Sanders and Thomas have Pro Bowl credentials. But despite their presence in the huddle, opposing defensive coordinators don’t lose much sleep when game-planning against Denver’s skill-position players.

Does Anderson have the skills to rush for 1,000 yards in a season?

Yes. No doubt.

But he’s running out of time to prove it.

Derek Wolfe returns from injury, wants “to put Philip Rivers on the ground” in Broncos opener

By Nicki Jhabvala
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An ankle injury had no chance of stopping Derek Wolfe. Not after 2013, when he suffered a bruised spinal cord and endured a trying recovery to get back on the field. Not after dealing with an ankle injury last year in training camp, plus two injured discs in his neck and a fracture in his elbow during the season.

Wolfe, the most-tenured Bronco on the defensive line, has said he’s used to pain. “My whole life has been painful,” he told The Post last season.

So ankle sprain? No chance of holding him back, especially not with San Diego’s Philip Rivers rolling into town for the season opener on Monday Night Football.

Wolfe has always been vocal about his enjoyment facing Rivers, the trash-talking quarterback who does not curse. And, after a few missed weeks of practice to recover, Wolfe seems hungrier than ever to face his divisional nemesis.

“It’s just weird,” Wolfe said. “It’s weird, but it makes me angry. It’s just nonstop. Always got something to say. But it’s fun. I play better when I’m angry, so keep saying it. Keep saying stuff to me.

“I don’t even know what he says. It doesn’t make any sense. He called me a crybaby one time and I was just like, ‘What?’ ... He’s a fun guy to play against.”

Wolfe is back. As if he ever really left for those few weeks to rehabilitate.

The ankle injury, he said, was a minor obstacle to the start of his season, but it at least afforded him enough time to rehab in time for the opener.

“Being hurt like that, I was just starting to get in shape and my motor was going and everything was good and then it was like, boom, you have a little setback,” he said. “But for me, I’m ready. Sitting in a training room and healing and getting ready, working out and finally getting to practice this week — I know I’m ready. I know the defense is ready. And I definitely know the offense is ready because Trevor (Siemian) is out there slinging the ball around and looks really good.”

Wolfe said he didn’t want to return until he was fully healed, and for good reason. For a player in the trenches, he needed the ankle to be 100 percent before it could handle his weight and that of 350-pound offensive linemen tugging on him.

Now, he doesn’t even think about. He tapes both ankles the same and approaches the game just as he always had — especially a game against Rivers.

“I just want to put Philip Rivers on the ground,” he said. “That’s all I’m thinking about. I’m not thinking about the spotlight, this and that. I don’t really think about that stuff. I just think about doing my job to the best of my ability. I don’t think about the crowd, I don’t think about the spotlight, I don’t think about what am I going to say to the cameras afterward — what are they going to ask me, what questions?’ I don’t think about any of that. I just think about how can I grade the best I can possibly grade at my job.”

Aqib Talib “honored” to be voted captain for first time in NFL career, more Broncos notes

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Ten years into his NFL career, Aqib Talib achieved a first Wednesday when he was selected by his teammates as one of five captains for 2017.

“It means a lot to me,” he said. “Your teammates voted for you, so it’s good to see that they look at me as a leader and good to see that I’ve been doing my job in OTAs and training camp. I’m honored.”

Talib statistically sits in a class of Hall of Famers, with nine career pick-sixes and 33 interceptions, and his voice in the locker room has long been the loudest. But never before was he voted captain.

“I think maybe my off-the-field stuff kind of prevented me from being a captain a lot of the time, but I think I always been captain material,” he said. “I’ve always been a good guy at practice, I’ve always been a great teammate and I’ve always been a leader.”

Injury update

The Broncos will enter the season relatively healthy after sustaining a number of injuries throughout the offseason and preseason. Defensive end Zach Kerr (knee bruise) and quarterback Paxton Lynch (shoulder sprain) were the only absentees from practice Thursday as they recover from their respective injuries. Running back Jamaal Charles and Talib were both given veteran days off but observed practice. As did running back Devontae Booker, who missed the entire preseason because of a wrist injury. He could be cleared to return by week’s end.

Defensive ends Derek Wolfe (ankle), Jared Crick (back) and Adam Gotsis (shoulder), and nose tackle Kyle Peko (foot) were all limited Thursday.

Receiver Demaryius Thomas, who was dealing with a thigh bruise, practiced in full.

Bracing for Irma

As the Broncos prepare for their season-opener against the Chargers on Monday, many players have concerns beyond football. Isaiah McKenzie, a Miami native, and others including quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, and safety Justin Simmons, grew up in Florida and still have family in the area, all of whom are bracing for Hurricane Irma.

“We’ve got a couple guys that are flying family here, actually. Isaiah (McKenzie),” coach Vance Joseph said. “Obviously the hurricane season is on. I’m a New Orleans guy and I grew up with hurricanes and it’s horrific, the winds and the water. Watching Houston, now watching Florida — it hasn’t hit yet, but it’s coming. It’s a huge hurricane, so we pray for those people down there and hopefully they can get out before it hits.”

Joseph said his family lost their home in Hurricane Katrina, when he was in San Francisco as the 49ers assistant defensive backs coach.

“Every high school football season we had hurricanes and we would just jump in the car as a family and drive north and stay three or four days and drive back home,” he said. “... But we didn’t stay. We always evacuated as a family.”

Footnotes. Joseph said he has yet to decide on which left guard — Max Garcia or Allen Barbre — will start in Monday’s game. ... Joseph said the team will have a season-long plan for Charles to both monitor his knees and keep him fresh for the full 16 games. ... Running back C.J. Anderson said he has lofty goals for the season, which include rushing for more than 1,000 yards. His biggest goal, however, is to have an impact in all 16 games.

Spotlight on Broncos offensive tackles as tour of top-flight AFC West pass rushers begins with Chargers

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
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Vance Joseph has repeated the claim often since taking over as the Broncos' coach in January.

It's a blunt assessment that goes something like this: The AFC West is the House of Havoc when it comes to elite pass rushers. Each team in the division, Joseph reiterated this week, has at least two hard-charging disruptors who can keep offensive coordinators up late at night and force quarterbacks to peek over their shoulders.

"Having two speed rushers is always an issue because you can't help both tackles all the time," Joseph said. "You can help one, but you can't help two. In our division alone, every team has two (speed rushers). Obviously, acquiring tackles for us was important. We have to block speed rushers six times this year. Two on each team, so that's six times this year. That's critical for us."

The Broncos drafted Garrett Bolles in the first round to play left tackle and signed Menelik Watson to play right tackle with the purpose of mitigating the damage caused by players such as the Chargers' Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram, whom they face Monday night in Denver. The duo, one of the best in the NFL, combined for 18½ sacks last season. And that may have just been a starting point.

"Honestly, I think we were just scratching the surface of what our productivity could be last year," Bosa said in June.

These strip-sacking, turf-churning players stock the AFC West. Justin Houston and Dee Ford with Kansas City. Khalil Mack and Bruce Irvin with Oakland. Von Miller and, when healthy, Shane Ray with the Broncos.

"We told Bolles when he first got here, 'You're going to grow up in this division fast,' " running back C.J. Anderson said. "He's excited and ready for the challenge."

Bolles doesn't lack for confidence. He's not shy about his desire to be the human caution tape that encircles quarterback Trevor Siemian. He even compares a defensive player knocking down Siemian to someone coming after his wife.

"You touch her, and you're in trouble," said Bolles, whose thundering voice may be the only thing more intimidating than his 6-foot-5, 297-pound frame.

The reality is there likely will be some growing pains for Bolles as he embarks upon his first season as the Broncos' starting left tackle. Some of them sprouted in the preseason, when he was flagged for three holding penalties against San Francisco.

"All of our first-time starters, it's not going to be perfect," Joseph said. "In my opinion, in Week 7 or 8, the thick of the season, those guys will be ready to go. We expect some errors from our young players,

but our young guys are talented. Their talent can overcome their errors, and that's what we hope for Monday night."

Watson knows how dangerous the division's pass rushers can be. He arrived in Denver in March after spending the past four seasons with Oakland.

"I'm pretty sure he's happy he ain't got to go against 58 (Miller) anymore," Anderson said.

Joseph said Watson has slimmed down since joining the Broncos. The fifth-year pro from Florida State missed the 2015 season because of a knee injury. He played in 10 games in his return last season. Now he's healthy.

"Menelik Watson, he's got his weight down and he looks really fit, and he's playing well," Joseph said. "I feel good about those guys blocking (Bosa and Ingram) one-on-one for the most part, but they're great players, so we have to help them from time to time. We can't help both, but we can help one guy from time to time."

The benefit of being in a division stocked with star pass rushers for the Broncos is the ability to pick the brain of arguably its best each day. Bolles has taken advantage of a quickly formed friendship with Miller. When Miller would beat Bolles during one-on-one drills in training camp, his victory would typically come with a brief lesson for the rookie from Utah. The tips helped Bolles win at least a few of those battles.

"I've been going against Von and Shane Ray in OTAs, then we have Shaq (Barrett) back, so I have the best defense in the whole National Football League right here in my locker room," Bolles said. "I'm going to be ready because I go against them every day."

Chargers return tickets for Monday's Broncos game, 300 seats now available for purchase

By Staff

Denver Post

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The Los Angeles Chargers have returned 300 tickets for their season opener Monday against Denver, Broncos vice president of public and community relations Patrick Smyth tweeted on Thursday.

The tickets are available on Ticketmaster.com.



C.J. Anderson ready for full-season run in setting up Charles

By Mike Klis

9 News

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There has been a lot buzz about what Jamaal Charles can bring to the Broncos' running game.

Rightfully so. He is a proven big-play guy.

But it's still C.J. Anderson who will start by breaking through some tackles to loosen up the defense for the quick and speedy Charles.

Anderson understood early in the offseason he was to complement Charles, not worry about getting replaced.

"I thought it was great," he said of Charles' surprise signing in early May. "I never turn back competition."

Wasn't he worried about losing his starting job?

"Not at all," Anderson said in a sit-down interview Thursday with 9News. "I wasn't worried about it for two reasons. One, I know what type of player I am and what I've done for this organization and what I continue to get done.

"And two, I also know we're both are going to play. And that's just the truth. We're both going to have our times to shine when we play. I'm just excited to have him here and him being healthy. He's just a special player. I mean at one point in time, where he was I would love to be. At the top."

Anderson has had his share of great games, too. It's just he had a bunch in the second half of 2014, a bunch in the second half and preseason of 2015, and a few more early in 2016.

In one respect, his career has already far exceeded expectations by entering his fifth NFL season. He not only was undrafted out of college, he was a backup running back in college (Cal).

In another, it's been frustrating to Fantasy League players that for all of Anderson's production, it hasn't come over a one, full 16-game season.

"I'm on the verge, that's how I look at it," Anderson said. "I'm on the verge to put it all together. The biggest goal for myself is to stay healthy and be consistent."

There were a couple years with Peyton Manning when the Broncos only needed the running game so their receivers could catch their breath.

Trevor Siemian can do the job but he needs a running game. The Broncos were 5-2 last year when Anderson went down with a knee injury. The running game slumped from there and the Broncos finished 4-5.

If Anderson, and Charles, can be there all year, C.J. may not finally have a full season. He should get to run in the postseason.

Broncos notes: Captains Talib, McManus honored to lead

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Just call him Captain 'Qib.

Aqib Talib is nothing if not real. On the outside, his selection as one of the Denver Broncos' co-captains may have raised some eyebrows. On the inside, where voting on team captains took place, Talib was a clear choice.

"I think maybe my off-the-field stuff kind of prevented me from being a captain a lot of the times," Talib told the assembled media Thursday. "I think I've always been captain material. I've always been a good guy at practice, I've always been a great teammate and I've always been a leader."

Talib has always stuck up for his teammates publicly. Sure, he's been known to run a little hot during the fight for team victory. He will challenge a teammate, on the field, if he thinks he's not doing what's best for the team.

He also scrapped with Harry Douglas, one play after the Tennessee receiver took a cheap shot, away-from-the-play, cut block on teammate Chris Harris' Jr.'s knees last year.

More importantly, Talib is arguably the Broncos' second-best player – after Von Miller – yet plays hard in practice every day.

"It's my first time being voted a captain in the NFL and it means a lot to me," said Talib, whose four consecutive Pro Bowl appearances and 9 career pick sixes has put him in the conversation as a potential future Hall of Famer. "Your teammates are voting for you so it's good to see that they look at me as a leader. It's good to see that I've been doing my job during OTAs and training camp. I'm honored."

It's also not every team that names its kicker as the special teams' captain. The honor usually goes to one of the core special teamers – someone who plays on kickoff coverage, kickoff return, punt coverage, punt return -- like Wesley Woodyard or David Bruton in past Broncos' seasons.

The Broncos' special teams captain this year, though, is placekicker Brandon McManus, who going on three seasons has become one of the team's best scoring weapons.

"This is, believe it or not, the first time I've been a captain I think in any sport," McManus said. "This was an honor for me to be here even though the team did vote a kicker out of the football room to be a captain. It was a huge honor for me.

"I wasn't only a kicker. I used to play quarterback and safety. Not just football but any other sport that I played I never had the opportunity to. I'm pretty sure I'm well liked in the locker room and the past two years I've done well for the team so they thought highly of me. Obviously, the preseason (10 of 10 in field goals with seven coming from 40 yards or longer; plus 11 of 11 in extra points) helped to give me

maybe the last edge or push to get over. It was a goal of mine to be a captain this year on special teams.”

Bronco Bits

Talib (Achilles) and running back Jamaal Charles (knee) were given what head coach Vance Joseph termed a veteran’s day off from practice Thursday. ...

Defensive lineman Zach Kerr is not expected to play Monday night after he missed practice again with a knee injury. ...

During the 1997 preseason, Chargers head coach Anthony Lynn was a Broncos’ backup running back to Terrell Davis while Joseph was trying to make the team during the preseason. During that time, Joseph and Lynn lived in Aurora home where their backyards bumped into each other. They face each other Monday night in the head coaching debut for both.

Late kickoff in opener just one of many schedule quirks Broncos face

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Take a step back from the usual one-game-at-a-time drumbeat of a season and it's clear the Denver Broncos' first month of the season could have a lot to say about how things go and just might show how well the Broncos can handle their business of preparation.

Monday night's regular-season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers is one of three home games the Broncos have among their first four games of the season. And by the time the Broncos have navigated the first six weeks of the season they will have already played half of their home schedule and had their bye week.

With all of that in mind, outside linebacker Von Miller was asked this week about the importance of the Broncos' ability to get out of the gates quickly, especially Monday night, and he essentially just repeated the question back.

"I mean you just said it," Miller said. "You have to get off on a great start to set the tone for the season. Right? You don't want to go out there and lose the first game, you want to go out there and win to set the tone for the season. It's important, like you said."

For his part, Broncos coach Vance Joseph has said he'll worry about how the schedule falls as each game approaches, that every "week is different, every game is different, when they tell us to play, we'll be there and be ready to play well."

The Broncos are one of the safest bets in the league in a home opener. They are 43-13-1 all-time in their home openers and their 37-19-1 record in opening games overall -- home or road -- is the best winning percentage (.661) in the NFL.

But this year's schedule has more than its share of quirks. The Broncos have eight games against teams that made the playoffs last season and the whole thing is back-loaded with road games.

Seven of the Broncos' last 11 games of the season are on the road and the stretch features a cluster of three consecutive road games -- Oct. 22 in Los Angeles, Oct. 30 at Kansas City and Nov. 5 at Philadelphia. And since the schedule went to 16 games in 1978 the Broncos have had three consecutive road games in a season eight times -- the last time in 2014 -- and they've gone 1-2 in that stretch of games seven times.

In 2010, a season that saw Josh McDaniels fired on the way to a 4-12 finish, the Broncos lost all three of the three consecutive road games.

Then just toss in the stretch run, which will feature four of the Broncos' last five games of the regular season on the road. It will all test the Broncos' ability to stay dialed in.

"That's all down the road," Miller said. "We have guys who understand what you need to do in the National Football League to be ready to play at our best, home or on the road. You have to play road games every year, no matter how they fall in the season. Let's just prepare and let's be ready to play every week and it starts this week."

The Broncos-Chargers game is the last of the league's opening weekend and the 8:20 p.m. (Mountain time) kickoff is the latest in the franchise's history. Yet another potential bump in a schedule that has several more waiting.

"It's great having a prime-time spot," said Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe after Thursday's practice. "But this is our third Wednesday practice this week (in terms of the team's schedule). It's like we're ready to go. It's 'come on, let's get to the game.' We're all ready."

Derek Wolfe, Jared Crick still on track to play in opener

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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As the regular-season opener approaches, the Denver Broncos expect to have most of their key contributors healthy and ready to play.

Defensive ends Derek Wolfe (ankle), Jared Crick (back) and Adam Gotsis (shoulder) were all officially listed Thursday as "limited" practice participants. But Broncos coach Vance Joseph said all three players "looked good."

Wolfe and Crick were both injured in mid-August and played just three and 13 plays, respectively, in the preseason. The two, and Gotsis, are expected to play Monday night against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Because of the Monday night opener, the Broncos also had an extra practice day this week. As a result, they gave cornerback Aqib Talib and running back Jamaal Charles a rest day Thursday.

Both will play against the Chargers. Charles' rest day was indicative of how the Broncos may try to regulate his workload.

Charles has played eight games combined in the last two seasons because of multiple knee surgeries. The Broncos believe Charles can contribute as a specialist in their offense but played him in just one preseason game -- 16 plays against the Green Bay Packers.

"We have a plan for Jamaal as far as how we're going to work him the entire year," Joseph said. "Obviously we want him fresh, that's going to be huge for us."

Broncos with Florida ties try to get relatives out of Irma's path

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph said a small group of the team's players were trying to make arrangements to evacuate relatives from the path of Hurricane Irma.

Rookie wide receiver Isaiah McKenzie and rookie safety Jamal Carter are Miami-area natives, while rookie defensive end DeMarcus Walker is from Jacksonville. Quarterback Trevor Siemian is from Windermere, Florida, just outside of Orlando.

Forecasters have projected Irma will reach Miami by Saturday and several of projected paths show the hurricane's path would take it north, with eye of the storm along the East coast of the state.

"We've got a couple guys who are flying family here," Joseph said. "... It's horrific, watching Houston, now watching Florida."

Joseph grew up in the New Orleans area (Marrero, Louisiana) and said his family was forced to evacuate from hurricanes almost annually.

"Every high school football season we had hurricanes," Joseph said. "Jump in the car as a family and drive north, stay four or five days and go back home. ... We didn't stay, we always evacuated. ... [When you return] you're hoping everything is fine, but you never know. We lost our home in Katrina, I was [coaching in San Francisco]."

Broncos' edge rushers must keep opponents' focus off Von Miller

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Shane Ray is expected to eventually be a big part of the Denver Broncos' pass-rush plan, but he still has a splint on his left wrist and will open the season on injured reserve.

That makes Shaquil Barrett's recovery from an offseason hip injury even more crucial. The Broncos open the season against the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night and that means they will welcome one of the most familiar faces at quarterback across from their defense in Philip Rivers.

"He is very, very, very intelligent -- you won't confuse Philip with certain looks," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph. "If you give him the same look over and over again, he will expose you. We have to do a good job of changing our calls and keeping him guessing some. If not, he will expose you and cut you up."

Monday will mark the 24th regular-season game Rivers has played against the Broncos; the first was in 2005. The Broncos learned long ago that sacking Rivers can be difficult because he's quick to decide where he wants to throw the ball.

Creating pressure and traffic in the middle of the formation is paramount. Without Ray in the lineup for the next seven games, the Broncos will need some of the team's other edge players to prevent offenses from simply selling out to stop Von Miller.

Barrett, Kasim Edebali and rookie DeMarcus Walker have that on their to-do list, given that they are in the rotation with Miller at outside linebacker. Barrett missed all of training camp and did not play in any of the four preseason games because of a hip injury he suffered in a workout, but he has looked ready to go this week in practice.

"It's really important and that's the role I'm trying to fill this year," Barrett said. "I'm just trying to get some of the pressure off of him and try to make some plays to help the defense out because if someone is over there not contributing, there's no point for us to be out there because they could just double-team Von the whole time."

Barrett, who went from the Broncos' practice squad in 2014 to playing 16 games in each of the past two seasons, played 36.5 percent of the defensive snaps last season.

The Broncos activated Barrett from the non-football injury (NFI) list as the preseason drew to a close and he has steadily progressed to the point where Joseph said he "looked great" in Wednesday's practice and was on track to play Monday night.

"My first week back, I had to rush around the edge and get some pressure from the tackle going around the edge with all my weight on my leg, and it withheld all that pressure in full," Barrett said. "After that, I was confident in it. I'm confident in it now. I feel 100 percent confident."

The Broncos' success in getting to -- or at least harassing -- Rivers through the years can essentially be divided into eras before and after Miller was selected in the 2011 draft. In 11 regular-season meetings with Rivers before the 2011 season, the Broncos had three games where they sacked Rivers at least three times.

After Miller arrived, the Broncos have sacked Rivers at least three times in eight of 12 meetings.

"I'm looking forward to it," Barrett said. "It's a big stage and we like being up on the big stage. It's more reason to come out there and shine more because all eyes are on you."

NFL footballs to have data-collecting chips this season

By Kevin Seifert

ESPN

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The NFL has expanded its data-collection program to include chips in every football used during the 2017 season, according to Zebra Technologies, the company that will provide the hardware.

The data, generated by radio-frequency identification (RFID) chips built into each ball, will be targeted for use by broadcasters as part of the league's Next-Gen statistics program. It will also be studied by the NFL competition committee, but at this point the information is not precise enough to assist officials with touchdown calls, marking the football for first downs and determining whether the ball has passed through the sideline.

Last season, the NFL experimented with chips in kicking balls used during the preseason and in Thursday night games. Among the points of study was how close the balls passed to the uprights on kick attempts, giving the competition committee information on whether it should propose narrowing the goalposts.

NFL players have been wearing shoulder pads with similar technology during games since 2014. For the ball project, the league commissioned Zebra Technologies to work with Wilson Sporting Goods to develop a chip that would not impact the movement or shape. The chip weighs 3 grams and is built in during production, according to Jill Stelfox, Zebra's vice president and general manager of location solutions.

The chip acts in part as an accelerometer, providing data such as the speed of the football, its spin and whether it is moving in a spiral or end-over-end. The Next-Gen program will experiment with using the information in tandem with player-tracking data. Teams get access to information for their own player tracking, which most coaches interviewed over the past year have largely opposed.

Eventually, however, the combination of player and ball tracking could prove useful. For example, Stelfox said special-teams coaches could document how quickly their players cover a punt relative to the ball's position in the air.

At this point, however, the football chips can't provide consistent enough information to help with officiating. According to Stelfox, the chips can provide location within 6 inches of accuracy -- a significant variance for measuring first downs. Even if it were more accurate, it couldn't document the exact location of a player's feet, knees or other body parts to determine where the ball is when the player is ruled down -- a critical part of the ball-marking process.

"In some cases," Stelfox said, "those 6 inches might be good enough [to spot the ball]. But in all cases, it's probably not good enough at this point with the technology being where it is. It also depends on where your feet are, and your knees are, and we don't have those tagged with chips. They're only in the shoulder pads. So the NFL is still going to need referees to do that."

The NFL did not immediately provide information Thursday morning on how it will use the new data.

Broncos move on without founding member of No Fly Zone

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
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Aqib Talib laughed at the audacity of the question.

Of course, this Denver Broncos secondary is still the "No Fly Zone" after the release of three-time Pro Bowl strong safety T.J. Ward, who signed with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"Yeah, ain't nobody flying," Talib said. "They still can't fly. The name doesn't change."

Opposing quarterbacks starting with Philip Rivers on Monday night still have to deal with Talib, Chris Harris Jr., Darian Stewart, Bradley Roby and a trio of young safeties filling Ward's shoes.

Second-year pro Justin Simmons will start and play more of a coverage role than Ward did. Will Parks, also in his second season, will play Ward's linebacker role in dime packages, and in Jamal Carter, the Broncos have an undrafted rookie from Miami who looks just like Ward only bigger and much younger.

Ward sat out almost all of training camp and the entire preseason with a hamstring injury, and Simmons did enough in his place that general manager John Elway decided to jettison Ward and his \$4.5 million salary in 2017, the final year of his contract.

"Simmons is a guy that can play in the box and obviously in high zones," coach Vance Joseph said. "He's a very smart player and a playmaker. It's his time and we're moving forward."

While Denver's defenders initially reacted with surprise to the word that the Broncos were considering parting ways with Ward, who helped them go 37-15 and win a Super Bowl in his three seasons in Denver, they also realize Simmons is ready to start.

"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."

Stewart said seeing a leader such as Ward go was rough, "but we believe in the young guys as well and those guys were with us on the field throughout camp, so the chemistry just got better."

"It still stays the 'No Fly Zone,'" Stewart said. "Justin is capable of making those same plays, too."

Simmons had mixed feelings about Ward's departure.

"T.J. is like an older brother to me, so it was hard," Simmons said. "I'm very sad to see him go but with that came an opportunity. Now I have to step up and I'm going to get a lot more snaps in, a lot more

playing time which means a lot more opportunities to make big plays and help this defense out any way that I can."

A third-round draft pick from Boston College last year, Simmons played in 13 games as a rookie, starting three. He posted two dozen tackles, a sack, two interceptions, four pass breakups, a blocked extra point and five special teams stops.

He said the faith the Broncos have shown in him will be rewarded.

"It definitely boosted my confidence," Simmons said. "I definitely didn't expect it to be the way it played out, but this definitely was a goal. Obviously you don't want to come in and just be a backup; you want to come in, contribute, be a starter, and earn those snaps and earn those reps. It's just a great opportunity."

Asked what Ward did to make him a better player, Simmons said: "A lot. The easier question would be, 'What hasn't he done?' That'd be a shorter response. T.J. has been there for me since Day One. Coming into last year, he was the first person to text me on draft night."

So, Ward's legacy lives on in the players he took under his wing.

"If I could take one thing from his game, it would be his nasty attitude," Parks said. "His nasty attitude while making plays."

That orneriness was on display when Ward got to Tampa Bay and suggested the Broncos had been unprofessional in how they handled his release.

"My thoughts are that T.J. was a great player for this franchise," said Joseph. "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."

Chargers-Broncos season opener is historic in many ways

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 8, 2017

The Los Angeles Chargers' game against the Denver Broncos on Monday night presents landmarks on the football field, along the sidelines and in the broadcast booth.

Not since 1960 have the Chargers represented L.A., where they played their inaugural season before bolting to San Diego. They headed back up Interstate 5 this offseason, extending Philip Rivers' daily commute.

Not in 30 years has a woman called a regular-season NFL game as Beth Mowins will when she handles play-by-play duties for the doubleheader nightcap alongside Rex Ryan, who will make his debut as an ESPN analyst.

And never before have two black head coaches made their NFL debut against each other in the same game, as Anthony Lynn of the Chargers and Vance Joseph of the Broncos will for the 10:20 p.m. ET kickoff.

The longtime friends and onetime neighbors are the first black head coaches for their respective teams, and two of eight head coaches of color this season, which matches the 2011 season for the most in league history.

"It's obviously a special thing on a big picture," Joseph said. "Hopefully in four and five years it won't even be an issue. It would just be two coaches going at it."

Mowins feels the same way about being the first woman to call an NFL game since NBC's Gayle Sierens in 1987.

"I don't worry too much about any place in history," she said. "I'll let other people handle that. My focus is on the day to day and while I know it's new to everybody else, it's not new to me. I've been calling 'Monday Night Football' games for my family sitting in the living room for decades. So, hopefully I can be just as entertaining in the booth as I have been at home."

Now, back to the game and its swarm of subplots:

REAL McCOY : Lynn replaced Mike McCoy, who landed in Denver for his second stint as Denver's offensive coordinator and is glad to be calling plays — if not the shots — once again.

"I've got a burning desire to call plays," said McCoy, who's now designing game plans for Trevor Siemian, who beat out 2016 first-round pick Paxton Lynch again this summer. Siemian's backup is Brock Osweiler, who returned to Denver last week after an 18-month odyssey through Houston and Cleveland.

GRATING THE QBS : Von Miller is the league's top pass rusher, but with Shane Ray on IR with a wrist injury and Shaq Barrett still working his way back from an injured hip, the Broncos don't have quite the pass-rushing duos the rest of the AFC West sports, including the Chargers with Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram.

"Ingram's a great player, he's a veteran, very similar to Von. But Von's the best of the best and I got to see him in practice" every day, Broncos rookie left tackle Garrett Bolles said. "I've been going against Von and Shane Ray in OTAs, then we have Shaq back, so I have the best defense in the whole National Football League right here in my locker room. I'm going to be ready because I go against them every day."

DEEP DIVISION : The AFC West appears to be the toughest division in the league top to bottom. The Chargers are coming off a 5-11 cellar season that included nine losses by eight points or less.

"This is probably the most talented Chargers team that I've played against. The defense is a whole lot better and the offense is a whole lot better," Miller said as he rattled off their many attributes. "I guess the move from San Diego to L.A. really helped out."

SWAPPING SPOTS : Russell Okung has gone from being Denver's left tackle to protecting Rivers' blindside.

"Russell's just a pro's pro," Lynn said. "He's a very good tackle. He's athletic, he's physical and he has great intangibles. He's been a big plus for our locker room."

Okung was battling injuries and didn't have a great season in Denver last year.

"He looks healthy on film," said Miller, "and he looks like the early Russell Okung that was at the Seattle Seahawks that had a lot of great plays and a lot of great years."

HUNGRY WOLFE : Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe returned from a severely sprained right ankle in half the six weeks that doctors expected. He said he's 100 percent and showed off an ankle Thursday that had no residual swelling or discoloration — in stark contrast to the puffy, purple ankle he showed on Twitter after getting hurt.

Wolfe said he thought he broke his leg and would miss the season. When told otherwise, "I was shocked. I couldn't wiggle my toes for three days." Wolfe also revealed he played last season with two injured disks in his neck which he hurt on opening night. That resulted in weakness on his left side and ultimately a right elbow injury that sidelined him for three games.

"I'm 100 percent" now, declared Wolfe.

Chargers-Broncos Capsule

By Staff

Associated Press

September 8, 2017

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS (5-11) at DENVER (9-7)

Monday, 10:20 p.m. EDT, ESPN

OPENING LINE — Broncos by 3½.

SERIES RECORD — Broncos lead 64-50-1

LAST MEETING — Broncos beat Chargers 27-19, Oct. 30, 2016

AP PRO32 RANKING — Chargers No. 24, Broncos No. 18.

CHARGERS OFFENSE — OVERALL (14), RUSH (26), PASS (8).

CHARGERS DEFENSE — OVERALL (16), RUSH (10), PASS (20).

BRONCOS OFFENSE — OVERALL (27), RUSH (27), PASS (21).

BRONCOS DEFENSE — OVERALL (4), RUSH (28), PASS (1).

STREAKS, STATS AND NOTES — Broncos have won 10 of past 12 meetings. ... First time in NFL history that two black coaches will make head coaching debut in same game with Chargers HC Anthony Lynn and Broncos HC Vance Joseph. ... Chargers' first game as Los Angeles-based franchise since team's inaugural season in 1960. ... QB Philip Rivers coming off eighth 4,000-yard season. ... RB Melvin Gordon averaged 102.5 yards rushing in past two games vs. Denver. ... TE Antonio Gates' 111 TD catches tied with Tony Gonzalez for most TD receptions in NFL history. ... Hunter Henry had 8 TD catches last season, most by rookie tight ends. ... DE Joey Bosa's 10½ sacks last season most by rookie since Aldon Smith's 14 in 2011. ... Broncos led league in pass defense last season but SS T.J. Ward released, replaced by Justin Simmons. ... QB Trevor Siemian averaged 258 yards within AFC West last season with eight TDs, four interceptions. ... RB Jamaal Charles has 799 scrimmage yards and seven TDs in past eight games against Chargers. ... WR Demaryius Thomas third player in league history with five consecutive seasons with 90 or more catches, 1,000 yards and five or more touchdowns. ... WR Emmanuel Sanders has three straight 1,000-yard seasons. ... OLB Von Miller's 13½ sacks ranked second in league. Since entering NFL in 2011, ranks second in league with 73½ sacks and tied for second with 19 forced fumbles. ... CB Aqib Talib has nine interceptions returned for touchdowns, most among active players.

Broncos reasons for hope, reasons for nope in 2017

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 8, 2017

Two quarterbacks. No playoff berth. That was the rub.

The Broncos wasted another terrific defensive season to develop a first-year starter in Trevor Siemian, and ill-prepared backup Paxton Lynch. After starting the season 7-3, the Broncos lost four of the final six games. Bennie Fowler's dropped overtime pass against Kansas City -- the watershed moment in the slide -- became symbolic of an ineffective offense that experienced a Grapes of Wrath drought over the final month.

A year later, everything is not different. But feels new. The Broncos hired coach Vance Joseph, who has fostered a younger vibe, and he added three former AFC West offensive coordinators to his staff in Mike McCoy, Bill Musgrave and Geep Chryst.

Gone is Son of Bum (Wade Phillips) exiting with an expiring contract that was not renewed given the team's desire to keep Joe Woods. He was the air traffic controller of the No Fly Zone. Now, he calls the signals. A lot of new. Was that was needed and necessary for the reboot? It begins on Monday night against the Los Angeles Chargers. The importance of a revved up start cannot be overstated with four of the first five games at home.

Is this Broncos team a sleeping giant, or an ordinary team with a clumsiness traits that won't be forgiven in the rugged AFC West? Let's take a look at my reasons for Hope:

1) D can be dominant

When viewed through a broad prism, the Broncos defense boasts gnarly stats over the last two seasons, holding teams to a league-best 192.7 yards passing per game, 74.3 passer rating with 94 sacks. However opponents benefited from two flaws, moles on Cindy Crawford's face as they were. The Broncos could not stop the run, allowing 117.8 yards per week. Worse, it worked as a double-pronged weapon because Denver was often trailing. The Broncos defensive allowed points on first drives in nine games, totaling 55 points, second worst in football. That will change. The Broncos will be more aggressive and varied in their looks, creating pressure and more turnovers. Give this group a chance to play with a lead, and look out.

2) The offense can't be worse

Yes, it amounts to damning praise. But the offense should be better from scheme alone. McCoy is creative in passing routes and motion. It should help produce mismatches. And against reason, I believe a third weapon can emerge in the passing game with Jamaal Charles. He is an X-factor in every way. He can play on third down, provide protection and force teams into deciding whether to cover him with a safety or linebacker. The key for Trevor Siemian to improve? The cast around him becomes better.

3) Von Miller is, well, Von Miller

The attention paid to Von Miller is the stuff of legend. He will be double-teamed. He will be chipped. He will be held. But if Shaq Barrett and eventually Shane Ray win their one-on-one matchups on the opposite side, it creates an avenue for Miller to go off. I would also look for Miller to line up in different spots, including the middle to cause havoc.

For a team coming off a 9-7 season, it's fair to wonder if the Broncos did enough. Here, then are the reasons for nope.

1) Offense fizzles again

Siemian is solid, if not pedestrian. He has to show he can take chances and take care of the ball. If the Broncos can run the ball, that would help him tremendously. He was under relentless pressure last season, leading to ugly games -- nothing worse than his performance at Kansas City -- and injuries. Can Siemian show he's more than a journeyman, a guy keeping the seat warm for Brock Osweiler, Paxton Lynch or the Next Big Thing. He threw well under pressure. He must show a better touch on short passes. If Charles and a tight end don't emerge, the Broncos offense will be a mess.

2) Miller neutralized

An injury to Shane Ray looms large. Same with Shaq Barrett. Ray looked poised for a 15-sack season. If the Broncos don't produce results through scheme or another outside linebacker, Miller's dominance will be measured in pressure not sacks. Um, not good.

3) Schedule swallows Broncos

The Broncos could be better and finish with a worse record. They play four of five on the road down the stretch. What means is if they don't start 3-1 it could get ugly early for this team. It doesn't help there are no easy wins in the division anymore.

Broncos Injury Report: Derek Wolfe isn't easing back into work

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 8, 2017

Three and a half weeks after suffering a lower-ankle sprain during practice Aug. 12, Derek Wolfe's ankle looks -- and feels -- normal.

He worked on a limited basis during practice Thursday, but he said after the session that he's ready for a full workload Monday night against the Los Angeles Chargers. There will be no easing back into work for the six-year veteran.

"Ease in? It's football. Especially in the trenches. I don't even think about it," Wolfe said. "It doesn't even feel like it's had an issue. I tape both of my ankles the same.

"I told you guys I wasn't going back on the field until I felt like I was 100 percent. I feel like I'm 100 percent, so why not go practice? You've got to practice to get better."

Derek Wolfe and fellow defensive end Jared Crick both saw limited work Thursday, but remain on track to play Monday.

Cornerback Aqib Talib and running back Jamaal Charles were given veterans' rest days Thursday.

"It's just smart to rest those guys who need rest," Head Coach Vance Joseph said.

Running back Devontae Booker (fractured wrist), quarterback Paxton Lynch (sprained right shoulder) and defensive end Zach Kerr (knee bruise) also did not practice.

Defensive end Adam Gotsis also saw limited work because of a shoulder injury but "looked good," Joseph said.

Shaquil Barrett expects bigger, better things of himself

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 8, 2017

Shaquil Barrett knows how to relieve the pressure on Von Miller. He knows the drill because he did so successfully in 2015.

That season, Barrett notched 4.5 sacks during the eight games he filled in for DeMarcus Ware. That half-season of work included six starts and two other games where he stepped in for the now-retired Ware because of injuries. He added another sack off the bench against Detroit in Week 3 that year to reach his career-high tally of 5.5.

From that experience, Barrett knows how to work as a complement to Miller, who will face double-teams, tight ends and running backs chipping him time after time. Barrett knows teams will scheme to stop Miller, and that a key to the Broncos' pass rush is what the edge rusher on the opposite side can do to capitalize.

"I'm real excited," Barrett said. "I'm going to try to take advantage. I'm going to do everything I can do to put pressure on the quarterback and make plays."

If Barrett can rack up sacks and pressures, teams will have to balance their blocking schemes, which creates more opportunity for Miller.

"So I'm just going to go out there and try to make some plays," Barrett said.

As he uttered those words, Shane Ray walked by. Ray was the projected starter opposite Miller, but will miss the first six regular-season games because of torn wrist ligaments. Nevertheless, he remains a vocal presence in the locker room, and he had plenty to say.

"You'd better make some plays!" Ray called out, a smile on his face.

Barrett laughed. But he knows the expectation as he steps back into the starting lineup after missing OTAs and training camp because of a hip injury that forced him to spend nearly a month on the non-football injury list.

For starters, that means exceeding his sack total of last year: 1.5, achieved in rotational work with no starts behind Miller, Ware and Ray.

"It should be easy to beat that goal," Barrett said.

The first key to that was being ready for this week. That required passing two tests -- the first of which involved having his hip hold up during the on-field work that began Aug. 21, when he returned to the practice field.

"My first week back, I had to rush around the edge and get some pressure from the tackle going around the edge with all my weight on my leg, and it [withstood] all that pressure in full," Barrett said. "After that, I was confident in it. I'm confident in it now. I feel 100 percent confident."

The second test was about endurance.

"I've had full strength since maybe about mid-August, but I didn't have the wind to go out there and actually play at full strength," Barrett said. "Now I'm getting my wind back and ready to go. I'm at full strength now."

Barrett is ready for a season in which he should be a key contributor, just three months after he stared down the possibility of having his campaign become an injury-wrecked nightmare.

"The doctor told me the best-case scenario and the worst-case scenario. I was always wishful for the best-case scenario," Barrett said.

"It ended up not being the best-case [scenario] -- it was a month or two later -- but it still worked out really good."

Trash talking or not, Philip Rivers a challenge for Broncos' defenders

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
September 8, 2017

Philip Rivers knows he needs to be careful with his trash talk on Monday.

Maybe that means he won't call Derek Wolfe a crybaby, which Wolfe found more confounding than enraging.

"It just doesn't make any sense," Wolfe said Thursday. "He called me a crybaby one time, and I was just like, 'What? ... What are you trying to do?'"

Rivers' intention with this kind of chatter is simply to have some fun, but occasionally that produces unintended consequences.

"It's fun, because I play better when I'm angry," Wolfe said. "So keep saying it, keep saying stuff to me."

Unfortunately for the veteran defensive end, Rivers cleared up his intentions during his conference call with Denver media.

"I honestly think that, like many things, the [trash talk] kind of grows way more, gets exaggerated than really what it is," Rivers said. "It's really an all-in-fun banter with the defense, just like we have in training camp with our own guys. There's really not much to it."

"This is a front you want to be careful of getting too mad or too angry. They're already tough enough as it is. It's really all in fun. It's all the way I played in the backyard growing up and just happen to be doing it here at the highest level. But I would say it's definitely, too, tapered as I've grown older."

Still, Wolfe and the rest of the Broncos can count on Rivers' competitive fire to remain, even if he is more reserved. Rivers will still be the dangerous quarterback he's always been, and now he has a healthier offense than in previous seasons.

"They're healthy now, and they've got all of their guys and all of their guns are on deck," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "They have Philip Rivers as their quarterback, so [if] you have a future Hall of Fame quarterback, you're probably going to be pretty good on offense."

Captain Crunch: How Von Miller earned the 'C' on his chest

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
September 8, 2017

On the Friday before the 2017 Pro Bowl, AFC team officials walked through the locker room taking votes for game captains.

Von Miller overheard a vote for him. And then he heard another. And another. They just kept coming.

Miller, then wrapping up the sixth year of his NFL career, had not yet been a captain of his own team but was about to be selected by the AFC's elite as a captain of the conference's Pro Bowl team.

He was blindsided by the selection. He hadn't gone into that week hoping to be named a captain. He hadn't changed up anything he did. He was the same Von he'd always been.

Two days later, he walked out to the NFL logo at midfield with Philip Rivers, Joe Thomas and Eric Weddle to meet NFC captains Drew Brees, Thomas Davis, Doug Baldwin and Bobby Wagner for the coin toss.

"Especially to be with that group of guys," Miller says, "I was blown away by that moment."

But the Super Bowl 50 MVP wants to be more than just a leader for a Pro Bowl team. He wants that role on his own team.

"To go to the Pro Bowl and be around all these guys for four days and have them vote me captain is crazy," Miller says. "I would like to have that same type of impact on my teammates that I play with every single day."

This is a title he really wants, but it's not something he wants to be handed. He wants to earn it and do it the right way.

"I would love it," he adds, "... but I'm not about to lobby for it."

He didn't have to. His teammates selected Miller as a team captain on Wednesday, five days before the season opener.

If anyone would have lobbied for Miller, it would have been rookie tackle Garrett Bolles.

Every step of the offseason and training camp, Miller was there for Bolles, either via text or FaceTime calls or in person at UHealth Training Center. And when they were together during offseason practices, Miller pulled the rookie aside to work one-on-one.

"We worked hands, we worked stance," Bolles says. "He taught me, watched my film, told me what I need to do to get better. And then after we broke for the summer to get ready for training camp, he FaceTimed me again and was excited for the season, excited to see how I was continuing to get better."

The tutelage paid off: Bolles earned the starting left tackle job heading into the regular season. And by facing up against arguably the NFL's best pass rusher almost every day, Bolles has confidence that matches his first-round pedigree.

"He beats me and I beat him, and that's how it's always going to be," Bolles says. "Some days he's going to get me more than I get him, but you learn from those and then he'll come to you and say, 'Your hands are low,' or 'You turned your shoulders. Your hips aren't square.'

"And that just helps remind me to worry about the little things, because he tells me every single day, 'You're going to be someone special if you just continue to work on the little things and continue to get better on all aspects of the game. And you just take one day at a time.' And I appreciate everything that he says."

Just like everything Miller does, his leadership style is unconventional. But that doesn't mean it's forced.

"It should be organic. It should be natural," Miller says. "I don't think it should take effort, because if it takes any effort then eventually you'll get tired of it. I think it should just be natural. It should just be a role that you're built for."

Miller can't really nail down exactly what it means to be a leader, but he doesn't think there's only one definition.

"I've had so many different leaders, in my eyes, in my opinion, that are great leaders, from DeMarcus [Ware] to Peyton [Manning] — all of these guys, and it's all different," Miller says. "I feel like consistency; they've got to be consistent. That's first and foremost. ... It just falls in line after that. It's not all about leading by example. It's not all about making speeches. It's about getting people to follow you, not by asking them, but by your actions."

And through his actions, Miller displays the kind of leader he can be. He has the ability to offer hands-on guidance during drills in practice or during film study in position meetings. In his own style, he can also bring some levity to the field when it's appropriate, like when he spent some of his veteran rest day blowing the whistle at the end of reps in one-on-one drills.

That part, that's just Von being Von. If he couldn't find fun in playing football or being around the game, he wouldn't be the same dynamic player. However, that doesn't get in the way of his responsibilities, like when he speaks up during meetings to show his younger teammates a tip or two to help them avoid making mistakes.

"He just says what needs to be said," outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett says. "He doesn't just get up and say stuff that don't need to be said. He speaks at the right times and everybody listens to him because it's Von Miller. Like [Monday], we were in meetings and ... somebody didn't have a good play and he talked to them, tried to tell them what they did wrong on the play and try to help them improve that. He doesn't, like, curse you out or anything, but he talks to you man-to-man and that's a good way to be so people can accept the coaching."

In many ways, Von Miller is the same person he's always been for the Broncos. He's not trying to be someone he's not just to show he's a leader capable of wearing the 'C' on his chest.

But some Broncos can sense a change in him.

"I think Von, he's always been a leader, just in terms of what he's done on the field," Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods says. "But once DeMarcus Ware left, Von knew he had to step up and become the leader in the locker room. He does a great job. I go in their meetings all the time. He does a great job in his position meeting."

"In the defensive meeting, he speaks up now. On the field, you can hear him in terms of getting guys to do what they're supposed to do: making them run to the ball, things of that nature. But he's done a great job. Because I've seen him three years ago to where he is now. He's definitely become a leader of this defense."

Aside from the team success, that's all Miller wanted.

The proof is on a wall in the Broncos' weight room. After the team had returned to begin its offseason workout program, the strength and conditioning staff had the players write their personal goals in permanent marker.

It's not hard to find Von Miller's at the very top, and he wrote only one goal.

"Team captain."

It wasn't to record 30 sacks or to be named Defensive Player of the Year, not that he doesn't have those ambitions. It's just that this one, well, maybe this one means a little more to him.

That's What They Said: Chargers HC Anthony Lynn and QB Philip Rivers

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 8, 2017

Playing in the last game of the weekend

Quarterback Philip Rivers: “We’ve done it a handful of times. I feel like we did it against the Texans one year, we did it against Oakland a few years, we did it at Kansas City one year. Seems like we’ve played that second time slot, Monday night opener quite a few times, so we’ve been through it before. It is a long day on Monday for sure at 8:20 MT. So that Monday will drag. Sunday’s kind of nice, obviously we travel and we get to watch all the games Sunday and kind of relax, but Monday does take forever. But it’s exciting, you dream about these kind of games as a little boy, and here you go you get to play on “Monday Night Football” in Denver, opening weekend, on Sept. 11, which obviously will be an emotional day, and it’s awesome.”

What it’s like to play in Denver

Rivers: “I think it’s two-fold. I love the stadium. It’s one of my favorite stadiums, empty. ... It’s an awesome stadium. A few stadiums on the road that we’ve been to a lot of times, I don’t go out before hand, before warmups. But Denver’s always one, when we get off the bus, I like to go out there and look at it empty. The crispness in the air, plus the stadium itself is awesome. I was one of those kids that grew up, when you built sand castles, I was building stadiums. I was into that kind of stuff. Just the look of the field — it’s about as perfect as it gets. From that standpoint already, [and] then you throw in the atmosphere and the crowd ... it’s awesome. You mentioned, we won some there, especially early in my career. In ’06, we won on Sunday night, come-from-behind victory. We won a handful early there in a row. We won that one on Thursday night back in ’13, and we haven’t been as good here as of late. But I think some of the success plus just the pure beauty of the stadium and the atmosphere I think is one of the reasons why. I’m always thankful each and every time we can come here.

Head Coach Anthony Lynn: “It’s going to be a heck of a night, I know that. It’s one of the best places to play an NFL football game and they have a great fan base and crowd, and it’s going to be a great environment.”

Respect for Miller

Lynn: “[Joey Bosa]’s in his sophomore year. He’s a really good player. He has a work ethic and the heart to be a great player, but he’s still young, he’s still growing. I don’t know where you rank as far as guys in the league now, I just know that Denver has a proven guy: Von Miller. I think he’s one of the best in the game.”

Rivers: “I said it when they were doing the NFL 100 players, I think Von’s one of the best defensive players [and] will be remembered as one of the best to ever play. I still find myself rewinding the tape. Not only on the pass downs, on the run downs. I think that’s what pushes him a notch above. He is unreal against the run. He plays on every down — all he’s got — and it’s impressive.”

McCoy faces old team

[On if there's an advantage for Mike McCoy]

Lynn: "No, not really. He knows the offense, the personnel, the people here — but we also know him. The people here, they know him. I think sometimes you can overthink things, and so we haven't paid that much attention."

Rivers: "He's not suiting up, is he? Nah, I'm kidding you. Mike was good. He and I continue to stay in touch. Now, obviously not this week. It was a good time. Obviously we didn't win as many games as either of us would've liked, but [I have] a great deal of respect for Mike as a coach and a man and [I] enjoyed our time."

Perspective on Siemian

Lynn: "Just watching him play here recently, he's an NFL quarterback. They've done a heck of a job with him. I remember when he came in last year, he started out well. I'm sure he's developing even more and gotten even better. I think they found their quarterback."

Tight end Hunter Henry's progression

Lynn: "He looks good. I liked him last year just from going back and watching the tape from [2016]. He's even taken it to the next level. He had a solid offseason, an outstanding training camp. He looks good. He's ready to go."

Support the Bowlen family & the Broncos' fight against Alzheimer's

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

September 8, 2017

The Denver Broncos and the family of Broncos owner Pat Bowlen will again join the Colorado chapter of the Alzheimer's Association as it raises money for Alzheimer's research, support and care.

The 2017 Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's will take place Saturday, Sept. 16 at Denver's City Park. A ceremony begins at 9 a.m., and the walk will start at 9:15 a.m. MT.

The Bowlen family announced in July 2014 that Pat Bowlen is one of many Coloradoans living with Alzheimer's disease.

In the United States, an individual develops Alzheimer's every 66 seconds, and more than five million Americans are currently living with the disease.

"Team Super Bowlen," led by Annabel Bowlen and members of the Bowlen family, invites fans of the Broncos to help it reach its fundraising goal and to work to put an end to Alzheimer's. Those interested in joining "Team Super Bowlen" or donating to the cause can visit the team's page.

In addition to the Alzheimer's Association, the Broncos are proud to partner with identified non-profit organizations benefitting those in our community: American Cancer Society, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver, Bonfils Blood Center, Denver Rescue Mission, Food Bank of the Rockies, Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver, Project PAVE, the Rose Andom Center and USA Football.

For more information about the Alzheimer's Association Colorado Chapter and Walk please visit: <http://www.alz.org/co/>.

Defensive players like Broncos' Von Miller embracing NFL's relaxed celebration rules

By Lindsay Jones
USA Today
September 8, 2017

Take heed, wide receivers — you're being upstaged.

During the NFL preseason, defensive players regularly took advantage of a league rule change which loosened restrictions for on-field celebrations.

Dallas Cowboys rookie defensive end Taco Charlton simulated making tacos for his teammates after collecting a sack. Cincinnati Bengals linebacker Vontaze Burfict dove head-first into an empty row of seats at FedEx Field in Washington while enjoying a 62-yard pick six. A covey of Seattle Seahawks backups danced in the end zone after an interception. And then there was Denver Broncos linebacker, who debuted a new sack dance he's dubbed the "Sexy T-Rex."

"That's a sack dance that everybody can do. I've got a lot of sack dances and celebrations planned," Miller said. "I've got to get my guys in it, too. It's better when you can celebrate how soccer players celebrate."

Apparently creativity and exuberance aren't only reserved for the receivers and running backs who regularly score touchdowns. In defensive meeting rooms and on practice fields around the NFL, pass rushers and ball-hawking corners have spent the offseason scheming in preparation for their own highlights.

Miller, an alum of the reality TV show *Dancing with the Stars*, suggested hiring a choreographer. Miami Dolphins defensive end Andre Branch has been designated as the dance master in his locker room. In Seattle, cornerback Richard Sherman said his teammates will come up with some "fancy stuff" they will unveil when the time is right.

Players are now permitted to collaborate with teammates for pre-rehearsed group celebrations; they can go to the ground, to kneel or make a snow angel, for example; and they can now use the ball as a prop. However celebrations that officials deem to be sexually suggestive or use violent imagery (like simulating the use of a weapon) are still illegal, as are acts that can be viewed as taunting.

"If they do anything like that, fine 'em. But if they're out there just having a good time, they're doing snow angels, then let a guy have fun," Sherman told USA TODAY Sports.

The league's relaxed stance on celebrations was overdue, players in multiple cities told USA TODAY Sports.

"I was waiting for it. You see it in baseball, with the bat flip. In soccer, they go crazy. In basketball, they've got a whole lot of different handshakes and everything. Football was stuck back in time," Dolphins cornerback Byron Maxwell said.

“I love to see guys that have charisma and can dance and put on a show. That makes the game fun. Fans want to see that.”

Players across the league were given presentations on the new rules from officiating crews during preseason. In a particularly memorable scene from the HBO NFL series *Hard Knocks*, Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive tackle Gerald McCoy questions referee Ed Hochuli about what sort of hip and knee gyrations are acceptable. (Any sort of hip thrusts are generally flagged as being too suggestive, even as players like Miller and Seattle defensive end Michael Bennett try to limit their number of thrusts to an acceptable level.)

Miller was fined multiple times in recent seasons for his celebratory gyrations, which have included a dance inspired by the sketch by comedy duo Key & Peele, and a Michael Jackson-esque crotch grab.

"Sexy T-Rex," however, has been deemed perfectly legal, while raising the bar for Miller's counterparts on offense.

Von Miller really excited about the 'energy' Brock Osweiler brings to the Broncos

By Will Brinson
CBS Sports
September 8, 2017

The Denver Broncos are a fascinating dichotomy of a football team, possessing what might well be the best defense in football but also squatting on an offense that could absolutely be a liability in 2017. Trevon Siemian beat out Paxton Lynch for the QB1 role in Denver, but it was hardly a fierce competition.

Now the Broncos have added old friend and Super Bowl champion Brock Osweiler, snagging the lanky quarterback in free agency after the Browns released him. It might seem like an awkward addition, but defensive leader and DPOY candidate Von Miller said on the CBSSports.com Pick Six podcast (subscribe on iTunes here!) that he's enthused about the addition of Osweiler and loves his "energy."

"Oh man it feels great, to have his energy back in the locker room. I've always been a huge fan of Brock Osweiler," Miller said. "I thought when he left, I thought it was unfortunate that he left, but when he went to Houston I thought he was going to put up numbers with DeAndre Hopkins and the guys there. It didn't happen, and he's back here with the Denver Broncos, but to have his energy in the locker room, it feels like 2015. We had a lot of success that year, we won a lot of games that year. So to have his energy back on the practice field, it feels great to have Brock Osweiler back."

Despite the surprisingly high praise for Osweiler, Von made it very clear that the Broncos are absolutely Siemian's team and that the whole franchise is behind him as the starting quarterback in Denver.

"This is Trev's team. He's worked hard for this team. He's improved, he's taken steps to improve on his game," Miller said. "This is Trev's team. Trev won the spot, he continues to go out there and make good decisions on the football field and he continues to look great on the football field. It's great to have Brock's energy back around but it's definitely Trev's team."

Osweiler mainly, then, serves as insurance in the event Siemian were to get hurt. Lynch is expected to miss several games, at least, with a sprain in his throwing shoulder. Remember, Siemian suffered an injury early in October of last year, was carted off and Lynch was pressed into action for Denver. Osweiler is absolutely in play this season and, despite Brock ditching John Elway in free agency and creating a stink in Denver, Brock got praise from his old boss who pointed out the former Broncos starter has won plenty of games for Denver.

The two have a very complicated relationship.

Anyway, hear Miller talk about all about Osweiler, his surprising goals for 2017, what he thought of the Texas A&M-UCLA game the other night and much more on podcast below. Don't forget to subscribe via iTunes and rate/review if you dig the show (you will dig it).

Miller, who was appearing on behalf of Old Spice, also talked about the new commercials he did for Old Spice's Invisible Spray body wash, which, in all honesty, are some of the more watchable commercials you can find on television. Watch one below and head to Old Spice's YouTube channel for more Von-fueled smellrific weirdness.

Half-off pizza, free coffee and other deals Broncos' wins can get you this season

By Laura Daily and Bryan K. Chavez

The Know

September 8, 2017

This season, you might hear a little more pep in the cheers for the Denver Broncos because, when they win or complete specific plays, they score great deals on food and drinks for fans. Depending on game stats, there are discounts on pizza, burgers, sandwiches, donuts, coffee and more. What's more, some of the deals are available all season long, regardless of victories or plays.

The promos are valid at participating locations in Colorado for the regular season. (Some offers may extend to post-season games.) Limit one offer per customer, per day. Note that for most of the offers, you must be present to redeem. (No sending one person on a run to get all the deals for others.) There are several offers to tackle, so huddle with your team and get your game plan (and forks) ready for a delicious season.

Game-day ritual

New this year, get any breakfast sandwich for free at McDonald's with any purchase, only via the McDonald's app. Maximize the savings by purchasing a \$1 coffee or soft drink to get the deal. Remember, the fast-food restaurant now serves breakfast all day.

Pizza party

The day after a win, celebrate with a penny-pinching pizza party. Papa John's offers fans 50 percent off all regular-priced menu items online with promo code "BRONCOS."

Hungry huddle

Tackle this popular deal from McDonald's with a few taps on a smartphone or mobile device — just download its app. (If you don't own a smartphone, pick up a promo key tag for the same deal at participating locations, while supplies last. Be warned, the quantity is very limited.) Log in and choose a location in the Denver metro area for the Broncos offers. Then, check under "Deals" for a digital coupon good for a Big Mac or Sausage McMuffin with Egg for \$1, the day after a game, win or lose. mcdonalds.com/us/en-us/mcdonalds-app.html

Morning perk

A win is always energizing, but even more so with this caffeinated perk from Conoco gas stations. Get a free coffee (12-ounce) between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m., the day after a win.

Tasty touchdown

There's no reason to have any beef with this deal from Arby's. The day after the Broncos score two or more touchdowns, get a regular Classic Roast Beef Sandwich for \$1. It's quite the savings, given the regular price is \$3.39 at most locations.

Donut dash

King Soopers celebrates a sweet victory with an equally sweet deal — a free raised or cake donut, the day after a Broncos win. Just swipe your SooperCard at checkout for the complimentary dough. Bite into the deal early, as the donuts are usually gone by day's end.

Forever orange (and blue)

Every Friday, show your pride by wearing Broncos gear and get 50 percent off any Orange Julius drink at DQ/Orange Julius.

Wing it!

When the Broncos make a regular season field goal, get a free shareable appetizer at Buffalo Wild Wings the following day. Get the required coupon at denverbroncos.com/bww, which you can print or show on a mobile device.

For each week's active deals, including any new offers, review milehighonthecheap.com for updates following game days.

The NFL is back. Are you?

By Ahiza Garcia
CNN Money
September 8, 2017

Last year the league had its hands full with decreased ratings, national anthem protests, domestic violence cases and fears about concussions.

The 10% ratings slump seemed to quantify the myriad problems facing the NFL. Some people even wondered whether it was the beginning of the end for the powerhouse league.

It was a shock for a league that has long been a juggernaut.

But the speculation and doomsday projections turned out to be just that. The NFL is back on course. Eric Shanks, president and chief operating officer of Fox Sports, said that "everybody bounced back" after the election and during the postseason.

And the NFL continues to win the battle for live viewers, even in the face of viewers' increased aversion to watching TV programming when it airs. NBC averaged more than 20 million viewers last year for its "Sunday Night Football" game.

Still, what happened last year was a wakeup call. Despite its strength, the league faces challenges as the 2017 season kicks off.

Related: [Blink and you'll miss them: Fox Sports to air 6-second ads during NFL games](#)

Game play

To speed up games and keep viewers engaged, the NFL is considering a play clock after extra points and touchdowns and will limit overtime periods to 10 minutes instead of 15.

It's also trying to change how it structures commercials so there are fewer breaks in the action. Fox Sports will use six-second commercials to shorten advertising breaks.

Shanks said the league has also made the early-season games more entertaining.

They "really built a great first-half schedule," he said.

To kick off the season, the reigning Super Bowl champion Patriots face the Kansas City Chiefs on Thursday night in a game that pits two powerful offenses against each other. And in the first "Sunday Night Football" game the New York Giants take on the Dallas Cowboys, a.k.a. "America's Team," in one of the most riveting division rivalries.

Protests

49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began taking a knee during the national anthem last year to protest the treatment of black Americans, especially by police.

Kaepernick's passive gesture was blamed for the rating decline, but a J.D. Power study of more than 9,200 fans showed that only 3% of viewers who tuned out cited those protests as a reason. Still, it had an impact.

"It is something they don't find attractive or they don't find compelling in coverage of the football game," CBS Sports Chairman Sean McManus said at a media event, citing internal research. But he emphasized that it was not the main reason people stopped watching.

Kaepernick remains unsigned, and many think he's being punished for speaking out. Look for this to be an ongoing storyline in 2017. More players are already joining the anthem protests.

Domestic violence

The NFL's handling of domestic violence also turned away some fans. In 2014, Ray Rice was suspended only two games after video showed him dragging his fiancée's body out of an elevator. The backlash led the league to toughen its domestic violence policy.

But the NFL is still figuring out how to handle the issue of domestic violence.

This season, the league was criticized for taking too long to suspend Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott for domestic violence accusations. But others said the punishment was too harsh because he hasn't been charged with a crime.

Concussions

Looming over all this is increased awareness and concern about concussions, which may be the closest thing the NFL has to an existential threat.

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, in 99% of deceased NFL players' brains that were donated to scientific research. Last September, the NFL announced a \$100 million concussion initiative aimed at making the game safer. The first \$40 million of that was just made available in August.

But there's enough concern that parents are keeping their kids out of football -- participation from 2010 to 2012 was down 9.5%, according to a 2013 study by ESPN.

Future fixes

Elizabeth Lindsey of the marketing agency Wasserman told CNNMoney that charged issues like concussions, protests and domestic violence can't be overlooked, but the NFL is aware of them and trying to address them.

"But you have to allow them time to clean up their house," Wasserman said. "These issues are getting discussed every day on Park Avenue."

Lindsey said as long as the league doesn't ignore its problems, it will continue to attract fans and advertisers. If ratings keep falling, ad dollars will follow, but that hasn't happened yet.

"It's not like people are taking ad money out of the NFL and putting it in baking shows," she said. "They're putting it in streaming deals and social."

The NFL told CNNMoney that it's confident it's still "the most valuable property in the sports and entertainment industry." The NFL credited its success to its "relentless focus on making the game both competitive and engaging for our fans."

The NFL has embraced social media and forged deals with Twitter and Amazon to stream games. Lindsey said the league's focus on international markets -- four games this season will be played outside the United States -- is another sign of its ability to adapt and innovate.

"If you run any business, you constantly have to keep an eye on 'Who are our fans? Who are our fans of tomorrow? How are they consuming?'" Lindsey said. "The NFL is doing that. They're not doomed because they're adapting. They're smart businesspeople."

Trevor Siemian “definitely more comfortable” going into second year as starter

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
September 8, 2017

Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian may not feel like Peyton Manning.

But he is a little more comfortable entering his second season as a starter, which stands to reason.

“That first game there is a lot of anticipation,” Siemian said, via Nick Kosmider of the Denver Post. “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 Two [as the starter].”

“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.”

Siemian could be excused if last year was a blur, replacing a future Hall of Famer on the fly and playing well enough. But hearing Von Miller compare him favorably to Manning this week was still a bit of an eye-opener, and also an indication of the trust the Broncos have in the former seventh-rounder. The fact the “competition” with former first-rounder Paxton Lynch didn’t seem particularly close was another sign of Siemian’s growth.

“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.”

Of course, Manning won a Super Bowl with the Broncos by being a caretaker while they leaned on a dominant defense. While Manning’s career is something Siemian (or just about anyone else) will never be able to match, there’s no reason to think Siemian can’t do enough to keep the Broncos competitive in the same way.