

Kiszla: Here's an easy-to-follow, 7-point plan for the Broncos to make the NFL playoffs

By Mark Kiszla
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For a generation, the mantra in Broncos Country has never wavered: In Elway we trust.

During this new NFL season, the team is leaning on Elway more than ever. Broncos president Joe Ellis obviously trusts Elway to be both the face and architect of the franchise, as his new five-year contract attests. But so many leading indicators — from a rookie coach to a cheap quarterback to a stash of money under the salary cap — suggest 2017 will be more about winning from now on than right now. Dare we say rebuilding?

Forget about winning the Super Bowl. If the Broncos are to make the playoffs, here are seven promises that must be fulfilled, starting with the home-opener against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Vance Joseph won't blink at crunch time: Denver could have hired Kyle Shanahan, son of the Mastermind, to be their new sage of the sidelines. Elway, whose track record indicates he values motivational skill over X's and O's acumen in a coach, instead chose Joseph to grow into the job.

I asked Joseph his biggest challenge as a rookie in charge of an NFL team. "It's less coaching. That part bothers me," said Joseph, who now coaches up his assistants rather than players. "It's more game management, and that's the thing."

So here are four words of advice on game management: Never take a knee. (We don't need another John Fox.)

Mike McCoy counts for three points per game: The Broncos' game plan is clear. They want to beat foes by beating them up. Run the rock. Watch Von Miller get up and (sack) dance. Control the clock. Win the game 21-17.

Well, Denver averaged 20.8 points per game last season. The team's margin of error was too small way too often. We don't expect a new offensive coordinator to work miracles. But if McCoy can deliver one extra field goal per game, I guarantee you the Broncos will be in the playoffs.

Garett Bolles is better than Reuben Foster: With the 20th pick in the NFL draft, I thought the obvious choice for Denver was Alabama linebacker Reuben Foster, a tackling machine that would pay immediate dividends in the run defense and likely become a Pro Bowler down the road.

Elway selected Bolles, a left tackle to protect his quarterback's blindside. Hey, what do I know? In Elway we trust. Right?

Trevor Siemian looks like Andy Dalton: There are those in Broncos Country that strain very hard to see Tom Brady in Siemian, a Big Ten quarterback underestimated by NFL scouts.

That's cute. Mr. Skittles is not Handsome Tom.

If Siemian can merely be Dalton, the Bengals' efficient game manager, the Denver offense will be boring and solid and bound for the playoffs.

Justin Simmons makes us forget T.J. Ward: Roster churn is inevitable in a league with a salary cap, where younger and cheaper is favored over old and experienced.

Defensive coordinator Joe Woods loves Simmons and fellow safety Will Parks. If they both score touchdowns this season, nobody will remember who wore No. 43 for the Broncos.

Aqib Talib knows best: The Broncos voted Jack Sparrow as their captain. Wait ... what? "I think maybe my off-the-field stuff kind of prevented me from being a captain ... I think I've always been captain material," Talib said.

Teammates do love Talib, because he will scratch and claw or rip chains asunder, doing whatever it takes to fight on their behalf. The Broncos have only 10 of 22 starters remaining from their Super Bowl 50 squad. It's the job of Talib to return the family feeling of a football brotherhood to the locker room.

Denver wins four division games: The NFL teams with the four toughest projected schedules are the Broncos, Chiefs, Chargers and Raiders. The reason is obvious. The AFC West is the toughest division, from top to bottom, in the league.

How can the balanced West be won? Going 4-2 in division games would be a good place to start. And if that's a goal, then the season-opener against the Chargers is a must win for the Broncos. All the emotional factors lean in Denver's favor. Home game. Monday night mayhem. There's a burning desire to stick it to McCoy's old team. This is a chance to make a big opening statement.

Prediction: Broncos 27, Chargers 17.

Kickin' it with Kiz: Can Broncos Country find kindness in its heart to forgive Brock "The Traitor" Osweiler?

By Mark Kiszla
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I've been a dedicated Broncos fan for 52 years, so please quit writing columns like you speak for the entirety of Broncos Nation. For you to inject yourself by writing ridiculous things like Broncos Country got kicked in the gut and it was a sad day when safety T.J. Ward was cut and Brock Osweiler was brought back to town? It makes you look silly, in my opinion. The Broncos want to be No. 1 on offense and No. 1 on defense. They have a chance to be just that. So stop making the Broncos about you and your thoughts.

Jim, Nashville

Kiz: Speak for the entirety of Broncos Country? No way. I'm not the great and powerful Oz. Heck, when I tell my 8½ pound dog to keep his favorite chew toy off the family room sofa, he looks at me like: Whatever, man. But before you declare I'm completely out of touch, perhaps you should read what many other fans think of the recent roster moves by John Elway, under scrutiny for the first time since he became general manager. In fact, let's start now ...

I hope the Broncos lose every game in which "The Traitor" Osweiler participates during the upcoming NFL season. It seems as if Elway has finally lost it as a general manager, perhaps because he has been married to a former Raiders cheerleader for so many years. First, Elway hired Vance Joseph, who knows as much about being an NFL head coach as I know about landing a spaceship on the moon. Second, he signed Osweiler, which was beyond stupid! Only a fairyland dreamer would think he might still be a good quarterback. And third, letting Kyle Slotter get away was idiotic; he could be the QB of the future for an NFL team. My prediction for the upcoming season: 7-9.

Ernie, Broomfield

Kiz: Hmm, the staff here at Kickin' It headquarters hasn't heard this much dissension in Broncos Country since Josh McDaniels was the coach.

Ian Desmond has been a \$70 million bust for the Rockies. Yes, it has been really tough on him with three stints on the disabled list. But it's hard to feel sorry for a man whose biggest problem is what to do with a monthly direct deposit of a million bucks. The fact he acts like a grouchy bear is just a sign of misplaced arrogance.

Gary, Denver

Kiz: I have less than 100 bucks in my wallet. But if that's enough to buy Desmond a Coke, a smile and a three-run homer, I'd be happy to do it.

And today's parting shot sounds best if read aloud, in the voice of Eeyore.

Is the world ending? I cite North Korea, hurricanes and wildfires. Elway brings back Joke Bustweiler; the only thing Joe Sakic has done all offseason is try (unsuccessfully) to trade Matt Duchene; the Rockies are dying a slow death in the playoff race, and the Rapids go from first to worst. Is the apocalypse upon us? Should I move to Cleveland?

Richard, depressed in Denver

The Baby No Fly Zone is all grown up: How Justin Simmons, Will Parks made the jump.

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Reality had yet to fully set in but 72 hours after learning he'd be the starting strong safety for the Denver Broncos, Justin Simmons stood before Boulder High School's football team and told the players how this wasn't supposed to be.

He wasn't supposed to be taking over for three-time Pro Bowler T.J. Ward, who was released.

He wasn't supposed to be starring on the Broncos' No Fly Zone secondary after only a year as a pro.

He wasn't supposed to be getting paid to do a job he never fully considered three years ago.

"For a small-town kid like me from South Florida to be able to make it," he began, "you know, growing up I wasn't the fastest, the strongest, the most athletic. All that stuff I just had to work at."

After a whirlwind week — and past 18 months, really — the tale seemed hard to believe, but true nonetheless.

Simmons, one of the most athletic defensive backs in the 2016 draft, literally leapt onto the scene with his 40-inch vertical and top-finishes in multiple drills at the NFL scouting combine, landed in the lap of the Broncos in the third round of the draft, and has exceeded expectations of those football minds who saw his potential.

Simmons has defied his own odds. Maybe others' too.

Five months ago he and fellow second-year safety Will Parks crowned themselves the Baby No Fly Zone. "We're still in the works," Simmons said at the time.

But the kids have grown.

Simmons is the freshest face on the Broncos' league-leading pass defense, and Parks is the Broncos' new starting "dime" linebacker. And since 2013, when their football fates intertwined in a college bowl game, the two have shared a spotlight in Denver and together forced the Broncos to clear a path for their continued rise.

"It always comes down to football decisions," general manager John Elway said. "With the young guys, they were playing well and it really wasn't anything to do with T.J. It was just the fact that the young guys played well and that was the best football move for us."

Ready to move up

It was called The Bunker and for much of his time in college, Simmons and former Boston College defensive coordinator Don Brown could be found there, poring over game film.

There is where the foundation for Simmons' football teachings were laid.

"Before I used to just go out there and play. I still did that a little bit in college, but with him he helped me digest film and really help me to look at what I need to be looking at," Simmons said. "So now, with these guys, it's a whole other level."

When Simmons and Parks arrived in Denver, they soon learned the film was their bible. They watched cornerbacks Chris Harris Jr. and Aqib Talib, who relied on the tape to wreck opposing offenses and critique their own play. They learned from Joe Woods, Denver's former defensive backs coach who was elevated to defensive coordinator this year, how to home in on the film — to know what to look for and how to digest it.

And they asked questions. A lot of questions, picking the brains of Ward and Harris, Talib, Bradley Roby and safety Darian Stewart.

"One of the vets told me, in college, you really just play football, but in the league, you learn football. Obviously it's not the case for everyone, but I found that to be really true," Simmons said. "Here, I'm actually learning offenses. I'm learning tendencies. I'm learning offensive coordinators' likes and dislikes when they're at a certain yard line on the field; if they're at the plus or the minus. If it's second-and-10 or second-and-7. It's things like that they all know which makes them so successful instead of just going out there and playing the coverage that's called."

A glimpse at the Broncos' recent history with defensive backs reveals these things: They like the smart ones. They like the tough ones. They like the versatile ones, who can cover and hit with the best of them, who can play in high zone and in the box near the line of scrimmage.

And they really like the ones who appreciate the details — the littlest details — on tackles and reads and footwork.

Simmons checked all the boxes, and many more with his play on special teams. Parks did, too.

NFL dreams start to emerge

Taryn Simmons is still coming to grips with this, because a year and a half ago she was planning for a wedding and a life unknown.

On April 1, 2016, she married her high school sweetheart in Stuart, Fla. April 29, 2016, she watched him slip on an orange-and-blue hat and hop on a plane for Denver, some 2,000 miles from their Fort Lauderdale home.

She would join him two months later, but she had no idea what she was really joining. There's no handbook for the NFL lifestyle, no roadmap to guide her as she left friends and family behind.

But then again, the NFL only became a real possibility a year before, during Justin's junior year at Boston College. He was on track to get his degree in communications to possibly pursue a career in sports broadcasting.

He eyed a life behind the camera, not in front.

"Every guy dreams about (the NFL), but he just didn't really see it as a reality for himself," Taryn said. "Then some of his coaches asked, 'Hey, have you thought about it?' He put some thought into it, but it was still option B. Some agents reached out to him and that boosted his confidence and we both decided, 'Hey, why not? Go for it and if it doesn't work out, we'll go live a normal life but if it does, we'll do it.' "

As a senior Simmons started all 12 games at safety for the nation's leading defense (254.3 yards allowed per game) and notched 67 total tackles and five interceptions. He played well at the East-West Shrine game, met with Broncos officials informally, then headed for Indianapolis, where he put on one of the most athletic displays in recent years at the NFL combine.

"The thing that's interesting about Justin is in his college career he played corner and safety," Broncos defensive coordinator Joe Woods said. "So you can tell he had that long build like a corner, you could see he had that coverage skill set and the thing I liked about him was, not that he was a knock-back tackler, but he was a very consistent tackler. Then when we went to the combine, his numbers were off the chart."

The Broncos wanted Simmons, but they masked their true interest. He never visited Denver and never worked out for the team ahead the draft. But the Broncos needed only seconds on draft night to turn in their card and make their selection of Simmons at No. 98 official.

"You want flexibility at safety in this league," then-head coach Gary Kubiak said. "Guys have to be able to cover. They have to be able to come down into the box and do those types of things. He's a very smart young man, so we've added a big piece to the puzzle."

Spotting their potential

Ahead of the 2016 combine, Woods and his future defensive backs coach Marcus Robertson had conversations about their future players. Neither knew they would all align months down the road, of course, but their eyes were on Simmons and Parks, the 6-foot-2 hybrid from Boston College and the 6-1 "spur" out of Arizona.

"Getting an opportunity to come over and coach them, I felt like I had a chance to develop two young players into some real high-level defensive backs in the NFL," said Robertson, a former all-pro safety who played 12 years in the league. "When you look at Justin Simmons, he's a guy who has an opportunity to be an outstanding safety in this league, given his football IQ and his ability to cover grass, or range, and he has outstanding ball skills. I think Will Parks is a little bit more of a strong safety, he's able to play in the box, he can play high, has a little more versatility but is a real tough and rugged type of guy.

"The thing you love about those guys is football is important to them and they put in the work and, as you can tell, the results are starting to come."

Expectations were met last year, when Parks played in all 16 games and Simmons 13, starting the last three. In the last two games of the season, when the Broncos were still in playoff contention, Simmons was called upon as Ward recovered from a concussion. It was an unofficial test, of sorts, and Simmons passed, tallying two interceptions, three pass-breakups and six total tackles in those games, while finishing the season as the only safety in the league without a single missed tackle and at least 200 snaps played, according to Pro Football Focus.

But more than the stats was the versatility that both Simmons and Parks offered. Last year Simmons moved around from safety to corner to dime and back again.

“That’s what we said when we first drafted him: We want to dictate how we play the game defensively, not the offense to dictate to us,” Woods said. “And he gives us the ability to that.”

The decision to release Ward came as a shock to many in the Broncos’ locker room, Simmons and Parks, included. But hints of the changing of the guard have been dropped since that fateful month of April 2016: their playing time as rookies, their extended reps during minicamp and most recently, their usage in preseason, when Ward nursed a hamstring injury.

Simmons was used often and in multiple ways, and impressed with his improvement in the box and consistency in coverage.

And it didn’t take long for Parks to read all the signs about their very near future.

“Justin would probably say the same thing — who wouldn’t want to start in the NFL?” Parks said. “Who wouldn’t want to go out there and make plays and be a difference-maker for their defense or their offense or whatever?”

“I’m excited. I mean, that’s a rival (the Chargers). Monday Night, primetime, only game on TV at that time. It’s time to go out there and make some plays, for real, for real.”

The kids are grown.

Broncos president/CEO Joe Ellis opens up about player protests during national anthem

By Nicki Jhabvala

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When linebacker Brandon Marshall decided to kneel during the national anthem last season in protest of social injustices throughout the United States, Broncos' president and CEO Joe Ellis found him in the team's dining room for an open and honest discussion.

"I told him, 'Brandon, I would like you to stand. But I respect the fact that you can do what you want to do, and as long as you're leading to some productive outcomes, I'm going to respect that,'" Ellis told The Denver Post on Saturday.

Marshall joined Colin Kaepernick, his college teammate and former 49ers quarterback, in kneeling for the anthem to bring awareness to a string of police brutalities and other injustices in the country. His intent, Marshall has said repeatedly, was to start a conversation, but to follow it with action. So he later met with Denver police chief Robert White about the department's use-of-force policy, and pledged to donate \$300 per tackle he made last season to local organizations and programs to "address critical social issues."

But his actions faced blowback, as he expected they would. He lost a pair of endorsement deals, received numerous threatening messages and letters, and watched a fan burn an orange shirt with his name on the back on the steps of the Broncos' practice facility.

"In so many different instances, players have only been able to reach out to fans on Tuesdays. Now we have social media and we have a lot more awareness of what's important to them, and their biggest audience isn't on a Tuesday at an elementary school," Ellis said. "It's on a Sunday at a game. So I respect the fact — we respect the fact — that Sunday is a big audience for them and I think we're making strides in allowing players to be able to express themselves and get behind some of their beliefs and causes on game day — 'My Cleats, My Cause' being an example. I think you'll see more of that.

"It's a complicated issue — though I don't know that some people see it as complicated — for fans and for the public in general because they use sports as a way to get away from a lot of the everyday dialogue and chatter and politics and whatever you want to call it. ... But as I told him, 'We want you to stand, but this is your decision and we'll respect whatever decision you make.' And he knelt for a few games and eventually stood up, and he got some things accomplished."

During the preseason, Broncos general manager John Elway offered a similar sentiment when he said players "have the right to display whatever they wish to display" but "the bottom line is that can't get in the way of our main goal, and that is to compete for world championships."

This season multiple players protested during the anthem, especially in the wake of the Charlottesville, Va., attack. Marshall, who knelt for eight games last season, said he has given thought to joining them.

“They say, ‘just play football. That’s what you do,’ ” he said. “They act like we’re football players 24/7, all day, every day just all about ball. I’m a human being. I have opinions. I have passions. I have things I would like to do.”

In the meantime, Marshall has been vocal about Kaepernick’s continued employment, which many believe is because of his protests and not his ability as a football player.

Asked if he would ever be hesitant to sign a player simply because of his protesting, Ellis said: “No, I would not. I would defer to (the personnel department) and we’d probably have a discussion about whether that would take away from what the team was trying to accomplish. But at the end of the day, if it was going to help us win, I would not take issue with that.

“As an organization, how do we feel? We feel players should stand for the national anthem. Everyone should — all our fans, everyone involved in the game. That’s how we feel as an organization. But players have their own personal beliefs and personal reasons and we respect that. They’re entitled to that.”

Broncos DEs Jared Crick, Zach Kerr ruled out vs. Chargers; Kyle Peko waived

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The Broncos will open their season Monday with a very thin defensive line.

Starting defensive end Jared Crick (back) and reserve Zach Kerr (knee) were both ruled out against the Chargers, and reserve nose tackle Kyle Peko, who was working his way back from a foot injury, was waived. The team is expected to make a corresponding roster move to fill Peko's spot ahead of the game.

Kerr and Crick had been listed as day-to-day but both were absent from Friday's practice and the team's Saturday morning walk-through.

Kerr has not practiced since injuring his knee in the team's third preseason game against Green Bay, on Aug. 26. Crick suffered what coach Vance Joseph said were back spasms during training camp and did not play in the team's last three preseason games.

"I think Jared is getting better, but he's not well enough to play a football game right now," Joseph said. "And in our opinion, if we put him out there this week, which we could probably, it would hurt us moving down the road."

Adam Gotsis will start in place of Crick opposite Derek Wolfe on the line, which leaves Shelby Harris as the team's lone backup on the line.

Asked if he will consider adding someone, Joseph said Saturday morning: "I'm not sure. Every option is going to be explored. That's always an issue when you bring someone up, you have to expose someone else to the outside teams in the league. ... Every guy we decide to dress or not dress, it's always based on our game plan."

Running back Devontae Booker (wrist) and quarterback Paxton Lynch (shoulder) were also officially ruled out, though neither were expected to play. Booker is inching closer to a return from wrist surgery, but there is no set timetable on when he will suit up in the regular season. Lynch is projected to miss at least the first few weeks of the season to recover from a sprain to his throwing (right) shoulder.

Unique schedule

Joseph, a first-year head coach, has adopted a practice schedule different from what the Broncos are used to in recent years. It's a regimen used by Marvin Lewis in Cincinnati, where Joseph was the defensive backs coach from 2014-15.

After their first two days of practice each week, the Broncos will use the third day as a "mental practice" and the fourth as more of an up-tempo workout.

“The reason you do it is you want two recovery days versus one,” Joseph explained. “So we do more work on Wednesday and Thursday, and take Friday as a mental practice and a recovery day for the players. But it’s not a loss when you’re talking about football. The offense got 85 reps today (during walk-through), so that’s a practice and a half for us. Defensively we got 65 reps. So we’re not losing our game plan knowledge, but we’re gaining, in my opinion, a day of recovery for our players. It’s a long season so we want to make a point to start recovery now and not at Week 10.”

Captain McManus

Brandon McManus was voted one of the team’s five captains for 2017, which is a rarity for a kicker. McManus said earlier in the week that it was “a huge honor” and that it was the first time he had ever been named a captain in any sport.

“It’s a testament to Brandon’s leadership, his personality, all the qualities that he brings to this team not only as our kicker, as our go-to guy when we need a big one, but he’s a guy who has a strong character presence and guys look up to him,” special teams coordinator Brock Olivo said. “And I’m really proud of him. That was one of his goals. He’s a great pro and he shows up to work every day and I think the guys respect him.”

Returner praise

Olivo arrived in Denver after a year with Chiefs receiver/returner Tyreek Hill. When the Broncos drafted Isaiah McKenzie in the fifth round, Olivo believed he found a player similar in talent, and certainly speed.

“I think Isaiah would have told you he was ready back in February to play in the NFL,” Olivo said. “He’s a good pro. He’s got a workman’s attitude, he shows up every day, he stays after to catch punts. He’s constantly asking questions — the right questions — and I know his champing at the bit to get rolling.

“He has more confidence in his ability to be where he’s supposed to be scheme-wise. He has a better understanding of the scheme and what we’re trying to do with him in the return game. He’s a kid who could fill in at some other spots. He’s tough enough, he’s fast enough, not just as a returner. I’m really happy with where Isaiah is at and I really enjoy coaching that young man.”

Footnotes. Veteran running back Jamaal Charles practiced in full again Saturday and “is ready to go,” Joseph said. ... Because the Broncos will have a shorter week after their Monday night opener against the Chargers, the team has already begun to prepare for their Week 2 meeting with the Cowboys. ... Receiver Cody Latimer will be the Broncos’ kickoff returner Monday night.

Broncos still looking for naming-rights partner, are moving forward with development plans around stadium

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Joe Ellis is closing in on 20 seasons in the Broncos' front office, but each season-opener makes his as nervous and giddy as the last.

"Especially home games," Ellis, the team's president and CEO, said in an interview with The Denver Post on Saturday. "You want to win so bad for your fans and season-ticket holders."

It's those fans Ellis says he has in mind as he continues to search for a new naming-rights partner for the team's stadium.

Last August the Broncos severed their sponsorship agreement with Sports Authority that was valued at \$55.3 million, and they assumed the rest of Metropolitan Football Stadium District's naming rights contract with the company. The now-bankrupt Sports Authority owed nearly \$20 million over the last five years of its naming rights deal.

The Broncos assumed the remainder of the contract to gain control over the process of finding a new sponsor, and last year employed marketing agency WME-IMG to secure a new naming rights partner.

"There's a sense of urgency and we as a staff and our agency are working hard to get the right company in at the right deal," Ellis said. "We've got big obligations to try to sustain and maintain and improve the stadium, and the naming rights component is a key component in terms of funding.

"We feel we're moving closer, but we don't believe we're to the point where we can start to get excited. We're still talking to a lot of people. But I'm optimistic."

Last year, Ellis had hoped a new brand — the third since the stadium opened in 2001 — would be on the face of the Broncos' stadium for the start of the 2017 stadium, for both optics and financial reasons. According to Ellis, the most recent analysis has raised the projected cost to maintain and continuously upgrade the stadium to \$650 million over 20 years.

"I think switching names on a building every five years or something like that is just not the right optic," Ellis said. "So we're trying to find the right partner that will be with us for a while. Whether that's 10 years or 15 years, I don't have the answer to that."

In the meantime, the Sports Authority branding remains plastered to the stadium to avoid a temporary name change and additional expenses in removing the signage. And the team has moved forward with plans for a proposed entertainment district around the stadium.

“If we’re going to have to raise \$650 million collectively with the district to maintain and improve the stadium and keep it up to a standard that the NFL and our fans will require, we’re going to have to have some creative financing solutions and this development plan or concept is a way we can possibly do that. It won’t fulfill all of our financial needs, but it’s a component, just like naming rights would be.

“It’s a mixed-use proposal of retail and housing of all different varieties as well as maybe office and hotel. There are a lot of different components that go into the concept, some park space we might be able to utilize for events outside the building, things along those lines. It’s still in the conceptual phase, but I think you’ll start to hear more and more about it in the next 12 months.”

Broncos, Denver submit bid to host 2020 NFL draft

By Nicki Jhabvala

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For years the Broncos and Denver have been interested in hosting a Super Bowl or NFL draft to put the city on a national stage. And they're hopeful they'll get to do so soon.

Broncos president and CEO Joe Ellis told The Denver Post on Saturday that the team has submitted an application to the league to try to host the 2020 draft, and that if Denver is not selected for that year, they will "absolutely" try for 2021, 2022 or 2023.

"The draft is something we'd really like to see accomplished," Ellis said. "I think it'd be nice for Mr. B (owner Pat Bowlen), to know that the city he's witnessed tremendous support from in terms of what they've done for the Broncos and how important the Broncos are to people and how important football is people.

"We've put in an application for 2020 and that may or may not come to fruition depending on how the league feels about when they're going to honor 100th season. ... We believe it would be a great thing for the city, a great thing for Colorado, a great thing for this Rocky Mountain region. It would draw a lot of people and would be a really fun event."

Ellis said he's already had discussions with NFL commissioner Roger Goodell and his staff about Denver's interest in hosting and said that "if we put the right package together we have an excellent chance."

Though the Broncos had looked into submitting bids for earlier drafts, they faced scheduling issues with events at the convention center, where draft night would likely take place.

The Broncos will likely face the same hurdles in future years because of Denver's growth and popularity as a site for hosting conventions. But as NFL drafts morph into city-wide festivals, the league has gotten creative with venues and Denver could use Philadelphia's 2017 model to work around potential conflicts.

Instead of hosting the latest draft inside one of Philadelphia's historical venues or its convention center, the NFL created a 3,000-seat theater on the steps of the Museum of Art. The city attracted a record 250,000 people to its streets for the three-day event.

The Broncos are also interested in hosting a Super Bowl, but remain realistic about their odds of landing one.

"The sense that I get is that the (NFL) committee tasked with guiding ownership to the pool of candidates for Super Bowls is less than enthusiastic about cold-weather sites," Ellis said. "It appears after New York (Super Bowl XLVIII) they're not in a hurry to do that again. And one day in Denver in February it'll be 60 degrees and sunny, and the next day it'll be snowing.

"Now, if the league were to open up the game to cold-weather sites without a dome, we would definitely want it. And I think Visit Denver and the mayor expressed interest in trying to throw our hat in the ring."

Broncos notes: Crick injury thins defensive line

By Mike Klis

9 News

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For openers, the Denver defense had a difficult time getting some its best guys to the starting line.

Shane Ray, the starting outside linebacker opposite Von Miller, has long been ruled out as he was placed on injured reserve (he is expected to return for game 7 at Kansas City). And now starting defensive end Jared Crick (back) and top backup defensive lineman Zach Kerr (knee) are out for the Broncos' season-opening game Monday night against Philip Rivers, Melvin Gordon and the Los Angeles Chargers.

Adam Gotsis and Shelby Harris, you're up. Gotsis figures to start in Crick's place at defensive end with Harris playing in passing situations.

"When you watch the San Fran game and the Green Bay game those guys played well," Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said about preseason games No. 2 and 3. "That's what I expect on Monday night, that's why they're here. Gotsis is a second-round pick. He's a guy with a bright future and Shelby Harris had a hell of a camp. What they did in preseason I expect them to do on Monday Night. That's why they're here."

With backup nosetackle Kyle Peko also just coming back from a broken foot injury, it wouldn't be a surprise if the Broncos called up rookie defensive tackle Tyrique Jarrett from the practice squad by 2 p.m. Sunday.

Jarrett is a 335-pound, undrafted space eater from Pitt. Promoting Jarrett to the 53-man roster, though, would mean someone would have to get cut.

"That's always an issue when you bring someone up, you have to expose someone else to the outside teams in the league," Joseph said. "That's always a possibility."

The chronology of Crick's injury and recovery may not be as serious as it appears. He was carted off the field Aug. 14 with a back injury. After rehabbing for three weeks, he returned for three practices this week, but then was backed off Friday and Saturday.

"I think Jared is getting better, but he's not well enough to play a football game right now," Joseph said. "In our opinion, if we put him out there this week, which we could probably, it would hurt us moving down the road. As a group discussion, we thought resting him this week would help us down the road with Jared Crick."

McKenzie moves grandma from Irma danger

Broncos rookie returner/receiver Isaiah McKenzie grew up never knowing his mom or dad. He was raised in Miami by his grandmother.

"It was rough at times, not having a mother or father," McKenzie said in an interview with 9News. "But it's not like they came in my life and then left. They were never there. So, it wasn't that hard to deal

with. My grandmother always had my back. Me and my six other siblings – there were seven of us altogether and we lived in a one-bedroom apartment and she helped us the best way she could.”

Miami had been in Hurricane Irma’s path until it recently shifted to Tampa.

McKenzie didn’t wait. Joseph said his rookie flew his grandmother to Denver on Thursday.

New practice schedule

Joseph has brought a unique practice schedule to Denver in that he does his walkthrough two days before the game – Saturday in this week’s case – followed by a full-speed, if shorter than usual, practice the day before the game.

Recent Broncos head coaches Gary Kubiak and John Fox went the other way with the walkthrough the day before the game. Joseph said he picked up the schedule from Cincinnati head coach Marvin Lewis in 2015.

“The reason you do it is that you want two recovery days versus one,” Joseph said. “(For a typical Sunday game) we do more work on Wednesday and Thursday and take Friday as a mental practice and a recovery day for the players. It’s not a loss when you’re talking about football, because the offense got 85 reps today. That’s a practice and a half for us. Defensively, we got 65 reps. We’re not losing our game-plan knowledge, but we’re gaining in my opinion, a day of recovery for our players.

“It’s a long season so we want to make a point to start recovery now and not start it Week 10 in the middle of the season. That’s the point behind the schedule.”

Broncos Bits

McKenzie will be the Broncos’ punt returner Monday while Cody Latimer will handle kickoff returns. ...

With the late start Monday (8:20 p.m. kickoff, Channel 20), Joseph altered the pregame preparation so that one meal would be served at 1 p.m. at the team hotel and another at 5 p.m. at the stadium.

Bottom line is Broncos love Broncos more than most

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 10, 2017

The Denver Broncos are their own self-help group these days.

They've heard what people have said about their prospects for the coming season. They've seen the numbers a variety of analytical outlets have revealed after the requisite crunching. And the bottom line is the Broncos like the Broncos a whole lot more than most of the rest of the football world.

"No doubt," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We know what kind of guys we have. We didn't get it done last year, but we've done a lot before that, and we know what we need to do to fix it."

But pick a media outlet, any media outlet, roll through the musings of a variety of analysts, and the predictions of four, five, six or seven wins for the Broncos are not difficult to find. The Broncos, however, have their own version of the math.

They won nine games last season and believe they carry a better roster into this season, which will open for them Monday night against the Los Angeles Chargers.

"I think we have a chance to be a pretty good football team," president of football operations/general manager John Elway said. "I like where we are ... you play the games and that decides it, but I like where we are, I like what we've done."

In the world of Elway, the phrase "pretty good football team" really means a playoff team. The Broncos won the AFC West for five consecutive seasons, four of those with Peyton Manning at quarterback, before last season's playoff miss.

When all was said and done in 2016, the Broncos made the decision that the roots of that playoff miss could be found in how things went on their offensive and defensive lines. That's where they spent the bulk of their available dollars in free agency -- they signed two offensive linemen and two defensive linemen in the March talent grab, and then they used their first-round draft pick on tackle Garrett Bolles and their second-round pick on defensive end/outside linebacker DeMarcus Walker.

They still have Pro Bowl players, such as Harris, cornerback Aqib Talib and safety Darian Stewart, on defense to go with wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders and running back C.J. Anderson on offense. They also still have a perennial candidate for defensive player of the year in linebacker Von Miller, one of the league's best at any position whose work in training camp made it clear he's poised for a big year.

The Broncos also have a pile of players who won Super Bowl rings just two seasons ago. So, what gives?

"We don't really worry about it," Talib said. "We only can control what we can control. They base a lot of how they rank you and what they think about you on what you did last year. This is a whole new team and a whole new attitude this year. We'll see."

Some of the outside skepticism could center around the team's second consecutive training camp battle for the starting-quarterback job. Trevor Siemian won the job for the second time, but he is still a bit of an unknown to many in the league.

He suffered a shoulder injury in Week 4 last season that he played through the rest of the way -- he had offseason surgery to repair it -- and he had a foot injury that kept him out of one start, as well. The Broncos believe if a revamped offensive line does its job and their run game is better than the 28th-ranked finish of last season, Siemian can flourish.

"Trevor is going to have a good year for us," Joseph said. "The thinking all along has been if we don't protect better or run the ball better than last season, a quarterback isn't going to do what needs to be done."

Monday night will be the Broncos' first formal opportunity to state their case about the whole thing, as well as their first chance to fix at least one of the things that got away in '16. They split games against the Chargers last season and were 2-4 in division games overall.

"Hell no, we don't agree ... with what some people say," Talib said. "But it's that thing: You can not like it or whatever, but you have to do something about it. We need to just handle our business, every week, go out there and do our thing and people can talk about that."

Broncos have depth issues to solve at defensive line before Monday's game

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 10, 2017

With the season opener two days away, the Denver Broncos have seen their depth on the defensive line take a hit in recent days.

Starting defensive end Jared Crick and backup defensive end/nose tackle Zach Kerr have both been ruled out of Monday night's game against the Los Angeles Chargers. Crick played in just one preseason game because of a back injury he suffered in mid-August, and Kerr suffered a knee injury in the Broncos' Aug. 26 preseason game against the Green Bay Packers.

The Broncos waived backup nose tackle Kyle Peko on Saturday. Peko had been listed as questionable for Monday night's game. He initially had been waived last weekend, when the Broncos trimmed the roster to 53 players, but he later re-signed with the team.

The Broncos now are expected to move a player up from their practice squad for Monday's game. One possibility for promotion is rookie nose tackle Tyrique Jarrett.

Crick, who led the Broncos' defensive linemen in playing time last season, had practiced on a limited basis on Thursday, but he was then held out of practice on Friday and Saturday morning.

"I think Jared is getting better, but he's not well enough to play a football game right now," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph. "In our opinion, if we put him out there this week, which we could probably, it would hurt us down the road."

It all means that 2016 second-round pick Adam Gotsis and Shelby Harris will get plenty of work at defensive end next to nose tackle Domata Peko against the Chargers. Harris is a third-year player who earned a roster spot with quality play in training camp: He led the Broncos with three sacks in the preseason.

"That's the way it's been throughout the preseason ... and that's what we expect Monday night," Joseph said. "That's why they're here ... what they did in the preseason I expect them to do Monday night."

Joseph also said after Saturday's practice that running back Jamaal Charles closed out a good week of practice, and he is expected to play against the Chargers. Charles played in just one preseason game as the Broncos tried to regulate his work.

Charles practiced fully Friday and Saturday, and Joseph said, "He's ready to go."

Broncos to unveil new offense against coordinator Mike McCoy's old team

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 10, 2017

Mike McCoy won't say it, not a word, won't even reveal if he's thinking it.

He won't offer, like many coaches who have been fired in a league in which that is such a common outcome, that he would like to show his former team he has got the coaching goods and can handle his business.

With McCoy in his second stint as the team's offensive coordinator, the Denver Broncos will open the season against the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night. The Chargers hired McCoy to be their head coach in 2013 -- and fired him four seasons later, in 2016.

McCoy takes an even-keel, close-to-the-vest approach to most questions in the public domain. And this week was no different.

"I've got all the respect in the world for everyone in the organization," McCoy said. "I can't thank the Spanos family [enough] for everything, the opportunity they gave me back in 2013 to lead the organization."

A few moments later, McCoy added: "I've got a lot of respect for all those players. You've got a lot of great people, not just players, but the way every coach, every player, through some tough times, fought their tails off every day. There were no excuses. Unfortunately, we just didn't win enough games."

McCoy was one of Vance Joseph's first hires this past January as Joseph assembled his staff with the Broncos. President of football operations/general manager John Elway has heartily endorsed McCoy's return to the team because of its potential benefits to quarterback Trevor Siemian and the offense in general.

McCoy was hired as Josh McDaniels' offensive coordinator in 2009 and was retained in 2011 when John Fox was hired to replace McDaniels, who had been fired with four games remaining in the 2010 season. McCoy stayed with the Broncos until after the 2012 season -- Peyton Manning's first with team -- when he was hired by the Chargers.

But injuries, the franchise's prospective move to Los Angeles and consistent struggles to close out close games resulted in McCoy's firing after the Chargers went 27-37 in his tenure. The Broncos have just two players left on offense from McCoy's previous time in Denver: wide receiver Demaryius Thomas and tight end Virgil Green.

And Thomas, for one, believes no matter what has been said this week, McCoy wouldn't be sad if the Broncos' offense made a case for him.

"Absolutely," Thomas said with a smile. "If you were the head coach for the Chargers and you got fired, you play them on Monday night, what would you want to do? I'd try to put 100 up if I could. I don't know if that's possible, but I'd try."

The game Monday will be the first real look at how much McCoy's latest version of the playbook resembles the one he and the Broncos staff put together for Manning in 2012. The Broncos were more than a little vanilla, as expected, in the preseason, but McCoy was given some specific orders from Joseph before the offseason program began.

Joseph wanted the Broncos to run the ball better (they were 27th in the league last season), protect the quarterback better (Siemien had shoulder surgery in the offseason from the punishment he took) and score more consistently. The Broncos were 22nd in scoring, one of 11 teams that did not average at least 21 points a game.

"[McCoy is] smart, he's super-duper smart," running back C.J. Anderson said. "Definitely put us in the right position to be successful and to make plays. That's something that we haven't had over here in a while. We're definitely excited about that. If I had to pick one thing from him, it would definitely be being smart and having that swag and sass about it."

Mike McCoy faces Chargers to begin 2nd stint in Denver

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

September 10, 2017

Mike McCoy is calling the plays again instead of the shots. His second stint as Denver's offensive coordinator begins Monday night against the Chargers, the team that fired him as their head coach nine months ago.

McCoy won't say it, but wide receiver Demaryius Thomas thinks McCoy would like to stick it to his former team.

"Absolutely. If you were the head coach for the Chargers and you got fired, you play them on Monday night, what would you want to do? I'd try to put up 100 if I could," Thomas said. "I know it's impossible, but I'd try."

There are other reasons this is a big game for the Broncos : It's a divisional game in the ultra-competitive AFC West, where teams can ill afford a home loss. Plus, the Chiefs are already riding high thanks to their 42-27 rout at New England in the NFL kickoff.

So, facing familiar faces doesn't necessarily add to his fire.

"I give all the respect in the world for everyone in the organization. I can't thank the Spanos family enough for everything and the opportunity they gave me back in 2013 to lead their organization," said McCoy, who went 27-37 in San Diego with one playoff appearance — a loss to Denver after his first season.

"I have a lot of respect for all of those players," McCoy said. "A lot of great people, not just players but the way every coach and every player through some tough times fought their tails off every day. There was no excuse as we just showed up to work every day, but unfortunately we didn't win enough games. We're excited here and that's the thing now. I've got a new home and we're ready to go."

Vance Joseph's first move as the Broncos coach was hiring McCoy, whose return to Denver has been celebrated by the offensive players.

"It's been great," said Thomas, who thrived under McCoy's tutelage early in his career, whether he was catching passes from Tim Tebow or Peyton Manning. "It's been great for the new guys that came around and learned the offense. You can see the excitement on their faces to get the season started."

The Broncos are expecting better production offensively after petering out under Rick Dennison and Gary Kubiak last year.

They beefed up their backfield, adding veteran Jamaal Charles and rookie De'Angelo Henderson, and they added venom to their O-line with first-round draft pick Garrett Bolles and free agents Allen Barbre, Ronald Leary and Menelik Watson.

The biggest addition, however, might very well be McCoy.

"I think Mike McCoy is a chess master," said tight end Virgil Green, one of just two players who were on the roster the last time McCoy was calling the plays for the Broncos. "He knows how to call plays, set plays up and how to set plays up that he was setting up two weeks ago. He's a wizard so I think him calling the plays and our coaches wanting us to understand why we're doing certain things is ultimately going to lead to our success."

Thomas likes the renewed focus on putting defenses on their toes instead of just controlling the clock.

"He's the same Mike McCoy that I knew three or four years ago," Thomas said. "He wants to go out and put as many points as he can on any team. Just go out and blow everybody out. He wants to give his playmakers the ball."

Notes: NT Zack Kerr (knee) and DE Jared Crick (back) were ruled out for the game and NT Kyle Peko (foot) is questionable.

Woody Paige: Broncos are value-added in 2017, but it might not be enough in talented division

By Woody Paige

KMGH

September 10, 2017

The Broncos definitely are a value-added team this year.

"Value-added" in business signifies that a company takes a homogenous product that is similar to merchandise offered by competitors and vastly improves it with significant changes.

Think of a potato chip brand with fresh flavors, different packaging, better taste, healthier alternatives and lower costs.

But, will all that marketing sell potato chips?

The Broncos have new coaches and new players and a new offensive scheme, and more depth and more experience and more accountability.

But, will all that additional value result in a Return to Glory?

Yes, the Broncos of 2017 will be superior to the Broncos of 2016.

Problem is, the competition in the AFC West is stronger. The opposing franchises have value-added teams, too.

Look at the Chiefs, for instance.

LOOK at what they did Thursday night in New England. They chewed up the Super Bowl champions, and spit them out like seeds.

The Chiefs already were a playoff team with a 12-4 record, and they value-added running back Kareem Hunt, who set the record for most yardage for a rookie in his inaugural appearance. They shut down GOAT Tom Brady (who played like he was 40), perplexed Bill Belichick, stopped the Patriots on third- and four-and-one, rallied from a halftime-deficit (which never happens in Gillette Stadium) and unleashed blur Tyreek Hill again. And Alex Smith threw the ball downfield, rather than dinking and dunking all night, and was All-World in the NFL opener – out-Bradying Brady.

Someone even suggested afterward that the Chiefs could go undefeated. Give me a break, but give them props.

The Raiders have value-added Marshawn Lynch, last seen two seasons ago being an exceptional running back for the Seahawks. The Raiders tied the Chiefs with a 12-4 record last season (and lost the division title on a tiebreaker) and were only Carr-wrecked in the playoffs because of an injury to Derek Carr. The young, electric Carr is back and now healthy and wealthy. Jack Del Rio, late of the Broncos, has done a magnificent job of turning around the Raiders.

Then, there's the Chargers, now in Los Angeles instead of San Diego. They won only five games in '16 and dismissed coach Mike McCoy, who has returned to the Broncos as offensive coordinator. The Chargers still have Philip Rivers and possess two outstanding outside rushers, and that bandbox soccer stadium they will play in this year will be, in my opinion, a positive switch. The Broncos and the Raiders would go into Qualcomm Stadium with thousands of fans and eliminate the home-field advantage. This season 25,000 Broncos' loyalties won't be able to attend the game. Season tickets are sold out. Orange won't dominate the stadium.

The Chiefs, the Raiders and the Chargers have to be better. The Chiefs have just proven themselves convincingly. The Raiders are being picked as a Super Bowl team by several "experts," and the Chargers will be a factor in the division.

The predictions on the Broncos are from 6-10 (last in the division) to 11-5 (wild card team).

The Broncos, who were winning five and six division games every year, finished 2-4 last season (losing twice to K.C. and splitting with the other two). This year, at best, the Broncos will end up 3-3 in the AFC West, winning at home and failing on the road.

The Broncos virtually were untouchable at Mile High stadium during the regular season of the Peyton Manning Era. They were touched, and torched, for three defeats last season in Denver.

And this year's schedule is no bargain in Denver and away. It is, based on last year's results, among the three toughest in the NFL. Every road game is a serious challenge. Even Buffalo. By Dec. 14, Andrew Luck definitely will be on the field in Indianapolis. In south Florida the Broncos will have to confront Adam Gase and, ye gads, Jay Cutler. Philadelphia and Washington (those dreaded eastern 11 a.m. kickoffs) will not be easy on Sunday morning.

Prevailing in three games in other locales might be a real achievement.

Winning all eight home games will be difficult. The Cowboys, the Giants and those dastardly Patriots – and the three division foes -- will create bold problems for a first-year head coach and a team loaded with first- and second-year players (16, at least).

The Broncos are more value-added, but more victory-challenged this season.

After the opening weekend of the NFL season, I'll be specific about the Broncos' forecast in Monday's column. Tune in.

Broncos Fever Mobile to reach fans across the state

By Staff

KMGH

September 10, 2017

This Broncos season, you may see the Broncos Fever Mobile in your neighborhood.

The mobile unit is a lab devoted to the study and treatment of Broncos Fever. The full-size, revamped ambulance is equipped with the most innovative fanademic tools and response team. It patrols the streets, responding to documented cases of Broncos Fever everywhere.

This season, UCHHealth will be distributing free take-home colorectal cancer screening kits alongside the Broncos Fever mobile unit at select events.

Although colorectal cancer is the the third-most common cancer in both men and women in the United States, it is also one of the most curable if caught early.

UCHHealth seeks to raise awareness that more than half of all cases can be prevented through early detection with annual screenings.

Broncos Injury Report: Zach Kerr, Jared Crick ruled out for Monday night against Chargers

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 10, 2017

Defensive ends Zach Kerr (knee bruise) and Jared Crick (back spasms) were ruled out for Monday night's regular-season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers, Head Coach Vance Joseph announced after practice Saturday morning.

Kerr and Crick will be joined on the sideline by running back Devontae Booker (fractured wrist) and Paxton Lynch (sprained right shoulder).

Crick, who was injured during practice Aug. 14, practiced Monday, Wednesday and Thursday before sitting out the last two days. Kerr, who suffered his injury against the Green Bay Packers on Aug. 26, has not practiced since then.

"I think Jared is getting better, but he's not well enough to play a football game right now," Joseph said. "And in our opinion, if we put him out there this week -- which we could probably -- it would hurt us moving down the road. As a group discussion, we thought resting him this week would help us down the road with Jared Crick."

Nose tackle Kyle Peko is listed as questionable, but he practiced throughout the last two weeks after being moved off the physically-unable-to-perform list because of a foot injury he suffered during OTAs.

"Kyle Peko has gotten better fast," Joseph said. "He practiced the last two days and looked OK."

With two defensive linemen out and Peko questionable, Joseph said that he was not yet sure whether he would make a roster move to bolster the defensive line before Monday's game.

"Every option is going to be explored," Joseph said.

With Kerr and Crick out, Adam Gotsis and Shelby Harris are likely to see extensive playing time. Gotsis started the preseason games against the 49ers and Packers because of injuries to Crick and Derek Wolfe, and Harris worked with the first team against Green Bay after Kerr was injured, setting him up for a three-sack performance that helped secure his place on the 53-man roster.

"When you watch the San Fran[cisco] game, when you watch the Green Bay game, those guys played well," Joseph said. "So that's what I expect on Monday night. That's why they're here. Gotsis is a second-round pick; he's a guy with a bright future, and Shelby Harris had a hell of a camp."

"What they did in preseason, I expect them to do on Monday night. That's why they're here."

Harris' preseason play caught the eye of Wolfe.

"I'm really impressed with Shelby," Wolfe said. "I thought Shelby had all the tangibles to be a good player, anyways -- just his build and his quickness and his strength, he's a strong guy. He comes out every day, and he's working. He wasn't used to [Defensive Line Coach] Bill Kollar's up-tempo individual drills and stuff like that, but once he got used to it, he's just done nothing but getting better, so I'm happy with that."

OTHER NOTES:

... Joseph added that Booker is "on schedule" in his recovery, but said that he did not have an exact timetable as to his return. Booker has not practiced since OTAs because of his injury.

... Running back Jamaal Charles had another full practice Saturday after getting Thursday off to rest and is "ready to go," Joseph said.

Westwood One's Ed Werder recalls his youth watching the Broncos, looks ahead to this season

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
September 10, 2017

Ed, before we get to the football, I found some of your tennis scores from your days at Longmont High School. You beat Buzz Voss of Poudre High School 6-1, 6-1 in 1977. I thought you might like to know.

"A lot of people went down 6-1, 6-1 or worse. We had a really good team. We actually finished fifth in state, and my senior year, I made the state semifinals over in Boulder. That's where we played. So I didn't get meals and lodging for my state appearance, but I made the state semifinals and then I lost to some silver-spooner from Cherry Creek, like we all do."

As a Longmont High alumnus, class of 1978, what memories of the Broncos' first Super Bowl run do you have from your high-school days?

"Living in Longmont from the time I was in eighth grade, I was certainly captivated by the NFL, even at that age, and the Broncos were obviously the local team and they were always competing with the Raiders to try to get to win the division and go to the playoffs every year. So yeah, I remember Matt Robinson, I remember Craig Morton. Dave Preston was kind of the star running back at the time. I obviously knew Floyd Little. So we were very interested when they went to their first Super Bowl, which didn't go so well. I remember later asking Craig Morton what he remembered about that game in the Superdome and he said, 'The ceiling.'"

"But I remember Jon Keyworth's 'Make Those Miracles Happen.' I remember Rob Lytle's touchdown in the playoff game. I remember Tom Jackson and running an interception back down the Raiders' sideline and telling John Madden, 'It's all over, fat man.' I remember all of those things."

After high school and college, how did the Broncos become your first pro sports beat?

"I graduated from Northern Colorado and early in my career I got a job replacing — well, not replacing — but I took the spot of Rick Reilly at the Boulder Daily Camera. So the Broncos were the first team I covered on a daily basis. And Dan Reeves was the head coach, and our circulation didn't really justify Dan Reeves treating me like he did the reporters from the Denver Post and the Rocky Mountain News at the time, but he did. And I've never forgotten that about Dan. And obviously I was very fortunate to be there at that time because Dan created a number of future NFL head coaches there that would ultimately become an important part of my coverage of the NFL, and having them as contacts and having access to them and their insights. And so I actually missed my brother's wedding. I have one brother and two sisters and I missed my brother's wedding because it was the Super Bowl that John Elway started for the first time as an NFL players. People always ask me, 'What's the greatest moment of your career as far as what you've covered?' And I've always said that it was that championship game in 1986 when John Elway led The Drive from his one-and-a-half yard line against the Cleveland Browns and put the Broncos in the Super Bowl. And my brother had the misfortune of having his wedding on Super Bowl weekend and that was the first time I was getting to be assigned to cover a Super Bowl."

What have you been doing with your time as you've been waiting to make your return to the field?

"We have a lot of family in Colorado and I guess about two months after the ESPN layoffs, we went ahead and followed through with purchasing a house here as kind of second home because we have a lot of family here, including our only grandchild; little Henry is two months old and lives up in Fort Collins. We've spent a lot of time here. We're from here. We love the mountains and the outdoor kind of mentality that exists here. In Dallas, everybody plays golf and does that sort of thing, and here it's more people are riding their bikes and hiking and kayaking and white-water rafting and we've done some of or many of those things and have just sort of gotten re-acclimated here. And ultimately we may choose between whether we live in Colorado again or [Dallas]. We'll keep our home in Dallas, but I always thought we would retire to Colorado; I just didn't expect it to be this soon.

"I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out what I'm going to do next. I have two years left on my ESPN contract and so they're obligated to honor that. At the same time, they've made us aware we also have obligations and so getting another full-time position has been difficult because anything I try to do, it has to be approved by them, including this handful of games I'm going to do on a freelance basis for Westwood One this year, starting with the Monday night game, Chargers-Broncos."

Turning toward the game, have you gotten a chance to talk with the coaches on both sides?

"Yeah, I didn't talk to Vance [Joseph] yet, but I suspect I'll see him on the field pregame. I did get some time with [Offensive Coordinator] Mike McCoy and [Defensive Coordinator] Joe Woods. I've known Mike for quite a few years. Joe I don't know so well. But one of the things I like to do as a reporter, and Kurt Warner — he's doing the game with me — he sort of admonished me, playfully saying, 'You don't need to be studying up on all this material like you used to do. I just need you down on the sidelines to tell us what's going on in the game.' But I like to go in with a sense of what the coaches think, what they prioritized, how they think they have to win the game, and I think that allows me to put whatever happens that I report on the sideline into a better context."

With this being the debut game for two first-time head coaches, what kind of impressions have you gotten of Vance Joseph and Anthony Lynn?

"I know that Vance Joseph was really a very highly regarded guy throughout the league. If I'm not mistaken, the Broncos have been trying to get him since he was an assistant in Cincinnati. I'm not surprised that when Gary Kubiak decided to retire that that's the direction that John Elway went. And then Anthony Lynn, he's a Bill Parcells disciple. He believes in a physical style of football. He wants to run the ball, as a former running back. He probably could have had the job in Buffalo, but he chose instead to go to San Diego, feeling like it was a better fit for him. I think it's going to be challenging because Philip Rivers is sort of at the end of his career and this team's enduring a move, franchise relocation, and they're playing in a very intimate setting, shall we say. So I think he's got — he's up against an awful lot. Vance obviously enjoys the stability of a franchise in Denver with a lot of people in place that he's very well familiar with."

For the Broncos, what kind of expectations do you have?

"I've covered a couple games that Trevor Siemian played in last year, so maybe I have a little more — I don't know — respect for him as a quarterback than maybe some people who haven't seen him play

quite as often. He is somebody, to me, who's in a position where he's much better able to fully execute the offense that the Broncos want to run.

"I think it was no small achievement that he won the starting job because, quite honestly, I expected that Paxton Lynch would be the starting quarterback for a couple of reasons, one of which was I know Kubiak had a really strong belief in Trevor. And to lose him was a significant setback for Trevor, in terms of how the franchise viewed the quarterback position. He had to essentially, as Coach Joseph said, he had to start all over. So he didn't theoretically get credit for what he did last year, which included playing through a shoulder injury that he kept quiet. And then to know that you're starting all over and you're competing against a guy who the team's invested a first-round pick in, that he was John Elway's first-round pick — I really felt like all Paxton Lynch had to do was make it close, and it's to the credit of Trevor Siemian that it wasn't close and they were able to determine that Trevor won the job even before Paxton hurt his shoulder.

"I think people always look to the quarterback to decide if a team has a realistic chance or not, but with them, it's not inconceivable that Trevor Siemian could play at the level Peyton Manning did when the Broncos won their most recent Super Bowl because they had a good run game and a great defense. And if they can recreate those two things this year, then I think Trevor Siemian is fully capable of delivering at his position. I think he's a guy who doesn't make a lot of mistakes. He's not going to put the team in a lot of bad positions, and I would expect him to be significantly better player in his second year as a starter than he was in his first. That's the expectation for every young quarterback. They make their biggest improvement from Year 1 to Year 2, so I think that should pertain to him as well."

Next year the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Contributors Committee will have two people it can nominate as finalists. Does it feel like Pat Bowlen is a virtual lock for taking that next step at this point?

"We saw Jerry Jones go in this year, and I think a lot of that was because the Cowboys are such a visible team and Jerry has been very influential from a business point of view in creating new revenue opportunities and showing the league what the value is of new stadiums and practice facilities and all that he's done. But I think Pat Bowlen, from everything I understand, and I talked to people at FOX, like David Hill, when I was at the Hall of Fame ceremony this year, and he told me Pat Bowlen had just as much to do with that TV deal in 1993 that changed the game for the NFL from a financial point of view as Jerry Jones did, even though it seems Jerry gets all of the credit for that achievement. And if you look at [what] the performance of the franchises have been like on the football field, certainly during most recent years, the Broncos have far surpassed what the Cowboys have achieved on the field. So I think it's an inevitability and it's something that when it does happen, it'll be long overdue."

As Hurricane Irma nears Florida, Justin Simmons keeping an eye on his family

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
September 10, 2017

Justin Simmons talks to his mom pretty regularly. But these days, as Hurricane Irma threatens his family's home in Stuart, Florida, they talk even more often.

Thursday night, Simmons received a call at 9 p.m. MDT. It had been a long day of driving, but his parents had finally reached their first stop in Georgia en route to some relatives in Virginia.

"It's been a lot more often now, due to the hurricanes and things of that nature," Simmons said. "But yeah, she called me, asking a bunch of different things. We talked about flights for a little bit to get them out earlier, but they decided they were going to end up driving, due to being there for their jobs and ... there were some things they wanted to bring with them in the car up to some relatives' house. They haven't seen the relatives in a while, either, so they figured they'd turn a negative situation into a positive."

His parents are part of an estimated 5.6 million Florida residents departing the state ahead of when Irma makes landfall.

Though the hurricane's projected path has shifted toward the west coast of Florida, much of the east coast is still under partial mandatory evacuation orders, mostly for manufactured homes and homes on islands or in low-lying areas.

But regardless of where Irma makes landfall, Simmons is glad his family will be safe, though he has some concerns about the aftereffects, too.

"It's a little stressful," Simmons said. "Almost every house in Florida is made, like, hurricane prep-wise. It's made to withstand hurricanes, but the crazy thing about it is you don't get flood insurance or anything like that because in Florida, it's bound to happen and so they can't cover every single home in Florida or else they wouldn't make any money. So that side of it is pretty scary, because if your house gets flooded, there's not really much you can do about the materials you have inside your home. That part of it is pretty stressful in and of itself. Just sending many prayers that way, not only for my family but for everyone — the Caribbean. Miami is going to get hit pretty bad and so just sending prayers everyone's way."

Simmons' family isn't the only group he's worried about. As a man driven by faith, Simmons is also concerned about the impoverished people who may not have homes or means to evacuate.

"I can only imagine," Simmons said. "I don't know what I would do, putting myself in their shoes as far as not really having a place to — not only not having a place to go, but having to withstand a storm of that magnitude outside, which is almost certain of death if you're out there. You're in the middle of those gusts and winds and that rain, and even the debris coming by. You don't know what's coming out of the wind from a debris standpoint. I'm hoping there's a lot of good community service around in different

parts of the area in Florida where — maybe just for the time it's supposed to hit — the homeless can come in and at least have a few hundred sleeping bags for them to just hang out in for a few days. And I know provision is obviously a big factor into that as well, and I'm not sure what they would do with that, but hopefully in each community they have something like that."

HC Vance Joseph's unique practice schedule designed with players in mind

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 10, 2017

As Head Coach Vance Joseph begins his first season with the Broncos, he's introduced a different practice schedule than has been seen in Denver in years past — and it's all designed with player safety in mind.

In contrast with how most of the NFL operates, Joseph's typical Friday practice focuses on mental repetition and recovery. For a Monday night game, that traditional Friday practice occurred on Saturday.

The Broncos will have a short, up-tempo, move-the-ball practice on Sunday morning.

Though Joseph coached last season with Adam Gase in Miami, he picked up this practice schedule from Bengals coach Marvin Lewis. Joseph spent 2014 and 2015 in Cincinnati as Lewis' defensive backs coach.

"We did it with Marvin my second year," Joseph said, "and the reason you do it [is] you just want two recovery days vs. one. We do more work on Wednesday and Thursday and take Friday as a mental practice and a recovery day for the players. It's not a loss when you're talking about football, because the offense got 85 reps today. That's a practice and a half for us. Defensively, we got 65 reps.

"So we're not losing our game-plan knowledge, but we're gaining, in my opinion, a day of recovery for our players. It's a long season, so we want to make a point to start recovery now and not start it Week 10 in the middle of the season. So that's the point behind the schedule."

The players have already shown appreciation for Joseph's practice schedule and the way he keeps them healthy and energized.

"He's got his own schedule," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "The guys love it. It takes care of the players, and we love it. We're getting used to it, but we like it so far."

Of course, nearly all practice schedules designed to keep players fresh are relatively recent inventions. Joseph, who had a brief NFL career in the mid-1990s, said he's seen a change in the way coaches look at managing their teams.

"As we research more about the human body, we realize that recovery and sleep and what you eat is so important," Joseph said. "When I played in the league, it was six weeks of two-a-days. It was practice on Fridays with helmets and shoulder pads. It's a different league. I think it's more about education [and] just knowing [what]'s better for the human body and recovery being a huge, huge concern as far as keeping your team healthy for a 17-week season."

Broncos waive nose tackle Kyle Peko

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

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The Broncos waived second-year nose tackle Kyle Peko on Saturday ahead of their season opener Monday night against the Chargers.

Peko appeared in one game as a rookie and spent the majority of 2016 on the Broncos' practice squad.

The Broncos initially waived Peko as they formed their initial 53-man roster, but they re-signed him Sunday, Sept. 3.

Denver is thin along the defensive line heading into their game against Los Angeles.

Defensive ends Jared Crick and Zach Kerr were both ruled out for Monday's game, Head Coach Vance Joseph announced Saturday.

Derek Wolfe and Adam Gotsis are also returning from injuries. They will count on Wolfe, Gotsis, Domata Peko Sr. and Shelby Harris on Monday night.

The Broncos now have a free roster spot if they wish to look for additional help along the defensive line.

The hidden story playing out on Monday Night Football sidelines

By Mark Cannizzaro
New York Post
September 10, 2017

Former Steelers owner Dan Rooney died at age 84 in April, but his legacy as a forward thinker lives on and will be showcased in a game Monday night that doesn't even involve the Steelers.

The meeting between the Los Angeles Chargers — in their first game since the controversial move from San Diego — and the Broncos in Denver will represent a proud, historic occasion for the league.

Had it not been for the “Rooney Rule,” which requires every team with a vacancy at head coach or general manager to interview at least one minority candidate, two African-American men making their respective head coaching debuts — Vance Joseph with the Broncos and Anthony Lynn with the Chargers — might not have gotten their opportunities.

Rooney, once the head of the NFL's diversity committee, is the man who is credited with creating the rule. And Joseph and Lynn have him to thank.

Monday's game will be the first time two black coaches have made their regular-season debuts with their NFL teams during the same game. Making it an even more poignant moment is the fact the two coaches have been friends for years.

Because they're coaching in the same division, the AFC West, if they both prosper, Monday night at Mile High Stadium figures to be the first of many meetings between them as head coaches.

Joseph and Lynn were teammates for a short time in Denver. They, too, both have ties to the Jets, though at different times in their lives. Joseph made the Jets as a free agent in 1995, along with Wayne Chrebet, when Rich Kotite was the Jets coach. Lynn was an assistant coach on Rex Ryan's staff from 2009-14.

“If I do a good job, it won't be an issue in the future for the Broncos to hire the next black head coach,” Joseph said recently in an interview with ESPN. “That's important to me. I take this responsibility very seriously. It means something to me.”

John Elway, the Broncos' executive vice president of football operations/general manager, insisted he wasn't seeking a minority for his new head coach to replace Gary Kubiak.

“To me, ‘VJ’ happens to be black, but to me it doesn't matter,” Elway told ESPN. “Having been in this game for so long, I don't see color. I want to get the best football coaches to give those kids [in the locker room] the best opportunity to be the best they can be and win championships. Having been there, and the experience that I've got, that's what's so important. I'm able to draw from what I liked about my favorite coaches. That's what matters to me about ‘VJ.’ ”

Joseph takes over a Broncos team that's just two years removed from winning the super Bowl and one with a loaded defense. Lynn takes over a Chargers team that went 5-11 last season, but Lynn actually was head coach for one game last season — as the interim Bills coach after Ryan was fired.

“Anthony, man, I’ve known him for a long time,” Joseph told ESPN. “He’s in his first year and I’m in my first year ... but only as head coaches. We’re not new to coaching. We’ve been doing this for a while. It’ll be fun.”

Coming to an NFL game near you, the Zero1, a helmet that helps guard against brain injuries

By Trent Gillies

CNBC

September 10, 2017

It's September, and the National Football League has returned. Yet shadowing the game again this season are growing concerns about players' brain health and safety.

In July, a neurological study revealed that the brains of more than 100 former football players were found to have a disease known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a condition linked to frequent blows to the head and concussions. CTE has become a hot button topic in the NFL, with the league going out of its way to safeguard players from its ravages.

"This has become not a sports protection problem, but a public health concern," VICIS CEO and co-founder Dave Marver told CNBC's "On the Money" recently. VICIS is a Seattle-based startup that's developed a new type of football helmet — called the Zero1 — they say can reduce the game's impact on the brain.

"70 NFL players are using it already out of the gate," Marver said. In Thursday night's Patriots-Chiefs season opener, "about a dozen of the Kansas City Chiefs were wearing the Zero1," including quarterback Alex Smith, Marver said.

In a laboratory study, the NFL and the NFL Players Association tested 33 helmets from different manufacturers, and the VICIS Zero1 came out on top.

Already, "about half the NFL teams have purchased this helmet already. So we think that's terrific for the first year."

VICIS's helmet comes with a \$1,500 price tag, which is about three to five times more costly than current helmets.

Compared to the existing equipment in use, Marver said VICIS's more flexible helmet has "been completely redesigned. Today's helmets have a hard outer shell and a little bit of padding. This one actually yields like a car bumper when impacted."

Players who've used it, "say it feels different in a collision," Marver told CNBC. "They're not feeling the severity of the impact as much. They're not having 'white-out' moments, they're not seeing stars."

Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson, who uses the helmet, told Marver that "he likes that he can see the whole field." Other players say they "appreciate the wider field of view and that's both a safety and a performance feature."

Earlier this year, researchers at Boston University's CTE Center found evidence of the degenerative brain disease in the brains of 110 of the 111 deceased NFL players they had studied.

The study added to the raging discussion about player safety, and the NFL has raised the bar on on-field penalties that could hurt players. That said, can a different helmet design stop concussions from occurring?

"...We're not claiming it can prevent concussions," Marver said. "However, it is the best helmet ever tested at reducing the severity of head impacts."

He acknowledged that "a helmet alone isn't going to take care of everything. It has to be accompanied by better tackling techniques, better coaching and so forth. But we're hopeful this is going to make a big difference."

Broncos rule out two defensive linemen, cut another

By Josh Alper

Pro Football Talk

September 10, 2017

The Broncos are down to four healthy defensive linemen for Monday night's game against the Chargers.

The team's final injury report before their opener listed defensive ends Jared Crick and Zach Kerr as out for the game.

Crick hurt his back at a practice during training camp in August and was able to get in a limited practice to start the week, but his absence from the lineup is no surprise after he missed Friday and Saturday. Kerr missed practice all week with a knee injury.

In addition to ruling out Crick and Kerr, the Broncos also announced that they have waived defensive tackle Kyle Peko. They waived Peko during the cut to 53 players and then brought him back the next day.

Derek Wolfe, Domata Peko, Adam Gotsis and Shelby Harris now make up the defensive line options and the team has an open roster spot they can fill before Monday night's game kicks off.