

Jhabvala vs. Kiz: Are all those sacks hazardous to the health of Trevor Siemian?

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Are all these sacks hazardous to the health of Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian?

Kiz: With a 3-1 record, the Broncos stand tall in the NFL standings. But is it safe for quarterback Trevor Siemian to stand in the pocket? Thirteen sacks in four games? Not good. In fact, Siemian is getting sacked on 9.35 percent of his dropbacks, which not only ranks 27th in the league, it's significantly worse than a year ago, when his sack rate was 6.56 percent.

Jhabvala: I don't think there is any scenario in which taking sacks is healthy for a quarterback. Pass protection is undoubtedly the biggest issue for the Broncos' new-look offensive line. The run game has been revived and the offense, in comparison to last year's, is much more productive. But Siemian has been hit 24 times and is on pace for 52 sacks this season. Pressure was expected early this season, given the caliber of pass-rushers they've faced already, but the lagging protection has made Siemian vulnerable.

Kiz: We all know sacks are detrimental to the health of scoring drives, and they're particularly worrisome for Siemian, whose history of injury, dating back to his college days at Northwestern, is well-documented. The Broncos have a choice: Either Siemian starts standing in a cleaner pocket, or Brock Osweiler will be standing in the Denver huddle as an injury replacement at quarterback. Can the tackles be counted on to protect Siemian from edge rushers?

Jhabvala: It's their job to protect the quarterback. The edges have been the biggest issues for the Broncos' line for the past three seasons, really, but this time of year should serve as a reminder. It was Week 4 of 2016 when Siemian was pummeled in Tampa Bay and suffered a shoulder sprain that he played with the rest of the season.

Kiz: The most significant play of Denver's 16-10 victory against Oakland came when Raiders quarterback Derek Carr suffered a back injury that could sideline him for a month or more. In the instant Carr went down, the Broncos took Oakland down a notch in the playoff race. Lose Siemian to injury, and that advantage would be gone, with the Denver offense in the same scramble mode now faced by the Raiders.

Jhabvala: Siemian's health is vital to this offense. It's easy to forget he's started only 18 games in his career and he'll make mistakes that a relatively inexperienced quarterback will make. But he's also a smart quarterback who will improve if given space to operate. The Broncos have provided support around him, with a deep running back group and a pair of Pro Bowl receivers in Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. But the line has to provide better protection. When this offense, with a healthy Siemian, is running on all cylinders, it's an impressive group. Perhaps underrated, even. But it won't be with Siemian on the sidelines.

Lunch Special: Which Broncos RB should be getting the bulk of the carries?

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The Denver Post's Nicki Jhabvala on Tuesday answered reader questions about the Denver Broncos in a live chat. Here are the highlights:

How is Shane Ray's rehab going and when is he scheduled to return?

Nicki: Shane Ray is on schedule with his recovery from wrist surgery. He told me last week that he has resumed on-field activities and will get the pins removed from his wrist in the coming days.

Ray was placed on injured reserve before the start of the season with the intent of being recalled in time for the Broncos' Week 8 game at his hometown, Kansas City, on Oct. 30. The plan holds. In fact, he's counting down the days (check his Twitter).

From what you've seen, which RB do you think should be getting the bulk of the carries?

Nicki: Vance Joseph has said many times that he wants C.J. Anderson to be the bell-cow back. Through the first four weeks, Anderson has taken the bulk of the reps and produced. He leads the team 82.5 yards per game and is on pace for 292 carries on the season. He's never had more than 179 in a season.

The Broncos have plenty of depth at running back this year, and with the recent return of Devontae Booker, it'll be interesting to see how they share the reps. But it's certainly a good "problem" to have. When they signed Jamaal Charles, the plan was to have him be a sparkplug on situational downs, and he's been just that. I think he's surprised some people with his play after multiple knee surgeries, but not the Broncos. This is what they hoped he would be for them.

Asked about the RB rotation going forth, Joseph said yesterday: "All three guys played well (Sunday). I thought C.J. played really well, breaking tackles, ripping off big runs. He was great in the pass game and he was great with protections. Jamaal Charles looks more explosive each and every week. He's played so he's close to making some big plays for us. That's been fun to watch Jamaal just burst through the line with great speed. 'Book' played well. He played solid yesterday running the football and in protections. On (A.J.) Derby's touchdown pass in high red zone, Book made the key block to block the safety. For a young guy who hadn't played much football this year to make that block was key for us there. I've been very impressed with Jamaal and C.J. Obviously having Book back that just makes us better there."

My opinion: Their plan at RB seems to be working.

Do you think this Broncos defense is better than the Super Bowl 50 team?

Nicki: This defense is good, especially against the run. Just look at the numbers: a league-low 50.8 yards allowed per game for an average of 2.42 yards per carry by opponents. It's held starting opposing RBs —

Los Angeles' Melvin Gordon, Dallas' Ezekiel Elliott, Buffalo's LeSean McCoy and Oakland's Marshawn Lynch — to only 1.9 yards per carry.

Denver's stifling run defense has been among the NFL's biggest surprises this season, considering it ranked 28th last season with an average of 130.3 rushing yards allowed per game. Even though this group has many of the same faces from the Super Bowl 50 unit, the defense is slightly different.

Now, if they can eliminate those big passing plays by opponents, especially late, they could be lethal. Currently Denver's pass defense ranks 10th in the NFL with 210 yards allowed per game.

What is the main reason why the Broncos' defense is so strong against the run this season?

Nicki: For starters their defensive line got bigger and welcomed some new faces. Derek Wolfe is healthier and added weight in the offseason, and has so far been a force against the run. Adam Gotsis has a year under his belt and packed on muscle, too. And perhaps most significant, they signed Domata Peko to be the anchor.

When he was in Cincinnati, Peko played in more of a read defensive line, so the Bengals never really utilized his size. Here, he's more of an attacking nose guard that capitalizes on his 6-foot-3, 325-pound frame.

Denver also signed Zach Kerr and Shelby Harris, who has been a big-play machine for the Broncos.

But the personnel is only the half of it. Denver also changed some things schematically to fit the run game. Their backers are getting downhill faster so the double teams are as hard on the interior defensive linemen.

Do you think the Broncos can win a Super Bowl with this offensive line and Trevor Siemian?

Nicki: They won a Super Bowl with a declining Peyton Manning, almost no run game and a piecemeal offensive line. I guess anything's possible when you have a great defense.

Broncos rushing game, now with full complement of backs, may just be hitting its stride

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
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C.J. Anderson stood on the sideline during the first quarter Sunday and watched veteran Jamaal Charles dart up the middle of the field for an electric 16-yard run.

In the second quarter, as he grabbed another breather, Anderson saw second-year back Devontae Booker give the Broncos a lift with back-to-back 5-yard runs with his first two carries of the season.

Anderson had gained only 26 yards on 10 carries in the first quarter, but even as he struggled to make headway against the Raiders' defense, the Denver backfield flourished as the team built a 10-0 lead. Anderson may be the "bell cow," as coach Vance Joseph has called him, but the Broncos proved Sunday their rushing attack is anything but a one-trick pony.

"I think it's going to go the way it's going to go," Anderson said. "We knew we all were going to play. We knew that when Jamaal got over here that we were all going to play. We're all going to have our time and have our moments to make plays. We all have different roles and we use our roles and our abilities within the game in the different roles."

Anderson's time came during the Broncos' first drive of the third quarter. After lowering his shoulder into the Raiders' defense with little to show for it in the first half, he started chipping away with an 8-yard burst up the middle. On the next play, Anderson broke loose, burning through a big hole on the right side for a 40-yard run that put the Broncos in position to take a 13-7 lead.

"In the beginning, (there was) a little frustration," said Anderson, who finished with 95 yards on 20 carries. "I kept telling myself, just keep grinding and stay with it. Keep grinding, trust your boys up front and things will happen. That's what happened today."

Their 16-10 victory Sunday gave the Broncos their first look at the possibilities presented by a full complement of starting-caliber running backs, and the results were encouraging. Anderson, Charles and Booker, who missed all of training camp and the first three games this season as he recovered from wrist surgery, combined for 174 total yards — 143 of which came on the ground. The three players were shuffled often in the first half by offensive coordinator Mike McCoy and running backs coach Eric Stutesville, each providing a different look.

Joseph lauded the tough running of Anderson, the increasingly "explosive" playmaking of Charles (47 yards on six touches) and the pass blocking of Booker, who made a key pick-up on blitzing Raiders safety Reggie Nelson when Trevor Siemian threw a first-quarter touchdown pass to tight end A.J. Derby.

"For a young guy who hadn't played much football this year to make that block was key for us there," Joseph said. "I've been very impressed with Jamaal and C.J. Obviously, having 'Book' back just makes us better there."

Anderson has often repeated his belief this season that Denver's running scheme is the perfect fit for the offensive line the team has assembled in the offseason. But the interchangeable success they've had in the backfield, he said after Sunday's game, goes beyond personnel for the Broncos.

"We know what the O-line is saying. The O-line is knowing what we're seeing and what we're saying," he said. "(Offensive line) coach (Jeff) Davidson and coach Stuedesville, we understand what they're saying (with) their plays and what's being talked back to us. We can all pretty much be on the same page and that's something that we want to keep doing."

With Booker back in the fold, the Broncos boast what could be the deepest running back room in the league. Rookie De'Angelo Henderson, who was inactive for the first time this season Sunday, has still yet to be involved in the offense. And talented second-year player Jonathan Williams resides on the team's practice squad.

Denver enters its bye week tied for third in the NFL in rushing at 143 yards per game. And now sporting their full complement of running backs, the Broncos may just be getting started.

"If you're dressed on game day, you're probably going to be in the backfield somehow," McCoy said. "We're just going to go with the flow of that. They're all unselfish and they all just want to win."

Broncos notes: Justin Houston late touchdown buzzes Broncos locker room

By Mike Klis

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On meeting day during the bye week Tuesday, one of the conversation topics in the Broncos' locker room was about how much money must have changed hands with Justin Houston's fumble recovery for a touchdown on the final play of the game Monday night.

Houston's touchdown wasn't necessary for the Kansas City Chiefs, as had he fallen on the ball, time would have ran out with a 23-20 win against Washington. But his touchdown off Washington's failed, multi-lateral, desperation play made it 29-20.

"I would have done the same thing," said Von Miller, the Broncos' version of Justin Houston. "Because at the end of the season, all they show is the defensive touchdown return. They don't ask how."

Houston's score may have been insignificant to the game. But it was extremely significant to bettors because Kansas City was favored by 6.5 to 7.5 points. A 23-20 win would have meant those who bet on Washington won. The 29-20 score meant Kansas City won the game and the wagers.

In general, the public majority usually bets with the favorite. So more people than not likely considered the Houston play an incredible stroke of good luck.

Jay Kornegay, who runs the Westgate Las Vegas Super Book, said the amount of money that changed hands on that final play was in "the small six figures."

Still, gamblers know losing hurts more than winning feels good. There might be a run on living room wall repairs this week in the nation's capital.

Parks scores

Pro Football Focus gave Broncos safety Will Parks high marks for his performance Sunday against the Oakland Raiders. The scouting site added it wasn't sure what position Parks plays as he seems to play safety, linebacker and cornerback.

"That's good," Parks said, smiling. "I think right now it's called a hybrid, or rover if you want to call it."

Parks' versatility has turned the Broncos into a "dime" defensive team as he's even though he's their third safety, he's played 61.4 percent of the defensive snaps through four games.

"When you're out there for that many different (sub) packages, it just shows they have confidence that you can stop the run," he said. "That's the big thing for me is stopping the run. But I'm also covering at least 50 percent of the time."

He covered so well one play, Raiders' quarterback Derek Carr hit him in the hip.

“That ball specifically, on film he throws that ball between the numbers and the sideline so I played it that way but he threw it quick and I wasn’t looking,” Parks said. “If I was looking I would have been able to catch it for a pick.”

Booker’s return

Devontae Booker was in for eight offensive plays as the Broncos’ No. 3 running back against the Raiders and got three carries for 14 yards.

Booker had missed training camp, the preseason and first three games of the regular season because of a fractured right wrist.

“It was more building that confidence back,” he said. “You do a lot of stuff as a running back between pass protection and catching the ball and running the ball. It’s just getting confident with my wrist. Getting hit on it. I got hit on it two or three times in (Sunday’s) game and it felt great. Can’t wait to see what next week has got in store for me.”

Early returns say Broncos may have answered biggest offseason questions

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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A 3-1 start is not a mandate for how things will go for the Denver Broncos after this week's bye, but it offers a glimpse the Broncos may have found answers to what were their biggest offseason questions.

They are ranked No. 1 in run defense, No. 3 in rushing offense and safety Justin Simmons has already put a win-preserving interception on his résumé as a first-year starter.

"I think that's true," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr. "We had to get some things worked out and I think we did. Everybody knows we started 4-0 last year and didn't make the playoffs, but so far we've done some things better."

Start with the run defense. The Broncos were a dismal 28th in the league last season, having allowed 135.2 yards per game on the ground.

And that meant, despite fielding a unit that led the league in pass defense for the second consecutive year and was ranked No. 4 overall, the Broncos weren't able to close the deal in enough games as opponents simply pounded away on the ground. But the defensive line got plenty of attention in the offseason, including the addition of nose tackle Domata Peko.

Peko's arrival and some defensive tweaks to get the linebackers more involved around the line of scrimmage have contributed to the most drastic improvement the Broncos have made anywhere on the field. The Broncos have allowed just 50.8 yards rushing per game and held Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch to a combined 95 yards rushing and no rushing touchdowns in the first four games.

"We want to be the best defense, and in order for us to be the best defense, we have to take out all the top dogs on offense," said linebacker Shaquil Barrett. "We have those guys on our schedule, so we can prove against the top offensive lines that we are great."

The Broncos' own run game, which consistently frustrated former coach Gary Kubiak -- he called it "one of my biggest disappointments last season" -- has flourished. The Broncos' new arrivals on the offensive line -- rookie left tackle Garrett Bolles as well as free agents Ron Leary, Menelik Watson and Allen Barbre -- have helped power an offense that has rushed for 143 yards per game.

The Broncos will continue to try to divvy up the carries among running backs C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles and Devontae Booker. But coach Vance Joseph made running the ball a priority, and the Broncos have rushed at least 30 times in each of their wins so far this season.

"It's just game by game, day by day, and it starts with practice," Anderson said. "... We definitely emphasize it so much more. ... We can all pretty much be on the same page and that's something that we want to keep doing."

And then there's Simmons, the second-year safety whose emergence in training camp and the preseason was the biggest reason the Broncos released T.J. Ward in September when rosters league-wide went to 53 players. Ward had been to two of his three career Pro Bowls in his time with the Broncos. He was an important voice in the team's locker room, and his departure fueled plenty of drive-time conversation on the local airwaves.

But Simmons has shown to be a sure tackler, and his leaping interception in the closing minutes of Sunday's 16-10 win against the Oakland Raiders was, his teammates said, an example of the athleticism he brings to the position.

"I think Justin has played better the last two weeks," Joseph said. "The first couple of weeks I thought he played a little cautious. [Sunday] and in Buffalo he played like Justin should play. He has great range. He's a great athlete and he's a smart guy. He's playing with more confidence as we play more here."

"There are obviously big expectations," Joseph said. "T.J. was a huge mentor to me and he was like a big brother, and so I wanted to do well, not only for Broncos Country, but for him as well. He helped me so much my first year and still to this day. ... Whether T.J. stayed or left, there would have been big shoes to fill regardless."

So far so good for Trevor Siemian, but the Broncos want more after bye

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Maybe it's because he was voted as a team captain a few months before his 25th birthday, maybe it's because folks have been talking about him and the Denver Broncos' quarterback job in some fashion for almost two years, but Trevor Siemian is still just 25 and sometimes he's going to play that way.

The Broncos are 3-1 as they work through their bye week and they reside in the division that happens to contain the NFL's only undefeated team -- the 4-0 Kansas City Chiefs. So, though the Broncos certainly like -- a lot -- what Siemian has done to this point, they will need their second-year starter to be all that and more when the team gets back to the field.

"He's still a young player," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph. " ... Trevor has done a lot of really good things, he's a really, really good young player, but we're always going to keep working at things. He knows that."

In the season's early going Siemian's four-touchdown day against the Dallas Cowboys is kind of the model of what the Broncos hope to see. He was efficient -- 68.8 percent completion rate -- and the Broncos were 4-of-4 scoring touchdowns in the red zone.

But Siemian had two interceptions in the Broncos' loss to the Buffalo Bills, including one when he was trying to throw the ball away. And in Sunday's win against the Raiders, he was sacked four times.

Joseph was clear that Siemian must take better care of the ball after the loss to the Bills, and Siemian later said he had to treat it like it was "a billion dollar football." After the Oakland game, Joseph said not all of the sacks were on the Broncos' pass protection.

"We had four sacks ... two were probably protection and two were probably Trevor," Joseph said. "He can throw the ball away, he can have a better feel in the pocket. He understands that ... As we play more games, he'll get a better feel in the pocket and know when the plays have expired."

The Broncos are tied for third in the league in rushing behind an offensive line that was retooled in the offseason, but that same offensive line has had moments in pass protection when it has looked out of sync. Siemian, who has taken his share of hits already, is tied for the fifth-most sacked quarterback in the league -- 13 times -- but has plenty of big-name company on the list. The four quarterbacks ahead of him are Carson Palmer, Alex Smith, Aaron Rodgers and Andy Dalton. Siemian is tied with Tom Brady.

Since Siemian played most of the 2016 season with a left shoulder injury that required surgery this past offseason, the amount of punishment he takes in the pocket will always be a concern for the Broncos. And despite their success running the ball, the Broncos' passing game in the new offense continues to be a work in progress.

There have been moments -- like the win against the Cowboys or the first quarter against the Raiders when Siemian threw for 140 yards -- when the Broncos have looked as good as any of the league's high-end attacks. But defenses continue to direct much of their coverage efforts toward wide receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders with the idea the Broncos won't be able to consistently protect well enough for Siemian to get to the third and fourth options.

When he does, like the two touchdown passes to Bennie Fowler this season or tight end A.J. Derby's four-catch day Sunday, the offense moves the ball. But that will have to consistently happen before defenses adjust and direct some of the help on Thomas and Sanders elsewhere.

"I just felt like we were always one play away from really getting momentum," Siemian said of Sunday's win. "We just didn't really have a rhythm, and they did a good job of mixing up coverages, defenses and safety pressures. They kept us on our toes, but we've got to find a way to stay in a rhythm, stay on the field and get it to our guys."

Siemian says he continues to work on his "situational awareness" as his development continues.

"I think you have to understand the situation, when you're backed up, you're obviously not taking any sacks," Siemian said. "If you're in the red zone and it's third-and-5, you take a sack and have to kick a 25-yard field goal rather than a 20-yard field goal. It's not that big of a difference ... There are times to throw it away and there's time to take a sack and it's a good sack."

Mason's Week 5 Power Rankings: Shuffling in the top half

By Andrew Mason
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1. KANSAS CITY (4-0) **LAST WEEK: 1**

Only Detroit's Billy Sims in 1980 has ever rushed for more yardage in his first four games than Kareem Hunt, who has 502 yards, but Hunt's gaudy per-carry average of 7.4 yards is 1.7 yards more than that of Sims.

2. DENVER (3-1) **LAST WEEK: 6**

Why is Denver so high? Because their combined offense/defense per-possession efficiency rank is the league's highest through four weeks.

The Broncos have the league's best record in the first quarter of the season the last five seasons, going 17-2 in Weeks 1-4 since 2013. Now they must sustain their start.

3. PITTSBURGH (3-1) **LAST WEEK: 3**

With the NFL's No. 2 pass defense, the Steelers have fixed a problem that had been a trouble spot in recent years.

4. ATLANTA (3-1) **LAST WEEK: 2**

The Falcons lead the league in net yardage and first downs per possession. They're fourth in net points, but with high rankings in the other two categories, high scores should eventually follow.

5. GREEN BAY (3-1) **LAST WEEK: 5**

Including the postseason, the Packers have won 11 consecutive games against teams that do not have a Georgia mailing address. Their game against the Falcons already took place in Week 2.

6. DETROIT (3-1) **LAST WEEK: 9**

Thanks to a pair of defensive touchdowns, the Lions lead the league in net points per possession allowed, surrendering just 1.07 net points per series.

7. PHILADELPHIA (3-1)

LAST WEEK: 12

Second-year quarterback Carson Wentz has found a steady groove; his passer rating in each game this year has been between 83.0 and 97.0. Not too high, not too low.

8. BUFFALO (3-1)

LAST WEEK: 15

The Bills are one Zay Jones near-catch away from being 4-0. Why say that? To make the point that the Bills are much closer to 4-0 than 2-2.

9. LOS ANGELES RAMS (3-1)

LAST WEEK: 18

Just 15 percent of the Rams' drives have failed to result in a first down; that's the best percentage in the league.

10. CAROLINA (3-1)

LAST WEEK: 20

The Panthers' inconsistent offense found life without Greg Olsen on Sunday, but how much of their success was due to going up against New England's struggling defense?

11. NEW ENGLAND (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 4

No. 1 in total offense; No. 32 in total defense. But on a per-possession basis, the Rams get more points, the Falcons and Saints generate more yards and the Falcons, Eagles and Saints produce more first downs.

12. HOUSTON (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 22

No defense is better at forcing three-and-outs than Houston's; opponents fail to get a first down 42.6 percent of the time they take possession.

13. SEATTLE (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 16

The Seahawks offense has accounted for 52 points and 783 yards in its last six quarters of play, but losing running back Chris Carson for the season could be a crushing blow.

14. WASHINGTON (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 13

A badly timed timeout and a near-catch by Josh Doctson ... the Redskins have only themselves to blame for falling at Arrowhead Stadium.

15. TAMPA BAY (2-1)**LAST WEEK: 17**

Thursday's game with New England has long been anticipated, as it marks the first time a Tom Brady/Bill Belichick Patriots team has played in Tampa. The last time the Bucs hosted the Patriots, Pete Carroll was New England's head coach, Drew Bledsoe was the Pats' starting quarterback, the late Charlie Jones (the original TV voice of the playoff-bound Colorado Rockies) called the game for NBC, Raymond James Stadium was still under construction and the Broncos had yet to win a Super Bowl.

16. OAKLAND (2-2)**LAST WEEK: 7**

The Raiders are in far better shape to withstand an injury to Derek Carr than they were last year; in fact, I'll argue that they could have beaten Houston last January if E.J. Manuel had worn silver and black that day.

17. MINNESOTA (2-2)**LAST WEEK: 8**

The pendulum swings of this team are dizzying, but without Dalvin Cook for the rest of the season because of a torn anterior cruciate ligament, it's hard to imagine the Vikings generating the kind of balance their offense needs to succeed.

18. DALLAS (2-2)**LAST WEEK: 10**

Aaron Rodgers and the Packers are the last people the Cowboys' struggling secondary want to see this week.

19. NEW ORLEANS (2-2)**LAST WEEK: 25**

A shutout of Miami probably says more about the Dolphins' struggling offense than the Saints' defense, but at the same time, New Orleans allowed 13 points to Carolina in its previous game. If these last two weeks are not a mirage, then the Saints have a surprise title contender, because a Drew Brees-led team competent defense = playoffs.

20. ARIZONA (2-2)**LAST WEEK: 23**

The Cardinals' wins aren't all that impressive -- in overtime over the Colts and 49ers -- and their offense remains inconsistent.

21. JACKSONVILLE (2-2)**LAST WEEK: 14**

With a power running game and an elite pass rush, this is a team built to play from ahead. But in their two losses, the Jaguars offense did not run a single snap while leading.

22. CINCINNATI (1-3)

LAST WEEK: 28

They've stopped the bleeding.

23. NEW YORK JETS (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 30

Whenever a team unexpectedly wins, I hear the voice of Harry Doyle, the inebriated announcer from "Major League," chronicling the surprise run of the Cleveland Indians to the 1989 National League East title. So as I watched the Jets-Jaguars game, I didn't hear the play call of CBS' Andrew Catalon. Instead, in my mind's ear, I heard Bob Uecker saying, "Hey, in case you haven't noticed -- and judging by the attendance, you haven't -- the Indians have managed to win a few here and there, and are threatening to climb out of the cellar."

24. BALTIMORE (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 21

The offense is besieged by injuries and hasn't scored a first-half point in two weeks. In total offense metrics, the Ravens rank 30th in yardage, 28th in net points per possession and 31st in net yardage per possession.

25. TENNESSEE (2-2)

LAST WEEK: 11

Burn the film.

26. MIAMI (1-2)

LAST WEEK: 19

After watching the last two weeks, I was surprised the Dolphins didn't rank dead last in the per-possession statistics across the board. Read on to find out who has that dubious distinction.

27. LOS ANGELES CHARGERS (0-4)

LAST WEEK: 24

A story in The Patriot-News of Harrisburg, Pa. told it all about the Chargers' lack of a home-field advantage at StubHub Center -- specifically that Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz was able to relay play calls with his voice last Sunday and didn't need to go to a silent count. Eagles left tackle Jason Peters said he couldn't remember ever playing in a road game when the quarterback didn't need to use a silent count.

28. NEW YORK GIANTS (0-4)

LAST WEEK: 26

Every year there's a team with high expectations that starts slowly and then gives opponents fits the rest of the way. That could be the Giants, who have absorbed two consecutive losses on last-second kicks.

29. CHICAGO (1-3)

LAST WEEK: 29

When the Broncos played the Bears in the preseason, it wasn't hard to notice the near-total absence of jerseys of current Bears players on fans in the Soldier Field grandstands. Mitchell Trubisky should eventually change that.

30. SAN FRANCISCO (0-4)

LAST WEEK: 30

In three out of four games, the 49ers' offense has failed to score a touchdown. They rank 24th in net points per possession, 27th in net yards per series and 29th in first downs per series.

31. INDIANAPOLIS (1-3)

LAST WEEK: 27

The Colts are dead last in net points, net yards and first downs per possession and have gone three-and-out more often than anybody else. The last time a band of Hoosiers had this much trouble generating consistent offense, Norman Dale was content with four players on the court. Fortunately for the Colts, Jimmy Chitwood -- er, Andrew Luck -- is starting to throw in practice this week.

32. CLEVELAND (0-4)

LAST WEEK: 31

For those of us -- including myself -- who like to say "it starts up front," chew on this: The Browns are Pro Football Focus' top-rated pass-blocking team and have their third highest-rated line overall, and yet their elusive first win seems farther away than ever.

Children's Hospital Colorado Jr. Reporter: Destiny Baca

By Destiny Baca

DenverBroncos.com

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I received an email from a woman named Christy on September 11, saying I had the opportunity to interview a Denver Broncos football player. Christy organizes Broncos activities with Children's Hospital.

Obviously, I could not turn this once in a lifetime opportunity down, so my parents and I made arrangements for me to go in only two days. I did not know who I was interviewing so I was very anxious to go and just be able to see the players and see the Broncos headquarters, etc.

On September 13, I woke up really early, around 5 a.m., just too excited for what was to come with my day. By 8 a.m., my Dad, my Grandpa and I were on the road heading from Grand Junction to Denver. My Dad, being an avid Broncos fan, was just as excited as we arrived to the UCHealth Training Center in Dove Valley. As soon as we were buzzed in through the doors, we were met by a woman named Hannah, who is a part of Christy's team. We got to introduce ourselves and talk for a little while before a worker from the Broncos headquarters came to give me my Jr. Reporter badge and give us a little tour of the training facility.

At the beginning of our tour we were led to another building and we got to view the indoor football field they practice on. We got to walk on the field and look at all the banners that had former Broncos players on it, take pictures, etc. We got to view other things as well as seeing the daycare room, the locker room, the cafeteria, the conference rooms, etc.

The whole time I was there, I kept wondering who I was going to interview. While my Dad and I were waiting with Hannah, we asked two other workers and the camera man who I would be interviewing. I was told that it was Todd Davis, a Broncos linebacker. When we were led outside to the field, many Bronco players were walking off the field and I was excited and shocked at the same time because it was an amazing feeling to know that I was surrounded by the Denver Broncos players. There were many reporters and cameras there for interviews with the other players.

As my Dad and I were talking, my Dad pointed behind me, when I turned around I seen Todd Davis walking up to me with a big smile on his face. As soon as he approached me, he put his hand out and I shook it and introduced myself. He was one of the nicest people I have ever met. Throughout my whole interview he kept the smile on his face and he gave great answers.

I would like to thank the Denver Broncos, Children's Hospital and Christy Dobson for this amazing opportunity! It was a major milestone in my life and I will never forget this experience.

Question: How does it feel when you make a great play?

Answer: "It felt really good! The stadium went wild, it was so loud that I could only hear one noise."

Question: What has your experience playing for the Broncos been like?

Answer: "Love it! I wouldn't want to play anywhere else, I love Broncos Country."

Question: What is your advice for kids who want to become professional football players?

Answer: "Work hard, stay focused and all your dreams will come true."

Question: If you could be any celebrity in the world, who would you be?

Answer: Barack Obama. "I'd love to be president."

Question: Do you have any superstitions?

Answer: "I always pray before I step out onto the field."

Question: What is your ideal perfect date?

Answer: "First, my wife is there! Then, take a helicopter ride to downtown, rooftop dinner and a helicopter flight to view the Rockies."

Question: What would you try if you knew you couldn't fail?

Answer: Professional Dancer. "I have a little bit of moves but if I knew I couldn't fail, I'd try it."

Question: What do you do in your free time?

Answer: Spends a lot of time with family. "I have a new 1-year old son and I love to spend as much time with him as I can."

Question: What are your priorities in life before football?

Answer: "God, family and football."

Question: What kind of car do you drive?

Answer: Ford F150

Question: If you could go on vacation anywhere, where would you go?

Answer: Dubai

Question: If you could have any other job besides football, what would it be?

Answer: Baseball or basketball

Question: Did you have a favorite subject in school? If so what was it?

Answer: Math. "The thing I like about math is it's either right or wrong."

Question: Who is your celebrity crush?

Answer: Halle Berry

Question: Have you bought your mom anything cool since you became a football player?

Answer: A car. "I'm buying her a house this year."

Question: Who's your favorite singer/band?

Answer: Beyoncé

Peyton Manning Talks Football, the Future and Life in Retirement as a Carpool Dad

By Peter King

MMQB

October 4, 2017

For as omnipresent as Peyton Manning is on TV these days, he sure knows how to disappear from the public eye otherwise. Other than occasional appearances to watch his beloved Tennessee Volunteers (he was honored at halftime of the Vols game Saturday), the formerly uber-public Manning has been mostly private since his retirement from football 19 months ago, turning into a carpooling dad for his twins and a part-time flag football assistant coach in the Denver suburb where he lives.

But this weekend in Indianapolis, Manning will come back into the light for awhile. The Colts will unveil a statue of Manning at Lucas Oil Stadium on Saturday afternoon, and he'll have his number 18 retired Sunday and his name installed in the Colts' ring of honor at halftime of the Colts-Niners game.

In advance of the weekend ceremony, Manning and I spoke for 33 minutes this week for The MMQB Podcast With Peter King, which also will be available for download via iTunes on Wednesday. The early part of the pod is about his life as a Colt, and the meaning of this weekend, having a statue of him unveiled at the ripe old age of 41. Later, we get into his current life.

"I am not 100 percent comfortable with all of this, but I'm extremely grateful to [owner] Jim Irsay and his generosity," Manning said from Denver. "I will admit I've gotten a couple of physicals recently, just to check my health, because I agree: Most people aren't alive to see something like this."

Regarding the headlines of Manning's life now:

- He said he never had a second thought about retiring and wasn't tempted to return, not even last year when Ryan Tannehill went down in Miami and close friend and Dolphins coach Adam Gase texted, apparently to gauge his interest in returning to play. "I'm out," he said, definitively.
- He's interested one day in exploring running a team, the way John Elway has taken the reins of the Broncos. But "it is just not the right place for me right now," he said.
- His twins, Marshall and Mosley, are in first grade, and he said much of his life is centered around speaking engagements, traveling with wife Ashley, and the twins' flag football and soccer games and practices.
- Owning a team doesn't sound like it interests him. Running one does—just not right now.
- When I asked if he was concerned about long-term effects of head trauma or his health later in life, he said he feels "like I am competing every day against my health—that's my new opponent ... That's important to me, to stay healthy, so I can be around for my kids and my family and see lots of things I still want to see."

- Manning said he spent “several days” with Rams coach Sean McVay “talking football, talking philosophy” in the spring. But he said he spent several days with a few teams in the past year or so, even sitting out of camera view monitoring one team’s draft weekend last April, just to learn the business of it.
- This was not on the podcast, but Manning running for political office has become a hot topic since he retired. Some in Tennessee would like to see Manning become a politician, but he has told me he has “zero interest” in running for public office.
- For a while, at least, it sounds like you might see Manning mostly as a TV pitchman, and not in very many other places.

“I’m still on TV a lot doing commercials,” he said. “I apologize to all the people out there who are tired of seeing me on commercials.”

Most people in football, when Manning’s name comes up, predict he’ll end up following in John Elway’s footsteps. Listening to Manning, that sounds like it appeals to him too—but the other obligations he has now conflict with the time it would take to run a team. Reading between the lines, it sounds like if and when he does come back, he’d want it to be with a team with the right structure for him to be a difference-maker.

“It certainly could be a possibility,” Manning said. “I know John didn’t take his job with the Broncos until he was 50 years old. He had stopped playing for 12 years at that point ... I’m 41 years old and it’s my second season out, so people like to make that comparison but it is such an individual thing.

“I believe in staying close to the game. I went to the combine last year and met with some GMs and some owners to pick their brains on different sides of things. I sat in with a team during the NFL draft this year. I stayed off camera, but I was able to sit in and watch. Often times if I am speaking at a certain event, I will stop by that NFL team or college team and go talk some football.

“But I know what that job entails, and that is an all-in job. That is a do-not-put-your-phone-down-ever job. It’s a 24-7-365 days a year job. Because I know what that commitment is and what that job entails, it is just not the right place for me right now. I really am enjoying what I’m doing. As far as what will happen in the next few years I can’t really say, but like I said, I will always be close to the game.”

He didn’t rule out ownership but said: “I keep looking for that \$2.5 billion in my pocket. Just don’t see it. Derek [Jeter, just named one of the new Miami Marlins’ owners] will be great in that role. I have such great respect for him. I’m happy for him. ... I enjoy teaching football. I love our football camp [the Manning Passing Academy]. I love going to these colleges and answering questions. I sat down at the Chicago Bears with Mitch Trubisky and he had some questions for me. I love paying it forward if anybody has any questions ... just probably not in the coaching world. An executive role of some sort, who knows, it is a possibility but it’s all pretty futuristic.”

Since he walked away in March 2016, Manning expected he might miss it more. Friends in football told him he would. But even when Gase reached out via text when Tannehill got hurt last December, it didn’t tempt him. Manning, as you recall, struggled mightily with arm strength down the stretch of the Super Bowl-winning season in 2015.

Maybe he just had enough of football. Whatever, he never felt the pull to go back.

“Adam Gase reached out to me [when Tannehill got hurt last season],” Manning said. “He said, ‘Look Peyton, I know what I am going to get asked in my press conference tomorrow. There’s no doubt they are going to ask me. Just tell me what you’d like me to say.’ And this was via text, and I said, ‘Adam, you tell the media that yes, I probably could come back and play and there is no doubt that we would go to the Super Bowl,’ ... I’m being sarcastic on that ... ‘but there is no way I could be at practice every day and still fulfill my carpool duties for my two 5-year-old twins. So I’m out. I had a lot of people tell me how much I was going to miss it and be anxious and miserable, and ... it is such an individual feeling, and that was just not true.”

Manning has buried himself in his new life. “My kids are playing flag football and soccer so I go to those practices and games,” he said. “It’s important to me to be a part of those and to be around. I am a volunteer assistant coach on our kids’ flag football team. Last year they wanted me to be a full-time coach and I said, ‘Coach, let me tell you, you don’t have any pass plays. I cannot be involved with a team that has no pass plays.’ So I got them throwing the ball a lot more this year.”

This part of our chat was not surprising: He said, “I feel busier than I ever have.” Manning was good at football. He’s not good at sitting around.

Now for your email...

CHARGERS TO LONDON?

Just a quick thought on the Los Angeles Chargers as I was watching them yesterday. With the complete and obvious lack of interest in L.A. and the generally poor product in London that the NFL has been bringing with the teaser games of rotating teams, do you think there could be any possibility that there could be a home for the Chargers across the pond? I’m sure Philip Rivers would most likely want no part of it (and I still hold out hope that something crazy comes up to send them back to San Diego) but a permanent team there would provide a market that seems to want a team and a better product could be consumed by the fans. I know the logistics of the travel for home and away games would be a HUGE hurdle, but it’s clear L.A. couldn’t care less if they are there.

—Rick, Deerfield Beach, Fla.

Anything’s possible, but the league is not going to pull the plug on the Chargers after one month. I’d be surprised if anything substantive happened before the Chargers tried to make a go of it for at least two years. I never thought the team was even a remotely good fit in Los Angeles—unless the Spanos family puts a winning product on the field. The Chargers have not won a game since Thanksgiving weekend; their nine-game skid is the league’s longest losing streak since then. That will not fly in Los Angeles, period.

NO LOVE FOR THE BILLS

The Buffalo Bills are 3-1 and all you can muster is six sentences about them (not including your haiku)? They’ve beaten Denver, who has a great D, and the defending NFC Champs. I get it. They are a small market team that hasn’t been too good in almost two decades. But if you can write as much as you do about the other surprise 3-1 teams, you could find more than six small sentences in your massive article to include more on them.

—Brian

I can't write about every worthy team every week. I'm sorry the Bills got jobbed, but it's going to happen.

USING THE TERM, "ANTHEM PROTESTS"

I am a long-time fan of your work and really appreciate the time and coverage you're giving to the NFL protests. However, referring to them as "anthem protests" only reinforces the misconception that the athletes are protesting the national anthem. In this age of lies, misinformation and fake news, semantics are important. "Police brutality protests" or "racism protests" would be a better term.

—Jared

Thanks, Jared. They are protests during the national anthems, and by and large, you're right—players are not protesting the anthem itself. They're protesting the perceived injustice in the country that they see. I guess I'd quibble with you. I shorten "protests during the national anthem" to "national anthem protests," and I think most people understand.

PATRIOTS DEFENSE

We are looking at another year when Bill Belichick the GM failed Bill Belichick the coach. New England's defensive depth and talent is woeful at best.

—Don D.

It's early. They suffered the injury at the dawn of the season they absolutely could not afford—to Dont'a Hightower. That came on the heels of the retirement of another player they couldn't afford to lose, Rob Ninkovich, who was in many ways this Patriot team's version of Mike Vrabel. But we'll see. Belichick is a pretty good coach. He'll adjust, and he'll figure out what his defense can do. For this week, though, it's about the worst time of the season for the Patriots to be a road team in a short week. They needed a good practice week, and they get nothing like that, and here come the Bucs on Thursday night.

JASON WHITLOCK IS INSANE

I've never been a fan of his, and reading his comments regarding Donald Trump and the protests further cemented that. Did he truly give the president a pass on his behavior AND words?! Did he really say the athletes should be held to a higher standard than the president?! He comfortably used words like "bait" and "troll" as if President Trump was still on a reality show?! Does he not realize that Trump occupies one of the most powerful offices in the world?! I've been reading your articles since I was 12 years old. It was the first time I thought about ending my dedication. I frowned when I saw Whitlock's name on your podcast. First one I missed. He's a disgrace to the profession.

—Tory E.

Whitlock's an opinionated and strident and popular voice in the media community, like him or loathe him. I'm an equal-opportunity listener. I don't think he gave the president a pass. His point was that the players overreacted to the words of a troll. I don't see what's wrong with that.

BOOING PRAYER

It is entirely unfair for you to suggest the fans in Baltimore were booing the Ravens' players for kneeling in prayer. They were booing what they viewed as disrespect to the flag of the United States. In a situation such as this, fans are focusing on what type of pregame display of unity their team has come up with rather than listening to the PA announcer to describe exactly what they are seeing. Naturally, when the team knelt, the fans associated that display with a political protest and showed their disapproval. Nothing more, nothing less. Bucketing the whole stadium as "booing prayer" is just

nonsense. Your defense of the player's right to protest has been stout since Colin Kaepernick knelt for the anthem a year ago, and that is commendable. But you should be just as stout in your defense of the fans right to object to those protests.

—Chris, Stamford, Conn.

Were you in the stadium? I was. This was the sequence of events: Teams line up on their respective sidelines ... PA announcer asks the crowd to pray “for kindness, for unity, for equality and justice for all Americans” ... When he says the word “pray,” the Ravens players kneel on their sideline and bow their heads ... The crowd boos, lustily ... Chris, this was not the PA announcer asking fans to stand for the anthem. This was the PA announcer asking the crowd to pray for the country. Is it possible many in the crowd were not listening? Yes. Is it possible that the crowd was so on edge waiting to see what the players would do during the anthem that the fans simply saw the kneeling and assumed the players would be kneeling for the anthem? Yes. But I reported what I saw, and heard. The PA announcer said pray, the Ravens kneeled, the crowd booed. If you want to interpret why that happened, that’s your privilege.

ON VICIOUS HITS

My first taste of the NFL was a Chiefs-Raiders game, somewhere around 1968. Though I can't specifically remember the date, I certainly remember Ted Hendricks driving his helmet into Len Dawson's back while Dawson was on the ground, and of course, the melee that followed. We've seen players carted off the field over and over, yet the offending party or parties are never punished in a manner equivalent to the injury they caused. Why? Why not suspend the offender for the amount of time the injured player misses work/games? Vicious hits, intended or not, need to be severely punished, or they simply won't stop.

—Chris

Not a bad idea to consider, Chris, except in this case Danny Trevathan would likely be playing for the Bears this week. Adam Schefter reported Tuesday that Davante Adams could play Sunday for Green Bay at Dallas.

CONCERNED GIANTS FAN

Full disclosure, I'm an enormous Giants fan and football fan. I'm not extremely savvy with regards to coaching strategy, planning and front-office process. So I don't understand why Ben McAdoo has a leash or how long the leash should be. Jerry Reese, too, for that matter. As Week 1 neared, I read the rags and was pleased to see the Giants ranked anywhere between 5th and 9th in the league. Now they're 0-4 and I see them doing nothing to get better. What gives?

—Cory R., New York

Cory, interesting email. Thanks for it. I think the one point I'd make is that, unlike baseball, there's not a lot a team can do to add players that really can help once a season starts. Most teams don't want to trade significant players during the season (the trading deadline this year is Oct. 31) unlike in baseball, and the difficulty in getting, say, an offensive lineman, up to speed in a couple of days in a new offense is a hard thing to do. It's like George Young, the late ex-Giants GM, used to tell us in the press: “We're not like baseball. They can plug in a second baseman for a second baseman. From team to team, they do the same job. We can't plug in a guard for a guard and have him play right away.” I think, especially in an organization that majors in patience, you're not likely to see significant changes till the offseason.

FANS WHO QUIT THE NFL

Thank you so much for posting these letters about fans turning off the NFL as a protest to players protesting during the anthem, as this is exactly the way I feel. Until you affect the NFL's pocket book there will be no change. I was an avid Monday-Thursday-all-day-Sunday fan. Haven't watched any this year and don't intend to start back. Thanks again for the post.

—Robin P.

Thanks, Robin. We'll see if permanent damage to the game is done here. I think more protests would have to come before that happens, but I could be wrong.

Trevor Siemian's Calm and Collected Demeanor Earning Him Respect—and Wins—in Denver

By Robert Klemko

MMQB

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Trevor Siemian hit rock bottom in a rental car traveling north on I-65 through pastoral northwest Indiana. Earlier that November afternoon in 2014, against Purdue, he'd charged into the fray on a QB sneak and faced that terrifying moment in football when your feet are stuck in a pile of bodies but you're still standing upright. A tackler slammed into his torso and his left leg stayed in place. Siemian, in his final season at Northwestern, wept as trainers helped him off the field.

Now it was dawn and as he leaned back in the car with his mother, father and older brother, Todd, he asked the big question aloud: "I wonder if I'll ever play again."

His parents were certain they knew the answer. He'd been a statistically poor passer on a losing football team. He had a well-paying job in real estate waiting for him. Still, nobody really knew what to say. "My husband and I agreed he was pretty much done—but we didn't want to tell him that," says Colleen Siemian, a registered nurse. "Then Todd said, 'Just give it another try, because in five years you don't want to say could've, would've, should've.'"

Todd was right, even if Trevor did find out he'd torn his ACL. Three years later Siemian is the undisputed starter for a Broncos team that has won three of its first four games. (Denver's no. 3-ranked running game and no. 1 defense have certainly helped that cause.) His performance in the first quarter of this season is the latest turn in an improbable journey from seventh-round draft pick to Peyton Manning understudy to competitor in a QB derby he wasn't supposed to win, but did. Twice.

Now Siemian's fellow Broncos have joined the chorus of former Northwestern teammates in issuing superlatives that show how far the QB has travelled since that miserable, anxious car ride.

"He's even-keeled," says receiver Emmanuel Sanders.

"Calm and collected," says running back C.J. Anderson.

"And cool," says coach Vance Joseph. "The perfect quarterback demeanor."

"I've played with Tom Brady and I've played with Peyton," says cornerback Aqib Talib, "and it's not just the mental side that makes them great. It's their calm—that poise, that unwavering confidence, man. They're always cool, they never panic. If you have [those same] traits, you're on your way."

Siemian's road to the NFL began in earnest when Greg Knapp, then Denver's QBs coach, visited Evanston, Ill., in the spring of 2015 for a post-pro day workout set up just for the QB, who was still limping from ACL surgery. Knapp, the only coach in attendance, had been tasked with identifying a passer to back up Manning (in what would turn out to be his final season) and Brock Osweiler (a '12 second-round pick), and he came away impressed with Siemian's football acumen.

Sure, this was a guy who for two years split time with Kain Colter—Siemian was the pocket passer, Colter the running threat—and then, in his only season as a full-time starter, stumbled to seven TDs with 11 interceptions. Still, Knapp went back to Denver thinking he'd found his man, and coach Gary Kubiak and general manager John Elway were intrigued too. They liked Siemian's play in big games, particularly in narrow wins over 17th-ranked Wisconsin and, on a windy November day, 18th-ranked Notre Dame. "He could really throw the football," says Elway. "There obviously wasn't a great team around him. [Knapp] liked his knowledge of the game, his ability to understand coverages."

Come draft time, Siemian and his family watched from their home in Windermere, Fla. On Day 3 they were barbecuing when they began to accept that Trevor was destined for undrafted free agency. Siemian's parents say the Browns and Texans reached out, expressing interest in signing their son once the dust settled. (Cleveland, which has spent decades in search of a franchise passer, used its two seventh-round picks on linebacker Hayes Pullard and cornerback Ifo Ekpre-Olomu; two years later, neither is on its roster.)

At pick No. 247, Siemian finally got a call from the Broncos' war room. "Knapp said, 'Trevor, I'm pounding my fist on the table,'" Colleen recalls. " 'I want them to draft you, but if they don't, you're gonna be a preferred free agent with us.' "

Elway and Kubiak pulled the trigger three slots later, with seven choices remaining, and Siemian was thrust into a competition with Zac Dysert (another project passer) for Denver's third-string job. Though low on the depth chart, he knew he had the best role model any young quarterback could ask for. Thanks to his confident demeanor, Siemian earned the respect of Manning, who tutored the young QB on every aspect of the position, etiquette included. On one occasion Siemian asked Manning if, after a game, it was the younger quarterback's responsibility to approach the older quarterback for the traditional handshake. The future Hall of Famer rejected that premise. The losing QB, he explained, always approaches the winner.

Siemian beat out Dysert that first season and collected a Super Bowl 50 ring. The following preseason, after Manning retired and Osweiler left for Houston as a free agent, Siemian stole the starting job from first-round pick Paxton Lynch and went 8–6, just missing the playoffs in a hypercompetitive AFC West. Despite completing 59.5% of his passes for 3,401 yards and 18 TDs (versus 10 picks), he had to hold off Lynch again deep into this summer. Meanwhile, Kubiak had stepped down in January and the Broncos replaced him with the defensive-minded Vance Joseph, adding former Chargers coach Mike McCoy as his offensive coordinator.

The new staff worked to build an attack that would give Siemian and Lynch an equal chance to thrive, and when the two QBs brought their playbooks home from their second minicamp, in June, Siemian applied a study technique learned from Manning. "You start with one play," he says, "and you try to understand the thought behind it, what defensive weaknesses it tries to attack. Then you say What if? for every scenario. What if I get Cover 1? What if I get Cover 3? You take into account how the play looks out of different personnel and you draw that up. Then you move on to the next play. When you get to camp, the plays kind of come to life." (Osweiler, who's back in Denver after stints with the Texans and Browns, says he now takes the same approach. "No one had ever taught me that before I met Peyton. We were very fortunate to see the game he was playing in his head.")

When it eventually came time to name this year's starter, Joseph felt the decision was so vital to the health of his organization that he sought input beyond the offensive brain trust, consulting with each of

his defensive coaches, from the D-line to the secondary. It was an unusual move for a head coach, especially in a building with more retired quarterback talent than any other in the NFL. The Broncos employ five men who played QB at the Division I level: Elway, Joseph, McCoy, Kubiak (now an adviser) and QB coach Bill Musgrave have more than 84,000 passing yards to their collective credit.

Siemian had arrived at training camp with an elevated understanding of the Broncos' new offense, which incorporates some spread elements he's familiar with from college. For some teammates, that new scheme is a welcome departure from an attack that had grown stale. "The offense was pared down last year," says Talib. "If you're running the ball well, it'll work great—but if you're not, nobody's gonna go for all that play-action, pop passes and bootleg. It was kind of one-dimensional.

"In this offense you can line up and do anything. [Trevor] might check to a run, a screen, anything. This is the offense Peyton Manning ran. It's grown-man football."

Siemian's mastery doesn't surprise Northwestern offensive coordinator Mick McCall, who recalls watching Siemian act like a coach on the field during practice at Olympia High in Orlando: "He had everyone's attention. If he said something, they did what he said. And he wasn't demonstrative or anything. His voice commanded respect."

What drives Siemian, more than the joy of tossing a perfect touchdown or the ecstasy of victory, is the brotherhood. McCall remembers his old QB as a social butterfly, dining with various position groups until eventually the defensive backs talked about him the way the receivers did. Colleen says her son explained early on why he preferred football over baseball: Baseball was an individual sport disguised as a team game, while football was like "going to war with a bunch of guys."

"I love the camaraderie of the locker room," Siemian says. "I love the huddle. Eleven guys—53 guys—getting on the same page for a common goal."

Lynch, who is due \$9.5 million over the life of his four-year contract, was drafted 26th out of Memphis to be Manning's successor. Siemian was a low-cost, long-term project who faced a steep climb to the starting job. His four-year deal will net roughly \$2.3 million, making him the lowest-paid starting QB in the NFL. Thus, the decision to start Siemian over Lynch has been characterized by many Denver pundits as a concession by Elway.

Elway doesn't see it this way. "Trevor did what we were hoping one of [our QBs] would do: take control of the position," he says. "I didn't take any loss there. We wanted the best quarterback playing, and obviously that's Trevor."

While Siemian has been an unexpected bright spot, Elway deserves credit for positioning the roster to be viable in the event that either quarterback stepped up. The GM drafted Georgia Tech defensive tackle Adam Gotsis in the second round a year ago to fill the gaping hole left by the departure of Malik Jackson in free agency. Gotsis, hampered by a leg injury as a rookie, has quietly been one of the most valuable players on a defense that has allowed a total of 95 yards to Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch.

In addition, 2016 third- and seventh-round picks Justin Simmons (Boston College) and Will Parks (Arizona) made longtime starter T.J. Ward expendable with their versatile safety play. The more elusive challenge has been in providing Siemian with capable offensive tackles. In the second round in '15 Elway

drafted Ty Sambrailo, now a reserve in Atlanta, and in '16 he signed free agent Russell Okung, only to decline a second-year option. Elway drafted Garrett Bolles (Utah) in the first round this year and signed Menelik Watson away from the Raiders, and while Bolles has potential, both have struggled in pass protection.

“There are a few reasons it’s difficult to find tackles,” says Elway. “There aren’t as many well-trained linemen coming out as there used to be, and they take longer to develop. You’re seeing a bigger discrepancy between the athleticism on the defensive line versus the offensive line. These guys rushing the passer are 285 pounds and run 4.5, so it’s a tougher matchup for the O-line. Plus, the rules have changed; there’s not a lot of [cut blocking] anymore, so these pass rushers are in a free-for-all. That’s making the divide a little wider.”

It’s also making Siemian’s job harder—and he appears more than up to the task. In victories over the Chargers, Cowboys and Raiders, he has taken a larger role compared to a year ago in making on-field, pre-snap adjustments that give his offense favorable matchups. And he’s always ready and willing to learn more. Manning called Siemian before the season opener, and before several other games last season, to talk football. Siemian likes to involve his family in his game-day preparation, going over plays with his father, Walter, in a hotel room. Walter will read a play call and Trevor will talk through the scenarios. But when Manning phones, Walter steps into another room. “[Trevor] is very private about that. He won’t share what Peyton says, and I don’t ask,” says Colleen. “I think Peyton respects that about him.”

Manning, in an interview with the NFL Network this offseason, said he realized Siemian was special when he saw him visualizing plays without the aid of a playbook or film. The successful passers, Manning said, can play the game in their minds.

Siemian’s mother had a hunch long before that. “Trevor sets goals high for himself,” she says, “and in his mind he has no choice but to achieve them. I knew, because I was his mother, that he was not going to give this job up easily.”

NFL on verge of changing 'May 16 rule' for rookie players

Tom Pelissero

NFL.com

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A rule that has frustrated NFL coaches and left some rookies behind for years appears to be on the verge of changing.

The NFL and the American Football Coaches Association are working toward a deal to overhaul the so-called "May 16 Rule" -- better known as the policy that has prevented rookies from participating in football activities if their schools were in session, regardless of whether they were still enrolled -- starting in 2018, sources with knowledge of the plan told NFL.com.

The league's competition committee was advised of the plan in a conference call Tuesday, one of the sources said. No vote is required to pass the change, but the plan is still being finalized, another source said.

All rookies in the past have been allowed to participate in rookie minicamps. But those from schools with classes still in session -- many of them from the Pac-12 -- have been barred from participating in many other spring activities, including organized team activities and minicamps, until their schools' exams were complete. This year, that included two top-10 picks from Stanford, Solomon Thomas (49ers) and Christian McCaffrey (Panthers), who told reporters he'd like to see the rule change "or at least make some exceptions."

Under the new rule, all rookies would be permitted to join their teams on a mutually agreed upon date, on or around May 16. If a rookie is still enrolled and his final exams are not complete, those still taking online classes would be allotted time to complete them; those enrolled in traditional classes would be allowed to return to campus for exams; and graduate students and those who completed coursework early could fully participate in offseason activities.

Rookies would still be able to stay in school through their final exams, and club employees will be forbidden by rule from telling a player offseason activities (AKA the Rookie Football Development Program) are mandatory or persuading them to leave school. Teams' player engagement directors and each school's academic advisors would jointly monitor players' academic progress. Players would continue to be permitted to participate in commencement ceremonies, too.

The NFL implemented the rule in 1990 "to protect student-athletes who have remained in school to complete their schoolwork," rather than pressuring players to drop out of school and join their new clubs, according to the league's football operations website. However, none of the small number of players impacted last year was even enrolled in classes, one of the people said. The NFL and AFCA have been working together to find a sensible solution.

The NFL's operations website said players from six schools with exams after June 1 were affected last year: Stanford, Washington, Northwestern, Oregon, Oregon State and UCLA.

NFL, NFLPA meet to discuss player social activism

Staff

NFL.com

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The NFL and NFL Players Association met Tuesday to discuss social activism by NFL players, the two groups announced in a joint statement.

"The NFL and NFLPA met today to discuss the important issue of social activism by NFL players," the statement read. "Roger Goodell, DeMaurice Smith, Eric Winston, Robert Kraft, John Mara, Art Rooney and other player leaders engaged in a productive conversation. We are all committed to an ongoing dialogue."

The meeting comes a week after a group of eight players, more than half of NFL team owners and Goodell met at league headquarters in New York to discuss social issues important to players.

In addition to those two meetings, Malcolm Jenkins, Anquan Boldin and Torrey Smith along with Goodell and Eagles owner Jeffery Lurie met with Philadelphia community leaders last month to get a better understanding of the criminal justice system.

Jenkins, Boldin and Smith invited Goodell and Lurie to join them in meeting with community leaders, which included Philadelphia Police Commissioner Richard Ross and community advocates for incarceration and bail reform. Eagles defensive end Chris Long and safety Rodney McLeod also accompanied the group.

Are the Broncos' receivers frustrated again? "They're always frustrated," says Vance Joseph

Ryan Koenigsberg
BSN Denver
October 4, 2017

It was just about one year and two weeks ago today when Emmanuel Sanders and Demaryius Thomas voiced their displeasure in the fact that they weren't getting the ball as much as they wanted.

Through two games in which the Broncos ran the ball very well, the lethal combination of Thomas and Sanders had only 17 catches and no touchdowns.

While adamant that they were happy with the 2-0 start, Sanders couldn't help himself.

"We're used to having 100-yard games," he said in 2016. "We're used to scoring touchdowns."

This season, through four games, Sanders and Thomas have combined for 48 catches, 437 yards and two touchdowns—both going to Sanders. It's a better pace, but following a game that saw the two only catch five balls for 38 yards, head coach Vance Joseph was asked if preaching patience to his stars on the outside is important.

"You have to," he admitted. "Most teams can't cover those guys one-on-one, most teams won't do that, it wouldn't be smart. They have to be patient, right now we are getting a bunch of shell coverage and a bunch of soft boxes, so our running game is really good."

"When a team is forced to play single-high and it gives us fair coverage outside, those two guys will show up more, he added. "Right now, it's basically bracket coverage. That's where Derby has to make plays for us, Bennie Fowler has made some plays. When you see Bennie catching three or four balls, you see Derby catching seven balls, that's where it has to affect the defense."

On Sunday, Derby caught seven balls for 75 yards and a TD and Fowler caught two for 35. Yet, much like last season when the original complaints began, the team struggled in the red zone.

Are they frustrated again?

"Receivers? They're always frustrated," Joseph said with a smile. "They want to catch ten balls a game. I like that, especially from [Sanders]. I like his personality, he wants the ball every play, that's cool. He should want the ball every play, he's a competitive dude."

Eventually, teams will have to commit to stopping the Broncos on the ground. At that point, DT and Emmanuel will get their's. For now, they'll have to continue being excited about their contributions as two of the best run-blocking receivers in the league.

NFL, players have yet to formulate a plan about future national anthem protests

Mark Maske
Washington Post
October 4, 2017

The NFL and representatives of its players continued discussions Tuesday about the issues surrounding protests by players during the national anthem.

There remains no formal plan between the league and players for handling players' anthem protests moving forward, according to several people familiar with the deliberations. But there has been some progress made toward an accord on the request made by some player leaders for the league's support on initiatives related to player activism, those people said.

Several people familiar with the talks between the league and players termed the discussions positive and constructive. A meeting Tuesday included NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell; owners John Mara of the New York Giants, Robert Kraft of the New England Patriots and Art Rooney II of the Pittsburgh Steelers; DeMaurice Smith, the executive director of the NFL Players Association; and Eric Winston, the veteran offensive lineman who is the union's president.

The league and players' union said in a joint written statement: "The NFL and NFLPA met today to discuss the important issue of social activism by NFL players. Roger Goodell, DeMaurice Smith, Eric Winston, Robert Kraft, John Mara, Art Rooney and other player leaders engaged in a productive conversation. We are all committed to an ongoing dialogue."

The NFL has played two weekends of games since President Trump said at a campaign rally in Alabama that owners should fire any player who protests by refusing to stand for the national anthem. Trump called such a player a "son of a bitch."

Many players responded to Trump's remarks by kneeling for the anthem the following Sunday, and owners issued statements expressing support for players. Some owners stood arm in arm with players before games that weekend in what were termed displays of unity. Three teams declined to participate in the anthem entirely.

Fewer players refused to stand for the anthem this past weekend. Owners took a far lower profile and no teams skipped the anthem entirely.

The league so far has allowed players and teams to determine their own approaches to dealing with the anthem protests. The NFL did not discipline players or teams that declined to participate in the anthem on the weekend after Trump's remarks; the league's game operations manual says that players are required to be on the sideline for the anthem and failure to comply may result in discipline.

The discussions between Goodell, owners, the NFLPA and other player leaders so far have yielded no clear plan for dealing with the anthem issue and the protests in the future.

Goodell also has remained in contact with players who have urged the league to formally support player activism. That request was made in a letter to Goodell sent by four players: Malcom Jenkins, Michael Bennett, Anquan Boldin and Torrey Smith. The players asked for, among other things, a month to be designated for awareness and recognition of player activism.

No understanding has been reached yet. But those talks have continued and people close to the situation said progress is being made.

Vance Joseph not concerned with early missed kicks from Brandon McManus

Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
October 4, 2017

Kicker Brandon McManus hasn't missed more than five field goal attempts in any of his first three seasons with the Denver Broncos.

That success led to the Broncos giving McManus a three-year extension worth \$11.254 million with \$6 million in fully guaranteed money right before the start of the regular season. However, McManus has had a shaky start to the season. He's missed a field goal in three of Denver's four games so far this season. While none of the misses have come back to bite the Broncos so far, it's not the ideal start to the year.

Head coach Vance Joseph is still confident in McManus despite the three missed kicks in four games.

"Moving forward, I feel good about B-Mac. He's a talent. I'm not down on him," Joseph said," via Arnie Stapleton of the Associated Press. "Things happen from time to time. I haven't changed my mind about how I feel about B-Mac. He's fine."

McManus missed a 29-yard kick last week against the Oakland Raiders that forced the Broncos to sweat out a result when the field goal would have given Denver a two-score cushion. He's also missed from 50 yards against the Los Angeles Chargers and from 49 yards against the Dallas Cowboys.

McManus has converted 75 of 92 field goal attempts in his career and has missed just two out of 121 extra point attempts.

Pat Bowlen's brother John to sell minority stake in team

Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
October 4, 2017

The brother of Broncos owner Pat Bowlen is prepared to sell his stake in the team, which is between 30 and 35 percent.

John Bowlen, the younger brother of Pat Bowlen, told Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post he felt it was the right time to sell.

"Personally I think the price is going to be good and we seem to have some interest," Bowlen said. "So that's it."

He said there was no animosity toward the team, and that he was "quite pleased" with the job president/CEO Joe Ellis and counsel Rich Slivka have done running the Broncos as two of the three trustees. That runs counter to the initial announcement he made on Twitter confirming his decision to sell, in which he said: "My brother Pat's leadership has been greatly missed."

Pat Bowlen stepped away from day-to-day operations of the team in 2014 as a result of the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

The team issued a statement confirming the sale, emphasizing that John "is extremely pleased with the way the organization is being operated under Joe Ellis in the absence of his brother, owner Pat Bowlen."

John Bowlen's stake should be worth around \$700 million, if you believe the Forbes estimate that pegs the team's value at \$2.4 billion.

Pat Bowlen's majority share in the team will transfer to his children, with one of them to be picked as controlling partner. The league will be monitoring this one closely, as the control of the Titans among the heirs of Bud Adams has been an issue for months, and remains unresolved.