

# Lunch Special: What's been the biggest surprise of the Broncos' season so far?

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
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Columnist Mark Kiszla on Friday talked all things Denver sports in a live chat. Here are the highlights:

Kiz: Hi everybody. As part of the weekly "tradition," let's cue my walk-up song. And this week, in honor of a great set I witnessed Thursday at Red Rocks, it's "Don't You Evah" by Spoon.

See your questions in the cue. Gonna take my best hacks. Starting in 3, 2, 1 ...

What in your opinion has been the biggest surprise of the first quarter of the Broncos season?

Kiz: It's Broncos bye week. But it's a Broncos town. So here goes ... The most pleasant surprise for me has been the play of defensive tackle Domata Peko. Watching him with the Bengals, I didn't think he had much left in the tank at age 32. He, however, has been key to the revival of Denver's run defense.

Predictions for Saturday? Think the Buffs bounce back against Arizona? Is their season over if they lose?

Kiz: Buffs. Under the lights. Versus Arizona. My first question: How many fans are in the stands? The Rise was real, but not sure the return of interest in CU football is quite so solid. Loss at UCLA was not unexpected, considering an overhauled secondary was facing a legit NFL talent at quarterback in Josh Rosen. Thought from the jump this was going to be a 7-5 CU team. Don't think the L in Westwood changes that prediction. But lose at home to the Wildcats? Season wouldn't be over. But a bowl bid — and a 6 victories — would become a much iffier proposition.

Oh, you asked for a prediction. Don't have a strong feeling, to be honest. I'll give the Buffs a 55 percent chance to win. I think percentage chances are more informative than throwing out a score and tip my hat to folks at ESPN for that innovation in the prediction game.

So the D-Backs say they didn't use the smartwatch to steal signs. Are you buying what they're selling?

Kiz: Well, I have no proof the Diamondbacks cheated. So innocent until proven guilty, right? But here are two thoughts: 1) Baseball is the one sport that honors a great tradition of cheating, from stealing signs to throwing spitballs, and 2) That big fat meatball of a breaking ball that Jon Gray threw Paul Goldschmidt in the bottom of the first inning had nothing to do with a tipped pitch. You could have blasted it for a three-run homer.

Who's the most important player for the Rockies to sign (or re-sign) this offseason?

Kiz: Man, I wish Carlos Gonzalez would return on a 1-year deal. But that's a personal dream, because he is my favorite player ever to wear the purple pinstripes. Love the joy he brings to the game, even when he's having a lousy season, as was the case for CarGo for most of 2017. But I don't think it's practical to expect a return by Gonzalez. The free agent that the Rockies need to make every effort to retain is

Jonathan Lucroy. I thought he was on the downside. And maybe his best years with the bat are behind him. But he is a catcher that's a classic leader. Good with the pitching staff. Good in the clubhouse. And I will even forgive the big, fat slider he called for Pat Neshek to throw against Archie Bradley, which was the worst mistake pitch of the Rockies' season.

What changes will the Rockies make prior to next season to improve chances of playing deep into the playoffs?

Kiz: First and foremost, the Rockies are going to have to rebuild their bullpen. It seems to me that Colorado got all the mileage left on the "tires" of closer Greg Holland. So general manager Jeff Bridich needs a new man to throw the ninth inning. The bullpen, so important to this 87-win season, will need a significant overhaul.

What are your thoughts on Cam Newton and his sexist comments? The guy clearly doesn't get it, but was the whole thing blown out of proportion?

Kiz: I was there after the Broncos turned Cam Newton into a tantrum-throwing child at Super Bowl 50. The man can pout. And he obviously has low regard for the media. Which is OK by me. His comments were sexist, but it's my guess Newton views a whole lot of journalists with contempt, and not only female reporters. I'm a huge advocate for women in sports journalism, and can remember way back to the 1980s, when I walked into a locker room with Chris Brennan (now with USA Today) after the USFL championship game, with players telling her to get out. But was this tiff blown out of proportion? Isn't everything that goes viral on social media blown out of proportion in 2017? Hasn't a large part of the president's election and governing strategy been to drop social media bombs that gets the whole country talking?

How has social media and blogging changed the sports reporter's job?

Kiz: Social media has made everything in sports journalism more timely ... and sometimes made it less thoughtful. I worked with Adam Schefter in Denver, long before he was the NFL's king of Twitter scoops. And I knew Adrian Wojnarowski when he was a columnist (like me) long before he was known for Woj bombs about the NBA. But I believe two things are important, and relatively unchanged: 1) Good content finds an audience, and 2) If a reporter is present at a game, practice, etc., the reporter is far more likely to produce interesting content and insightful commentary.

Who's your pick to play in the World Series as of now. And who will win it?

Kiz: Cleveland was the best team in baseball a year ago. The Indians, however, did not win. And that's the beauty of a short series. It also makes the World Series champ difficult to predict: Because the playoffs are a series of short series, and thus are apt to produce more random outcomes. So I will pick the Indians to win the World Series. But think it's no better than a 35 percent chance they are the champs. In other words, I'd take the field right now over Cleveland. National League rep? I guess the Dodgers are the favorites, but I don't think they will make the World Series. I'm not sure the Dodgers will get past the Diamondbacks ... and I wouldn't have been sure the Dodgers were going to beat the Rockies, either.

I'm gonna look past the G-men and Bolts, because I think those are dubs. Do you think the Broncos can beat the Chiefs on MNF in Arrowhead?

Kiz: I'm going to try to be polite here. But I think you're nutso for looking past the G-men and Bolts. I will be surprised if the Broncos go undefeated in those 2 games.

What's more shocking? Matt Duchene still being on the Avs, or them winning their first game?

Kiz: If Semyon Varlamov plays every night as well as he did in the season-opener against the Rangers, the Avs will be in every game. His consistency, and healthy, have been iffy, as we all know. Matt Duchene is still here, wearing a Colorado sweater. Miracles never cease.

I know you're a soccer guy. So what's your prediction for U.S. vs Panama today and U.S. at T&T on Tuesday? Do they make the World Cup?

Kiz: Yes, I am a soccer guy. And, yes, my Friday night plans are set. I will be watching USMNT vs Panama. The lads from the USA have made a fine mess for themselves, trying to escape from CONCACAF and get to Russia for the World Cup. But here's my feeling: They will get 4 points in the final two matches, in large part because Christian Pulisic seems to play far better on American soil in WC qualifiers. On the road, I think he tends to get beat up a little. At home, he's a dangerous play-maker. I'm guessing Arena sends his side out in a 3-5-2 vs. Panama. That's the first thing I will be looking for in the Friday match. And Tim Howard? Is he the magical goalkeeper of old? Or beginning to show troubling signs of age?

Do you think Jamal Murray should run with the 1s or the 2s? He really seemed to take over offensively when he was with the 2s the other night in L.A.

Kiz: If starting the season with the 2s helps with Jamal Murray's development, I'm certainly open to the idea. But by playoff time (or long before), Murray needs to be the starting point guard for this team. If the Nuggets want to make any noise in the playoffs, Murray needs to be playing 30-plus minutes per game, as quickly as possible during the regular season.

# The Broncos' defense has been a run-stopping force. But here's "the crazy part" ...

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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The numbers alone are staggering, but they tell only half the story. Because with every mention of the Broncos' stifling 50.8 yards rushing allowed per game, their NFL-low 260.8 total yards allowed per game or their 1.9-yards-per-carry average surrendered to a quartet of Pro Bowl running backs comes an inherent qualifier:

What if?

What if the Broncos (3-1) eliminated the deep passing plays that led to three touchdowns in the first four weeks of the season?

What if they continue to suffocate their opponents' running game but also shut down their passing attack?

"That's the scary part. From the outside looking in, is there is so much more that could be accomplished with this defense," safety Justin Simmons said. "It's scary because, all in all, we played pretty well (against the Oakland Raiders last weekend), lights out. But there are a lot of plays we left out there on the field, where they shouldn't have scored at all."

It's scary because the Broncos' defense that led the league in pass defense the past two seasons is now a force against the run, begging the question of just how good this unit can be two years after it reached historic levels while leading the way to Denver's Super Bowl 50 victory.

It's scary because, four weeks into the season, as the Broncos use an early bye to self-scout and review, they believe they have only scratched the surface of their potential on defense.

"It's really on us. It's about focus and details," coach Vance Joseph said. "It's a high ceiling for that entire group. Stopping the run the way we have, that forces teams to be one-dimensional. Now our pass rushers can take over the game along with our cover guys. If we stop the run that way for the entire year and play solid pass defense, we're going to be hard to beat."

### Beginnings of a stifling run D

Along with bolstering the offensive line, improving the running game was a priority for general manager John Elway during the offseason as he looked to enhance his already elite defense. The backbones of the group remained in place, with a trio of Pro Bowlers leading the secondary, outside linebacker Von Miller setting the edge and defensive end Derek Wolfe returning as a leader on the line. A run defense that ranked No. 3 in 2015 tumbled to 28th in the 32-team league last season, allowing 130.3 yards per game.

"We've had players playing very good inside, playing very good at the point of attack; the linebackers have done a good job filling their gaps," Elway said via the Broncos' website. "It's been a team effort,

defensively, and it's been a point of emphasis. It's really been astounding what we've done the first four weeks."

Personnel moves — none more significant than the signing of 325-pound nose tackle Domata Peko — and scheme changes have helped turn Denver's defense in a run-stopping machine that contained Melvin Gordon (54 yards), shut down Ezekiel Elliott (8 yards), stifled LeSean McCoy (21 yards) and all but eliminated Marshawn Lynch (12 yards).

Their 203 total yards rushing allowed are the fewest in team history through four games — and the eighth-fewest in NFL history. Of the opponents' 84 total rushing attempts, only three have gained 10 yards or more. Denver's average of 50.8 yards rushing allowed per game is tops in the league and bests the No. 2 team — the Philadelphia Eagles — by 20 yards per game.

"It's team-run defense," Peko said. "Everyone is being gap sound, and our linebackers are doing a great job of coming downhill. Todd Davis is playing great for us, Brandon Marshall, everyone on the front seven is playing great and that's what it is — it's all about team and everyone doing their job."

Before the season, the Broncos set out to make history and lead the league in pass defense for three consecutive seasons. They set out to plug the holes in the running game.

Denver's performance against the run has forced opponents to rethink their attack and essentially pick their poison: spin their wheels on the ground, or air it out and test Denver's No-Fly Zone secondary. Many have turned to door No. 2, where their success has been limited but on occasion has resulted in big plays.

"Last year at this time, we weren't stopping the run like this," cornerback Chris Harris said. "So now we get more pass attempts and we're playing with Pro Bowl receivers almost every week and a Pro Bowl-caliber quarterback every week."

#### Eliminating the big pass plays

The Broncos watched their season-opening victory over the Los Angeles Chargers nearly crumble on one play. Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers, in the shotgun, slung the ball 38 yards to receiver Travis Benjamin, who slipped past Broncos cornerback Bradley Roby and safety Darian Stewart along the left sideline for a touchdown.

The game's ending, of course, was just as memorable, when defensive end Shelby Harris blocked a field goal to preserve the Broncos' victory.

But last Sunday against Oakland, the Raiders pulled out a similar play to gash the Broncos for a 64-yard touchdown. Quarterback Derek Carr found receiver Johnny Holton, who sped past Stewart for the second-quarter score. The game's ending had a similar feel, with Simmons' game-saving interception. But Oakland's big gains in the passing game kept it in the game.

"They hit us two times on the same play," Harris said. "Both times, we were supposed to have them doubled and we got 'em looking like Stew was getting beat. The corners have to stay high and be able to double-team their receiver and don't make it look like Stew is getting killed."

The Broncos aren't necessarily getting beat in the passing game. All three of the Broncos' starting cornerbacks — Harris, Roby and Aqib Talib — have an interception to go with Simmons' pick against Oakland. The big passing plays they have surrendered have been matched with game-changing takeaways and stops.

Of their opponents' 93 total completions, 11 have been for 20 or more yards, and the Broncos' average of 210 yards passing allowed per game ranks 10th in the NFL through Week 4. Their 5.45 per-play average ranks eighth.

"They're not really attacking us, it's just that they can't run the football anymore," Harris said. "So they get more passing attempts. We're getting up on teams, so now they have to play two-minute offense, so it's not really like that.

"Now we're taking that run away and they're going to have to get way more attempts and now turnovers are going to start skyrocketing, I think."

And therein lies the "what if." Say a big pass play here and a big pass play there are eliminated. Say the turnovers do skyrocket, as Harris anticipates.

Just how good can the Broncos be on defense? While they are quick to remind everyone they're only four weeks into the season, they too have pondered the answer.

"That's the crazy part about it. We're just getting started and I think we're just scratching the surface," Peko said. "We had some mistakes in pretty much all of our games. It just shows what kind of defense we are. We're relentless and we can overcome mistakes, but we've got to clean that stuff up and if we clean it up, we'll be a tough team to beat."

#### Denver's D: By the Numbers

A look at the Broncos' defense through the first four weeks of the season:

260.8: Average total yards allowed, fewest in the NFL.

4.4: Yards per play allowed, second-best in the league.

50.8: Rushing yards allowed per game, a league low.

203: Total rushing yards allowed, fewest in team history through four games.

1.9: Rushing average per carry by opponents' starting running backs: Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch. They have combined for 95 rushing yards on 50 carries.

210: Passing yards allowed per game to rank 10th in the NFL.

25.9 percent: Opponent third-down percentage, second-lowest in the NFL.

# Broncos' Max Garcia named NFLPA's Week 4 Community MVP

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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Broncos guard Max Garcia was named the NFL Players Association's Week 4 Community MVP for his ongoing relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

Garcia and his family in Atlanta coordinated a collection drive for canned goods and necessities for those affected by the hurricane, which hit the Puerto Rico on Sept. 20 and left dozens dead and the island without power.

Garcia had family living in Puerto Rico when the category 4 storm hit and he went days without being able to contact them. His grandfather, who had been residing in a nursing home, died a few days later.

To continue to provide relief to Puerto Rico, Garcia established his own website — [maxgarciaphilanthropy.com](http://maxgarciaphilanthropy.com) — to accept donations and continue to raise awareness.

"I'm very humbled to receive this week's NFLPA Community MVP," Garcia said via the NFLPA's site. "After a catastrophic hurricane stormed through my mother's homeland, raising awareness on the disaster it left was crucial for me. Unfortunately, during the aftermath of the hurricane, my grandfather Don Felix Romero passed away — making my desire to help in the relief efforts all that more urgent."

In addition to his Hurricane Maria relief efforts, Garcia has helped to bring attention to sex trafficking. He and his mother joined other NFL players on a trip to the Dominican Republic to meet with victims of sexual exploitation.

Garcia recently told of his trip in a sit-down interview as part of CNN's Freedom Project.

The NFLPA will make a \$10,000 donation to Garcia's foundation or charity of choice, as well as an in-kind donation to him on behalf of Delta Private Jets. The honor also makes Garcia and the rest of the weekly community MVPs eligible for the Byron Whizzer White Award.

# Von Miller: When it comes to sack dances and celebrations, I'm a seasoned vet

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

October 7, 2017

When the NFL relaxed its celebration rules over the summer, former Dancing With the Stars contestant Von Miller had grand plans.

He pushed for a team choreographer to help to take advantage of the new opportunities. He wanted the offensive line to get the help it needed.

"The entire National Football League will not be able to take advantage of it," he explained. "But the five percent that do take advantage of it, it could be big. ... Just think about it. You get a touchdown and you got five offensive linemen and they have a little Temptations routine. It'll be great. We have to get a choreographer once a week to help all of the guys out because everybody can't move like me."

When his call went unanswered, he took on an added role and choreographed dances of his own.

You see, Von Miller relies on not one, but two playbooks.

During the Broncos' third preseason game against Green Bay, Miller sacked Aaron Rodgers on a third-and-7 in the first quarter and unveiled his "Sex T-Rex" dance, pulled straight from his list of moves to bust out in certain times, situations and against certain opponents.

"Everybody can do that at home. It was planned," Miller explained. "That's a sack dance that everybody can do. I've got a lot of sack dances and celebrations planned. I've got to get my guys in it, too. It's better when you can celebrate how soccer players celebrate. You can get some chemistry with that, too. You saw me and Will (Parks) choreograph some stuff together."

But last Sunday against Oakland, after he whipped around the edge of the line to take down quarterback EJ Manuel in the fourth quarter, Miller was curiously subdued in his celebration.

"It just depends on the moment in the game. If you get a sack on second down and you dance and bust out a move and then they get the first down on the next play, you look like an idiot," he said. "So you got to really pick and choose the time. If it's like third down and they're driving the ball and we get a huge sack and forced fumble, that's when you can really like (celebrate)... but I'm always conscious of the momentum."

"A sack dance is really when you're just killing them like, 'OK, it's over.' But you really don't want to do sack dances on first and second down. When you start doing a little dance it can be great, but it doesn't matter how great the sack dance is. If they get the first dance and score on the next play, you look like an idiot."

Nevermind that the sack came on a critical third down Sunday. Miller knows what he's doing out there, so don't question his moves.



“I mean, I’m a seasoned vet when it comes to this,” he said. “Sack dances and celebrations, I know the perfect time to do it. You just like, feel it. You just feel it, and that was more like a rally, let’s get the offense out there so we can finish them up.”

And while most are raving about — and sometimes criticizing — the sack and touchdown celebrations throughout the league, from Kansas City’s Travis Kelce and New York’s Odell Beckham Jr., Miller’s big dances are coming.

“When you watch the game, it’s just expected now,” Miller said. “Travis Kelce, he’s great. He’s taken off with the touchdown celebrations and Odell and all of these guys. If I get a touchdown, I got something for y’all, too.

# NFL Week 5 Preview: Broncos bye week perfect time to play catch up

By Nick Kosmider

Denver Post

October 7, 2017

Been too locked in on the Broncos the past month to pay attention to the rest of the NFL? The Denver bye week is a perfect time to catch up on the resurgent, Jared Goff-led Rams, the wildly up-and-down Patriots, the slow-out-of-gates Chargers and Giants and the cast of offensive rookies around the league turning heads. Oh, and will the Chiefs, the last remaining unbeaten in the league, be knocked off their perch? (Games on Sunday unless otherwise noted.)

Game of the Week: Packers (3-1) at Cowboys (2-2), 2:25 p.m. The hallmark of Dallas' success last season was its bruising run game. This year, that component of the offense can be described as uneven at best. To keep up in the NFC East, the Cowboys need to get Ezekiel Elliott rolling.

Patriots (2-2) at Buccaneers (2-1), 6:25 p.m., Thursday. Tom Brady, at 40 years old, leads the NFL with 1,399 passing yards. But New England's defense has statistically been the worst in the league by a wide margin. That could be trouble vs. Jameis Winston, Mike Evans and Co.

Jets (2-2) at Browns (0-4), 11 a.m. The Jets have ridden their defense to a surprising two-game winning streak. Cleveland coach Hue Jackson said he remains confident in rookie QB DeShone Kizer despite a winless debut month.

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Jaguars (2-2) at Steelers (3-1), 11 a.m. Rookie Leonard Fournette has played a big role in Jacksonville's No. 2 rushing offense (148.8) yards per game. Pittsburgh's Le'Veon Bell broke out with 186 total yards and two TDs in a win over the Ravens last week.

Seahawks (2-2) at Rams (3-1), 2:05 p.m. First-year coach Sean McVay has the Rams in position to take a firm lead in the NFC West race. QB Jared Goff has made big strides. Is he ready for the Seattle defense?

Ravens (2-2) at Raiders (2-2), 2:05 p.m. Oakland's offense was already sputtering. Now the Raiders will be without QB Derek Carr (back) for at least two weeks. The Ravens are last in passing offense at 143 yards per game.

Chiefs (4-0) at Texans (2-2), 6:30 p.m. Yes, Kansas City has the NFL's top rushing offense behind rookie sensation Kareem Hunt. But Alex Smith's continued growth has been a major part of the Chiefs' unbeaten start. Rookie QB Deshaun Watson has given the Texans life.

Vikings (2-2) at Bears (1-3), 6:30 p.m., Monday. Chicago rookie QB Mitchell Trubisky will make his NFL debut on national television against a division rival. The Vikings, meanwhile, have to find a way to deal with the absence of promising rookie RB Dalvin Cook (torn ACL).

# Who will buy John Bowlen's no-control, high-dollar minority stake of Broncos?

By Mike Klis

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Uncle John wants out.

John Bowlen, brother of Broncos' principal owner Pat Bowlen, wishes to sell his minority interest that could command anywhere from \$500 million to \$800 million.

This does not necessarily mean the Bowlen Family ownership is beginning to splinter. In terms of controlling interest, John Bowlen and the Pat Bowlen Trust do not intersect, but run parallel.

John Bowlen's minority interest – which has no voting or controlling rights – is not part of the Pat Bowlen Irrevocable Family Trust that contains 100 percent control of the Broncos.

There is strong evidence suggesting Broncos fans should be happy with their team's trust set up. It has led to team president and chief executive officer Joe Ellis overseeing the day-to-day operations of the franchise and general manager John Elway running the football department since the start of the 2011 season.

In the 6 ¼ seasons since the Ellis-Elway team took charge, the Broncos have gone 70-30 in the regular season, won five AFC West Division titles, earned two Super Bowl appearances and won one world championship.

"Fans are always comfortable with the status quo of a successful franchise," said Randy Vataha, a popular receiver of the New England Patriots in the 1970s who now runs Game Plan LLC, which represents buyers and sellers of sports franchises. "If there's a change, that's when they're going to pay attention. With a team like Denver, I'm sure the fans are completely comfortable with how it's been run to this point. It's a great franchise. They compete every year."

A new owner, in other words, has a greater chance of messing up the Broncos than improving the overall state of the team. Ask yourself this, Broncos fans: Would you rather have an audacious billionaire like Daniel Snyder running the team, or the Pat Bowlen Trust?

Still, there is controlling interest and there is cash. John Bowlen's stake has considerable cash value. As it stands now, John Bowlen believes he holds 31 to 35 percent of the Broncos' financial ownership -- all of which, to reiterate, is classified in a non-controlling minority interest. None of that financial value falls under the umbrella of the Pat Bowlen Family Trust.

With Pat Bowlen battling Alzheimer's Disease, his trust is run by three trustees: Joe Ellis, the Broncos' chief executive officer and president; Rich Slivka, the Broncos' executive general counsel, and Mary Kelly, a local attorney who has previously represented Pat Bowlen in legal affairs.

The trust lists his seven children as beneficiaries. His two oldest daughters Amie and Beth are from his first marriage to Sally Parker. Pat and his second wife Annabel had five children: sons Patrick III and John, and daughters Brittany, Annabel and Christianna.

One of these seven is to run the Broncos, according to the wishes of Pat Bowlen and the plan currently being carried out by the trustees.

Ellis recently received a contract extension. Considering Elway in late-July received a new five-year deal that runs through 2021, it figures that Ellis' new contract extends at least that long.

Broncos' football operations figure to be status quo for a while.

What's new is John Bowlen wants out as minority partner.

"I want to make this very, very clear: This has nothing to do with what Joe or Rich are doing," Kerry Bowlen, John's wife, told 9NEWS last week. "There's no animosity at all. It's just John and Pat were always partners. And now that Pat is no longer involved with running the team, it's just purely time to go. Let a new owner come in. And for us financially, spiritually, it's time as well."

Let's put John Bowlen's share at 31 percent. Forbes Magazine recently put the Broncos value at \$2.4 billion -- and the publication has been mostly low in its assessments compared to the ultimate sales of sports franchises. For instance, in August 2014, Forbes listed the Buffalo Bills' value at \$935 million. A month later, Terry and Kim Pegula bought the franchise for \$1.4 billion.

Still, using Forbes' \$2.4 billion as the starting point for the Broncos' total franchise value, John Bowlen could begin by asking for roughly \$740.4 million.

Will it sell? It won't be easy because that's a lot of loot for no say. Tennessee Titans minority owner Susie Adams Smith has been trying to sell her share of the team.

One attorney who has put together several sports ownership deals says John Bowlen would probably have to give a discount because his interest has no voting rights or controlling interest.

It also doesn't appear John Bowlen's minority interest includes a right-of-first-refusal clause should the trustees decided to put the team's controlling interest for sale. Right of first refusal would be a huge component in the sale price.

Without it, instead of \$740.4 million, John Bowlen might have to settle for, say, \$500 million or \$600 million. That's still a lot of money for no control, and no first-refusal rights. Will there be interest, anyway?

"I would think, a lot," Vataha said. "It's always hard when you get to that level of value that you're talking about -- several hundred million dollars no matter how you look at it to be a non-controlling owner. That's always a major factor in getting a deal done. But I think there will be great interest. You don't know what the sale number is but there will be real interest. I think a deal gets done. That's a great franchise."

What would multiple bidders do the sale price -- could it go past \$740 million to \$800 million?

Even if John Bowlen is only offering an economic interest, there's reason for a person worth a couple billion to consider it a good investment.

Consider that Forbes says the Broncos are the 24th most valued professional sports franchise with their \$2.4 billion figure, and that the franchises ranked ahead of them all play in considerably larger markets than Denver.

More significantly, the Broncos' value soared 24 percent from the previous year. Only the Los Angeles Rams and NBA's Golden State Warriors had a greater percentage increase among the top 24 sports franchises.

So the Broncos are not only highly valued, they're hot.

Consider also that sports franchises have also been fairly recession proof. Their value has increased at a far greater rate than, say, the S&P 500.

This helps explain why minority, non-controlling, sports partnerships have become popular in recent years. Will Farrell, Will and Jada Pinkett Smith, Justin Timberlake, Peyton Manning's wife Ashley, Gloria Estefan, Marc Anthony, Bill Maher, Serena and Venus Williams, Fergie, Nelly, Usher and Jay-Z are among the celebrities who own minority shares in sports franchises.

A buyer of John Bowlen's minority interest could be in better position to purchase the team outright if eventually the Pat Bowlen Trust sells the Broncos on behalf of the children. First, a minority owner would have already passed NFL inspection.

Secondly, the trustees do have a fiduciary responsibility to operate in the best interest of the beneficiaries. If someone comes along and offers to buy the Broncos for \$3 billion, Ellis, Slivka and Kelly would be obligated to approach the children and ask, what do you think?

Who would have the financial wherewithal to purchase a minority stake in the Broncos for anywhere from \$500 million to \$800 million?

Vataha said the new partner wouldn't want to take out a loan for the purchase because the interest would slice too far into the potential investment gains. To come up with the kind of liquidity necessary to pull off such a purchase, someone would need the ability to cash in other assets.

"You would think it would be somebody with multi-billion net worth," Vataha said. "If you get down to a billion dollars you're talking quite a bit of liquidity of assets to buy this.

"I'm also not sure it does this all have to be sold as one piece. Can you sell it to a group? I'll put six guys together and they all buy 5 percent (of the team's total ownership). That does happen in the NFL. Quietly, but it does happen."

Because all minority owners require NFL approval, a group of multiple buys for John Bowlen's interest could get unwieldy. He's hoping to sell to one or two investors.

Forbes Magazine says there are 2,043 billionaires in the world. Start there. John Bowlen has Canadian ties so perhaps he can reach out to David Thomson, who runs Canada-based Thomson Reuters and is worth \$27.2 billion.

Billionaires with Colorado ties include Charlie Ergin, of the DISH Network; Philip Anschutz, a diversified investor who owns stakes in the NBA Los Angeles Lakers and NHL's L.A. Kings; John Malone, the cable magnate who already owns the Atlanta Braves of Major League Baseball; James Leprino, the mozzarella cheese king; Pat Stryker, a venture capital, real-estate developer; and Gary Magness, whose stepmother Sharon owns Thunder, the Broncos' mascot.

9NEWS reached out to local oil and gas magnate George Solich, who sent along a "no comment" to the inquiry of whether he would be interested in John Bowlen's stake.

"A buyer could be thinking if I buy it at a good price now, when the whole team goes up for sale, I've already got 30 percent at a better price than the ultimate price," Vataha said. "You'll need to understand all the financials, how the trust works because you buy that minority interest now and somebody else could be running the team in two years."

Again, the Pat Bowlen Trust plans on keeping the Broncos' controlling interest in the family. But it appears the trustees and beneficiaries are about to say goodbye to uncle John, and welcome in a new minority business partner.

# Broncos' Von Miller on typical sacks pace, but believes he can do better

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 7, 2017

Broncos linebacker Von Miller has a team-leading four sacks in four games. Projected over 16 games, it would be the second-highest single-season total of his career, only behind the 18.5 he had in 2012.

But Miller thinks his sacks pace will only increase as he and the Broncos continue to adjust to the unwavering attention he has received from opposing offenses in the first month of the season.

"I'm my biggest critic," Miller said this week. "I feel like there is some stuff -- if I'm not leading in sacks, I've got to do better."

As expected for a perennial Defensive Player of the Year candidate, Miller has faced a steady diet of double-teams, chips, scrapes and even a smattering of triple-teams during the Broncos' first four games.

The Los Angeles Chargers, who held Miller without a sack in the opener, had several snaps with a running back waiting behind a double team already blocking Miller, just in case Miller broke through. But the Broncos knew all this was coming, as did Miller, and they continue to adapt and try to overcome the attention.

Asked earlier this season how many snaps Miller affects every game, Broncos defensive coordinator Joe Woods said, "All of them, whether he gets a sack or not."

Still, Miller wants to see more tangible evidence.

"I need to figure out ways to get to the quarterback," Miller said. "I need to figure out ways to beat the double-teams and beat the chip block. That's just my individual goals. I'm going to always be hard on myself. Defensively, I feel like we're playing really good football in the run and in the pass. ... I feel like as a defense, we've been playing pretty well."

There is that. After four games the Broncos are currently the league's No. 1 defense overall, No. 1 against the run, tied for sixth in scoring defense and 10th against the pass.

There is also the matter of Shane Ray, who was second on the team in sacks last season with eight and has yet to play because of wrist surgery he had in training camp. Shaquil Barrett has started in Ray's outside linebacker spot and has forced the issue at times against opposing blockers, as have Derek Wolfe and Shelby Harris in pass-rush situations.

Ray is expected to be back in the lineup Oct. 30 against the Kansas City Chiefs, and his presence should ratchet things up a little more. Ray has consistently said he's "counting the days" until he returns.

In the meantime, the Broncos will continue to entertain the idea of moving Miller around the formation from time to time. Miller says he's more focused on the big picture of wins, losses and keeping the bar



high for a defense with a long list of goals. A team captain, Miller is still smarting over an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty against him in the loss to the Buffalo Bills -- both he and Bills quarterback Tyrod Taylor were laughing as Miller offered a hand after hitting Taylor on the pocket, and then Miller pulled his hand away -- that he said "killed the game for us."

Miller was almost subdued after a sack in the Broncos' victory over the Oakland Raiders.

"If you get sacks on second down, you dance and bust out a move, then they get the first down on the next play, you look like an idiot," Miller said. "You've got to really pick and choose the time. If it's third down and they are driving the ball, and you get a huge sack -- sack, forced fumble -- that's when you can really put it out there. I'm always conscious of the momentum."

There is a chance for some momentum in the coming weeks. After this week's bye, the Broncos will face three of the eight most-sacked quarterbacks to this point over their next five games. The Patriots' Tom Brady, the Chiefs' Alex Smith and the Eagles' Carson Wentz have all been sacked at least 12 times this season.

But those are matters for another day.

"I just want to have all-around impact," Miller said. "Every play, every way. ... Sacks are what I do -- that's my job -- so I'm always going to think I need to get more, and I think I need to get more. But we're

# Broncos search for root of red zone issues

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 7, 2017

When the Denver Broncos officially exit their bye week on Monday, one of the biggest issues they will have had on the to-do list is to figure out why something that was good in the season's first two weeks has been so decidedly not good in the last two weeks.

Because in their last two games before the bye, the Broncos' ability to score touchdowns once inside the red zone has dipped significantly. And the Broncos have spent some time this past week trying to determine how much they need quarterback Trevor Siemian to pick up the pace when the goal line is in view, how much is the receivers not winning enough one-on-one battles in and around the end zone as well as how much is just simply too many mistakes at the wrong time.

Or whether it simply has been all of the above.

"It's the difference in one play or two plays," Siemian said. "When you have opportunities, you have to capitalize on them. I can think of a couple plays we could have turned into points."

Overall, inside their opponents' 20-yard line the Broncos have converted just 50 percent of their trips into touchdowns and that is tied for 20th in the league. But even that figure is built on their quality efforts in the first two games while the signature play of the red-zone frustrations of the last two games may have come last Sunday.

On a first-and-goal from the Raiders' 4-yard line, in position to turn a 16-7 lead into a three-possession game as the third quarter drew to a close, Siemian had a pass deflected into the air that Emmanuel Sanders caught for a 10-yard loss. That put the Broncos in second-and-14 and three plays later Brandon McManus missed a 29-yard field goal.

"That kind of stinks," Siemian said. "It's just one or two plays here and there, and when you get those opportunities in the right play, you have to make the most of it."

They've had penalties -- two in the last two games inside the 20 -- they've surrendered sacks on back-to-back plays inside the 20 against the Bills, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas doesn't have a touchdown catch this season and in four games the Broncos don't have a running back with more than one rushing touchdown as C.J. Anderson and Jamaal Charles each have one.

It all means after the Broncos were 3-of-5 scoring touchdowns in drives inside the opponents' 20 in the season opener against the Chargers and 4-of-4 in the rout of the Cowboys, they are 1-of-7 combined in the last two games -- a loss to the Bills and a win over the Raiders.

Upon further review, coach Vance Joseph has called it "self-inflicted wounds," a combination of Siemian, penalties, bobbles in pass protection and the team's marquee players not winning enough battles to finish touchdown plays.

"We can be better and we will be better," Joseph said. "Absolutely we can. In my mind, as I've said, it's not scheme, it's mistakes, it's a batted ball, a false start at the 5-yard line. We can't do those things. I think we've had two penalties already this season at the 5-yard line or closer. You can't have those. It's detail and winning those matchups. We've had moments where we've done it pretty well and we need more of those moments when we come back."

"We know we can be better there," Siemian said. "There's an urgency there. But again, it's four games. It's a small sample size. So, we're going to get better there. I trust in that."

# Broncos' improved run defense key to Denver's turnaround

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
October 7, 2017

Scoot over, “No Fly Zone.” Make room for “Ground Control.”

The Broncos are allowing a league-low 50 yards rushing through the first month of the season, helping them hit their bye week at 3-1, a game behind the lone unbeaten Kansas City Chiefs in the AFC West.

The Broncos have shut down Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch.

Those four workhorses loomed large on their schedule as the Broncos mixed changes in philosophy and personnel to seal the leaks in their run defense that doomed them in 2016. Collectively, that group rushed for nearly 4,000 yards and 40 touchdowns a year ago even with Lynch on hiatus. Against Denver, they managed a measly 95 yards and no TDs on 49 carries.

That’s 1.9 yards a pop.

“Everyone in the front seven has been playing great,” noted nose tackle Domata Peko, the gem of general manager John Elway’s free agent class and a major — but not the only — reason for Denver’s turnaround.

“I feel like I found my second wind here in Denver,” said Peko, who spent his first 11 NFL seasons in Cincinnati.

He’s sure made a great first impression.

“He’s on fire every day,” coach Vance Joseph said. “That is fun to see from a guy in his 12th year. He hasn’t missed a start in seven years. He never complains. He’s here every day and in a good mood.”

Nobody is really salty in Denver, although the Broncos know they’re going to have to take this show on the road soon. After hosting the Giants next week, the Broncos, whose lone loss came at Buffalo in Week 3, play seven of their final 11 games away from home.

As they demonstrated in 2015, however, defense travels.

Denver’s top-ranked defense carried Peyton Manning across the finish line two years ago, sending the five-time MVP out as a champion.

The inability to stop the run last year — the Broncos were 28th in the league, allowing 130 yards a game — was a major reason they missed the playoffs and a chance to defend that title. So, Elway drafted DeMarcus Walker and signed free agents Peko, Zach Kerr, Shelby Harris and Kasim Edebali, then claimed Ahtyba Rubin off waivers from Seattle.

Joseph promoted secondary coach Joe Woods, a Wade Phillips protege, to defensive coordinator and they began blending concepts from Joseph's 4-3 background and Woods' 3-4 roots.

Joseph also put his team in full pads a lot more than his predecessor did a year before, when the Broncos were coming their Super Bowl triumph.

"I think stopping the run and running the football better" is where that's paid off, Joseph said. "That was our goal in training camp. ... If you don't do it in pads, you won't get good at it."

Peko replaced Sylvester Williams as the fulcrum of Denver's run defense and his teammates marvel at how he never gets his hips turned and is absolutely eating up double teams.

"I don't think he gets enough credit," linebacker Von Miller said.

Inside linebackers Brandon Marshall and Todd Davis are playing closer to the line of scrimmage on early downs, attacking the running lanes instead of inching back in the read-and-react style they played under Phillips.

Opponents must deal with Miller and star cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr. again, something they shied away from down the stretch last year when they could just hand off the ball.

Guards now have to account for Marshall and Davis, and that, in turn, means defensive ends Derek Wolfe and Adam Gotsis aren't getting double-teamed nearly as much.

The key to it all is having their top-notch cornerbacks cover receivers one on one, which Harris figures will lead to more big plays by the "No Fly Zone."

"We're taking that run away. We're going to get way more attempts," Harris said.

An assistant defensive coach walked through the locker room this week and suggested the front seven get its own moniker, maybe "No Run Zone."

Across the room, the defensive backs sneered.

They insisted the run stuffers need more than a month's worth of wonderful work to earn a nickname like theirs.

Marshall, for one, is fine with such a holding pattern for "Ground Control" or anything else that comes up.

"I'm good with that," Marshall said. "It's too early."

# How Brock Olivo connected with his Italian roots and changed his future

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 7, 2017

Brock Olivo's parents could have been HGTV stars had they been born to this era. Honestly, it's not hard to imagine.

*"I'm David Olivo, and this is my wife, Vicki, and our two children, Brock and Daisy. After my NFL career ended, Vicki and I found a new passion together, moving into old homes and renovating them before moving on to the next one. Welcome to 'Bringing the House.'"*

The couple paid the bills with other work — David was a high-school teacher and football coach, and Vicki dabbled in real estate and antiques — but home renovation was their passion.

But they didn't invest in just any kind of houses. They focused on old buildings. One of the Olivos' homes, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote in 1987, was built around 1850, and since its construction circa 1850 by a German baker, it had been a winery and a hospital during the Civil War.

In their line of work, they were careful to retain the character of these homes while updating certain aspects like kitchen appliances or bathroom fixtures.

Mixing the modern with the vintage was a point of pride, a reflection of their life as Italian-Americans. And from the lessons of his youth, Brock knew he was destined to follow chase his Italian heritage wherever he could.

"That's kind of how I grew up," the young Olivo says. "My parents always bought these old homes and restored them and so it was this rustic setting, but they would throw these great, new kitchens in there or these bathrooms. So it was this rustic with the modernity of the new. I guess I've always had that in my background, and I just never knew how much I appreciated it until I matured and saw the contrast between America and Italy, and the beauty of combining the two.

"My gosh, what a beautiful phenomenon."

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Brock Olivo had always been fascinated by his Italian roots.

At Christmastime, the Olivos usually visited his paternal grandparents' house in Arnold, Pennsylvania. The children of Italy-born immigrants, they spoke Italian or an Italian-English mix in their homes.

"To me, it was like warping to another era," Olivo says. "My parents would take us to Pennsylvania for Christmas, and it was this completely different world. Now I'm hearing Italian, eating grandma's homemade ravioli and cantucci, and all these things, and the coffee and Italian wine."

As a curious child, Olivo would ask his father or uncle what was being said in Italian, and eventually his grandfather began teaching him the language.

Decades later, after a prolific football career at the University of Missouri and a short NFL career, he decided to truly explore his family's background firsthand by moving to Italy in the spring of 2002 to play for the S.S. Lazio Marines in the Italian Football League.

The significance of the trip, if he hadn't been able to fully understand it before, became apparent as soon as the country became visible in a window on his airplane.

"I remember the descent into Rome and seeing the countryside and thinking, 'Wow, this is surreal,'" Olivo says. "It was emotional for me, because nobody from my family had been back on Italian ground since my great-grandfather left back in 1918. It was many years — almost a century later — that an Olivo went back."

That summer, he would return home to the U.S., but he knew he'd be back.

"I knew there was more to be discovered in Italy for me," Olivo says. "No question. I left a lot of doors open."

After living to the U.S. for six years, he went back to Italy to coach the same S.S. Lazio Marines and the Italian National Football Team from 2009-11.

This time, Olivo was able to fully immerse himself in Italian life. That, of course, begins with coffee.

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Coffee is valuable to most NFL coaches, but it is more valuable to Brock Olivo.

Prior to living in Italy, Olivo had been just a "regular coffee drinker," as he puts it. Drip coffee, no cream, no sugar.

But by the time he left, Olivo understood that distinct part of Italian culinary culture, and it "Italianized" him.

"Regarding coffee, [it's] more artisanal," he says. "You have to have your coffee a certain way. The typical Italian puts a teaspoon of sugar into his or her espresso, but the hardcore, true connoisseurs of it don't. They want to taste it black. They want to taste all the essentials of the coffee. It's almost, nowadays, for lack of better terms, sommeliers of coffee, people who take it that seriously. I'm not — I'm far from that. I just appreciate it. And I appreciate the way their coffee culture is preserved. Even the young generations, they stick to the books. It's very cool. I love it."

To be indoctrinated as he was, Olivo simply observed the process and felt a connection with the culture.

"I really admire the way that they preserve traditions," Olivo says. "I love the fact that you can walk into an Italian café and there's a real barista making real espresso, not some automatic push-a-button-and-it-comes-out [process]. No, he or she is grinding the beans, they're tamping it, they're pulling the shot for

the right amount of time and they're serving it to you, as if every individual one was the only one they're going to make that day."

Italian traditions imparted an intimate authenticity, which is a feeling Olivo cherishes.

"When you think about Italy, one of the things you think about is the Italian food culture, but that encompasses a lot of stuff," Olivo says. "It's food, wine, agriculture. Most of the stuff grown in Italy is organic by nature. They don't label it organic because it is organic; that's how they've always been and how they've maintained it. So I learned about that. I learned about winemaking. I learned how to harvest olives. I went and saw the olive-oil process. And my wife being from there, [being] Sicilian, I learned how to make bread, cannoli, various types of stuff. So cooking obviously has been something that I've learned. Now, I'm not really passionate about all that stuff — cooking and whatnot — but just being there and being part of that culture, in a sense, you learn it. It's infectious. It really is. I'm fascinated by the way that they do things, the way they do things as they did 100 years ago."

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Two months before he left Italy in 2011, Brock Olivo met the woman he would one day marry.

But long before that could happen, he returned to America and put more than 5,000 miles between them.

Olivo had found a job coaching the United Football League's Omaha Nighthawks. Then he moved on to coaching running backs and special teams at Coastal Carolina.

"We did long distance, real long distance," Olivo says with a laugh. "We defined the term for a while."

A couple years later, Federica moved to America with her daughter, Sofia, and their family became complete.

Olivo had gone to Italy in search of a connection to his ancestry and his family's history, and he ended up finding his family's future.

Reflecting on his journey, Olivo couldn't help but think of how it all began when his great-grandfather left his homeland in 1918.

"The fact that he made that sacrifice at 18 years old to cross the Atlantic on his own and to allow us to be born and raised in the greatest country in the world, I mean, we feel forever indebted to him," Olivo says. "So that's why we kept his spirit alive, and that's why I will never let it die. And my children will know that and really anyone who comes in contact with me feels that, as well, because it's important to me."



# NFL's first 30 days: A case of reshaped identities

By Jarrett Bell  
USA Today  
October 7, 2017

Friday is the 30-day marker for the NFL's 98th season, and what a ride it has been.

Raise your hand if you saw the Buffalo Bills in first place.

Sit down — or, better yet, take a knee — if you pegged the Jacksonville Jaguars (still with Blake Bortles under center) winning two more games than teams quarterbacked by Eli Manning and Philip Rivers have combined.

Sean McVay? They told us he was good. Yet somewhere, Eric Dickerson — extreme critic of the Los Angeles Rams' previous coaching regime — can take a bow.

Kareem Hunt. Deshaun Watson. Leonard Fournette. Christian McCaffrey. Rookies, playing like they've been here before.

Sure, the NFL typically serves up unpredictable drama, compelling dashes from worst to first and social litmus tests. Yet there's nothing quite like the present campaign to hammer that home. Threaded together, the early stages of this season underscore the relevance of identity — on and off the field.

Take the New England Patriots defense. Who are these guys? While Tom Brady cruises along like 40 is the new 30, Bill Belichick entered Week 5 with a defense allowing the most yards and second-most points in the NFL. That, friends, is an identity crisis — even if the Patriots won Thursday (with some help from Tampa Bay Buccaneers kicker Nick Folk).

Meanwhile, there's the matter of establishing new identities. Buffalo's Sean McDermott is nobody's Rex Ryan. Yet like the other two rookie coaches (McVay and Vance Joseph) who have started 3-1, McDermott has come as advertised in fixing the area of his expertise. The Bills' D has allowed the fewest points in the league. Likewise, Joseph has the Denver Broncos defense humming even better against the run — just ask Marshawn Lynch, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Melvin Gordon for proof. And McVay has turned the Rams offense that was worst in the NFL last year into a juggernaut.

Andy Reid, the veteran coach of the Kansas City Chiefs, is in the middle of another type of identity shift, which is propelling the NFL's only undefeated team. In my view, with Reid's creative offensive schemes, there's not a more exciting team to watch these days. Efficient quarterback Alex Smith, among the early candidates for MVP, is playing better than ever while bolstered by Hunt, explosive Tyreek Hill and an array of wrinkles baked into Reid's offense, including the read-option. You can no longer label Reid as Mr. Conservatism.

But you can wonder what happened to the New York Giants (0-4), Miami Dolphins (1-2) and Tennessee Titans (2-2), all of who came into the season with high expectations. Whatever was supposed to happen, hasn't happened. At least not yet. The Dallas Cowboys can relate. One more loss and they will already match last year's regular-season total.

Thirty days does not make an entire season. The next 30 should reveal much more about many teams' true identities. I mean, the Rams were 3-1 last year, too, en route to 4-12.

The NFL, as a league and cultural phenomenon, undoubtedly has a set of identity issues itself, flowing from the protests that seemed to be on the back-burner when the season began but now reignited with a passion.

Punked by Donald Trump, the league is walking a tightrope in trying to mitigate damage to its business model — i.e. support from fans and sponsors — amid protests linked to societal issues that are discomfiting to a significant number of its players.

Unity sounds good, but the theme pushed after Trump blasted the NFL is too shallow. Players, coaches and owners certainly came together in the face of Trump's criticism and skewing of the underlying source of the protests — police brutality and racial inequality — engaging in mass demonstrations before games across the league in Week 3. But that was largely a one-and-done deal.

The unity theme sure didn't resonate Sunday in Baltimore with the largely white fans at M&T Bank Stadium who unmercifully booed Ravens players as they knelt in prayer before the national anthem. Similar boo-greetings took place a week earlier in New England and Arizona, where the Dallas Cowboys took a collective knee before the anthem.

The NFL has been progressive in taking a stronger stand — finally — against domestic violence. It has been proactive with community service — such as the breast cancer campaigns of recent years, expanded this year to raise awareness for all types of cancer — and its commitment to the military.

Yet the league, as an institution — and while Colin Kaepernick remains unemployed — faces a much more challenging task to reveal what it stands for in the face of the racial layers linked to the protests. We know its stance on sexism, as Cam Newton was quickly admonished Wednesday for his ridiculous and insensitive remark to a female reporter. The widespread heat on Newton may have showed, sadly, that a football player can be held to a higher standard than a presidential candidate.

On the same day, word circulated that Washington receiver Terrelle Pryor contended that issues he had with fans in Kansas City on Monday night stemmed from some slurring him with the N-word. The league insists it won't tolerate such racially charged animus at its stadiums, and threatens to ban violators. We'll see.

To paraphrase Maya Angelou, people will show you who they are better than they can tell you. When it comes to identity, that applies to the NFL on and off the field.

# National anthem protests don't appear to be hurting NFL ticket sales

By Kevin Spain  
USA Today  
October 7, 2017

It's still early in the process to get a full grasp of how the NFL national anthem protests are going to affect the league, but it certainly has been something that sparked conversation.

President Trump's base of supporters and those who take offense to players who take a knee during the anthem — a protest started by then-San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick to call attention to racial inequality and police brutality — have made their feelings known about their displeasure, some even calling for a boycott.

Is that having an effect? Not really, according to ticket brokers.

TickPick, where customers can bid on tickets for events, had a significant drop in NFL ticket sales last week, until the weekend. They were down 17.9% compared to the same week last year. At the time, CEO Brett Goldberg and director of client relations Jack Slingland said that while they've seen a drop in sales after Week 3 in years past, what they experienced last week was more significant.

Looking at the data, they couldn't say for sure the protests were the reason — because you only get feedback from those who buy tickets and not from those who choose not to — but because there was so much press about the issue, it was something that had to be studied.

Then over the weekend, they got a 9.6% increase in sales from the week before.

This week, they've seen a 21.8% decrease in sales compared to before Week 4, but that was pretty much in line from the kind of decrease they've seen in recent seasons, which have been more than 30% lower in two of the past three years.

In a statement to USA TODAY Sports, the company said it expects the way the "NFL, the owners, the teams and the players handled last week's games will reduce the volatility that we have seen in ticket sales."

At SeatGeek, the numbers seem to indicate very little, if any, change in buying habits. The company said that ticket prices have been pretty normal for the past two weeks.

The company said according to their sales data, they're seeing a similar number of transactions each week. So the conclusion here is that there either has been no impact from a call for a boycott or there is a number of folks buying tickets because of the publicity the league has been getting.

Not only have fans not stopped going to games, but they're watching on TV more than they did last year. Despite Trump's claim that TV ratings are down, the overall figures for the past two weeks say the opposite. Week 3 ratings were up 3% across all games from 2016, including a spike of 63% in the rating

for Monday Night Football, the league announced last week. Overall, viewership for Monday Night Football is averaging 11.9 million through the first four weeks, a 5% increase from last year.

Fox's NFL coverage for Week 4 drew a 12.6 rating and 26 share, a 14% increase over its Week 4 coverage a year ago. The network broadcast one game nationally on Sunday and the ratings were about 20% better than in the same slot covered by CBS in Week 4 of 2016.

NBC's Sunday Night Football rating was unchanged from last year's Week 4 game. The Seattle Seahawks' blowout victory over the Indianapolis Colts resulted in a 11.0 rating and 19 share.

CBS was the one network to see a ratings dip for its national game (Oakland Raiders vs. Denver Broncos), which began at 4:25 pm ET. That telecast had a 10.8 rating and an 18 share, a 23% decline when compared to Week 4 in 2016.

# Broncos Bye Week Checkup: Denver Has Improved Line Play On Both Sides Of The Ball

By Rick Brown  
CBS Local  
October 7, 2017

There was a lot of uncertainty as the Denver Broncos (3-1) headed into the 2017 season. While the Broncos secondary finished as the top unit for a second year in a row, the rushing defense was among the worst in the league. On offense, the Broncos were unable to run the ball and it had rippling effects throughout the team. The Broncos offense finished in the bottom half of the league, while no one on the Broncos' team rushed for more than 650 yards. Last season, the Broncos were only averaging 92 rushing yards a game and so far through four games, Denver is averaging 143 rushing yards.

Not only have the Broncos improved their offensive running game, but they have also improved the run defense. Denver finished near the bottom of the league in rushing defense in 2016, and are now the No. 1 rushing defense this season. These improvements can be attributed to rookie Garrett Bolles on the offense and Derek Wolfe and Domata Peko on the defensive line.

## Improvements In The Trenches

What has been really impressive is the performance of the offensive and defensive lines through the first four games of the 2017 season. The addition of 2017 first-round pick, Garrett Bolles, has turned this once porous line into a respectable NFL line. The Broncos are averaging more than 50 extra yards so far this season. Along with the addition of Ronald Leary, a free-agent from the Dallas Cowboys, the offensive line, anchored by Matt Paradis, is now a top-performing unit. Broncos management took the same approach to the defensive side of the ball and it is paying the same dividends.

Denver gave up 130 rushing yards per game during the 2016 season. Through four games in 2017, the Broncos are allowing 50 yards a game. Several players have contributed to this improvement on defense. Derek Wolfe and Adam Gotsis have continued to improve their play, while veteran free-agent Domata Peko has done a great job of locking down the middle of the line. The defensive line is causing a lot of ruckus as the Broncos rank 14th in the league in sacks. There is a lot to like as the Broncos go into the bye week with a 3-1 record, but the Broncos still have plenty of work to do if the team wants to compete in January.

## Closing Out Games And Kicking Woes

Through four games, the Broncos have won by 3, 6 and 25 points, and have one loss by 10 points. During the season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers (0-4), the Broncos won after head coach Vance Joseph iced the kicker and the special teams blocked the field goal attempt. Though Denver led most of the game against the Chargers, LA came roaring back in the fourth quarter to almost pull out a win. Then against the Oakland Raiders (2-2), the Broncos again led most of the game and almost lost to the backup quarterback, E.J. Manuel, in the fourth quarter. This comeback from the Raiders could have been avoided if Denver's kicker, Brandon McManus, made all of his field goal attempts.

Through the preseason, McManus was perfect on field goal attempts—and then came the season opener. While he missed his first two attempts in the game against the Chargers, he has since made seven out of eight attempts. While no NFL kicker is perfect, McManus has missed some important kicks in close games. Each miss of McManus' continues to keep opposing teams in the game instead of putting the contest out of reach. The Chargers and Raiders both took advantage of missed field goals and almost came out with a victory against the Broncos. While missing a kick is inevitable, hopefully McManus can perform better in high pressure situations throughout the remainder of the season.

#### A Giant Achievement

The Broncos have a huge task after the bye week as the New York Giants (0-4) come to the Mile High City for Sunday night football. New York's record this season is a bit of a surprise, but it is never safe to sleep on these Giants. The Broncos secondary will have a lot to contain with this talented roster of wide receivers. Look for Brandon Marshall, Sterling Shepard and Odell Beckham Jr. to fly high against the No Fly Zone.