

# Vance Joseph has new message for Broncos players as they prepare for grueling 12-game stretch

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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Vance Joseph roamed the Broncos' indoor practice Monday afternoon sporting a new look.

On the front of his gray, long-sleeve T-shirt was "MORE," in white block lettering. On the back read:

Effort  
Detail  
Focus  
Commitment

Since taking over the Broncos in January, Joseph has not-so-subtly scattered his aphorisms throughout the team's practice facility, many of which were collected along his coaching stops over the years. They're dictums as much as motivators, so when players returned from their bye week to begin their 12-game stretch, awaiting them, too, were the new shirts.

"The message to our team is to do more. We want more effort, more focus, more detail and more commitment," Joseph said. "That's our message. As we move through this season — hopefully with success — as we have success, we want to do more to keep our edge, so to speak.

"That's our message after the bye: Let's do more than what we did in the first quarter."

The Broncos ended the first quarter of their season with a 3-1 record, but they have a fresh reminder of how quickly a season can turn, and how quickly playoff hopes can rise and fade.

In 2016, when they returned from their Week 11 bye with a 7-3 record, they succumbed to the Kansas City Chiefs in a season-altering overtime loss and finished their season 2-4 and without a spot in the playoffs. This year, after enjoying their earliest possible bye of the season, the Broncos face a grueling stretch that includes three successive road games (Weeks 7-9) and two games against the undefeated Chiefs.

Next up on Sunday are the 0-5 New York Giants, who lost receivers Odell Beckham Jr., Dwayne Harris and Brandon Marshall to season-ending injuries last weekend, and could also be without receiver Sterling Shepard because of an ankle injury.

Trap game? Not in the eyes of the Broncos, who heard the same words ahead of their loss at Buffalo in Week 3.

"There might be a little uncertainty: 0-5 with a few guys out, they may try to mix some things up," safety Justin Simmons said. "They also played the first game of the season without Odell. So there might be some stuff there. All in all, you never know. ... That's another great thing about this bye — it's an opportunity to prepare for everything that we might see. It's a great opportunity at home to be 4-1."

After hosting the Giants, the Broncos embark on their three-game road stretch to Los Angeles, Kansas City and Philadelphia.

For the last two of those road games, the Broncos could have starting edge rusher Shane Ray and rookie tight end Jake Butt on the active roster. The former was placed on injured reserve after suffering a wrist injury in training camp, and the latter has yet to play a live snap in the NFL because of a knee injury he suffered in college. Both are set to practice for the first time next Monday and figure to be key pieces in the team's quest for the postseason.

"For me, I just want to feel like I'm contributing to the team and helping this team win," Butt said. "It's been hard doing that from a distance a little bit behind the scenes. I'm excited to try to earn my fellow teammates' trust in practice and earn the coaches' trust."

The Broncos return from the break with the league's leading defense in total yards (260.8 per game) and yards rushing allowed per game (50.8). They return with an offense that ranks third in yards rushing (143 per game) and sixth in third-down percentage (46.7 percent).

But Joseph wants more.

"It's on my T-shirt," Joseph reminded. He added: "That's our second-quarter motto there."

# Broncos to wear all-blue uniforms vs. Giants

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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The Broncos will wear their alternate all-blue uniforms Sunday when they host the New York Giants.

The team last wore their blue-on-blues in Week 14 of the 2015 season, when they fell to the Raiders 15-12 — when Oakland defensive end Khalil Mack amassed five sacks of quarterback Brock Osweiler. Prior to that loss, the Broncos previously wore their all-blues in an October 2014 game against the 49ers, when Peyton Manning threw four touchdown passes and surpassed Brett Favre for the most career TD passes.

The all-blue unis made their debut in an August preseason game in 1997 and appeared for the first time in a regular-season game in 2003, against the Raiders.

# Linebacker Shane Ray, tight end Jake Butt nearing return to practice for Broncos

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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Shane Ray has counted down the days in tweets and on a calendar hanging in his locker. Jake Butt has eagerly anticipated his first steps onto an NFL field since the Broncos drafted him out of Michigan in April.

Both players will take tangible steps toward their respective returns to football when they practice Oct. 16.

Ray, the Broncos' third-year outside linebacker, has been out of action since suffering a torn ligament in his wrist on the second day of training camp. He was moved to the injured reserve list before the season and is eligible to return for the Broncos' game at Kansas City on Oct. 30.

"To perform at the level I was and then get hurt the second, third day of training camp, it's been tough," Ray said. "Watching so much film, studying every day, but not be able to go out there and perform and execute the things that I'm doing mentally in my head, it's very difficult. But I can't tell you how much more hungry it's made me to get on the field and actually start making plays."

Butt, the rookie tight end, hasn't gone through a practice since he suffered a torn ACL — the second of his football career — in the Orange Bowl on Dec. 30. He's on the non-football injury list and would be eligible to return as soon as the Broncos' game at the Los Angeles Chargers on Oct. 22. The Broncos will have 21 days to either add Butt to the 53-man roster or leave him on the NFI list once he begins practicing.

"I plan on putting my trust in this coaching staff and the trainers," said Butt, a fifth-round pick by the Broncos. "I feel good. For me, being a competitor, the sooner I can help this team the better."

This is the second time Butt has gone through the ACL rehab process. The first came between his freshman and sophomore seasons at Michigan, and he returned to game action just six months later. Butt is now 9½ months removed from the latest injury, and he believes he's ready to not only return to the field, but also make an impact.

"The hardest part for me has been, I want to make this team," Butt said. "I don't want to be handed a spot. I want to earn this and make this team. I've been having to do that off to the side without the coaches really coaching me and outside of meetings and everything. That's been the hardest part."

**Not pushing Charles.** The Broncos through four games could not have hoped for much more out of veteran running back Jamaal Charles, who is sixth among NFL running backs with a least 30 carries at 5.3 yards per rush.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph conceded Monday that it's tempting to give Charles a larger workload given the burst he's displayed through four games, but the team is playing the long game with the 30-year-old veteran.

"You do (have to strike a balance) because our goal for Jamaal is to keep him healthy for a full season," Joseph said. "When you watch Jamaal burst through the line, absolutely you want more of that. C.J. (Anderson) is playing well and (Devontae Booker) has got fresh legs. We have three backs capable of being number ones. I think keeping Jamaal at his pitch count, so to speak, is going to help him stay healthy for 16 games and hopefully more."

Injury update. Broncos wide receiver Cody Latimer (knee) "is feeling better" following the team's bye week, Joseph said Monday.

Latimer, who was held out of the Broncos' Oct. 1 victory over the Raiders, was not at practice during the portion open to media Monday.

Joseph also said quarterback Paxton Lynch will test his injured right shoulder with a brief throwing session Thursday or Friday.

# Broncos must beat hapless Giants, Chargers to set up Chiefs showdown

By Mike Klis

9 News

October 10, 2017

To Vance Joseph, the New York Giants aren't winless this season. They are a team coming off an 11-5 playoff year.

To Joseph, the Giants didn't just lose four receivers to injury, including Odell Beckham Jr. and former Bronco Brandon Marshall. They are a team Joseph says has a Hall of Fame quarterback.

Eli Manning has two Super Bowl titles and a 14-season Iron Man streak of 216 consecutive starts. But if Peyton's younger brother is a Hall of Famer then Joseph fully understands the power of the East Coast Bias.

The Broncos are back from the bye and can't fool around. They must pounce on this hapless team from New York this Sunday night (kickoff 6:30 on 9News) at eventually-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

Then if the Broncos beat the Chargers next week in Los Angeles, the AFC West showdown will be on.

This season sets up nicely for the Broncos – if they are 5-1 going into their Halloween Eve game at undefeated Kansas City.

"I don't think it could play out any better," said Broncos linebacker Shane Ray, who is on pace to return from his wrist injury for the Broncos' game October 30 at Kansas City. "With how well the Chiefs are playing, I feel like we're the team to beat them. I feel like we're the team that balances up against them very well. For me to come back in that game to add some pass rush, I'm so excited. I want to be a part of the reason why we take them down and really take over our division."

Joseph came back from the Broncos' bye week with a motivational theme. He put the slogan on T-shirts and distributed them to his players, keeping one for himself.

"The message to our team is to do more," said Joseph. "We want more effort, more focus, more detail and more commitment. That's our message. As we move through the season, hopefully with success—as we have success, we want to do more to keep our edge so to speak. That's our message after the bye. Let's do more than what we did the first quarter."

In that case, 5-1 would be more than 3-1. The Chiefs are the NFL's only undefeated team at 5-0.

"It's a good football team, so we'll see," Joseph said. "That's down the road. Our focus is the Giants right now. The Chiefs—I mean that's what, I don't know, a month away, maybe?"

Three weeks, coach. After your team plays the 0-5 Giants this week and 1-4 Chargers next week.

# Latimer to miss week or two after blood injection procedure on knee

By Mike Klis

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The Denver Broncos will be missing their best special teams players for another game or so after Cody Latimer underwent a blood injection procedure in his right knee last week.

Latimer has been bothered since the start of preseason with patella tendinitis in his right knee. He still was excelling as a kickoff returner, where he ranks second in the NFL with a 28.4-yard average, and as a gunner on punt and kickoff coverage.

His knee condition became aggravated while playing on the Buffalo Bills' artificial surface in week 3 and Latimer did not play in the Broncos' week 4 win last week against the Oakland Raiders.

He underwent a Platelet-rich Plasma (PRP) procedure during the bye week. Blood was drawn from his arm, then the blood was spun in a device. The blood is separated and the plasma, platelets and red and white blood cells were injected into his knee.

"It was lingering and it was the bye week so we decided to get it done," Latimer said Monday.

Kobe Bryant, Tiger Woods and Rafael Nadal are among the well-known athletes who have had the PRP procedure that is often recommended for those with tendon injuries.

The recovery is typically three or four weeks. With the bye counting as one week, Latimer will miss this Sunday's game against the New York Giants and while there is hope he can play Oct. 22 against the Los Angeles Chargers, the Monday night game October 30 at AFC West-leading Kansas City may be more realistic.

"It's feeling good now," Latimer said. "I wanted to get this over with now so the rest of the year I'm straight."

## Ray, Butt nearing return

Broncos' head coach Vance Joseph revealed during his press conference Monday that veteran outside linebacker Shane Ray and rookie tight end Jake Butt will come off their respect injured reserve lists and start practicing next Monday.

Ray has been on a six-week injured reserve list after undergoing surgery to repair ligament damage in his left wrist, an injury suffered on the first day of training camp.

Ray must practice for two weeks, but because the Broncos play Monday night at Kansas City, he will be able to play in that game.

“That one day makes a difference,” said Ray, who grew up outside of Kansas City and recently had two pins removed from his wrist. “Can’t wait.”

Butt suffered a torn ACL in his right knee during Michigan’s 33-32 Orange Bowl loss to Florida State last December 30.

The Broncos drafted him in the fifth round, anyway, and placed him on their non-football-related injured list, where he had to stay for six weeks. He will have to practice for at least two weeks, but the Broncos could have him practice a third week before making a decision on whether to activate him onto their 53-man roster, or place him on season-ending injured reserve.

The signs are positive, though, Butt will help the Broncos in the second half of the season.

“I feel good,” Butt said. “Obviously, for me being a competitor the sooner I can help this team the better but I have my full trust in this coaching staff and this group of trainers.”



# Broncos pleased with run game, but seek more balance on offense

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 10, 2017

Four games into their season, it appears as if the Denver Broncos' offense has repaired its biggest failing from last season. But the Broncos still find themselves in search of more touchdowns, more consistency and some more big-play pop.

"I like where we are because we've won some games and we know there's still a lot more we can do," quarterback Trevor Siemian said. "... I think we are just kind of one play away from putting things together."

The Broncos were 28th in the league in rushing last season, with their issues in the offensive line consistently revealed in the struggles. This season, however, with C.J. Anderson healthy, the addition of running back Jamaal Charles, and a remade offensive line, the Broncos enter Week 6 ranked No. 3 in rushing at 143 yards per game.

While that is a source of pride, they also haven't quite been the offense they want to be overall.

"Who we are right now? I'm not sure," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said on Monday. "But running the football, right now, is good for us."

It has been, indeed, as it has powered the Broncos well enough that they are in the league's top 10 in third-down conversions, No. 4 in time of possession and are scoring, on average, about two more points a game than they did last season.

But that has come with wide receiver Demaryius Thomas still without a touchdown catch as the passing game has been largely feast or famine -- even in the same game, at times. That was clearly evident in the Broncos' win over the Oakland Raiders just before their bye, when Siemian threw for 115 yards in the first quarter, but had just 64 passing yards the rest of the game.

Siemian was tied for the league lead in touchdown passes after two games, with six, but has had one touchdown throw -- a one-handed snatch by tight end A.J. Derby -- in the past two games. Defenses, despite the Broncos' rushing totals, continue to take their chances putting extra players in coverage to stop Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders rather than load the line of scrimmage against the run.

"Right now, I think it's a work in progress," Joseph said. "Our running game is there, we're averaging 143 a game, I think, with three healthy backs. That part is right for us. The passing game, it's plays that we missed, but it's how they're playing us, also."

Joseph has been committed to the run. The one game Siemian has attempted more than 32 passes is also the only game the Broncos have lost -- against the Buffalo Bills, when Siemian threw 40 times.

The Broncos would like to get more efficient when they do throw. Siemian is tied for 16th among the league's starting quarterbacks -- with Philip Rivers -- at 7.0 yards per attempt.

The Broncos either need another productive receiver that can force defenses to send help away from Thomas and Sanders or they need to continue to run the ball well enough to pull a safety closer to the line of scrimmage. Either scenario would give the Broncos a little more room to move the ball in the passing game, especially downfield.

Siemian has one completion this season of more than 30 yards and that was in the season opener -- a 44-yard completion to tight end Virgil Green.

The Broncos' offense hasn't always closed the deal, either. They've scored just seven points in the fourth quarter in their first four games combined -- the lowest total in the league.

By contrast, the unbeaten Kansas City Chiefs have scored 73 fourth-quarter points this season.

"We've got two Pro Bowl-caliber receivers, so most teams can't match up in single-high coverage," Joseph said. "... Our game plans are determined by what we see from defenses."

# Broncos want 'more' against winless Giants

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Sunday will be the Denver Broncos' fifth game of the season and it will also be the fourth time they've played at home in those five weeks.

So as they re-convened Monday after their bye week, coach Vance Joseph wanted to get his team's attention because there is plenty of heavy lifting on the way. The Broncos will face the 0-5 New York Giants Sunday night in Denver.

The importance of the game, beyond simply a win the Broncos would like to have, is the Broncos will not play another home game after the meeting with the Giants until a Nov. 12 game against the New England Patriots.

As a result Joseph broke out a new shirt. With "More" on the front and "Effort, Focus, Detail, Commitment" listed on the back.

"(The) message to our team is to do more," Joseph said. "... As we move through this season, hopefully with success, as we have more success we want to do more to keep our edge, so to speak."

The Broncos, 3-1, returned to work Monday morning with the Kansas City Chiefs leading the AFC West, at 5-0. The Broncos' lone bobble to this point was a rather disjointed effort against the Buffalo Bills in Week 3 that is also their only road trip to this point.

The Giants have an assortment of injuries, including a season-ending ankle fracture to wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. to go with their winless start, so Joseph has tried make the team's reset take hold.

Hence, the new wardrobe. After Sunday's game the Broncos have a stretch of three consecutive road games -- Oct. 22 against the Los Angeles Chargers, Oct. 30 against the Chiefs and Nov. 4 against the Philadelphia Eagles.

"I think it works," said Broncos safety Justin Simmons. "Coaches always talk about how this generation is all about the T-shirts and wanting to represent whatever on a T-shirt. They always make stuff like that here or whatever the focus is for the month or for the rest of the season, obviously. That T-shirt represents what we're trying to hone in and lock in on."

The Broncos are healthy as well. Wide receiver Cody Latimer (knee) and backup quarterback Paxton Lynch (shoulder) were the only players who did not take part in Monday's practice.

# Shane Ray, Jake Butt cleared to return to practice next week

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 10, 2017

Denver Broncos linebacker Shane Ray has kept a calendar in his locker thus far this season so he can mark off the days until his return to the lineup Oct. 30 against the Kansas City Chiefs.

By league rules, Ray, who is on injured reserve after undergoing wrist surgery in training camp, cannot play in a game before Week 8, when the Broncos face the Kansas City Chiefs at Arrowhead Stadium. But Monday morning Ray said he got "the next best thing" when he was formally told by the Broncos' coaches he will return to practice next week.

Ray will take part in his first practice since the opening days of training next Monday.

"I've just been taking it week by week, day by day on my calendar," Ray said. "But at least I get to practice next week and I don't have many more days to mark down."

Both Ray and tight end Jake Butt, who has been on the team's non-football injury list after having knee surgery for an injury suffered in his last college game at Michigan in December, will return to practice next week. The Broncos will have to make a decision on Butt as they watch him practice in the coming weeks as to whether to add him to the roster or put him on injured reserve for the remainder of the season.

"We're excited about those two guys coming back," coach Vance Joseph said.

Butt has said he has kept up with the playbook, though he has not practiced with the Broncos since he was selected in the fifth round of the draft this past April. If the Broncos see him practice the way they expect, he could provide some impact in the passing game as he gets more acclimated to the offense in the season's second half.

The Broncos have 21 days to move Butt to the active roster or injured reserve after he returns to practice. But Butt would be eligible to play as soon as the Broncos' Oct. 22 game against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Ray said he expects to be game ready Oct. 30.

"I've pretty much done simulated games with the strength coaches, we've worked how many plays I would play," Ray said. "It would have been different if I had hurt my knee or something, but I've been running the whole time. I've been doing everything."

Ray, who was second on the team last season with eight sacks, was expected to be a starter at outside linebacker opposite of Von Miller before his injury. The Broncos are No. 1 in total offense, No. 1 in run defense and No. 10 in pass defense.

The Broncos, having had their bye this past Sunday, have played one fewer game than most teams and are tied for 23rd in the league in sacks with 10.

"Our defense has looked very good, our run defense has been stellar and we have done what we do in coverage," Ray said. "Our pass rush has been good too, but I feel like it's going to get better when I come back. I can't wait."

# 'I'm A Quick Healer': Broncos Rookie Jake Butt To Practice Soon

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
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The Denver Broncos will soon find out whether their roll of the dice on tight end Jake Butt has a chance to pay off this season.

Coach Vance Joseph said Butt will practice next week for the first time, triggering a 21-day window for the team to decide whether to activate him or officially turn his rookie season into a redshirt year.

"I plan on putting my trust in this coaching staff and the trainers," Butt said Monday. "I feel good. Obviously for me, being a competitor, the sooner I can help this team the better."

Butt, who tore his right ACL in his final college game, will practice Monday alongside outside linebacker Shane Ray, who's been out since the first week of training camp with a torn ligament in his left wrist, Joseph said.

Ray is eligible to return to action on Oct. 30 against Kansas City. Butt could make his debut a week earlier, against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Butt is a versatile tight end who was considered a first-round pick — maybe even the headliner of a great tight end class — but he slipped to the fifth round after tearing his right ACL against Florida State in the Orange Bowl.

He underwent surgery Jan. 10 to repair the same ACL he tore in 2014.

"It's been really tough," Butt said. "The first time I tore my ACL, I missed one game. I came back six months and one week later. I got banged up throughout college. I don't know. I always say I'm a quick healer. It's been really tough. It's been an adjustment having to sit back and watch.

"For me, I just want to feel like I'm contributing to the team and helping this team win. It's been hard doing that from a distance a little bit behind the scenes. I'm excited to try to earn my fellow teammates' trust in practice and earn the coaches' trust."

Butt, who collected on an insurance policy for slipping down the draft, was the cautionary tale of this year's draft after running backs Leonard Fournette and Christian McCaffrey skipped their bowl games a year after Notre Dame linebacker Jaylon Smith cost himself millions by blowing out his left knee in the Fiesta Bowl.

Fournette and McCaffrey were both top-10 picks and are already making an impact for the Jaguars and Panthers, respectively.

Butt has always insisted he has no regrets, however.

“I’ll never regret playing in a football game in my life,” Butt said on the day he was drafted.

Butt has had plenty of time to study the playbook.

“I feel really good about the playbook. I’ve been hitting it just as if I were playing. I still watch film with the guys. I quiz myself. I look at the scripts every day and make sure I know what everyone is doing,” Butt said. “It’s going to be an adjustment of course because it’s one thing to do it off to the side or in your head when you’re quizzing yourself, but it’s another thing to hear it in the huddle, get out and then make your necessary adjustments depending on the defense.

“That’s a challenge I’m excited about. I’ve been doing my best to make sure I’m prepared.”

# Cowboys' Jerry Jones reignites protest conversation in NFL

By Schuyler Dixon  
Associated Press  
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Now that Jerry Jones of the Dallas Cowboys has become the first NFL owner with a public suggestion of repercussions for displays during the national anthem, players are opening up more about the delicate balance of team chemistry and politics in the locker room.

And they're not necessarily slamming the powerful and outspoken Jones for suggesting his players will be benched if they disrespect the flag.

"He's the owner. Either you listen or you don't," Washington Redskins tight end Vernon Davis said Monday. "And if you don't listen, then you won't play. It's all up to each and every individual."

Jones was responding Sunday night to questions about Vice President Mike Pence's decision to leave an Indianapolis home game in protest of about a dozen San Francisco players who kneeled during the anthem. President Donald Trump tweeted after Pence's walkout that he had told his vice president to leave if any players kneeled.

On Monday night, Trump also tweeted his support for Jones.

"A big salute to Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, who will BENCH players who disrespect our Flag," the president tweeted. "Stand for Anthem or sit for game!"

Former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick started the movement early last season when he sat on the bench, and later kneeled, during the anthem to protest racial inequality and police mistreatment of black males. He remains unsigned and wants to resume his career.

The 74-year-old Jones, also the team's general manager, said after a loss to Green Bay on Sunday that the NFL cannot leave the impression that it tolerates players disrespecting the flag and said any Cowboys doing so will not play.

They were the most provocative comments so far from Jones, a powerful behind-the-scenes force in the NFL and recent Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee who had already been clear in his support of standing for the anthem.

The NFL players' union had a swift rebuke Monday. Executive director DeMaurice Smith said Jones contradicted assurances last week from Commissioner Roger Goodell and New York Giants President John Mara that players could express themselves without reprisals.



"I look forward to the day when everyone in management can unite and truly embrace and articulate what the flag stands for, liberty and justice for all, instead of some of them just talking about standing," Smith said. "We look forward to continuing our talks with them on this very issue."

Many of the NFL's 32 teams have held meetings in various forms to discuss the issue since Trump said more than two weeks ago during a rally in Alabama that owners should fire players who kneel for the anthem.

In some cases, teams have struggled with their responses.

After Trump's criticism, the Pittsburgh Steelers agreed to stay off the field before the anthem. But Army veteran Alejandro Villanueva, an offensive lineman, stood at the edge of a tunnel with his teammates in darkness behind him during the anthem two weeks ago.

Villanueva said he was not making a political statement or defying his teammates, calling it a misunderstanding that was "very embarrassing on my end."

Miami coach Adam Gase recently created a team policy requiring players either to stand or wait in the tunnel. Three chose to stay off the field Sunday at home against Tennessee — Michael Thomas, Kenny Stills and Julius Thomas. All three have kneeled in the past.

Asked why he was responding to questions on the topic after previously declining to comment, Gase said, "Because I thought it was time for us to address it."

After several meetings over two days before a Monday night game in Arizona two weeks ago, the Cowboys and Jones kneeled arm-in-arm before the anthem. All of them stood during the anthem, with arms still locked. Otherwise, the Cowboys have stood on the sideline.

The Denver Broncos decided two weeks ago that they would stop kneeling after coach Vance Joseph met with his leadership group. The Broncos stood before their most recent game against Oakland, with linebacker Brandon Marshall raising a fist. Denver was off Sunday.

"We just feel like as a team, it's bringing more negative attention ... than it is positive," safety Justin Simmons said. "So, we made our point the one time we did it. The awareness of the social injustices are out there."

During their bye last week, Atlanta players and coaches had a discussion mediated by a representative from the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality. Falcons owner Arthur Blank invited the outside perspective, and the team has decided to stand during the anthem.

"There's no policy that was written or spoken about," coach Dan Quinn said. "It's more one that was really in the heart of brotherhood, that what we do, we'll do it together."

Jones isn't the only owner who feels strongly about players standing for the anthem, but there have been no indications of teams requiring their players to stand. Mara has told Giants players he wants them to stand but supports their right to do otherwise.

"As a team we've had our talks about it and we're good to go," said Redskins running back Chris Thompson, among several Washington players to deny reports that they are required to stand. "Our ownership, we've all talked about it. I think on our end, we're good."

# Broncos look to avoid letdown vs. winless Giants

By Troy Renck

KMGH

October 10, 2017

This wasn't supposed to happen.

The New York Giants — the once mighty Giants — arrive in Denver this Sunday and Eli Manning owns as many wins as Peyton Manning this season. The elder Manning brother retired following the Broncos' Super Bowl 50 title and is now represented by a statue in Indianapolis. Eli looks forever removed from his pair of Super Bowl crowns, aging in dog years behind a porous offensive line.

For the Broncos, humility remains important. They started getting the feels after a 2-0 start and dissolved in Buffalo following a less-than-ideal week of practice, coach Vance Joseph admitted. The Giants represent a must-win because, well, they haven't won. Good teams take and make their layups when they show up on the schedule.

Losing to Buffalo should pay dividends this week.

"Trap game? I don't see it that way. Our team won't see it that way," said Joseph, while praising the Giants' pedigree, Manning and their stout defense. "Buffalo, we just didn't play good enough. That wasn't a trap game and this won't be either."

A message met the Broncos as they returned from parts unknown after their bye week: MORE.

Three wins in four games is a start, an appetizer. The meat of the schedule arrives with three consecutive road games looming at the Chargers, Eagles and Chiefs. Joseph wants more. More effort, detail, focus, and commitment.

"It's the same as championship habits. It trickles down to the players, to our leadership group," defensive end Adam Gotsis said. "I like seeing (the message) personally because it shows me where his mind's at. If I am coming in that day and my mind's not right, and I see coach I know I need to buckle it up."

The Broncos used the week to rest, recover and research. The danger with the Giants is now they have been typecast as ugly men in the fight. They have nothing to lose. And with so many of their top players gone, it creates mystery about their offense. A pass-happy team might try to run in back-to-back weeks after losing superstar Odell Beckham Jr. (broken ankle) and Brandon Marshall (ankle) to injuries.

"There's a little bit of uncertainty, but that's the NFL," safety Justin Simmons said. "We have to be ready for anything."

The Broncos recognize this is a time to build momentum. They are 15-3 at home following bye weeks. With brawls ahead against the aforementioned Chiefs, Patriots and Raiders, they can't afford a misstep.

They need more, not less.

## Footnotes

Outside linebacker Shane Ray had the pins and screws removed from his left wrist. He will practice Monday, and plans on playing against the Kansas City Chiefs on Oct. 30. "It's been hard. But I can't wait to get back out there." ... Tight end Jake Butt, a former Michigan star, could return for the Chargers game. Like Ray, he will practice on Monday, creating the possibility of a quick return depending how his surgically-repaired knee responds. "It's been an adjustment having to sit back and watch. For me, I want to feel like I am contributing to this team and helping us win. I want to make this team. I don't want to be handed a spot." Butt could help provide another weapon in the red zone. ... Quarterback Paxton Lynch will throw from 10 yards later this week as he makes progress from a preseason shoulder injury. With Ray and Butt returning soon, the Broncos will need to clear two roster spots. It's fair to wonder if Lynch will land on the IR with Brock Osweiler serving as the backup. ... Receiver Cody Latimer remains bothered by a patella tendon issue in his knee. He did not practice Monday. Again, with two spots needed his health could place his roster spot in jeopardy as an IR possibility in the coming weeks. It is worth monitoring as Ray and Butt inch toward the active roster.

# Jake Butt ready to 'hit the ground running' when he makes Broncos practice debut

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 10, 2017

When you're injured and working your way back, you take help from any spot you can find it.

In 2015, Peyton Manning turned to Jordan Taylor, who ran routes for him as Manning rehabilitated from a foot injury to try to get ready for a playoff run.

In recent weeks and months, rookie tight end Jake Butt leaned on Dustin Little, an assistant athletic trainer who is also the club's Director of Rehabilitation, to help get him back up to speed on his route-running as he completed his recovery from a torn anterior cruciate ligament suffered last December in Michigan's Orange Bowl loss to Florida State.

Jake Butt

"I don't want the word to get out, because someone might pick up our trainer, Dustin, off waivers. He's been slinging this bad boy around here," said Butt, a fifth-round pick in this year's draft.

"I've got him giving our snap counts. I'm training him. We're talking through coverages and everything."

It's not like practice, but it's the closest Butt has been able to come in preparation for his practice debut next week. That not only marks the earliest possible point that he could begin practicing per the rules of the non-football injury list, but it also comes just over nine months after he underwent surgery to repair the torn ligament.

"[Tuesday] is nine months, and what my doc told me was that nine months was when I was going to get cleared, so even if I do get cleared tomorrow, I've got to wait for the beginning of Week 7 so I can start practicing," he said.

Once Butt begins practicing, the Broncos have a 21-day window to decide whether to move Butt off the non-football injury list and onto the 53-man roster.

"[Tight Ends] Coach Geep [Chryst] just says we're going to [make it] like a parachuter coming in," Butt said. "You want to hit the ground running."

And he doesn't just want to be on the 53-man roster taking up a spot without meriting it.

"I want to make this team," Butt said. "I don't want to be handed a spot. I want to earn this and make this team. I've been having to do that off to the side without the coaches really coaching me and outside of meetings and everything. That's been the hardest part. I want to make this team."

The meeting room and the playbook are the two places where Butt has been able to stay on schedule.

"I still watch film with the guys. I quiz myself. I look at the [practice] scripts every day and make sure I know what everyone is doing," Butt said.

"It's going to be an adjustment, of course, because it's one thing to do it off to the side in your head when you're quizzing yourself, but it's another thing to hear it in the huddle, get out and then make your necessary adjustments depending on the defense."

Between his work in meetings, his study time and his on-field rehabilitation sessions with Little, Butt has done everything he can to be ready for the moment that arrives next week. The rest is up to him.

"I feel good running routes," he said. "I feel good blocking. Everything that we've been doing off to the side, I been feeling really good about."

# Joseph emphasizing focus as team prepares for 12-game run after bye

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 10, 2017

As Vance Joseph watched over his team's first practice after a weekend off, he reminded the team of his message for the rest of the season by wearing a new shirt.

On the front:

More

On the back:

Effort

Detail

Focus

Commitment

"The message to our team is we want more effort, we want more focus, we want more detail and we want more commitment," Joseph explained to the media after Monday's practice. "That's our message. As we move through the season — hopefully with success — as we have success, we want to do more to keep our edge, so to speak. That's our message after the bye: Let's do more than what we did the first quarter."

Joseph's target is complacency, and the shirt is just part of embedding the message into the players' minds, practices and habits.

"It's everything on it: detail, effort, commitment, a relentless attitude and being accountable," safety Will Parks said. "When mistakes pop up on the field or in the locker room, wherever ... just man up to it, tell the truth to yourself, look [at] yourself in the mirror. When it comes to certain things — when it comes to commitment — all that falls into one place. When you're committed, then you have to be determined, disciplined and you have to have effort, obviously. I think that shirt is big, especially going into a week coming off a bye week and getting back to football. It's a lot that goes in to it."

Along with the two "Championship habits" signs inside UHealth Training Center, this shirt is part of Joseph's coaching initiative meant to remind players of what's needed from each player to ensure their team is the last one standing at the end of the year.

"That's a lifestyle. For a lot of us, that's probably how we lived since we were young kids," Parks said. "And just to have a coach that emphasizes that, it shows you how he grew up and what he believes in, and if a lot of the guys have the same beliefs as the coach, that can go a long way."

# Broncos to wear all blue vs. Giants

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

October 10, 2017

The Broncos will exchange their usual orange-and-white home uniforms for their alternate all-blue uniforms for Sunday night's game against the Giants.

The Broncos last wore blue-on-blue in Week 14 of 2015, a 15-12 loss to the Raiders. Before that, Denver wore all blue in a 2014 game against the 49ers, a 42-17 win in which Peyton Manning passed Brett Favre for most career touchdown passes with 509.

The look was introduced as part of the Broncos' 1997 rebranding, making its debut in an Aug. 17 preseason game against the Patriots. But it would not appear in a regular-season game until 2003 against the Raiders.

Since the Broncos swapped the orange tops into their regular home uniforms, the team has worn blue jerseys with blue pants or blue jerseys with white pants as their alternates. In 2016, Denver worn blue and white for games against the Texans and Patriots.



# Broncos Injury Report: Lynch to have throwing session, Butt and Ray expected at practice in a week

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 10, 2017

After resting through the bye week, the Broncos are poised to see a few of their injured young players return to practice, Head Coach Vance Joseph said Monday.

Paxton Lynch, who has been sidelined with a shoulder injury since a collision in the Broncos' third preseason game, is scheduled to begin throwing again toward the end of the week.

"Paxton is also feeling better," Joseph said. "Hopefully Paxton can have a brief throwing session Thursday or Friday. That's the plan for Paxton."

Shane Ray and Jake Butt are also expected to resume practicing in a week, Joseph added. Ray suffered a torn ligament in his left wrist during training camp and was placed on injured reserve just after the team's initial roster cuts. Butt tore his ACL during the 2016 Orange Bowl and has been rehabbing with the Broncos on the non-football injury list for the past few months.

"Jake Butt is doing great," Joseph said. "He's going to practice Monday [Oct. 16] along with Shane Ray. We're excited about those two guys coming back on Monday to practice."

Ray's been counting down the days until his return, eager to get back on the field and to leave his recovery behind him.

"It's been hell," Ray said. "To prepare how I did this offseason and come in and perform at the level that I was, to get hurt the second or third day of training camp, it's been tough. Watching so much film and studying every day, but unable to actually go out there and perform and execute the things that I'm doing mentally in my head, it's very difficult. I can't tell you how much hungrier it's made me to get out on the field and actually start making plays."

Joseph also provided an update on Cody Latimer, who was not at Monday's practice as he recovers from a knee injury that kept him out of Week 4's matchup with the Raiders. Joseph said the wide receiver and special teams dynamo is progressing.

"Cody is feeling better," Joseph said. "After the four [or] five days off, he's definitely feeling better."

# Paul Klee: Who's the fastest return man in the NFL — Kansas City's Tyreek Hill or Denver's response? Isaiah McKenzie: "Me"

By Paul Klee  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
October 10, 2017

Flying along at 30,000 feet above sea level, Broncos punt returner Isaiah McKenzie had an epiphany.

Its name: Tyreek Hill.

"I was watching on a plane when the Chiefs game was on (Sunday night). And when Tyreek took that one back, I was like, 'Nah, this can't be happening,'" McKenzie told me at his locker inside the Broncos' Dove Valley headquarters on Monday. "Then I had a thought of my own, 'Why not me?'"

"It's the second quarter of the season now. The first quarter was all right for me. But these next four games — the second quarter — I'm taking it by storm."

There's a storm brewin', all right. He wears a No. 84 jersey and counts a Kansas City Chief as his personal motivation. Inside a loud, proud division that's threatening to evolve into a two-horse race between the Chiefs (5-0) and Broncos (3-1, with games against the winless Giants and one-win Chargers up next) is a budding rivalry between a pair of electric returnmen.

For the Chiefs, it's Hill. Listed at 5-foot-10, 185 pounds, Hill changed the landscape of the AFC all by himself. Yes, he's been that dynamic. Last year the Chiefs took a chance on a prospect with Olympic speed and a despicable backstory. It's paid off bigly.

For the Broncos, it's McKenzie. Listed at 5-7, 173 pounds, McKenzie was Denver's response to Hill. "Juice," Vance Joseph calls it. He's a punt returner who's capable of busting off an 80-yard score each time he touches the ball.

"Tyreek Hill was a Pro Bowler last year for special teams. I feel like I can do the same thing this year, if not even more," said McKenzie, a rookie whose 11-yards-per-return average ranks fifth in the NFL. "I feel like I've got to beat him out. He's my competition for the Pro Bowl. I've got to keep chasing him until I get it."

After a pause to steady his bearings, much like Hill catching his balance as he turned the corner on an 82-yard return that sealed the Chiefs' win against the Texans, McKenzie added: "As I watched that game, I was so mad it's my bye week. I wanted to play right then. I'm ready right now."

Are the Chiefs finally, truly for real? The results say yes. On its way to the NFL's final unbeaten record, Kansas City thumped playoff hopefuls New England, Philadelphia and Washington with an efficient offense, right-place/right-time defense and Hill's world-class speed on special teams. There's not much to not like — aside from K.C.'s history — which makes it tough to trust the Chiefs at any point in time.

No team wins September Super Bowls like the Chiefs. And no team finds more interesting ways to lose than the Chiefs.

“It’s us and the Chiefs,” said Broncos pass-rusher and Kansas City native Shane Ray, whose scheduled return from a wrist injury is the first Broncos-Chiefs matchup, on Oct. 30. “That’s what it looks right now. That’s kind of what I’m thinking it’s going to be, honestly.”

The Broncos can’t afford to look past Eli Manning and the Giants on Sunday.

But we can!

When the Chiefs selected Hill in the 2016 draft, yesterday’s lunch crawled into the back of my throat. Two years earlier Hill had pleaded guilty to physically abusing his pregnant girlfriend. Now it’s every football Sunday when “Ty-reek! Ty-reek!” accompanies the Tomahawk chop inside Arrowhead Stadium.

On the field “we’re kind of similar, you know? We’re both fast. We’re both quick. We’re both little receivers. We both do it a little different,” McKenzie said. “I look at him and say, ‘I can do the same thing he’s doing. Why not me next?’”

Through the first four games of their rookie seasons, Hill’s punt return numbers (11 attempts, 13.36 yards per return, two touchdowns) edge McKenzie’s (11, 11.09, zero TDs). Hill stands as the undisputed return champ of the NFL. Until McKenzie takes one to the house, it’s a one-way rivalry.

“I’m planning on getting two this week. He got one, I’m getting two,” McKenzie said. “I want to be first in touchdowns, first in yardage, first in everything.”

OK, let's get down to the nitty gritty: Who’s faster — Tyreek or Isaiah?

“My boy right here,” Broncos special teams ace Cody Latimer said, nodding toward the locker next to his.

“Me. It’s my start. He has to catch me,” McKenzie said. “My start is ridiculous. Then he’s got to come get me. If he doesn’t come get me after the first 20 (yards), I’m throwing up a peace sign.”

Ready, set, fly.

# Jerry Jones: Cowboys players 'disrespecting the flag' won't be allowed to play

By Michael Middleurst-Schwartz

USA Today

October 10, 2017

Jerry Jones is taking a hard line on protests during the national anthem.

The Dallas Cowboys owner indicated after a 35-31 loss to the Green Bay Packers on Sunday that anyone from his team who participated in such a demonstration would not be allowed to play.

"If there is anything disrespecting the flag, then we will not play. Period," Jones said, according to the Dallas Morning News. "We're going to respect the flag, and I'm going to create the perception of it."

Cowboys defensive linemen Damontre Moore and David Irving said they held up a fist Sunday at the end of The Star-Spangled Banner. Moore said he had been doing the same thing since Week 3, when he return from a suspension.

"It's just something that I do," Moore said, according to Pro Football Talk. "I've got my morals. I've got my values and my things that I think about. I don't want to cause no attention to nobody else and bring unwanted attention, but on the same token, you know, there's certain things that people are doing it for. So, for me, it's just one of those personal things that I do."

"We cannot in anyway give the implication that we tolerate disrespecting the flag," Jones said, according to the Morning News. "We know that there is a serious debate in this country about those issues, but there is no question in my mind, that the (NFL) and the Dallas Cowboys are going to stand up for the flag."

Earlier on Sunday, Vice President Mike Pence left the Indianapolis Colts' game after 23 San Francisco 49ers players chose to kneel during the anthem. Pence wrote he "will not dignify any event that disrespects our soldiers, our Flag, or our National Anthem."

On Sunday night, the NFL Players Association said that discussions on social issues should not be stifled. Assistant executive director of external affairs George Atallah later wrote the union's statement was originally written in response to Pence.



Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross also weighed in Sunday.

“He’s changed that whole paradigm of what protest is,” Ross said of Trump prior to his team’s home opener, via the (South Florida) Sun-Sentinel.

“And I think it’s incumbent upon the players today, because of how the public is looking at it, to really stand and really salute the flag.”

# Cowboys have gone from America's Team to Trump's MAGA Team

By Charles Robinson  
Yahoo! Sports  
October 10, 2017

For months, the alternative facts of the Donald Trump Administration have been parsed, catalogued and dissected, with seemingly all manner of political statements subject to a debate over accuracy. But at least one declaration has passed into legitimacy.

President Trump told the truth about Jerry Jones. And ever since, America's Team has become the political property of Team America.

In September, Trump said the Dallas Cowboys owner would find a way to halt protests when it came time for his team to honor the American flag on a football field. And on Sunday night, Jones affirmed it, drawing a political line down the middle of his locker room and essentially threatening the job and livelihood of any Cowboys player who would dare cross it.

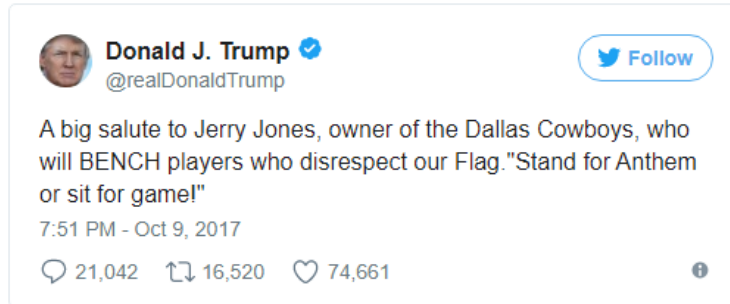
Whether intended or not, the Big "D" in Dallas and the Big "D" in the White House are in perfect alignment. And just like that, they became Donald Trump's team. His shining beacon. The political chip he will play over and over again on Sundays. That's what Jerry Jones invited. He took Trump's declarations on striking down "son of a bitch" anthem-kneelers and backed it up with his own franchise.

"If there's anything that is disrespectful to the flag, then we will not play," Jones said Sunday night, after being told that Cowboys Damontre' Moore and David Irving had each raised a fist following the national anthem. "OK? Understand? If we are disrespecting the flag, then we won't play. Period. ... There is no room here – if it comes between looking non-supportive of our players and of each other or creating the impression that you're disrespecting the flag, we will be non-supportive of each other. We will not disrespect the flag."

Will that compass get ripped as being hypocritical? Undoubtedly. That's what happens when a team roster has occasionally been a weigh station for a woman batterer, drunk drivers, drug abusers, a man convicted of manslaughter and more. All manner of flawed personalities that Jones has defended in the past. But a man taking a knee? Unacceptable.

Jones would rather not play than play with a guy who takes a knee during the national anthem. Those words might as well have been written by Trump, who has repeatedly said NFL players should be forced to stand for the flag and national anthem or be fired.

Trump continued to bang that drum Monday evening, tweeting:



Lest we forget, while Trump was blasting that message out, he repeatedly referenced his NFL owner friends and how they agreed with him – but lacked the fortitude to make the statement. Either Jones heard that rallying cry or he folded to the multiple calls that Trump placed to him in recent weeks.

Either way, Trump said Jones would step up for the cause. And now Jones has legitimized that claim.

As he tweeted on Sept. 27, “Spoke to Jerry Jones of the Dallas Cowboys yesterday. Jerry is a winner who knows how to get things done. Players will stand for country!”

Trump was right. Dallas players have. And maybe we know part of the reason. The fake Jerry Jones meme that became so popular last year – in which he supposedly threatened to fire players who kneeled during the anthem – is suddenly very accurate. That’s funny considering so many people in the Dallas organization insisted that meme was rubbish.

Apparently something changed because the rubbish has become reality.

It’s Jones’ prerogative. It’s his team. The players are his employees. And barring a massive fistfight with the players union over freedom of speech, he can go ahead and suspend whoever he wants over the anthem protests. At the end of the day, it’s his bottom line that he has to worry about.

In the final analysis, some will call Jones strong for standing up for something he believes is being sullied – even if the players who would protest would say their message is being warped and manipulated. Others will say Jones is being oppressive and trampling on a constitutional right, even if it’s a workplace and Jones can set whatever behavioral guidelines he deems appropriate.

Whichever viewpoint is embraced, there’s no denying one thing: Jones and the Cowboys will now be adopted by Trump and his administration as the shining example of what an NFL team and its players should do – regardless of any on the team who would disagree. And that puts players in an extremely awkward spot. It invites political division inside the roster.

Even now, some are opining that Jones’ anthem demand could be obliterated by two knees: Dak Prescott and Ezekiel Elliott. Surely he couldn’t follow through with his declaration if one of his two superstars decided they weren’t going to follow along. Undoubtedly, that’s an unfair expectation of either player – both of whom have a multitude of reasons to be more loyal to Jones than almost any other person or social cause.

But that's a perfect example of why Jones' stance – either publicly or privately – is so corrosive. Not only does it invite politics right into the heart of an organization, but it puts the onus on the players to either defy ownership or have a litany of opinions formed about them. None of which takes into account what it does inside the organization, where some are likely thrilled with Jones and Trump, and others feel like their voice is being extinguished or their social activism efforts trampled.

There's one certainty in all of this: it's going to get only bigger for the Cowboys. If they weren't already there, they are locked in as the adopted shining example of the Trump administration helping to bring change and Make America Great Again.

As far as Trump is concerned, America's Team put on the red campaign hat this week. And Jones did the one thing that is sure to draw effusive praise, tweets and applause from the commander-in-chief.

Jerry Jones made Donald Trump truthful. He made him right. That's not something this president will ever let escape his grasp. And now, neither will the Cowboys.



# NFLPA head reiterates: 'No player is disrespecting our country'

By Shalise Manza Young  
Yahoo! Sports  
October 10, 2017

On Sunday evening, after his team's last-minute loss to the Green Bay Packers, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones told reporters that players on his team will stand for the flag, and that there will be no disrespecting of the flag.

His words came after Vice President Mike Pence attended the Colts-49ers pregame ceremonies in Indianapolis only to leave after Niners players, as has been happening for a year, kneeled during the anthem.

Jones' statement in particular flies in the face of the public words of many NFL owners, who have said, in varying ways, that while they prefer their players stand, they respect their decision to exercise their First Amendment right to a peaceful protest. The league does not have a hard rule demanding that players stand.

Also, in recent weeks, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has held meetings with a select group of owners, players and members of the NFL Players Association to discuss the protests. But after Sunday, NFLPA head DeMaurice Smith felt it was time stand up for his players once again, releasing a statement on his personal Twitter page:

"Last week both the Commissioner and the Chair of the NFL Management Council [and Giants co-owner] John Mara were clear when they assured our union leaders, in the presence of other owners, that they would respect the Constitutional rights of our members without retribution," Smith wrote.

"I look forward to the day when everyone in Management can unite and truly embrace and articulate what the Flag stands for: 'Liberty and Justice for All' instead of some of them just talking about standing. We look forward to continuing our talks with them on this very issue.

"No player is disrespecting our Country or our Flag. As thousands have shown in the past, it takes bravery and courage to speak and confront these issues as our players have, especially when it is unpopular with some.

"There is room for Management to do the same and maybe then players do not have to risk the taunts and threats alone. This is their opportunity to lead as well and will be a true test of their motto that 'Football is Family.'"

Players have said repeatedly that their intent is not to be disrespectful, whether to the military or the flag, and that they are kneeling to spur conversation and hopefully change.

Smith's top deputy, George Atallah, was also on Twitter on Monday. "Athletes," he wrote. "Through everything that's happened in the past few weeks, consider the power you wield."

# NFL players are reportedly under pressure from owners and management to stop protesting during the national anthem

By Scott Davis  
Business Insider  
October 10, 2017

In the weeks since President Donald Trump's suggestion that NFL owners "fire" any "son of a b----" who kneels during the national anthem, several reports have indicated that the league and team owners are concerned with the optics of national anthem protests.

Now, according to The Root's Michael Harriot, several NFL players have said that they are under pressure from owners and management to stop any protests.

According to Harriot, some teams may be coming down on players in a more straight-forward fashion. One NFL linebacker told The Root: "They didn't say what would happen. But they let us know that we are expected to stand during the anthem."

Another player told The Root that his coach's stance recently changed..

"My coach said his father served in Desert Storm," the player said. "He said he fought for our right to take a knee. Then, all of a sudden, he's asking us not to do it. I know management must have talked to him. He looked like he was ashamed to even say that to us."

According to Harriot, one player said that his team's coach told players they were allowed to make one gesture after Trump's comments and that would be it. As the player said, anyone protesting after that would be acting individually, and many teams stress that there "ain't no room for individuals here."

ESPN's Don Van Natta and Seth Wickersham reported on October 1 that the league and team owners held meetings about how to stop protests in the wake of league-wide player demonstrations following Trump's comments. According to the report, some owners worried about how the protests might affect league business. Many felt that owners and players had to get on the same page with regard to the protests.

Commissioner Roger Goodell reportedly said the league can't just tell players to stop. One owner, according to ESPN, said, "We'll get our guys in line."

According to Van Natta and Wickersham, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, a Trump donor, said during a meeting that kneeling had to end, but that owners also had to find a sincere way to listen to players' concerns.

On Sunday, following a loss to the Green Bay Packers, Jones said that any Cowboys player who disrespected the flag would not play.

"If there's anything that is disrespectful to the flag, then we will not play," Jones said.

Some players are in a perilous position, however. As one player told The Root, "Out of all the players you see taking a knee, there are probably three times as many who want to do it but are scared." The player said that players who aren't first- or second-stringers don't have the job security to act against ownership's wishes.

While many teams have resumed standing for the anthem and making gestures like placing their hands on their shoulders or linking arms, kneeling hasn't stopped altogether. Several San Francisco 49ers and Indianapolis Colts played knelt during the anthem on Sunday, prompting Vice President Mike Pence, who was attending the game, to leave early. In a statement, Pence said he would not "dignify" an event that disrespected the military or US flag.

Kneeling during the anthem was initially started by former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who sought to draw attention to social injustice and police brutality.

According to ESPN, some players felt that maybe it was time to move on from kneeling, wondering if the message had become diluted. ESPN reported that players and owners did not come to an agreement or make much progress on a solution to how to get players' message across while appeasing owners.

From the sounds of it, some owners may be moving in another direction.

# Trump suggests cutting NFL's 'massive tax breaks' because of players' anthem protests

By Alex Lockie  
Business Insider  
October 10, 2017

President Donald Trump continued his crusade against NFL players making demonstrations during the national anthem, this time suggesting tax laws should change to hurt the league.

"Why is the NFL getting massive tax breaks while at the same time disrespecting our Anthem, Flag and Country? Change tax law!" tweeted Trump on Tuesday morning.

The NFL gave up its tax-exempt status in 2015, but individual teams and the league itself often extract hundreds of millions in taxpayer dollars to help build new stadiums.

Additionally, when National Football League and the American Football League merged, Congress waived usual antitrust legislation, allowing them to essentially create a monopoly on professional football.

However Trump stands accused of political grandstanding and wasteful spending of his own, after Vice President Mike Pence quickly left an Indiana Colts game after a few dozen players knelt during the Star Spangled Banner.

"I asked @VP Pence to leave stadium if any players kneeled, disrespecting our country," Trump tweeted after the incident. "I am proud of him and @SecondLady Karen."

The incident, which many saw as a political stunt, likely cost taxpayers up to \$250,000.

Trump is currently pushing for tax reform in Congress, but his agenda has stalled amid infighting within the GOP.

# Jerry Jones says Trump reminded him of NFL policy on standing for anthem

By Des Bieler  
Washington Post  
October 10, 2017

A day after asserting that Dallas Cowboys players who staged demonstrations during the national anthem would be benched, team owner Jerry Jones said President Trump had reminded him of the NFL's policy on conduct during pregame renditions of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Jones also said his edict would help his players, who otherwise might feel compelled to bow to pressure from peers to join the protests, which have made headlines and drawn frequent condemnation from the White House.

ESPN's Chris Mortensen reported Jones's comments Monday, claiming the owner thought the "controversy would 'go away' " after a Monday night game two weeks ago in which Jones knelt with his team before the anthem, after which they stood arm-in-arm as the song was performed. Following that demonstration, Jones said his organization had "wanted to make a statement about unity" and "a statement about equality."

During that display, Trump noted on Twitter that the crowd was booing the kneeling Cowboys and that he approved of the way "they all stood up for our National Anthem," adding, "Big progress being made — we all love our country!" The next day, Trump tweeted that he had spoken with Jones, claiming, "Players will stand for Country!"

Jones confirmed that he spoke with the president but told a Dallas radio station, "There are many things we don't agree on." On Monday, though, Mortensen said Jones told him, "You know who reminded me about the game ops policy? Donald Trump."

The NFL's game operations manual notes that the national anthem "must be played prior to every NFL game" and that "all players must be on the sideline" for it. The section also states that failure to do so "may result in discipline." This season, the league has declined to punish players who chose to remain in the locker room or tunnel during the anthem, and three entire teams, the Steelers, Seahawks and Titans, did so in Week 3.

The manual also says that while the anthem is being performed, "players on the field and bench area should stand at attention, face the flag, hold helmets in their left hand and refrain from talking." Some have noted the significance of the word "should," indicating the NFL does not mandate that its players stand during the anthem.

In addition, the manual acknowledges the importance of public perception, noting in its anthem instructions, "It should be pointed out to players and coaches that we continue to be judged by the public in this area of respect for the flag and our country." On Sunday, Jones echoed that sentiment, saying, "We cannot in the NFL, in any way, give the implication that we tolerate disrespecting the flag."

"If we are disrespecting the flag, then we won't play. Period. Period," Jones told reporters Sunday (via the Dallas Morning News). "We're going to respect the flag."

The 74-year-old, who purchased the Cowboys in 1989, reiterated that stance to Mortensen, saying in the reporter's words that there "will be no exceptions to [the] workplace policy." Jones said he had implemented that policy last year, after seeing players on other teams refuse to stand during the anthem, in protests of racial injustice that began with former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

While Kaepernick has been unable to latch on with a team since becoming a free agent in March, which many attribute to his social activism, a handful of players began the season staging their own protests, including kneeling, sitting or raising a fist during the anthem. That number ballooned to more than 200 in Week 3, while some teams chose to stand with their arms linked in a show of unity, after Trump sharply criticized the protesting players at an Alabama rally, using the term "son of a bitch."

On Sunday, there were far fewer protests involving kneeling, amid reports that several NFL teams had told their players to stand. Dolphins owner Stephen Ross, who in the past has vocally supported his players' right to protest, said, "I think it's incumbent upon players today, if that's how the public is looking at it, is to stand and salute the flag."

The Eagles' Malcolm Jenkins, who has been raising his fist during the anthem and has worked toward helping create better relations between police and community members, said Monday to NBC Sports Philadelphia, "I think we've made that very clear that what we are demonstrating about has nothing to do with the flag but everything to do with social injustice, racial inequality and the things that Jerry Jones and other owners who are making statements have yet to address.

"And so I'd love to hear their takes on that part of the conversation, what these players are trying to draw attention to," Jenkins continued. "Their thoughts on, you know, police brutality and racial inequality, education gap, the economical gap in these communities that they make money in. And I'd love to hear that part of the conversation so that it's not so argumentative, so that it's not isolating the players who are trying to do the right thing with the platform that they have."

Jones, who is heavily involved in his team's personnel operations and has long held a reputation for being willing to overlook character concerns in pursuit of talent, told Mortensen, "I've always had our players' backs on issues I've been criticized for." However, he added that while he understood the players' social concerns, he would offer no compromise on protests during the anthem.

Jones said he spoke about his anthem policy Sunday after Vice President Pence walked out of a Colts-49ers game in Indianapolis, before which more than a dozen San Francisco players took a knee during the anthem. Trump subsequently revealed on Twitter that he had directed Pence to do so if that situation arose.

During a Cowboys game at home against the Packers, which took place later Sunday, two Dallas players, Damontre Moore and David Irving, raised their fists as the anthem concluded. Jones said Monday that the pair would not necessarily be punished but that he wanted, as Mortensen put it, "clarity for them going forward."

Later Monday, Trump praised the owner, saying on Twitter, "A big salute to Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, who will BENCH players who disrespect our Flag. 'Stand for Anthem or sit for game!'"

# Mike Ditka on NFL protests: ‘No oppression in the last 100 years that I know of’

By Des Bieler  
Washington Post  
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Even before this NFL season, which has featured team owners linking arms with players as shows of solidarity amid sharply critical comments from President Trump, some players were noting that the original message of protests during the national anthem had been largely lost. To them, the cause of bringing attention to racial injustice, in particular police brutality against black men, had been overshadowed by a heated national discussion over the merits of taking a knee during the national anthem.

To former NFL coach and ESPN analyst Mike Ditka, however, that cause made no sense to begin with. In a pregame interview before a radio broadcast of Monday night’s game between the Chicago Bears and Minnesota Vikings, he said, “There has been no oppression in the last 100 years that I know of.”

Saying that “you have to be colorblind in this country,” Ditka noted that “the opportunity is there for everybody.” He added that the place to protest was at “a ballot box,” and that people should “respect” the winners of elections.

The 77-year-old was speaking with Jim Gray on Westwood One. After a brief discussion of the team with which he is most associated, the Bears, Ditka was asked about Vice President Pence walking out of an NFL game Sunday because of anthem protests, and about the pregame demonstrations in general.

“Is this the stage for this?” Ditka said. “If you want to protest, or whatever you want to protest, you’ve got a right to do that. But I think you’re a professional athlete. You have an obligation to the game.

“I don’t see a lot of respect for the game, I just see respect for their own individual opinions. ... Respect the game, play the game, when you want to protest, protest when the game’s over, protest whatever other way you want to.”

With Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones making news for saying that his players would either stand for the anthem or get benched, Gray asked Ditka if that would be his policy, as well, were he in charge of an NFL team.

“Yes,” Ditka replied, “I don’t care who you are, or how much money you make, if you don’t respect our country, you shouldn’t be in this country playing football. Go to another country and play football. If you had to go to somewhere else and try to play this sport, you wouldn’t have a job.”

“If you can’t respect the flag and this country, then you don’t respect what this is all about, so I would say: Adios.”

Ditka has not been shy in the past about expressing political views, and he was an early supporter of Trump’s presidential campaign. Starting well before the election, Trump has taken frequent shots at

former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who began the anthem protests last season, and Ditka has followed suit, saying a year ago that he had “no respect” for the player.

“My choice is that I like this country, I respect our flag, and I don’t see all the atrocities going on in this country that people say are going on,” Ditka added at the time.

The Eagles’ Malcolm Jenkins, who has been raising his fist during the anthem and has worked toward helping create better relations between police and community members, offered an explanation Monday of some of the concerns felt by NFL players. “I think we’ve made that very clear that what we are demonstrating about has nothing to do with the flag but everything to do with social injustice, racial inequality and the things that Jerry Jones and other owners who are making statements have yet to address,” the safety said to NBC Sports Philadelphia.

“And so I’d love to hear their takes on that part of the conversation, what these players are trying to draw attention to,” Jenkins continued. “Their thoughts on, you know, police brutality and racial inequality, education gap, the economical gap in these communities that they make money in. And I’d love to hear that part of the conversation so that it’s not so argumentative, so that it’s not isolating the players who are trying to do the right thing with the platform that they have.”

Later on Monday, Gray asked Ditka, “For those who want social justice, and for those who look back at the lives of Muhammad Ali and Jesse Owens, and John Carlos and Tommy Smith, your response would be?”

“I don’t know what social injustices have been,” the Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee replied. “Muhammad Ali rose to the top. Jesse Owens is one of the classiest individuals that ever lived. I mean, you can say, are you talking that everything is based on color? I don’t see it that way.

“I think that you have to be colorblind in this country. You’ve got to look at a person for what he is, and what he stands for and how he produces, not by the color of his skin. That has never had anything to do with anything.

“But all of a sudden, it’s become a big deal now, about oppression. There has been no oppression in the last 100 years that I know of.

“Now maybe I’m not watching it as carefully as other people. I think the opportunity is there for everybody. Race, religion, creed, color, nationality — if you want to work, if you want to try, if you want to put effort into yourself, I think you can accomplish anything.”

The former coach, who won a Super Bowl with the Bears before a head coaching stint with the New Orleans Saints, said in 2013 that not running against Barack Obama in the 2004 Illinois Senate race was the “biggest mistake I’ve ever made.” He told a Chicago radio station last year that “Obama’s the worst president we’ve ever had.”

“He would be great to play golf with,” Ditka said at the time of Obama. “He’s not a leader. This country needs leadership. It needs direction.”



On Monday, Ditka made an apparent reference to Obama's successor, telling Gray that NFL players are "protesting an individual," adding, "That's wrong, too."

"You know, you've got a ballot box, you've got an election. That's where you protest," Ditka said. "You elect the person you want to be in office, and if you don't get that person in office, I think you respect the other one, that's all."

"Football has been so good to these guys," Ditka said of NFL players on the pregame show. "It's been so good to me. Enjoy it, have fun with it, and I don't think it's the stage for protests. I'm sorry, a lot of people disagree with that, but that's my take on it."

# There are two sides to the NFL anthem debate, and both are right. And wrong.

By Sally Jenkins  
Washington Post  
October 10, 2017

Let's not play around about what's happening here: Donald Trump and Mike Pence are telling young black men in the NFL, "Shut up and sing." On the other side, the take-a-knee-for-the-anthem social activists in pro football are telling military veterans, "Our message for these three minutes is more important than your sacrifice." Both sides accuse the other of divisive political "stunts." Both mean it.

The dynamic driving this difficult issue is not patriotism, or lack of it. It's sincerity. This is what perpetuates the debate, makes the good people on both sides so incapable of letting it go: Each side suggests their cause is somehow the sincere one, whereas their opponents are just mouthing toxic junk for political theatre. The kneelers are spoiled, privileged NFLers who couldn't possibly be truly aggrieved about lives lost to racial injustice, and are just making themselves leftist poster boys. The millions of fans who boo and threaten NFL boycott are just conservative soreheads who must be racially insensitive and couldn't possibly be genuinely incensed over refusing to stand for a flag that has draped coffins.

On Sunday, Vice President Pence committed an act of political stagecraft on behalf of a significant body of people who are angry and feel unheard. Remove for a moment the argument over whether he should have spent taxpayer money to do it. Ask, how is it any different from what the San Francisco 49ers did in Indianapolis on Sunday, using the stadium as a stage for social protest on behalf of communities who feel voiceless?

If you hold conflicting thoughts about the events over the first month of the NFL season, if you feel an uncomfortable tug of competing priorities, if you don't know whether to agree with 49ers safety Eric Reid when he talks about racial miscarriages that have been "rampant for decades on top of decades," or with Cowboys owner Jerry Jones when he tells players to either stand for the anthem or sit for the game, then you are right where you should be.

No moral dilemma in sports ever has been harder to sort out. It is simply not easy to choose a side, for two reasons: Walter Scott, and Jordan Haerter. Scott was an innocent unarmed black citizen shot in the back in Charleston by a cop during a traffic stop. Haerter was a Marine on guard duty who died in Ramadi, Iraq, stopping a terrorist attack. Whose death deserves more attention?

It's simply not true that NFL players are more careless than the rest of us of military sacrifices. If anything, they may have closer ties to the one percent of Americans who serve than you or I. A 2011 survey found that more than 100 players and coaches have direct relationships to the armed forces. Arizona Cardinals receiver Larry Fitzgerald's aunt and uncle are both Army colonels. Chicago Coach John Fox's father was a Navy Seal. Cowboys defensive end David Irving's father is a Marine master sergeant, and two of his brothers are Marines.

As for the 49ers' Reid, his mother is an Army veteran. That has not prevented him from taking a knee to call attention to the death of Alton Sterling, shot by several police bullets at close range in Reid's hometown of Baton Rouge, after an officer allegedly put a gun to his head and said, "I'll kill you, bitch."

“If I need to say it every time y’all ask me, this is not about the military; this is not about the flag; this is not about the anthem,” Reid said, after Pence’s staged walkout on the 49ers-Colts game for “disrespecting” the banner. What it’s about, he insists, is racial injustice, “and I will continue to say and encourage people to educate themselves on how we got to where we are today because it didn’t happen overnight, and it’s not going to happen overnight to fix these issues. So we’re going to keep talking about it. I know that I will keep doing what I feel is necessary to use the platform I have to make those changes.”

In other words, Reid and other players are using their NFL stage to make calculated gestures on injustice they feel deeply about. The NFLPA acknowledged as much Monday in a statement defending their actions: “Our men and their families are also conscientious Americans . . . and some have decided to use their platform to peacefully raise awareness to issues that deserve attention.”

It’s a decision I respect, and have defended.

But Pence had every right to “use” that platform too, to redirect attention to those who have died serving. Whatever you may think of Pence and Trump as spokespersons, millions of Americans deeply, and legitimately, feel the anthem is the wrong moment to hijack for a cause, no matter how worthy or peaceful. Among those who apparently feel that way is White House chief of staff John Kelly, the retired Marine general who lost his son Robert to a landmine in Afghanistan. Recently CNN quoted Kelly as saying, “Every American should stand up and think for three lousy minutes.”

If Alton Sterling was from Reid’s hometown, Jordan Haerter was from mine, and three lousy minutes of undivided attention seems not too much to spend on him. He was a lance corporal who died at the age of 20 when he stood in front of a terrorist truck loaded with explosives and fired into it, in order to prevent it from blowing up his entire barracks in Ramadi. General Kelly awarded him a Navy Cross posthumously and described his actions in a 2010 speech to the Semper Fi Society that deserves to go down in the annals of great American oratory for its eloquence on the quiet thanklessness of servicemen and women.

“I have promoted them and unceremoniously disciplined them,” Kelly said. “I have hung decorations on them and court-martialed them. I have visited them mangled and broken in military hospitals around the country, in lonely defensive positions across Iraq, and in briggs. I have known thousands of them over nearly 40 years, and I can tell you without hesitation or qualification that I never met one who would have run from his post that morning.”

So the real question is not: Who is right? The real question is: How can we be the home of the free if we force and pressure everyone to stand for the brave? It’s a hard question, and the only people who are wrong are the ones who think they have it perfectly right. It’s to the NFL’s credit that it has struggled to arrive at a pat answer. The list of countries where patriotism in public stadiums is compulsory starts with North Korea. On the other hand, as has been pointed out by the American Legion chapter in Indianapolis, “Having a right to do something does not make it a right thing to do.”

I’ve talked about these competing “rights” a little bit with another guy from my old hometown, a boy named Yogi Dorelis with whom I used to play touch football. He grew up to do two tours in Afghanistan and five in Iraq as a helicopter pilot, and won the Distinguished Flying Cross for rescuing wounded soldiers under heavy fire during Operation Anaconda. Which he laconically describes as, “We got back to

see another day, that's about it." He strongly disagrees with kneeling. Strongly. But here's what else he thinks, for what it's worth.

"The only really Un-American thing would be if people were afraid to express how they feel on either side of the argument," he said. "Sure people get geared, social media blows up, fans boycott, people call each other names. Feel however you want to feel about the issue, post what you want, watch what you want, get mad at what you want, but take a second to appreciate that you can do all that in this country without any fear of serious repercussions."

In all of this, it's the only right answer I've heard so far.

# Vance Joseph won't force the ball to Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
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The Broncos had an early bye at 3-1, and their offense has shown signs of improvement. Especially in the run game. But that has resulted in a decline in the passing game.

As the Broncos emerge from the bye with a Sunday night game against the Giants, the potency of the passing game is an area of concern. However, Broncos coach Vance Joseph won't make changes simply for the sake of improving the numbers.

"We don't want to force feed the ball to those guys," Joseph told reporters on Monday regarding receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. "Obviously going into our prep and our gameplan week, the pass game goes through Thomas and Sanders. That's not a secret at all. But it depends on how defenses play us. Whatever they give us from a defensive perspective, we're going to take advantage of. If they give us shell coverage and taking those two guys away, we're going to pound the football. Hopefully, we'll force those guys to close the middle and play more cover three and cover one so we can get a fair matchup outside. If they play shell, we're going to run the football. That's our formula to score points right now."

That's the key when it comes to playing offense generally. If the defense takes away the run, you pass. If they take away the pass, you run.

And a coach can't worry about whether any specific players are frustrated about how it all plays out.

"Receivers? They're always frustrated," Joseph told reporters last week with a laugh. "They want to catch want to catch 10 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."

Through four games this year, Sanders has 20 catches for 190 yards and two touchdowns. Thomas has 18 receptions for 247 yards and no scores.

It's definitely a drop from 2016. Sanders had 25 catches for 293 yards and three scores through four games a year ago. Thomas had 21 catches for 332 yards and two touchdowns.