

# Kiszla: Here is NFL's chance to be better than Washington politicians in tackling anthem controversy

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
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Broncos cornerback Aqib Talib proudly stands during the national anthem. Why? "For the people who go to war for us," Talib said Wednesday.

Teammate Brandon Marshall has taken a knee and raised a fist during the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" prior to Denver games, giving a voice to victims of police brutality.

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones and his fellow NFL teams would be on firm legal ground to suspend or fire players that protest at the stadium. "Yes, a player could lose his job for a political protest," said attorney Adam Schlatner, leader of the sports industry team at Cozen O'Connor in New York.

And President Donald Trump has taken to Twitter, trying to bully commissioner Roger Goodell to "finally demand that all players stand" out of respect for our country.

But here's what smart people in pro football know: While anthem protests have contributed to declining television ratings, the players are the sport's lifeblood. It's impossible to dictate the terms of patriotism with athletes, strong and stubborn by nature.

When Broncos chief executive officer Joe Ellis and franchise owners gather next week in New York, hoping to move past the anthem controversy, mandating that players stand for the anthem would only give rise to the popularity of a new fight song in NFL locker rooms. It's a song by YG and Nipsey Hussle, played this contentious week for all in the Cowboys locker room to hear by team captain Orlando Scandrick.

"I was listening to my music," Scandrick explained to the Dallas media. "I like that YG song." The lyrics denigrate and threaten Trump in a very direct and profane way, raising the emotional ante against a president that has referred to any player that dares to protest during the anthem as an SOB.

As far back as two weeks ago, Marshall asked me if it were true an NFL team could fire a player that refused to stand for the anthem. Jones has since made his own stance crystal clear on the issue, insisting no disrespect for the flag would be tolerated in Dallas. "Understand?" Jones said. "If we are disrespecting the flag, then we will not play. Period."

Schlatner, who focuses his practice on commercial litigation, said the law would likely side with players that stage a protest against poor working conditions, the perception of collusion against former San Francisco quarterback Colin Kaepernick or even threats made against their employment by Trump. On the other hand, Schlatner said teams could suspend or dismiss a player that stages a political demonstration, such as a protest against police brutality, on company time.

So, to answer Marshall's question: He does place his job security as a linebacker in Denver at risk by making a political statement during the anthem, if the Broncos were so inclined to punish him.

Talib gave voice to active military members and veterans that take great offense to anthem protests, saying he doesn't believe kneeling solves any problem. "Trump may make us go to war again, and then those guys are going to go to war for us again," Talib said. "That's why I'm standing. I appreciate everything those guys do."

While the NBA has long fostered a relationship with its players that has encouraged them to speak out on social issues, dating back to the "I can't breathe" T-shirt worn by Cleveland Cavaliers star LeBron James in 2014 after the death of Eric Garner in a confrontation with a New York police officer, the NFL has a more troubling history of regarding its athletes as faceless, replaceable parts.

While Goodell has circulated a letter to all 32 teams stating he wants players to stand for the anthem, the commissioner insists the issue will be addressed with input from the players union.

You mean there might be a better answer to the anthem controversy than a Twitter tantrum? Politics might encourage passive aggression, with Vice President Mike Pence walking out on an Indianapolis Colts game where Peyton Manning was being honored, but football requires its participants to get down in the trenches with a foe.

A real leader tackles a problem head-on, face-to-face, seeking compromise that at least partially serves the end goal of both combative parties. Here is the NFL's chance to be better than Washington politicians, who are too busy pointing fingers of blame to get anything done. By shining a light on social issues with the same power it uses to fight cancer, maybe league owners and players can bring some meaningful resolution to the anthem tiff. Talk it out. It's what adults do.

As Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe recently said: "Don't you think it would be great if the rest of the world would try that? Sit down and talk to each other. Figure it out."

# Why Vance Joseph makes plan for player health; Aqib Talib talks anthem protests

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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Perhaps it's a sign, and if it is, Vance Joseph will take it. The Broncos, he believes, had the best Wednesday practice they've had all year as they return from a bye and prepare to face the 0-5 Giants.

Joseph has generally been candid with his assessments of practice. In the days leading up to their loss at Buffalo in Week 3, he noted a change in a focus in players. It differed from the weeks prior, when they dismantled the Chargers and then the Cowboys, and the lacking attention to detail in Week 3 led to their first loss of the season.

"The difference is we're off a bye so guys are feeling good," Joseph said. "We've got very few injuries — knock on wood — thus far. It's beautiful out, it's nice weather, and that helps. But I think it's just guys being fresh, and being excited about playing a football game again. We're in a good spot right now, so we got to continue to do more and push our guys to continue to focus and push forward and get better every day."

The Broncos' only injured or recovering players are receiver Cody Latimer, who is working his way back from a knee injury, and quarterback Paxton Lynch, who is healing a shoulder sprain.

Joseph has made an effort to give certain veterans — running back Jamaal Charles, cornerback Aqib Talib and nose tackle Domata Peko — rest days each week in an effort to preserve their health. He's taken lessons learned from his time with former coach Gary Kubiak in Houston and Marvin Lewis in Cincinnati and applied them here.

"It's important. Obviously, we're playing football and it's a physical game, so you're going to have some injuries. What (the Giants went through on Sunday, you can't prevent that. But I think having a plan for the entire year helps to keep players healthy. ... Long-term, you have to plan early for that. You can't in Week 10 say, 'let's back Talib off because he won't make it and Jamaal Charles won't make it.'"

**Stance on protests.** In a memo to NFL owners, commissioner Roger Goodell made it clear the league wants players to stand during the national anthem. Cowboys owner Jerry Jones went so far as to say his players will not be allowed to compete if they don't stand.

Talib took a knee before the Broncos' game at Buffalo as part of a league-wide response to Donald Trump's inflammatory comments about protesters. But the Broncos' cornerback has stood for every other game and said Wednesday that if the league requires all players to stand going forward, he wouldn't have a problem with it.

"I stand anyway, so it wouldn't affect anything I do. I stand anyway. Like I said, I don't feel like taking a knee and all that, it doesn't really solve a problem in my eyes. There definitely is a problem out there, but taking a knee and all that — I stand for the people who go to war for us. Trump may make us go to war again and then those guys are going to go to war for us again. So that's why I'm standing. I appreciate everything those guys do."

# Depleted Giants reeling ahead of meeting with Broncos

By Nicki Jhabvala  
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The New York Giants have come undone.

The 2016 playoff team with a potential Hall of Fame quarterback and once elite defense has tumbled to 0-5 and sits in the cellar of the NFL.

It ranks 28th in scoring (16.4 points per game), 30th in rushing (77.8 yards) and among the bottom 10 in seven defensive categories.

It lost receivers Odell Beckham Jr., Dwayne Harris and Brandon Marshall to season-ending injuries in a single game, last Sunday against the Chargers.

"I've been around a lot of football," Giants head coach Ben McAdoo said. "I'm young but I have some miles on me, but, no, I've never seen anything like that and hope I never do again."

And, most recently, it lost star cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie to suspension for a reported "altercation" with McAdoo.

"We had a conversation yesterday and he came into the building today and decided to leave and we have suspended him," McAdoo said.

McAdoo refused to divulge the length of suspension and declined to comment further on the report of the altercation.

"I've said everything I needed to say," he said.

The New York Giants are unraveling on and off the field, just in time to face the Broncos and their top-ranked defense in Denver.

"We just haven't played well enough. We've done some good things, we've played in some close games, we've had opportunities," Giants quarterback Eli Manning said. "We just haven't made some plays at certain times to win football games. You got to expect games in this league to go into the fourth quarter and you got to make more plays than the other team in that period.

"We got to keep working, that's all you can do. We got a game to get ready for and we got some new guys on offense who we have to get up to speed."

Those tasked with becoming Manning's new offensive weapons are former practice squad receivers Travis Rudolph and Ed Eagan, undrafted player Roger Lewis Jr., and former Broncos draft pick Tavarres King, who was released by the Giants in September and re-signed Monday.

"The good thing is most of them were here during training camp," Manning said. "Tavarres King has been with us the last couple of years and played for us in regular seasons and caught some touchdowns.

Rodger Lewis played all last year and played this year, and a few other guys have been here on the practice squad. So they know the system, they know the plays, they know the routes and the concepts, I've thrown routes with them. It's not brand new for them, so they should be able to hop in there and play fast, know their assignments and that's what you want."

But they'll try to do so against a Broncos' front seven that has a knack for creating pressure and, lately, stifling the run. And they'll try to do so against an elite secondary that helped Denver lead the league in pass defense the last two years and, through four games this season, has come up with four interceptions.

The Giants, so far, appear a shell of the team that went 11-5 last season and have left many wondering what else can possibly go wrong.

McAdoo says "that's a loser's mentality" and that they're "preparing to win a game this week."

The Broncos said the Giants' string of misfortune is a nonfactor in their approach.

"Our goal each week is to play our best game that we can play, so that does change with who we're playing, if they have issues, if they don't have issues — it does not matter to us," coach Vance Joseph said. "It's about our football team each week playing our very best football game we can play."

# Isaiah McKenzie has flashed electric ability. Should the Broncos use him more?

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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Isaiah McKenzie had just flashed his quick-cutting brilliance on a 64-yard punt return against the Raiders. The play on Oct. 1 was called back by a penalty, but that didn't erase the highlight of the 5-foot-8 rookie burning down the sideline.

McKenzie also had broken a tackle just as he caught another punt in the third quarter, shedding the contact and tearing up the field for a 29-yard gain that set up a Broncos field goal in their 16-10 victory.

In short, the electric returner had provided fireworks. But as he evaluated his performance following the game, McKenzie landed on a seemingly harsh grade.

"I gave myself a 'C' for this last game," he said.

The reason was simple.

"I didn't have no touchdowns," McKenzie added. "I just wanted to be No. 1 — in everything. Touchdowns, punt-return yards, the whole nine. Everything I'm doing, I want to be No. 1 at it. That's my plan."

Through his first four career games, McKenzie has flashed the potential the Broncos saw when they drafted him in the fifth round out of Georgia. They envisioned McKenzie solving some of the issues the team had suffered in the punt-return game the past few seasons, when a lack of big returns was a glaring weakness.

Coach Vance Joseph wasted little time in training camp naming McKenzie the team's starting returner, and it's a job he has grabbed and, quite literally, sprinted away with.

"He's always a shoestring tackle away or one block away (from the end zone)," special teams coach Brock Olivo said. "He's exciting and the guys know that. We just look forward to getting him the opportunity to get the ball in his hands."

The success McKenzie has produced in the open field — his average of 11.1 yards is second among players with at least 10 returns — raises the question: Should the Broncos find more ways to get him the ball? Perhaps more like the AFC West-leading Chiefs have used their own former fifth-round pick, Tyreek Hill?

"We're putting in a couple of plays each week for him to suit his skill-set," Joseph said. "So as we play more, he'll get more opportunities, offensively."

The offensive staff, Joseph said, has enjoyed crafting plans for McKenzie, even though his actual use has been limited to this point. His lone carry, on an end-around against Buffalo, gained 4 yards, and he has yet to be involved in the passing game.

Still, his quickness can be a weapon even when he doesn't have the ball.

Take the Broncos' opening touchdown pass against the Raiders. McKenzie was lined up near the right sideline, outside of Demaryius Thomas. Before the snap, McKenzie sprinted in motion toward the other sideline, looping behind Denver's backfield in the process. The motion is a common tactic designed to identify the opponent's coverage, but the speed with which McKenzie carried out that action helped pause the defense just enough for tight end A.J. Derby to run clear on a double move toward the end zone.

"He's got a fun skill-set, which is speed," Joseph said.

For his part, McKenzie is comfortable biding his time. The staff has praised his eagerness to consume the playbook and make himself prepared to assist when he's called upon. But the rookie sees no reason to rush the process.

"We use everyone, so, eventually, I'll get used and I'll get in, step by step, and take it from there," he said.

In the meantime, he's eager to do the only thing that will raise the grade he's given himself: find the end zone.

"Every time I catch the ball, I'm trying to make a guy miss and get upfield," McKenzie said. "The punt-return team, they make good blocks. It's just up to me to end it."

# Bronco notes: QBs Lynch, Kelly start throwing

By Mike Klis

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In a significant development to the Denver Broncos' long-term future, Paxton Lynch threw passes after practice Wednesday.

You remember Paxton Lynch. First-round draft pick. Quarterback.

Lynch's throwing session was his first on the practice field since he suffered a sprain to his right throwing shoulder in the Broncos' preseason game August 19 against the San Francisco 49ers.

"For Day 1, it felt good," Lynch said.

He threw 15 passes in all – a set of five from 5 yards, another five from 10 yards and another five from 15 yards. That doesn't exactly sound like he'll be ready to replace Brock Osweiler as Trevor Siemian's backup any time soon.

But you've got to start somewhere.

So when will Lynch be game ready?

"I don't know," he said. "I just know it's OK to start throwing and the doctor said we'll progress from there."

Lynch said his right throwing shoulder injury is not as severely injured as Siemian's left, non-throwing shoulder was last year. But the key words there are "throwing" and "non-throwing" shoulders.

"I think Trevor's was worse than mine because he had to get it fixed (through surgery after the 2016 season)," Lynch said. "I didn't tear anything. I just had a strain. They just don't want to rush into it."

## Chad Kelly update

Like outside linebacker Shane Ray and tight end Jake Butt, rookie quarterback Chad Kelly is eligible to start practicing Monday.

Unlike Ray and Butt, Kelly has not been told he will. Kelly, who has been on an injured reserve list because of wrist and knee injuries, also started throwing following practices this week.

"I'm feeling really good," he said, adding he'll be throwing up to 30, 35 yards by week's end.

So long as it translates

Not sure how the Broncos will play in their game Sunday night (6:30 kickoff, 9News) against the 0-5 New York Giants. But they are practicing for the Giants like never before.



“We had our best Wednesday of the year today,” said Broncos head coach Vance Joseph. “Obviously, it’s beautiful out and we had some snow on Monday. When you’re indoors, you’re on turf so that can affect the player’s mindset. Today, it was awesome today. It was a beautiful practice.”

It should be noted that a couple days after the Broncos suffered their only loss at Buffalo in week 3, Joseph said his team did not practice well on Wednesday of that week.

“I think the difference is that we’re off a bye so guys are feeling good,” he said. “We’ve got very few injuries, knock on wood, thus far. It’s beautiful out, it’s nice weather—that helps. I think it’s just guys being fresh and being excited about playing a football game again. We’re in a good spot right now. We have to continue to do more and push our guys to continue to focus, push forward and get better every day.”

# Aqib Talib says he stands for those Trump 'may take to war'

By Mike Klis

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The National Anthem controversy won't go away for the NFL.

It has with the Denver Broncos. The matter was resolved two weeks ago when the players agreed to stand as a team during the playing of the Star Spangled Banners.

But it's still a hot topic for the league as a couple dozen players from various teams are still using the Anthem as a protest, while President Trump uses Twitter to condemn the demonstrations.

The owners are gathering next Tuesday to discuss the issue, and let's face it, right or wrong, the only way the controversy likely goes away is if everyone stands. See the Broncos.

That doesn't mean some players shouldn't have felt offended when the President referred to them as "S.O.B.'s" last month. It just means that so long as some players sit or kneel during the National Anthem there will be fans who don't like it.

I have talked to people who have said they have stopped watching the NFL because of the Anthem protests. The NFL is well aware of its protesting customers to the player protests.

There has been speculation NFL commissioner Roger Goodell may attempt to reach an agreement with the players on standing for the National Anthem – while stopping short of calling it a mandate – next week.

How would a mandate go over with the players?

"I stand, anyway," said Broncos cornerback Aqib Talib. "Taking a knee and all that that's not going to solve the problem in my eyes. There definitely is a problem out there but taking a knee and all that – I stand for the people who go to war for us, man. Trump may take us to the war again and then those guys are going to go to war for us again so that's why I'm standing. I appreciate everything those guys do."

Talib was among the many Broncos who took a knee during the National Anthem prior to game 3 against the Buffalo Bills. But that appeared to be a protest specific to the President's demeaning rhetoric, not the country's social injustice, as it was during protests sparked by Colin Kaepernick last year.

And for the Broncos, it appears to be a one-time protest. All Bronco players stood for the Anthem the following week prior to their game against the Oakland Raiders. (All Raiders stood except for running back Marshawn Lynch, who sat.)

Despite Trump's wishes, NFL owners are not likely to issue their players an ultimatum to stand for the National Anthem. There are union labor laws to consider and the owners do appear sensitive to players' rights regarding this matter.

Perhaps, the only way this gets resolved is if the owners sit down face to face with union leaders and players. Players like Aqib Talib.

# Thomas joins Sanders on the Broncos Huddle

By Rod Mackey

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It was wide receivers times two Wednesday night on the Broncos Huddle. Demaryius Thomas, who leads the team in receiving yards, joined Emmanuel Sanders, who leads the team in touchdowns by a receiver. Still, both Thomas and Sanders are hoping to do more. With the Denver ground game being so good, the Broncos have been running more than throwing, but Sanders believes that could change soon.

"I feel like this season we really haven't been able to open it up because of the way teams are playing us," Sanders said. "I mean, right now, me and Demaryius are on pace to tie the record for consecutive 1000 yard seasons out of any wide receiver tandem, so obviously teams are going to play us differently. If we keep running the ball like that, we will be able to get those big plays down the field."

Sanders and Thomas also showed off their skills on the part of the program called technique time.

The 3-1 Broncos will host the 0-5 Giants Sunday night, but the players promise there will be no looking past anyone. The records aren't the only thing that makes these two teams so different. While the Broncos have one of, if not the best, one-two wide receiver punch, the Giants lost four wide receivers to injury last week.

# Rodgers-Cromartie's suspension likely doesn't alter Broncos' intentions

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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As the Denver Broncos work their way toward Sunday night's game against the New York Giants, they were informed Wednesday that New York's defense will be without cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie.

Rodgers-Cromartie has been suspended by the Giants, meaning the Broncos will face the league's 26th-ranked defense without a cornerback who had started its first five games. While coach Vance Joseph has said Rodgers-Cromartie's status "does not matter" in the big picture as the Broncos go about their prep work, Denver has spent plenty of time over the past two weeks trying to kick-start production in the red zone, and in particular how to shake its top two receivers -- Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders - - loose from all of the double coverage the two have faced.

After four games, Thomas does not have a touchdown catch, and while Sanders has two, both came in the Week 2 victory over the Dallas Cowboys.

"There's like two or three plays that if you make and score touchdowns then nobody's talking about the red zone," quarterback Trevor Siemian said. "It was such a small sample size, it's easy to talk about it a lot. I don't think that's where we'll be by the end of the year. ... But once those opportunities come up, those handful of plays, you've got to get in the end zone."

The Giants have limited Detroit quarterback Matthew Stafford to 122 yards passing and the Eagles' Carson Wentz to 176, but every quarterback they've faced has cashed in with at least one touchdown pass. The Giants have surrendered 10 touchdown passes overall in their 0-5 start, including three each by the Buccaneers' Jameis Winston and the Chargers' Philip Rivers in the Giants' two most recent games. Rivers is the only one of the five quarterbacks the Giants have faced who has thrown an interception against New York's defense.

Rodgers-Cromartie had been benched -- which reports indicate was at the root of the confrontations with Giants coach Ben McAdoo and others that led to the suspension -- but his absence might still force Giants defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo into situations where he can't always send help toward both Thomas and Sanders.

It's not that Siemian hasn't tried to get the ball to Thomas and Sanders during Denver's 3-1 start; it's more that defenses have limited the damage to this point. Sanders has been targeted a team-high 34 times, with Thomas just behind at 30; Sanders leads the Broncos with 20 catches, with Thomas second at 18.

Thomas has also averaged 19.1 yards on his seven third-down receptions. But in the past two games, the Broncos have scored a touchdown on just one of their possessions inside their opponent's 20-yard line, and at some point Thomas and Sanders will have to be part of the solution.

“They’re going to get their chances,” Siemian said. “... When those guys get their looks, it’s only a matter of time. I know it’s important to those guys to win ... but we’re winning. I’m not worried, those guys are going to get their touches.”

Bennie Fowler, A.J. Derby and others could help alter opposing defenses' plans if they can make some plays in the middle of the field. Joseph has said the key might be doing what’s needed to get Thomas and Sanders the ball without forcing the issue too much.

“We don’t want to force-feed the ball to those guys,” Joseph said. “Obviously going into our prep and our game-plan week, the pass game goes through Thomas and Sanders. That’s not a secret at all.”

“They’re two of our best players so you want to get them the ball, and usually your best players, for you to win, you’ve got to get it to them a bunch,” Siemian said. “The other teams are smart, too, and they understand what we’re trying to do and that’s the back and forth. ...

[But] the other guys stepping up really helps that.”

# Broncos plan to steer clear of Giants' turmoil

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph's skills as an orator could well be tested this week if he attempts to present what has happened to the New York Giants as having no impact on the team the Giants will bring to Denver this weekend.

The Giants are 0-5, lost three wide receivers to injury for the season in their last game and have suspended one of their most experienced defensive players. Giants cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie -- a former Broncos player -- was suspended by the team after a reported confrontation with Giants coach Ben McAdoo.

Rodgers-Cromartie's discipline is just the latest addition to the turmoil the Giants have faced this week as part of their difficult start. They put three wide receivers on injured reserve earlier in the week, including Odell Beckham Jr. and Brandon Marshall, and a fourth receiver -- Sterling Shepard -- is a question mark for the game because of injury.

Asked during a conference call Wednesday if he had wondered what else could go wrong at any point, McAdoo abruptly said "No, that's a loser's mentality."

By contrast, the Broncos are coming off a bye week, are largely healthy and trying to stay in step with the Kansas City Chiefs, who lead the AFC West at 5-0. So, Joseph has essentially told the Broncos to worry about how they handle their own business this week.

"We don't (address it), it's really about our football team," Joseph said. "That's been explained to our football team. Our only goal each week is to play our best game that we can play. That doesn't change who we're playing or if they have issues, if they don't have issues, doesn't matter to us."

Many of the Broncos' players found out about Rodgers-Cromartie's suspension after they finished Wednesday's practice. Quarterback Trevor Siemian said he heard about the suspension "about 30 seconds" before he was asked about it after the team's workout.

The Giants' injuries at receiver, however, will require at least some attention from the Broncos, as they try to figure out how New York's offense will adjust. Tight end Evan Engram, who played some at receiver in this past Sunday's loss to the Chargers, and running back Shane Vereen are two Giants players who could be more involved in the passing game.

"We have to put ourselves in (Giants coach) Ben McAdoo's shoes," Joseph said. "He's got to use his resources, the tight end, the two backs... We have to put ourselves in his shoes and kind of figure out what his plan is going to be against our defense. It's going to change some, but the foundation of what they've done for the last two months, that can't change, but what's next for him? We have to get ahead of that and have an answer."

The Broncos have not played since their Oct. 1 victory over the Oakland Raiders. Joseph called the Broncos' work Wednesday "our best Wednesday of the season," and players like Siemian and running

back C.J. Anderson said they believe the Broncos would not let the Giants' travails factor into their own preparation.

"If you don't show up in this business every week, then you're going to get your butt kicked," Anderson said.



# Broncos insist star receivers will get their chances

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

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Emmanuel Sanders called Denver "wide receiver heaven" after Mike McCoy returned this year for a second stint as the Broncos' offensive architect.

It hasn't exactly been nirvana for Sanders and fellow star Demaryius Thomas so far.

Blanketed by defensive backs, the veteran receivers have combined for just 38 catches and two touchdowns.

Sanders has both of the scores but his 20 catches for 190 yards work out to 9.5 yards per catch, well below his career average of 13.4.

He is on pace for a 760-yard season, which would be his worst since joining the Broncos in 2014 and embarking on three consecutive 1,000-yard seasons.

Thomas is averaging 13.7 yards a catch on 18 grabs, right around his career average of 14.1. But he's on pace for 72 catches and 988 yards. While most receivers would relish those numbers, Thomas has five consecutive 1,000-yard seasons with at least 90 catches.

Thomas has now gone 10 games without a touchdown and seven without a 100-yard performance, both of which are career highs.

That's not the kind of production expected from a pair of receivers pulling in a combined \$15.25 million in salaries this season.

"They're going to get their chances," quarterback Trevor Siemian insisted Wednesday as the Broncos (3-1) installed their game plan for the reeling New York Giants (0-5). "It's only a matter of time. I know it's important for those guys to win, which we've been doing, which is good. I think when you're losing a bunch of games it makes it harder on everybody. But we're winning. I'm not worried. Those guys are going to get their touches."

The answer isn't force-feeding the football to Sanders and Thomas, either.

Coach Vance Joseph said if teams continue to focus on his star receivers, "we're going to (continue to) pound the football."

Siemian is certainly on board.

"They're two of our best players, so you want to get them the ball and usually with your best players, to win you've got to get it to them a bunch. But the other teams are smart, too, and they understand what we're trying to do," Siemian said. "So, that's the back and forth. ... and other guys stepping up really helps."

Those include running backs C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles and Devontae Booker, tight ends A.J. Derby and Virgil Green and slot receiver Bennie Fowler III.

Sanders trusts he and Thomas will benefit down the road from all this attention.

"Thank God our running game is playing really well," Sander said. "If we're able to keep running the football like that and be multi-dimensional, it's going to be hard for teams to stop us. You can sit up there and play zone all you want, but then when C.J. and Jamaal are running for 150 yards, at some point you've got to load that box and now it's 1-on-1 with me, Demaryius and Bennie.

"That is when we have to take over," Sanders added. "That is our jobs."

Giants quarterback Eli Manning would love to have Denver's problems.

Last week he lost four wide receivers , including three for the season in Odell Beckham Jr. (ankle), Brandon Marshall (ankle) and Dwayne Harris (foot).

More drama came Wednesday when coach Ben McAdoo suspended veteran cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie .

"Well, we've just got to keep working," Manning said. "That's all you can do."

FOLLOWING FOOTSTEPS: Manning was asked on his conference call with Denver media if he'd like to follow in his brother Peyton's footsteps and finish his career with a championship contender should the Giants head into rebuilding mode after the season.

"I think I'm on a great team and a great organization and no," Manning said. "Hey, I'm worried about winning this game right here and that's my only concern right now."

NATIONAL ANTHEM : Cornerback Aqib Talib said he wouldn't be affected if the NFL mandates players stand for the national anthem rather than taking a knee to protest social issues.

"I stand anyway," Talib said. "Taking a knee and all that, that's not going to solve the problem in my eyes. There definitely is a problem out there, but taking a knee and all that — I stand for people who go to war for us, man. Trump may take us to war again and those guys are going to go to war for us again, so that's why I'm standing. I appreciate everything those guys do."

# Renck's Take: 7 things to know about Broncos vs. Giants

By Troy Renck

KMGH

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What is the Broncos' motivation when the New York Giants have become Lilliputians?

The Broncos own a 3-1 record and are 15-3 at home following a bye week. It represents one of the rare instances in the NFL schedule where the Broncos might be too good for their own good.

They can ill afford to overlook the decimated, winless Giants. New York lost its top two receivers in Odell Beckham Jr. and Brandon Marshall and suspended cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie on Wednesday for an earlier altercation with coach Ben McAdoo.

Good times. Bad team. And frankly, not the Broncos' problem.

"They can definitely be dangerous because of that shock factor. We don't know how fast their receivers are," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "We have to prepare for everything."

Here are seven things to know as the Broncos attempt to stay undefeated at home:

## 1) They know better

The Buffalo game provided a slap to the forehead. The Broncos didn't practice well, and lost a game they should have won. According to coach Vance Joseph, the Broncos staged their best Wednesday practice of the season, which is an encouraging sign.

## 2) They throw curves

The Broncos allowed 55 points on first possessions last season. It became a source of embarrassment for a proud, productive defense. Coordinator Joe Woods promised changes. This season, the Broncos have not allowed a point in the first quarter.

"We are throwing curveballs," Vance Joseph said.

## 3) They stop the run

The Broncos have allowed 203 yards rushing in the first four games, eighth best in NFL history at this juncture. Nose guard Domata Peko deserves credit for bringing energy, passion and leadership.

## 4) They need to finish

The Broncos start well, but have shown unintended mercy. Denver has scored seven fourth quarter points, undermined by penalties and mistakes. This is the week for the Broncos to demonstrate that they can put a team away.

## 5) They need more takeaways

The Giants are ripe. They don't run well, and don't throw well. Other than that. With Eil Manning under pressure and veteran corners matched against inexperienced receivers, The Broncos should produce takeaways on Sunday night in their all-blue uniforms. The Broncos have only four takeaways, which ranks 21st, and have yet to recover a fumble. As the shirt says, they need "MORE."

#### **6) They need more Charles**

The Giants defense remains stout. They can cover, but struggle to account for running backs in the passing game. Hello, Jamaal Charles.

#### **7) They, um, know better**

As stated before, the Broncos realize they can't overlook anyone. A strong argument can be advanced that they are top five team right now. With three straight road games looming, including at Philadelphia and Kansas City, there's no room for hiccups.

# Broncos Aqib Talib stands for troops that Trump 'may make go to war again'

By Troy Renck

KMGH

October 12, 2017

Commissioner Roger Goodell continues to attempt to lay out a league-wide policy for the national anthem, writing in a memo to all 32 teams on Tuesday that "Everyone should stand" as the NFL attempts to "move past this controversy."

The Broncos, after their leadership council met with coach Vance Joseph, decided prior to their fourth game that they would stand for the anthem. All players did with linebacker Brandon Marshall holding his fist in the air as the lone individual expression. Marshall knelt for the first eight games last season to raise awareness of social injustices, which created dialogue that helped change the Denver Police Department's use of force policy.

Players, for the most part, have steered clear of the anthem topic following the Broncos' unified message. Cornerback Aqib Talib was asked Wednesday what his reaction would be if the commissioner required players stand.

"I stand anyway. I mean it wouldn't affect nothing I do. I stand anyway. I don't feel like taking a knee and all that, man, ... It's not solving the problem in my eyes. There's definitely a problem out there, but taking a knee and all that," Talib said, before continuing, "I stand for the people who go to war for us. (President) Trump may make us go to war again. And those guys may go to war again. And I stand for them and all that they do."

Goodell's memo Tuesday showed the league trying to find a balance between supporting its players' causes, while not upsetting its fans. Goodell said he is "very proud of our players and owners who have done the hard work over the past year to listen, understand and attempt to address the underlying issues within their communities" and expressed respect for players' "opinions and concerns about critical social issues. ... Like many of our fans, we believe that everyone should stand for the National Anthem. We want to honor our flag and our country and our fans expect that of us."

A previously scheduled meeting next week in New York will allow Goodell to discuss the issue with owners. President Trump, who galvanized players in protest before Week 3 games after using a derogatory term when insisting players should be fired for not standing, praised Goodell's memo.

"It's about time that Roger Goodell of the NFL is finally demanding that all players STAND for our great National Anthem -- RESPECT OUR COUNTRY."

Goodell has not demanded players stand. The league, instead, is looking for solutions to bring the players and owners together on this issue.

# **Broncos Injury Report: Cody Latimer, Paxton Lynch still sidelined**

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 12, 2017

Quarterback Paxton Lynch and wide receiver Cody Latimer did not practice as the Broncos returned to the field Wednesday to continue their preparations for the New York Giants.

Lynch, who has not practiced since suffering a sprained right shoulder on Aug. 26, could have a "brief" throwing session Thursday or Friday, Head Coach Vance Joseph said after Monday's practice. Latimer has been sidelined because of knee soreness the last two weeks and did not play Oct. 1 against the Oakland Raiders.

Cornerback Aqib Talib, nose tackle Domata Peko Sr. and running back Jamaal Charles also received veterans' rest days, as they have on previous Wednesdays. Peko began receiving the veteran days in Week 4.

# Homecoming: Trevor Siemian pauses NFL reality, returns to where unlikely career began

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 12, 2017

Outside of Bluestone, cars roll down Central Street.

Some head east toward Northwestern's campus, while others trek west toward the suburbs.

Ryan Field sits just three blocks away, and soon, Trevor Siemian will walk toward his former home stadium and address his alma mater's football team as the team's honorary captain.

He hasn't played for Northwestern in three years, but he still has responsibilities on the football field.

For now, though, he sits inside the nearly empty restaurant and sips on a cup of coffee.

From his vantage point, he can see helmets for each Big Ten school prior to realignment in 2014. He beat nine of those 11 opposing schools during his four years at Northwestern — and none of those wins was the biggest of his career.

Two mounted flat-screen TVs are also within Siemian's view, and tomorrow they'll likely show the Wildcats' homecoming matchup against Penn State. They're muted for now, and Siemian doesn't pay them any mind.

Dozens of golf pin flags — from courses like Augusta and Bethpage Black and Evanston's Canal Shores — adorn the walls and outnumber the patrons at least 10-to-1. Including the wait staff, there are just over a dozen people inside what one reviewer has called a modern-day "Cheers" bar.

It's the perfect setting for an NFL quarterback looking for to escape into quiet and familiarity.

Siemian's schedule is less crowded than during any NFL week, and it shows. He stops to chat with John Enright, Bluestone's owner, and is in no hurry to leave the familiar setting. His girlfriend, Bo Podkopacz, sits across the table with an open law-school textbook.

The moment doesn't feel much different than would any normal Friday afternoon study session, and it's easy to imagine a similar afternoon toward the end of 2011, when the couple started dating.

Siemian had arrived in Evanston the previous year weighing "170 pounds, soaking wet," Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald jokes. There were no promises of the NFL back then, just an opportunity to work toward a successful football career — or something else.

Fitzgerald's pitch focuses on a recruit making a 40-year decision, not a four-year decision. There's hardly a better example than Siemian, who was close to accepting a job in real estate prior to the 2015 NFL Draft.

But even as a freshman, Siemian began to show the necessary traits that would someday lead him to the NFL.

“He’s from a great family,” Fitzgerald says. “Obviously he has very hard-working parents. You couldn’t ask for anything better. And I think what they taught Trevor shows up today: the humility, how great of a teammate he is, how level-headed he is, the work ethic. He worked his fanny off here. And he was always willing to do anything for his teammates. I think that — again, from afar, is what it looks like I’m seeing in Denver.”

The former Northwestern quarterback and former Northwestern soccer defender aren’t eating this afternoon — they’ve just arrived from Trattoria Demi and will later head south to Chicago for dinner with two dozen former teammates — so for now, Siemian just nurses his coffee and enjoys the place he used to frequent.

He’s used to these wooden chairs and the worn tables. He rented a home just three houses down when he lived in Evanston and was a regular at Enright’s restaurant.

At times, the neon signs and string lights would glow along the top of the Bluestone bar, and at others, the sun would glimpse in through the window like on this October afternoon.

It’s a perfect day for golf, and Siemian snuck away to a Skokie course early Friday morning to grab a few holes during his break from the NFL grind.

This is the new normal, and it’s an adjustment for the couple.

“I kind of feel like in college, he flew under the radar completely,” Podkopacz said. “We’re Big Ten, but it’s a different animal [than other schools]. And now it’s kind of crazy, just the pomp and circumstance and all the interviews and everything. I feel like he handles it well, so it’s been cool to watch, but it’s kind of crazy.”

Here, though, there’s none of that. As he says goodbye to Enright, he could be mistaken for any upperclassman on this college campus. Siemian drops a \$10 bill on the table, heads out into the fall air and rejoins reality.

Siemian wasn’t necessarily the big man on campus when he started at Northwestern.

When Podkopacz met him, she says she didn’t know what position he played or if he’d ever get into a game.

Fitzgerald calls him one of the most underappreciated players he’s coached during his 12-year coaching career.

For the early part of his career, Siemian wasn’t even the most popular quarterback on his own team.

But that’s changed over the last couple years.



When Fitzgerald informed his team Siemian would be speaking to them before Northwestern played Penn State, some of the younger players acted as star-struck as when Peyton Manning stopped by Northwestern a few months earlier.

“It means the world to the guys,” Fitzgerald says. “It’s so funny. I’m sitting here talking to a handful of guys earlier in the week, like, Trevor’s coming back.’ And they’re like, ‘I’m going to get his autograph.’ The younger players, [at least]. The older guys played with him, at least a couple of them. They’re like, ‘Shut up, man.’”

One kid, the adolescent son of running backs coach Matt MacPherson, followed through.

As Siemian walked up to Ryan Field, MacPherson’s son was waiting in a Siemian Broncos jersey. Denver’s quarterback stopped to sign and take a picture. He would later take more photos with MacPherson’s son.

Siemian’s short interaction with him, Fitzgerald later told the former NU quarterback, made the boy’s entire year.

“It’s just so funny how perspective changes, but one thing that hasn’t changed is Trevor,” Fitzgerald says. “That’s who he is, and we’re incredibly proud of him.”

Inside Trienens Hall, Northwestern’s current indoor practice facility, Siemian stood alongside Fitzgerald and chatted during breaks in Friday afternoon’s walkthrough.

Those who played with Siemian greeted him as he walked among them as they stretched. Those who know him solely by reputation likely saw the NFL starter they each hope to one day become.

For Siemian to even be in Evanston was a bit of a perfect storm, Fitzgerald says. The Broncos’ bye aligned with Northwestern’s homecoming, and the Wildcats often look to their NFL alumni to serve as honorary captains.

Fitzgerald reached out to Siemian during Broncos training camp about returning to Evanston, and Siemian readily accepted.

“That’s obviously incredibly humbling,” Siemian says, “but it’s just great seeing everybody. The coaches, the equipment guys — everybody that you used to see on a day-to-day basis that you don’t get to see. It’s cool.”

And while the Wildcats weren’t likely to rescind the invitation had Siemian not earned Denver’s starting job this fall, the weekend’s recognition reminded Siemian of the preciousness of the opportunity he’s been given.

“I think you kind of go into the NFL and it’s a very fluid business and things can change so quickly,” Siemian says. “I think it helps remind you. And for me at least, I don’t take a day for granted for what we’re doing.”

As practice ended and the team formed a semicircle in front of him, Fitzgerald introduced his former quarterback with a stat line that demonstrated the type of effort he wanted to see Saturday from his current team.

At Penn State in 2014, Siemian carried the ball five times for negative 8 yards. He also scored three rushing touchdowns on those carries and helped deliver Northwestern a 29-6 win.

Siemian carried that message forward as he began to speak. It's paramount to give everything possible to make the most of one of the sacred few chances each team gets, he said. Siemian leaned on lessons from his current head coach, Vance Joseph, and echoed Joseph's message that each opportunity is invaluable.

And so, for just a couple of minutes, Siemian captured the attention of this Northwestern team. And the seniors, who made up most of the front row, seemed to pay most attention to Siemian's message as they prepared for the fifth game of their final collegiate season. Their chances were running out, and here was a player who made the most of his final plays as a collegiate player.

That Siemian became an NFL starter was merely a bonus.

This would not be a long, impassioned speech though, because Siemian knew what was on his own mind when honorary captains came back to speak when he was a player:

Food.

So he wrapped up his speech, broke the team down and let Northwestern's players head off to a catered meal that he and his former teammates remember in the same way he might recall a fishing story.

"The more you get away from it, the better it was," Siemian says.

In his office on the second floor of the Nicolet Football Center, Pat Fitzgerald waits to attend a pep rally ahead of Saturday's game.

Over the last few seasons, Fitzgerald has hustled off to a team dinner and then back to campus for the homecoming pep rally.

He's decided to stay put this year, and he has a few minutes to burn on Friday night.

Among the football memorabilia — from his playing career and ensuing coaching career — and family photos, the former Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year and All-American linebacker seems content to fill the time talking about his former quarterback.

Know this about Fitzgerald: There's no one more synonymous with the Northwestern program and no one who moves quicker to speak with great pride about its current and former players.

Also know he's aware the narrative suggests Siemian's wasn't a traditional path.

Northwestern just doesn't have the same quarterback pedigree as programs like Cal or USC.

While in Berkeley, Jared Goff could look to Aaron Rodgers as a model. Mark Sanchez could look to Carson Palmer.

For Siemian to find the last Northwestern quarterback to start a season opener, he'd have to search all the way back to Otto Graham a half century ago.

That didn't really occur to Siemian, though, when he looked at Northwestern's previous quarterbacks. He just saw a way forward.

"It's weird for me thinking that, because when I was in school, Mike Kafka was right before me, Dan Persa was before me, and those are both really good players," Siemian says. "A few years before that you had C.J. Bachér, Brett Basanez, so I kind of saw at the time ... these guys are in the NFL. This is a quarterback university! I didn't think of it any other way."

There wasn't much success, but it did exist. Kafka, in particular, hung around NFL practice squads for five years and saw limited action with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2014.

That was enough direction, though, for Siemian to feel comfortable as he continued his career, and he would soon become the first Northwestern quarterback to win a Super Bowl ring, albeit as a practice-squad player.

When he earned the Broncos' starting job the following offseason, he was repeatedly compared to Graham and deemed as an impressive player in relation to Northwestern's history.

Here's what was missed, though: Siemian grabbing the starter's role was impressive in comparison to the rest of the Big Ten, as well.

During the four years at Northwestern in which he saw game action, 51 quarterbacks attempted a pass. Both Kirk Cousins and Russell Wilson departed for the NFL after the 2011 season, but since that point, Siemian remains the only other Big Ten quarterback to nab a starting job.

So how'd he pull it off?

In part, Fitzgerald said, Northwestern's offense prepares quarterbacks for the rigors of the professional game, and much of that credit belongs to offensive coordinator Mick McCall.

But Siemian's own work ethic has plenty to do with it, too. He arrived at Northwestern as a three-star recruit who faced some semblance of a quarterback competition nearly every season he was on campus. Injuries plagued his redshirt junior and redshirt senior seasons, and he never seriously challenged Northwestern's all-time marks.

That's still no reason to look back on his career and wonder "what-if." As Fitzgerald says, there's a reason the rearview mirror is a whole lot smaller than the windshield.

It is worth it, however, to look at Siemian's fledgling NFL career and wonder if the hardships he faced in college prepared him for back-to-back quarterback competitions in Denver.

“I think it’s why he’s such a good pro,” Fitzgerald says, “He wasn’t the guy that had the recruiting-inflated ego. He wasn’t the guy that came here and left as the all-time winningest everything. ... He was this humble guy that’s worked and earned everything that he’s received.

“He’s always been a great teammate, he’s always been a great person. I think great things happen to great people, and there’s nobody greater than Trevor Siemian.”

Siemian doesn’t need this kind of attention.

As the doors to the Wildcafé — a team dining area outfitted with a buffet, tables and place settings — swing open, a group of nearly 150 alumni and guests cheer as Siemian walks in. He’s the surprise guest on this Saturday morning, and Northwestern Vice President for Athletics and Recreation Jim Phillips has just told the story of Siemian’s senior year ACL tear.

Siemian said in that Purdue locker room he’d be back, Phillips tells the crowd, and now he’s back as a Super Bowl champion.

The guests stand for “Touchdown Trevor,” as Phillips calls him, and Siemian speaks briefly before ceding the microphone to Northwestern’s president, Morton Schapiro.

“It almost seems like the more I get away, the more I remember how special this place was to me and really probably for all of us in this room,” Siemian says. “I’m lucky, I have a great job. I pinch myself every day that I got a chance to come here.”

But knowing Siemian, he can’t wait to get back out to the parking lot to tailgate and enjoy his first game back at Ryan Field since he left three seasons ago.

He tells the crowd as much, saying this is the first time he’s ever gotten to just relax before a game.

There are parts he enjoys, like when he cracks up during Schapiro’s video, which shows Siemian running over Schapiro’s daughter on the sideline during a game against Nebraska.

But he would still much rather be out in the parking lot, where Siemian can act like he isn’t the new face of Northwestern football.

He can say that honor belongs to New Orleans’ Zach Strief or Chicago’s Sherrick McManis or former NFL player Corey Wootton.

That’s truly what he wants. Even as he makes a huge impact for the football program and the university, Siemian doesn’t need the accolades, the attention or the publicity.

That’s not to say he doesn’t recognize the importance or the honor of coming back to his alma mater. He realizes he’s lucky to be in this position, and he says he knows it’s a great opportunity to represent the university and stay connected with a close-knit community.

If you want to know the real Trevor, though, just listen to Fitzgerald, who has known Siemian since the time he was a teenager in Windermere, Florida.

“I get text messages from him all the time before games,” Fitzgerald says. “He hasn’t changed a lick. From my perspective, he’s normal — whatever that means. He’s just a normal guy who just enjoys his job, is a great person before anything else. And it’s been so much fun to watch.”

Kickoff approaches.

On the Northwestern sideline, Siemian chats with alums and a handful of others who make their way up to him during pregame.

Ahead of the national anthem, he walks to the sideline and files in line with the rest of the staff to face the flag. He then makes his way to the boundary, and he links arms with Northwestern’s captains ahead of the coin toss.

They take their first step out onto the field.

It’s been three years since Trevor Siemian was last standing on the grass here at Ryan Field.

And his final play wasn’t glamorous.

Against Michigan on Nov. 8, 2014, Siemian threw a touchdown pass with three seconds left to cut the Wolverines’ lead to one. Rather than kick the extra point to send the game to overtime, Northwestern went for the two-point conversion.

Siemian slipped as he rolled out of the pocket, though, and the Wildcats fell to 3-6.

Siemian and the four Northwestern captains, arms still linked, get closer to midfield.

It wasn’t until the beginning of the 2014 season that he even began to hear feedback that he could potentially wind up in the NFL.

“That’s when I said, ‘If I have a good year, I’ll have a chance to play,’” Siemian says.

And leading into the Notre Dame game, Siemian’s chances seemed slim.

“My stats were horrible,” Siemian says. “I didn’t have good stats at all.”

A week later, Siemian threw for 284 yards and a touchdown and rushed for a touchdown as he led Northwestern to a 43-40 overtime road win over No. 15 Notre Dame.

That’s the game — the one you’ve heard about.

The one where former quarterbacks coach Greg Knapp and former head coach Gary Kubiak saw the trees blowing sideways and Siemian throwing darts. They decided then they needed to do their research on Siemian.

And for good reason, Fitzgerald says. Players only get so many opportunities in their careers where they can “make people open their eyes to your skill set,” Fitzgerald says, and that’s exactly what Siemian did nearly 36 months ago.

“Even the balls that were incomplete were on the money,” Fitzgerald says.

Siemian unlinks arms and puts his hands on the backs of Godwin Igwebuike and Tyler Lancaster. The four captains then continue to midfield for the coin toss as Siemian looks on.

His final senior year stats weren’t close to spectacular.

The fifth-year quarterback finished with 2,214 yards, seven touchdowns and 11 interceptions.

For comparison’s sake, Siemian threw for 3,401 yards, 18 touchdowns and 10 interceptions last season with the Broncos.

But if you watched the film, there was reason to believe Siemian could project as an NFL quarterback.

Looking back, he believes his anticipation, accuracy and mental understanding of the game stood out all season.

“[The Broncos] probably had to watch some more tape [after Notre Dame], but through all the bad film I put out there in college, there were a few good plays sprinkled in there,” Siemian says. “You just had to look for them.”

Penn State wins the toss — they’ll later win the game — and the Northwestern captains move to the appropriate side of the field. Siemian begins to walk off the Ryan Field grass.

No one will ever mistake Siemian’s college career for Matt Leinart’s or Vince Young’s or even Braxton Miller’s. Some players — quarterbacks, in particular — are destined for college success, and others find their way in a professional setting.

When Siemian was preparing for the 2015 NFL Draft, Fitzgerald consistently told evaluators that his best football was still ahead of him. If he’d had two more redshirt years, Fitzgerald says, who knows how his collegiate career may have ended.

What he did have, however, was plenty to prepare him for an NFL future.

“I think he’s a great example of what you can do when you buy in and you work just relentlessly to become the best player you can be,” Fitzgerald says. “You can’t control everything. He couldn’t control getting injured a couple times, but he could control how he improved.”

Siemian steps off the field, and the game begins.

Midway through the first quarter, Siemian stands on the near sideline as Northwestern’s offense threatens to score its first touchdown. The drive stalls, though, and Northwestern is forced to punt.

Siemian heads up to his seat, where he’ll meet up again with his former teammates and cheer on Northwestern.

Siemian, perhaps better than anyone, knows one drive, half or game doesn't define a player or a team. And so he watches a football game from a Ryan Field seat for the very first time.

Three years later, Trevor Siemian is home.

# That's What They Said: Giants HC Ben McAdoo and QB Eli Manning

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

October 12, 2017

## On getting new receivers up to speed:

**BM:** "It takes a little bit of time but they've been here. They're guys that know the system, that have been around here and have spent some time here. A couple guys that we brought back, one on the practice squad and one for the active roster. [Giants WR] Darius [Powe] and [WR Tavarres King], they've spent some time here in the past for a couple of years, so they're familiar with the system. We're going to take it slow, just fast as we can."

**EM:** "I think the good thing is, most of them were here during training camp. Tavarres King's been with us the last couple years and played for us in the regular season, caught some touchdowns. Roger Lewis played all last year, played this year. A few other guys have been here on the practice squad, so they know the system, they know the plays and the routes and the concepts. I've thrown routes with them, so it's not brand new for them. And so they should be able to hop in there, play fast, know their assignments and I think that's what you want. When you start getting brand-new guys or a new system, that's when it's tough. They're kind of learning on the run, but I think we've got our whole offense. We can go play and play fast."

## On the rash of injuries last weekend:

**BM:** "I've been around for a lot of football. Fortunately, I'm young, but I have some miles on me. No I haven't seen anything like that and hope I never do again."

**EM:** "We've got to keep working. That's all you can do. We've got a game to get ready for, we've got some new guys on offense who we've got to get up to speed. So, uh, have a great gameplan, go out there — I thought we had a good practice today, and just go out there, compete our tails off and try to get a win."

## On facing Miller:

**BM:** "Von is a talented player. His first step is tremendous. He has anticipation from the line of scrimmage. He's fast and explosive. Strong, gifted and he works hard. He's a tough matchup for any tackle in this league or any tight end in this league. We'll have to pick our spots with our tackles, how to drop back and throw it and probably give him some help at times. He's a tremendous challenge to block, especially in his own building."

**EM:** Von is obviously a tremendous player and does a great job getting to the quarterback, stopping the run [at] full speed. You have to keep an eye on him, make sure he's not taking over the game. I've seen it first hand. ... We've just got to make sure we're aware of where he is and do a good job, if possible, of getting two guys on him."



**On what they see from Siemian:**

**BM:** “You see a guy that from Year 1 to Year 2 (by) playing his confidence has gone up. You see a little more rhythm in his body, you see his instincts coming out – his natural instincts coming out. I like the way he moves in the pocket with his eyes downfield. He’s not afraid to take some chances and play aggressive in the play-action game, which I think is important in this league. You can’t play scared. He’s done a tremendous job.”

**EM:** “I haven’t seen a whole lot of Trevor. We haven’t played a team that they’ve played. I guess I saw a little bit of the Chargers game. I think he played well, has made some good throws. They’re winning some games, so it seems like he’s playing good football right now.”

**On losing the first five games of the season:**

**BM:** “Listen, we’re preparing to win a game this week. We’re excited at the opportunity to come out and play a prime-time game on a big stage versus a quality opponent. We want to show what we can do. We’ve been in some close ball games here. The last three have come down to the last possession. We’re just excited to come out and compete.”

**EM:** “Every game is different. Every game’s got its own reasoning. We just haven’t played well enough. We’ve done some good things. We’ve played in some close games. We’ve had opportunities, we just haven’t made some plays at certain times to win football games. You expect games in this league are going to go into the fourth quarter, and you’ve got to make more plays than the other team in that period.”

# Broncos' Von Miller: Giants' Odell Beckham 'should be the highest-paid player ever' in NFL

By Nate Davis  
USA Today  
October 12, 2017

Von Miller became the NFL's highest-paid linebacker last year. But now he's ready for his pay stubs to be overshadowed by Odell Beckham, whom Miller says deserves to be the league's best-compensated player.

"Odell should be the highest-paid player ever in the National Football League," Miller said Wednesday ahead of Sunday night's matchup, when his Denver Broncos will host Beckham's winless New York Giants.

"He should be the highest-paid player ever, regardless of position. That's just the type of player he is. It doesn't matter if it's quarterback, offensive line, receiver. It doesn't matter. The type of impact that he has on the globe, the type of viewers that he brings — just him as a player. That makes up for him not playing quarterback.

"So, he's a once in a lifetime player. Definitely deserving. There's no reason that he won't come back and be the same type of player. That's just one of the guys that you invest in. When you get a guy like that, that's the guy that you invest in, that you want to keep around for his whole career."

Beckham, who had season-ending ankle surgery this week, is making \$1.8 million this year. He's scheduled to earn \$8.46 million in 2018, the option (and final) year of his rookie contract. Before being hurt, he had eclipsed 90 catches, 1,300 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns in each of his NFL seasons.

Beckham expressed over the summer that he believed he should earn the league's top dollar, even though that's a stratosphere typically reserved for quarterbacks.

The top 16 average salaries in the NFL all belong to star passers. Miami Dolphins defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh checks in at No. 17, while Miller follows at 18. Earlier this year, Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford and Oakland Raiders quarterback Derek Carr became the first players to average \$25 million or more annually.

Pittsburgh Steelers star Antonio Brown is at the top of the receiver scale with a four-year, \$68 million deal.

Miller, who's spoken to Beckham since the operation on his fractured ankle, was disappointed he wouldn't be able to face his friend on the field.

"We had this game circled a long time ago," said Miller. "This was a game that I was looking forward to playing in. I wanted to play. This is my first time playing against O and the Giants, so I was looking forward to it. This was the game. That's how it is when life happens."

# NFL and players union will meet with owners about anthem protests

By Kevin Spain  
USA Today  
October 12, 2017

A day after the NFL said the league would be discussing what to do about national anthem protests at the owners' meetings next week, it sent out another memo saying the players union would be involved in those discussions.

Wednesday, NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy tweeted that commissioner Roger Goodell and union head DeMaurice Smith would be there to talk to owners about what the league can do to move forward on players' concerns toward social issues.

The owners will meet Oct. 17-18 at The Conrad in New York.

"Commissioner Roger Goodell reached out to NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith today and both he and player leadership will attend the League meetings next week," the league said in a statement. "There has been no change in the current policy regarding the anthem. The agenda will be a continuation of how to make progress on the important social issues that players have vocalized. Everyone who is part of our NFL community has a tremendous respect for our country, our flag, our anthem and our military, and we are coming together to deal with these issues in a civil and constructive way."

On Tuesday, Goodell sent a memo to teams saying, "We believe that everyone should stand for the National Anthem."

Then Wednesday, after President Trump tweeted that it was "about time" Goodell and the NFL demanded all players stand for the anthem, the league sent out a statement, clarifying the commissioner's stance that the league was looking to "move from protest to progress, working to bring people together."

# NFL, players have one easy answer for how to end protests on their own terms

By Christine Brennan

USA Today

October 12, 2017

If there was any doubt about who really is fighting whom in the continuing saga of the NFL anthem protests, Wednesday morning's back and forth between Donald Trump and the league should settle matters once and for all.

At 6:47 a.m. ET, Trump tweeted the following: "It is about time that Roger Goodell of the NFL is finally demanding that all players STAND for our great National Anthem-RESPECT OUR COUNTRY."

Only problem with that tweet is that Goodell said no such thing in a letter to all 32 clubs on Tuesday. Goodell did not "demand" that all players stand during the anthem. He said they "should stand," reiterating the language already employed in the league's current anthem policy while also saying it's time for the league "to move past this controversy...together with our players."

Nearly three hours after Trump tweeted, the NFL called him on his mistake in one beautiful sentence:

"Commentary this morning about the Commissioner's position on the Anthem is not accurate."

The league went on to say it "is doing the hard work of trying to move from protest to progress, working to bring people together."

Perhaps that means there's someone out there trying to pull us apart? Is there anyone out there with a Twitter account trying to do that?

Since Trump inserted himself into what was a dying issue late last month, many in the news media have turned the anthem protest story into an owners-vs.-players battle, which is exactly what Trump wants.

But that's just not right. The owners and players certainly have their differences, but those pale in comparison to the havoc Trump is wreaking on both parties.

If we're going to be correct about this, we need to call this what it is: Trump waging war on the NFL for his own selfish political purposes.

This was not a fight the NFL wanted. Trump dragged the league into this one with his despicable, race-baiting, "son of a bitch" comment about anthem protesters in a political speech in Alabama nearly three weeks ago.

But like it or not, this is the fight the NFL now faces. As much as the league says it wants to work with its players on the very significant issues some are highlighting with their bended knees and locked arms, it can't when a human noise machine with a cell phone continues to pound away from the vast beyond.

So, what to do? There's a very simple answer: Go back to the days before 2009 when teams were not required to come out of the locker room until after the anthem was played (except for the Super Bowl and after 9/11).

With no players on the field, the anthem will go on, fans will stand at attention or stand in line for nachos or run in from the parking lot or do whatever it is they do during the anthem, and the controversy — at least the visible part of it — will be over.

This quick fix would deprive Trump of visual evidence of player protests, which has provided the oxygen for his incessant and incendiary tweets. He'd find something else to tweet about, for sure, but it likely wouldn't be about players on the sidelines during the anthem, because they wouldn't be there anymore.

What this solution must not do is stop the ongoing conversations between the players and the league over the issues of social injustice that Colin Kaepernick first drew attention to on the 49ers sideline last year, concerns that have faded the past couple of weeks as players felt the need to join forces to protest against Trump.

Those who would be angry to lose the powerful imagery of players taking a knee should consider that they'd also likely lose Trump in this deal. Getting him out of the way would allow the league, the clubs and the players to address these important issues calmly and wisely.

Keeping players in the locker room is a far better answer than the preposterous plan Jerry Jones floated the other day, the one in which he said he would immediately bench any players who protested during the anthem. How would that work if, say, quarterback Dak Prescott took a knee, or perhaps the entire Dallas Cowboys wide receiving corps?

One nagging concern among NFL players has been Trump's end game, that if and when they stop protesting and stand at attention, Trump would be able to declare victory. Can you imagine what that would look like? The tweets might never end.

Staying in the locker room just might solve that problem too. The patriotic sideline scene Trump is dreaming about can't happen if the players aren't there.

# Labor union files complaint over Jerry Jones' anthem policy for Cowboys

By A.J. Perez

USA Today

October 12, 2017

A labor union has filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board over Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones' threat to bench players who take part in protests during the national anthem.

Local 100 of the United Labor Unions, which represents workers in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas, has requested the NLRB to "investigate preemptively in order to prevent illegal firings of players."

"Sorry, Jerry, you're over the line, partner," the union said on its Facebook page. "Workers have rights."

Wade Rathke, chief organizer of Local 100, told the Forth Worth Star-Telegram in a statement that the players have a right to protest, and Jones has no authority to punish players over their actions during the anthem.

"Jones, through his efforts to bully his playing workforce, is attempting to unilaterally establish a previously nonexistent condition of work," Rathke said.

NFL owners will meet next week in New York, and player protests -- meant to call attention to racial inequality and police brutality -- will be discussed, with possible changes to the league policy in the offing. Currently, the NFL's operations manual says players "should" stand at attention during the anthem.

NFL spokesperson Joe Lockhart told reporters on Tuesday that the league has not disciplined any players for kneeling or any other conduct during The Star-Spangled Banner.

Rathke told The Dallas Morning News that the chances his union's complaint will spur the NLRB to take action probably aren't great.

"People get so high and mighty and rich and think they can just do anything. But the law is here, so sorry," he told the newspaper. "Frankly, we're hoping this is just a wake-up call."

# NFL, NFLPA statement: 'No change in the current policy regarding the anthem'

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

October 12, 2017

President Donald Trump is not getting his wish -- at least not yet. In a joint statement released on Wednesday, the NFL and NFL Players Association revealed that the league has not enacted a rule that would require players to stand for the national anthem.

Here is their statement:

"Commissioner Roger Goodell reached out to NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith today and both he and player leadership will attend the League meetings next week. There has been no change in the current policy regarding the anthem. The agenda will be a continuation of how to make progress on the important social issues that players have vocalized. Everyone who is part of our NFL community has a tremendous respect for our country, our flag, our anthem and our military, and we are coming together to deal with these issues in a civil and constructive way."

That statement came a day after NFL spokesman Joe Lockhart stated that the league's owners will likely discuss a rule change that would require players to stand for the national anthem. In recent weeks, Trump has pushed for the league to enact a new rule to prevent players from protesting during the national anthem. Players on several teams have been sitting/kneeling during the anthem to protest racial injustice -- a movement that began with then-49ers quarterback and current free agent Colin Kaepernick last season -- though the protest has shifted in recent weeks to a show of unity after Trump's inflammatory comments.

Last month, Trump advocated for teams to fire players who kneel during the anthem.

"Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now,' Trump said. "Out. He's fired. He's fired."

"You know, some owner is going to do that, he's going to say, 'That guy that disrespects our flag, he's fired,'" Trump also said. "And that owner, they don't know it -- they're friends of mine, many of them -- they don't know it, they'll be the most popular person for a week, they'll be the most popular person in this country, because that's a total disrespect of our heritage, that's a total disrespect of everything that we stand for."

In response to Trump's comments, most teams demonstrated during the anthem in a show of unity. And many protests against racial injustice have continued. In response to the continued protests, some team owners have supported the players' right to protest while Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has said that any player on his team who doesn't stand for the national anthem will not be allowed to play.

# What Roger Goodell's Memo Means for the National Anthem Protests Going Forward

By Peter King

MMQB

October 12, 2017

Things you need to know this morning about where the issue of players standing for the national anthem lies, and what the league might do to force players to do so:

**1. The league currently has no proposal prepared to vote on next week at the NFL owners' meeting in New York that would mandate players to stand at attention for the national anthem.** This could be semantics. But I was told on Tuesday that the NFL is focused on trying to build a bridge to the players so that leaders such as Malcolm Jenkins and Doug Baldwin—and the NFL Players Association—could feel good about partnering with the league on some community initiatives.

**2. Roger Goodell did lay down the gauntlet on Tuesday, however.** While Goodell was in Miami participating in a ride along with three Dolphins players and the North Miami Police Department and the Broward County Sheriff's Department, ESPN's Adam Schefter broke the story of Goodell's memo to NFL ownership. It said, in part: "Like many of our fans, we believe that everyone should stand for the National Anthem ... We want to honor our flag and our country, and our fans expect that of us." Goodell said the league "wanted to move past this controversy ... together with our players." The tenor of the memo was clear: Although the league might feel the anthem controversy has been hijacked by the President and Vice President, we're not going to make progress on the issues the players care about by continuing to protest during the anthem. We've got to stand for the anthem or risk alienating a huge swath of our fans. Now the question will be: Will the players buy that?

**3. There is no question that the players can't simply take some money deal from the owners to do social justice work in exchange for agreeing to all stand for the anthem, because they'd risk being labeled as sellouts to the protest cause.** This will be the tricky part, navigating the endgame. The NFL has to find some way for the players to win.

**4. The endgame? My gut feeling is the league will start by offering to devote a week or weeks—the way the NFL does with cancer causes ("Crucial Catch") or the military ("Salute to Service")—to fund and partner with players to highlight and sponsor work on civil rights causes in NFL communities.** That could be promoting better police-community relations, or working on reduced sentencing and work-release employment programs. It is thought that the players have been pressing the league to spend multiple weeks on social work and civil rights projects this season, and the success or failure of this partnership will probably be decided by whether players feel the league is digging deep enough to make real change in communities.

I have spoken to a couple of players in recent weeks, since this controversy started, who are skeptical of the NFL's efforts. One said the NFL's history of dehumanizing players and forcing them to do what owners want (the way Dallas owner Jerry Jones spoke about not allowing any protesting player to play for his team) reinforces the impression among players that if they don't get in line, the league will try to steamroll them. That, clearly, is an impression the NFL will have to fight—that they're just playing nice now to get the players to do what they want.



Another player, Baldwin, sounded introspective on Tuesday after the Goodell memo leaked. He wanted some time to consider his thoughts, then said he felt the NFL and its players shouldn't continue the fight that President Donald Trump started almost three weeks ago.

"As an NFL community," Baldwin said, "I believe it's important that we do not directly engage in the divisive rhetoric that is clearly being aimed at the NFL. It's also important that we understand that the original intent and motivation of the players' peaceful protest was to bring awareness to social issues that we see in our country. Although I know the divisive rhetoric is accomplishing its goal in our society, I do believe this is a unique opportunity for the NFL to galvanize our efforts collectively while re-humanizing the players and engaging in the true issues. I hope we can be a model for our society."

"This has never been about disrespecting the flag. This has always been about trying to better society, and we hope we can work with the NFL to help do that. I think it's up to us to speak up for those who don't have voices to speak. Working to help those who need help, working to try to make society better, is both patriotic and honorable."

Recently, I asked Baldwin about his passion for this issue—about not just being an athlete who only plays and ignores the evening news. He sounded surprised at the question.

"How can you not have a vested interest in the future of our society?" Baldwin said. "I understand we all have our issues. We have issues in our locker room. We have issues in our society. But even though we have issues on our team, we come every week unified. We're a team. We work toward a collective goal. We put aside our egos for the greater good. That's what I want us to do in our communities now."

In the next week, Goodell's challenge will be to make players believe the league and the owners share Baldwin's attitude, or at least will contribute significantly to their causes. It's not going to be easy.

Now for your email:

## **ON PENCE'S WALKOUT**

I enjoy reading your articles on MMQB. My comments about our VP walking out after the National Anthem was played are:

- Yes he knew they 49ers would kneel;
- Yes he knew his walking out would make news;
- Yes, like the NFL players, he took advantage of the opportunity to showcase his protest of the protesters;
- The media's focus on his walkout was their choice. The media could have, and probably should have, ignored him and focused on Peyton Manning's jersey retirement.
- Our VP's behavior clearly indicated the serious issue of kneeling during the national anthem is not going away quietly; and,
- The article mentioned the VP should have shown respect for Manning's jersey retirement by not walking out. Why? What is more important, showing respect for a retired football jersey or respect for our country and its flag? So you know my stance in all of this, I have no issue with the players' protesting in the way they see fit. Neither do I have any issue with those that oppose the players' manner of protesting. This is what makes our nation the greatest country to have ever existed. — Patrick Oates

Interesting points, Patrick. My question for you: Do you seriously think if the Vice President of the United States attends a football game, with lots of attention surrounding his visit, to pay tribute to the greatest player in Indianapolis Colts' history, and walks out of the event before the halftime tribute is paid to Peyton Manning, because of the national anthem protests ... that the nation's press should ignore it? Glad you're not my editor, or the editor of any publication that reports the news.

### **PLEASE STICK TO SPORTS**

I don't understand. You complain that VP Mike Pence upstaged the Peyton Manning ceremony and as a result the Indianapolis Star website had five headlines talking about Pence leaving. If you were really concerned about Manning not getting his appropriate recognition, why didn't your article simply talk about Manning and the ceremony that celebrated him? Instead you spent paragraphs talking about the entourage that accompanies any American VP and other unnecessary details. You gave much more attention to Pence than to Peyton. Why is that? Are you just as partisan and political as Pence? Why can't ESPN and SI writers stick to sports, instead of politics? — David, California

Three points, David:

- 1) I wrote 950 words on Manning's Saturday statue unveiling. Gave him quite a bit of his due. Was there another national columnist who wrote about Manning's statue unveiling? Did another national columnist or media person cover the event? Not that I saw.
- 2) Pence stole the attention from Manning's day on Sunday. When the Vice President walks out in protest at a football game, it's mega news, and it's going to overshadow everything else.
- 3) Pence is the one who chose to mix politics and sports at the highest level of the political and media food chain.

Clearly this will never happen, because I'm relatively inconsequential on the national scene, but I hope one day if I retire that someone I counted as a friend doesn't exploit my retirement for his own personal or business gain. That is precisely what Pence did to Manning.

Last point on all of this: A prominent NFL executive wrote me a text Sunday night. The text said, in part, that this exec was appalled at the Vice President using Manning's ceremony for political reasons. This exec (I know, because we have discussed politics before) was a Trump voter.

### **DÉJÀ VU FOR THE COWBOYS**

Must be a Packers jinx. Why haven't my 'Boys learned the lesson not to leave time on the clock as it will come back and bite them, which did happen. The Cowboys had that game won aside for the stupid penalties. It was an amazing game on both sides. — Sylvia

I feel strongly that the Cowboys messed up on the offensive play calls late. With 1:24 left in the fourth quarter, trailing by four points, Dallas had second-and-2 at the Green Bay 11-yard line. They chose to throw into the end zone. It was incomplete. Just not a smart call, because even if they score on the play, the Packers will have about 1:18 left, with one timeout, and Aaron Rodgers will simply need to drive 45 yards after the kickoff to tie the game with a field goal. The play there should have been to run Ezekiel

Elliott up the gut and bleed the clock ... or force the Packers to use their last timeout. Then, if Dallas didn't convert on the second-down run by Elliott, Dak Prescott would have two more plays to convert for a first down, and to bleed the clock. As important as scoring there, in my opinion, was taking significant time off the clock so that Aaron Rodgers wouldn't have enough time to win it. And after Prescott scored with a run on third down, Green Bay took over at its 25-yard line, down 31-28, with 1:13 and one timeout left. Who didn't think Rodgers was going to drive down for at least a field goal? So I fault Dallas's clock management in a big, big way.

## **SOBER OCTOBER**

When I read your Beernerdness section of The MMQB this week, I answered your question about drinking too much as a YES. Some weeks I was wondering how you are able to write the great columns since you describe having quite a few different beers. Since you are going a month without beer, maybe you could spend one week talking about the variety of non-alcoholic beers that are on the market. You could even do your own taste testing and still complete your October challenge. It would be a great shout out to all of us who love beer but don't drink alcohol. — Chazz Steiner

Thanks a lot, Chazz. That is a great idea. I will try a couple of them and get back to you with my reviews. In the meantime, I am going to give the Beernerdness section to fans/readers the next three Mondays.

## **DECLINING RATINGS**

When the NFL calculates their data on viewers, do they include the counts of how many folks are watching RedZone? Personally, as a lifelong Miami Dolphins fan in an Eagles market, I rarely watch live game broadcasts anymore. The local games generally don't interest me, and, if I watch RedZone, I get to watch snippets of the Dolphins games, often times live. Plus, the very draw of RedZone is that you get to see all of the scoring and interesting plays from around the league. Watching a whole game seems slow enough, but it gets slower when it's a game you are not emotionally invested in! — Diane, Doylestown, Pa.

Diane, excellent point. In fact, the RedZone does nip away at the ratings. I've been told about 900,000 or so viewers tune to RedZone for some or all of their Sunday viewing ... but that clearly does not apply to the Monday night, Thursday night or Sunday night games, since those obviously have no competition from other games. The FOX and CBS Sunday day games would be affected, though.

## **TRAVEL NOTE**

As a Charlotte resident and aviation enthusiast, I have to take (slight) umbrage with your comment re: Indy being the only sports city that you can get to your gate in 29 minutes. The car ride from the Westin in Uptown Charlotte to Departures Road at the Charlotte airport in 15 minutes ... I think it's easy to get through pre-check and to your gate in the remaining 14 minutes. Just saying. — Matt DuBose

My experience is that, from the time I leave my hotel room to the time I am at my gate at the airport, that Indianapolis is the fastest experience of any airport serving an NFL city. But I have done that Charlotte run the way you suggest, and I have never timed it. Where I think you'd spend a few extra minutes is after getting through security ... those four wings can contain some time-consuming walks. But I will hand it to you—it would be close.

## **STATUES**

In regards to your call on more NFL teams to erect statues honoring their greatest players, you suggested that Denver should erect a statue of John Elway. While I agree that would be appropriate (probably even more so after his executive days are over), I'm sure Elway would agree that Denver already has a statue honoring their most influential person over the past 30-plus years: Pat Bowlen. — Scott, Tucson

You could be right, Scott. But my feeling is I've never seen a franchise where the owner is more beloved than the best quarterback in franchise history.

## **EARL THOMAS**

I know Peter King was watching Dallas/Green Bay, but I was surprised he didn't comment on Earl Thomas's play against the Rams. I guess I'm a homer, but it was one of the great defensive plays I've seen (and I grew up in Pittsburgh) by a free safety that plays on the level of Troy and Ed. — Howard Coleman

I owe the Seahawks one after last weekend. I was so swamped that I didn't have the time to invest in a game that certainly deserved my attention.

## **VETERAN QB TRADE?**

With the Jaguars suddenly relevant and so many teams with older QBs going nowhere, what do you think about the potential for a trade? Philip Rivers to the Jags? Eli Manning? Carson Palmer? I'd include Drew Brees and Ben Roethlisberger, but neither the Saints nor the Steelers are probably ready to throw in the towel on 2017 yet. I know a mid-season trade, especially for a QB, would prove a steep (maybe impossible) learning curve. But Rivers could still be viable for the next 2-3 years. I think it could make a lot of sense. The Jags get a QB who isn't a liability (hopefully) and they can still draft someone in the next year or two to groom behind him. — Evan, Milwaukee

I love the way you think, Evan. I hope the Jags make calls on Rivers and Manning before the Oct. 31 trade deadline. They could be a quarterback away from winning a game in January. Maybe two.

# Roger Goodell's National Anthem Letter to NFL Owners—Annotated

By Robert Klemko

MMQB

October 12, 2017

Roger Goodell's Tuesday letter to the NFL's 32 teams, laying out the league's stance on social justice protests during the national anthem, and the plan to reach a resolution at next week's league meeting, was the strongest message yet from the NFL offices on the issue dividing the viewing public.

It comes after Jerry Jones's promise to bench Cowboys players who protest during the playing of the anthem, and the league pointing out its previously obscure game-day policy on the anthem—which now provides for discipline in the form of fines, suspensions, and/or the forfeiture of draft choice(s) for teams that have players not on the field for the anthem.

After playing a behind-the-scenes intermediary role early on, NFL HQ is mobilizing, through its messaging, to resolve a conflict that it acknowledges is alienating fans. Here's that letter (in bold), with my thoughts on its real message, to teams, players and fans (in italics).

## MEMORANDUM

**To: Chief Executives**

**Club Presidents**

**From: Commissioner Goodell**

**Date: October 10, 2017**

**Re: Fall Meeting/National Anthem**

**We live in a country that can feel very divided. Sports, and especially the NFL, brings people together and lets them set aside those divisions, at least for a few hours.**

*Yes, nothing bridges divides like the most lucrative sports league in North America, which offers its players the least contract guarantees of any league; and which primarily draws talent from impoverished communities via a feeder system that denies adult athletes anything more than a small fraction of its gargantuan profits. And nothing heals divisions like asking those players to set aside their political views and honor a tradition with jingoistic undertones that, in part, was paid for by the Department of Defense and served as marketing for the military.*

**The current dispute over the National Anthem is threatening to erode the unifying power of our game, and is now dividing us, and our players, from many fans across the country.**

*It's starting to hit us in our pockets, folks.*

**I'm very proud of our players and owners who have done the hard work over the past year to listen, understand and attempt to address the underlying issues within their communities. At our September committee meetings, we heard directly from several players about why these issues are so important to them and how we can support their work. And last week, we met with the leadership of the NFLPA and more players to advance the dialogue.**

*These are their communities and their problems. And while we're happy to throw money at community initiatives that work to address symptoms of poverty and inequality (provided we get our due recognition for the display of charity), let's keep it off the TV broadcast, gents.*

**Like many of our fans, we believe that everyone should stand for the National Anthem. It is an important moment in our game. We want to honor our flag and our country, and our fans expect that of us. We also care deeply about our players and respect their opinions and concerns about critical social issues. The controversy over the Anthem is a barrier to having honest conversations and making real progress on the underlying issues. We need to move past this controversy, and we want to do that together with our players.**

*It's about honoring the flag, plain and simple. Don't you know, when John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, they were protesting the flag and the anthem, not racial inequity at home. All this talk from people like Michael Bennett and Malcolm Jenkins about gaps in income and education and a racial disparity in the rate of killings at the hands of police—that's all window dressing. These men dishonor the flag.*

*That said, we care deeply about our players' concern for social issues, and we badly want to move past this money-sucking conflict and talk about real issues. Not that we would actually acknowledge what those issues are in this memo.*

*Also, this memo is not going say outright that we are going to compel players to stand for the anthem. But you get the idea.*

**Building on many discussions with clubs and players, we have worked to develop a plan that we will review with you at next week's League meeting. This would include such elements as an in-season platform to promote the work of our players on these core issues, and that will help to promote positive change in our country.**

*You want NFL.com to blog about Richard Sherman visiting a Boys and Girls Club in South Central? Done. You want the NFL media relations army to blitz reporters with stories about local food drives and whatnot? Well, we already do that, so, done! But players, please keep your thoughts and initiatives to yourselves on Sunday afternoons, because a significant percentage of people who spend their money on us and our advertisers do not see you as men with emotions and empathy and pride worthy of their attention—especially if it disrupts their escape into sports. To them, you are lucky to have risen to this station in life (through no hard work of your own) and ought to be grateful to the patriotic billionaires who stick localities with the bill for their new stadiums and see fit to pay you to play a game. Grown men willing to pay hard-earned cash to wear your name on their backs and watch you perform would be loath to consider a belief of yours that contradicts their own. And we don't dare challenge them.*

**We want to ensure that any work at the League level is consistent with the work that each club is doing in its own community, and that we dedicate a platform that can enable these initiatives to succeed. Additionally, we will continue the unprecedented dialogue with our players.**

*Remember, this is unprecedented. A few years ago we brought in some talented women to teach us that hitting women is bad, and now we're just getting up to speed on this whole social activism deal. To be honest, we didn't realize how confident you, the players, have become in your voices in the age of social media. But we understand now, and we want you to be quiet at the precise moment when your voices can be heard the loudest. Please?*

**I expect and look forward to a full and open discussion of these issues when we meet next week in New York. Everyone involved in the game needs to come together on a path forward to continue to be a force for good within our communities, protect the game, and preserve our relationship with fans throughout the country. The NFL is at its best when we ourselves are unified. In that spirit, let's resolve that next week we will meet this challenge in a unified and positive way.**

*Let's unify! And by unify I mean go back to the status quo. Clubs that allow protests to continue will suffer the consequences.*

# Roger Goodell: 'No policy change' on national anthem

By Staff

NFL.com

October 12, 2017

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said Wednesday that "there has been no policy change" regarding players standing for the national anthem before games.

Speaking with NFL Network's Nate Burleson in New York, Goodell addressed a claim made Wednesday morning by President Trump on Twitter that the NFL is "demanding" players stand for the anthem.

"What we've had is unprecedented dialogue over the last year with our players, our owners, with community leaders and law enforcement," Goodell said. "What we plan to do is have a very in-depth discussion with the players and owners next week to make sure we truly understand the issues and also understand the approach we want to take together with the players to address these issues in our communities."

A league spokesperson told NFL.com on Wednesday that "commentary this morning about the Commissioner's position on the Anthem is not accurate. The NFL is doing the hard work of trying to move from protest to progress, working to bring people together."

In a joint statement released by the NFL and NFL Players Association on Wednesday, both the league and union stated there have been no changes to the current policy regarding the national anthem:

"Commissioner Roger Goodell reached out to NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith today and both he and player leadership will attend the League meetings next week. There has been no change in the current policy regarding the anthem. The agenda will be a continuation of how to make progress on the important social issues that players have vocalized. Everyone who is part of our NFL community has a tremendous respect for our country, our flag, our anthem and our military, and we are coming together to deal with these issues in a civil and constructive way."

Goodell told Burleson that "the real dialogue and the real issues have been overtaken by the controversy" surrounding the national anthem.

"What we want to do is get back to focusing on the actions that we want to take to really improve our communities and support our players to get things done," Goodell said. "We want to get to from our current situation to where we are really making a difference in the community and get involved in action that is going to have a positive outcome for our law enforcement, for our communities, and for our country overall."

Goodell also stressed to Burleson the importance of having a dialogue to learn and understand from one another.

"We need more understanding," Goodell said, "and that's what has happened for us over the last year with our players going into their communities and doing the listen and learning tours, going to ride-alongs, listening to community leaders, going to bail proceedings, and seeing what the players have focused on is what they want to try to improve in their communities. By sharing that with our owners,



our owners support that effort. They understand this is important to our players and they want to help them make a difference. That is what's so unique about this -- our owners and players coming together to help use the platform to make great changes in our community. The bottom line is, we all agree we want to make our communities better."

Miami Dolphins players, team staff and Goodell on Tuesday met with Miami-area police as part of team's Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality. The group met with North Miami Police Dept. and Broward County Sheriff officers as part of the program, which included a ride along.

"The most important thing I've learned is how important this is to our players and how much work they have actually done in their communities to identify these issues and identify solutions, more importantly," Goodell said. "By sharing that with us and sharing that with our ownership, there is a deeper understanding of each other and how we can go about making our communities better, collectively. We want to support one another in that effort and that is what makes me proudest of our players and proudest of our league."

Goodell added: "I do think there's a sense of urgency because we want to get in the communities and make a positive impact. It's important for us to continue to work together. The urgency that we all feel is continuing the work that we are doing, keeping focused and having a positive outcome for our players, our communities, our teams, our fans and for the leaders in our communities. I believe that urgency is actually beneficial -- but this isn't something that started two weeks ago, this is something that we have been focused on for well over a year. It requires patience and a deeper understanding than we have on a lot of these issues. I know our fans are focused on football, as they should be. We want to get that focus on football. We want to support our players, support our communities, and help make them better."

# Donald Trump's Careless Tweet Forces NFL Clarification On Players Standing

By Gabe Zaldivar

Forbes

October 12, 2017

Human tweet bot Donald Trump took to his favorite social media channel on Wednesday to offer his latest thoughts on the NFL and its national anthem policies.

That tweet reportedly led the league to issue a public statement that asserted claims such as those made by the president were false.

On Wednesday morning, the president revisited the debate over NFL players kneeling during the playing of the national anthem, a subject he has been fond of tweeting about for several weeks now.

He wrote:

“It is about time that Roger Goodell of the NFL is finally demanding that all players STAND for our great National Anthem-RESPECT OUR COUNTRY”

The tweet is presumably a reaction to a letter procured by ESPN’s Adam Schefter, who posted it to his Facebook page. It’s a memo from NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell to chief executives and NFL club presidents.

Following are portions of that missive.

The current dispute over the National Anthem is threatening to erode the unifying power of our game, and is now dividing us, and our players, from many fans across the country. I’m very proud of our players and owners who have done the hard work over the past year to listen, understand and attempt to address the underlying issues within their communities.

Like many of our fans, we believe that everyone should stand for the National Anthem. It is an important moment in our game. We want to honor our flag and our country, and our fans expect that of us. We also care deeply about our players and respect their opinions and concerns about critical social issues. The controversy over the Anthem is a barrier to having honest conversations and making real progress on the underlying issues. We need to move past this controversy, and we want to do that together with our players.

Building on many discussions with clubs and players, we have worked to develop a plan that we will review with you at next week’s League meeting. This would include such elements as an in-season platform to promote the work of our players on these core issues, and that will help to promote positive change in our country.

Goodell emphasizes that the letter is meant to explain this very subject will be broached next week at the league’s meeting.

At no point does it specifically state that a new policy has been enacted concerning players standing for the anthem.

Of course, it's easy to see how some might misconstrue the meaning in the memo, especially if you are prone to headline reading without digesting full articles.

ESPN's Kevin Seifert posted an article, "Roger Goodell sends letter to NFL teams, wants players to stand during anthem."

Seifert was just one of many articles that report Goodell wants players to stand, which is a solid assertion seeing as how Goodell went through the trouble of stating players "should stand" in the letter.

However, the irresponsible thing would be to peruse the letter and state unequivocally that the subject was dead and that players are decreed to universally stand this weekend.

The NFL, seeing a galloping horse sprint away from a gaping barn door, tried to lessen expectations by releasing a public statement Wednesday.

It states, via Ian Rapoport:

Commentary this morning about the Commissioner's position on the Anthem is not accurate. As we said yesterday, there will be a discussion of these issues at the owners meeting next week. The NFL is doing the hard work of trying to move from protest to progress, working to bring people together.

Commissioner Goodell spent yesterday with Miami Dolphins players, law enforcement and community leaders witnessing first-hand the outstanding work our players and clubs are doing to strengthen their communities. Players from around the league will be in New York next week to meet with owners to continue our work together.

The previous letter was meant to prepare executives for a major subject ahead of its meetings. Rather than see Goodell's desires dissolve into a weekend set of football games, the anthem is again a national debate thanks to a tweet from the president.

The tweet was potentially damaging enough to next week's conversations that it warranted a public statement from the league to clarify its stance.

It's almost as if the president of the United States doesn't want this subject to die a cold death. On Wednesday, he took a social media stick and stoked the fire enough for an official NFL statement to come out of the embers.

# Trump says Kaepernick's protests would have ended if NFL had 'suspended' the QB

By Des Bieler  
Washington Post  
October 12, 2017

President Trump offered his latest critique Wednesday evening of the protests NFL players have been staging, saying that Colin Kaepernick, the ex-49ers quarterback who was the first to kneel during the national anthem last year, would never have continued to do so if he had been "suspended" by the league.

"I watched Colin Kaepernick, and I thought it was terrible, and then it got bigger and bigger and started mushrooming, and frankly the NFL should have suspended him for one game, and he would have never done it again," Trump told Fox News's Sean Hannity in an interview conducted before an audience at the Harrisburg (Pa.) Air National Guard Base. "They could have then suspended him for two games, and they could have suspended him if he did it a third time, for the season, and you would never have had a problem."

"But I will tell you," the president continued, "you cannot disrespect our country, our flag, our anthem — you cannot do that."

Earlier in the day, Trump tweeted, "It is about time that Roger Goodell of the NFL is finally demanding that all players STAND for our great National Anthem — RESPECT OUR COUNTRY." The NFL commissioner had said Tuesday in a letter to team presidents and chief executives that "we believe that everyone should stand for the national anthem," adding, "We need to move past this controversy, and we want to do that together with our players."

After Trump's tweet, though, the NFL provided a statement to The Washington Post in which it said, "Commentary this morning about the Commissioner's position on the Anthem is not accurate. As we said yesterday, there will be a discussion of these issues at the owners meeting next week."

The league's annual owners meeting has been scheduled for next Tuesday and Wednesday, and the issue of player protests will be high on the agenda. Kaepernick's example was emulated by some other NFL players last year, and a few more at the start of this season, but over 200 took a knee during the anthem last month after Trump sharply criticized the protests, using the phrase, "son of a bitch."

Many NFL teams issued statements objecting to the president's comments, and some owners joined their players in linking arms while standing during the anthem. Ahead of a game at the host Arizona Cardinals, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones joined his team in taking a knee on the field before the anthem, then they rose and stood with arms linked as the song played.

However, last weekend saw far fewer anthem protests, amid reports that several teams were telling their players to stand. Jones said Sunday that he would bench any Cowboys player who did not stand for the anthem, with Dolphins owner Stephen Ross asserting, "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."

Jones subsequently claimed that Trump had “reminded” him in a phone conversation of the NFL’s policy on conduct during the anthem. In turn, 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!’ ”

[Jenkins: There are two sides to the NFL anthem debate, and both are right. And wrong.]

The NFL does not have a policy prohibiting players from kneeling or sitting during pregame renditions of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The league’s game operations manual says that “all players must be on the sideline” for the song and that they “should stand at attention, face the flag, hold helmets in their left hand and refrain from talking.”

“It doesn’t say the players must stand,” Joe Lockhart, the NFL’s executive vice president of communications and public affairs, recently noted of the policy. “It says the players should stand.”

A joint statement issued Wednesday by the NFL and its players’ union said, “There has been no change in the current policy regarding the anthem.” NFL Players Association Executive Director DeMaurice Smith will attend the owners meetings next week to try to come to an agreement on any possible policy changes.

If Goodell had wanted to suspend Kaepernick, he would not have had a rule violation to cite, but the league’s collective bargaining agreement does give the commissioner broad powers to impose punishments “for conduct detrimental to the integrity of, or public confidence in, the game of professional football.” Those powers were ultimately upheld in the long-running Deflategate saga, in which New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady was made to serve a four-game suspension, but Goodell and the league have also taken some courtroom losses and likely have no appetite to antagonize players, as well as some fans, by unilaterally issuing suspensions for anthem protests.

For Kaepernick’s part, the free agent quarterback, whose inability to sign with an NFL team has widely been ascribed to his social activism, retweeted a post Wednesday critical of the president. The post quoted and contained an audio clip of Ameer Hasan Loggins, a doctoral candidate in African Diaspora Studies at Cal-Berkeley, saying that Trump “invested in the USFL [in the 1980s] to try to overthrow the NFL.”

Trump tried to purchase the Buffalo Bills in 2014 but, as Loggins put it in the clip retweeted by Kaepernick, “those same billionaires that he calls his friends voted not to let him into their club.” According to Loggins, “it’s very much so in line with his God complex and his narcissism” that Trump now wants to use his power to tell NFL owners how to run their league, but the scholar noted that the owners had joined in demonstrations with their players “to unify against what Donald Trump said.”

# Shane Ray, Jake Butt to practice next week for Broncos

By Curtis Crabtree  
Pro Football Talk  
October 12, 2017

Linebacker Shane Ray and rookie tight end Jake Butt are both expected to return to practice for the Denver Broncos next week after missing the first six games of the regular season.

According to Arnie Stapleton of the Associated Press, Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said that both Ray and Butt will return to the practice field next week. Ray has been on injured reserve since the start of the regular season with a torn ligament in his wrist. Butt has been on the non-football injury list while recovering from the ACL injury he sustained in his final college game for Michigan.

Butt can practice for up a period of 21 days before the Broncos would have to put him on their active roster or end his season by moving him to injured reserve. Considering Butt doesn't have a single professional practice under his belt, it's likely the Broncos will use most, if not all, of their three-week allotment before making that call.

Ray is not eligible to return to the active roster until after Week 8 is in the books, though he can practice for the next two weeks in their interim without counting against the team's 53-man roster.