

The NFL could mandate players stand for the anthem. Players, Broncos included, are divided in their opinions.

By Nicki Jhabvala
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On Sept. 1, 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick heeded the advice of former Army Green Beret and Seahawks long-snapper Nate Boyer and changed his approach. Instead of sitting during the national anthem, as he had for three preseason games to protest the oppression of African-Americans and minorities, Kaepernick took a knee.

The action, while still bothersome to Boyer, was a compromise. But in the 400-plus days since Kaepernick kneeled on the sideline of Qualcomm Stadium, the national conversation about protests has spiraled into a divisive and political debate. When NFL owners and players convene next week at the league's fall meetings, a decision could be made to require players to stand for the national anthem, adding a new and even more tenuous wrinkle to a controversy that has created confusion and incited strong, and varied, reactions.

Buccaneers defensive tackle Gerald McCoy has said there would be "an uproar" if owners mandated players stand.

"Because you're basically taking away a constitutional right to freedom of speech," he told reporters. "If guys wanna have a, I guess you would call it a peaceful protest, I don't think it's right to take that away."

But Broncos cornerback Aqib Talib, who kneeled during the team's mass protest in Buffalo, said he would be unaffected.

"I don't feel like taking a knee and all that, it doesn't really solve a problem in my eyes," he said. "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. (President) 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."

In recent days control of the debate has seemingly become a tug of war between the owners, the players, the league, the fans, even politicians. Vice President Mike Pence, in what appeared to be a staged protest of his own, walked out of the Colts' game Sunday after seeing 49ers players kneel during the anthem. Cowboys owner Jerry Jones on Sunday said if any of his players do not stand for the anthem, they will not play.

And on Tuesday, Commissioner Roger Goodell issued a memo to all teams that said "everyone should stand for the national anthem," a directive that drew praise from President Donald Trump, who inflamed the issue weeks ago when he called for the firing of players who "disrespect" the flag.

Kaepernick's original message and compromise forged with Boyer have become muddled, leaving many — Broncos players included — wondering what the national division is even about anymore.

Political tug of war

Broncos tight end Virgil Green is, in many ways, a proverbial bridge to two primary sides of those for and against the protests. His father served in the military, and Green was a college teammate of Kaepernick and Brandon Marshall, the Broncos' linebacker who protested for seven games last season.

The Broncos' 2016 Walter Payton Man of the Year for his leadership on the field and in the community, Green says his conversations about the anthem and the protests are about understanding. When 32 Broncos players kneeled before their game at Buffalo in response to Trump's remarks, Green, wearing a white glove, stood with his fist raised in a show of unity.

"With the way I feel we're being antagonized, it's almost like our hand is forced," he said of the politics surrounding the issue. "When people say our military fought for us, they didn't fight for us to stand up to a flag and put our hand over heart. They fight for us to have freedom and the right to do what some of the guys are doing. That's why they are willing to do the things that they do for this country because, supposedly, we are free."

But Broncos cornerback Chris Harris, like Talib, said he wouldn't think twice about standing.

"I love football," he said. "I would do whatever I can to play football."

Green believes many others will think the same, and that players' job security, playing time and the lasting example of Kaepernick, who remains unemployed by the NFL, may take precedence.

"You can have your beliefs," Green said, "but unless you're willing to accept the consequences that Colin took, guys aren't willing to lose their jobs when so many people depend on us financially."

Prior to the Broncos' win against Oakland, the team's leadership council made of more than 20 players decided the players would stand in unity going forward. The move, while not unanimous, was painted as a step forward.

"We're past that and it was a team decision that we all feel good about," head coach Vance Joseph said. "We've moved past that."

Work off the field

But as the league and its players seek to rediscover the original message behind the protests and a potential resolution, many cite the work that is often overlooked.

The evening after the Broncos lost in Buffalo and faced a rash of critics for their protests, Harris and a handful of his teammates who kneeled held a fundraiser at a local steakhouse to benefit Denver Children's Home.

"I think it's something people don't look at," Harris said. "They don't see the things we do in the community. I think they kind of expect you to do it."

The following day, receiver Demaryius Thomas, also among the 32 who took a knee in Buffalo, spent about two hours with elementary school children in Denver. Prior to the Broncos' game against Oakland,

guard Max Garcia supported family in Atlanta who were raising money and goods for those in Puerto Rico who were affected by Hurricane Maria.

Green and Talib spent this past Monday evening in the fieldhouse of the Broncos' Dove Valley training facility working with nearly 300 children from local Boys & Girls Clubs. And outside linebacker Shane Ray this week announced an upcoming fundraising event to benefit his Ray's Awareness foundation and its programs to help youth in Denver and Kansas City.

"We'll always have the situation where people won't see us as total people. Sometimes they just see us as football players," Ray said. "But they don't see the impact we make in the communities. And people say we're the most spoiled people in the country because we're athletes."

This year, the off-field work of players, as well as the league and teams, has seemingly grown amid the debate.

"That's the kind of stuff that needs to happen, where it's embracing the other side," Boyer said. "It's not just raising your fist or taking a knee and asking somebody else to fix the problem. It's being a part of those solutions."

But the controversies on the field have often masked the solutions found off the field. The latter is where Green sees the ultimate compromise.

No mandate needed.

"I want us to all come together as a people," he said. "I don't care if you're a Christian man or if you're a Muslim, I'm going to treat you as a man. I don't care if you're homosexual, I'm going to treat you as a person. I don't care about your beliefs or how you live your life. As long as you show respect to me, I'm going to respect you. That's what it all boils down to."

Countdown almost complete: Broncos' Shane Ray is ready for his comeback

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Hanging inside the locker of Broncos linebacker Shane Ray is a calendar and daily reminder of what's to come. Below six images of Ray in action is "KEEP GRINDIN,'" in all caps, and a 30-day countdown to his return. "30 days, 29 days, 28 days — all have been X'd out as Ray inches closer to his projected return, which is aptly labeled at the bottom of the calendar with: "TODAY'S THE DAY ... TIME TO SHINE."

Ray, a former first-round draft pick, entered the Broncos' offseason program this year in what he described as the best shape of his life. He studied more and studied differently, relying on the advice and guidance of DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller as he dissected tape of his own play to try to improve.

He was ready to become a full-time starter for the Broncos in the wake of Ware's retirement.

Ray's time was 2017 and it was supposed to start Sept. 11. But because of a wrist injury suffered at the start of training camp, Ray's moment was postponed until Week 8, when the Broncos plan to recall him from injured reserve to face the Chiefs in Kansas City, his hometown.

"It's been really hard, honestly just because I'm such a competitor," Ray told me this week. "I came in this offseason playing and feeling the best I've ever felt and mentally knowing where I'm at and not physically being able to do the things I see on film, it's hard."

Last week, Ray had the pins removed from his surgically repaired wrist. Monday, he is slated to practice for the first time, giving him needed reps on the field before the snaps begin to count Oct. 30.

"They expect me to come back and play sam and will linebacker, just like they thought before the season. So I'll be ready," Ray said. "It'll be a task to maneuver around and have a cast on, but I'm still the same guy that everybody was looking at and talking about before the season. I'm just excited to finally get back on the field."

Often overlooked in a players' path to recovery is the mental toll of watching from afar, of training but waiting, of hearing the outside noise while also trying to tune it out.

Ray's journey was trying, as expected, but he believes he's in football shape, or as much as he can be after weeks of rehab and conditioning. His body is close and will be honed with a week of on-field work.

But his mind is overloaded.

"Because of Von and DeMarcus, I see things differently than I did last year and the year before that. So my film study, I'm just breaking stuff down like a cyborg now. I look at 200 plays of just this guy, trying to find any twitch," Ray said. "It's kind of taxing on me because I'm just watching so much film and I can't do anything. I felt like a coach. I felt like an assistant coach for the last three weeks, whether it's been

finding tips to give to Joe Woods on guys, their stances, or talking to Kasim (Edebali) or DeMarcus (Walker), or talking to Shaq (Barrett) about stuff in the meeting room.”

Ray will soon shed his unofficial role as an assistant coach and return to being a player, a starter on a defense that leads the league in total yards (260.8) and rushing yards (50.8) allowed, raising the bar for Ray.

A rusher through and through, Ray’s personal goal of a sack a game is intact. But he has a bigger goal now, too.

“It heightens my focus to come in with those guys playing as well as they are in the run game,” he said. “When I come in, I need to make sure that I’m gap-sound in everything I do. Because the reason we’re so effective is because everyone is doing their job. For me, I want to come back and make sure we stay the top run defense, make sure I’m not the reason those numbers drop. In doing that, I’m not worried or concerned about that.

“We’ve done an excellent job in run defense, and of course the more sacks we get the better our pass defense will be as well. It goes hand-in-hand. I want to come back and bring as much pressure as I possibly can.”

Broncos' Von Miller: "You have to be desperate for a win or it's not going to happen."

By Nick Kosmider
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Even if he was facing a team of pee-wee football players, Broncos star Von Miller insisted Thursday that he would approach Sunday night's game against the depleted, reeling Giants the same way.

"I don't care if you were playing ... the 'Little Giants,'" Miller said, referring to a 1994 film featuring pint-sized players competing in Giants and Cowboys uniforms. "I would still be up for it. That's how it is. They've got weapons over there. Eli (Manning), with the football in his hands, they have the opportunity to win. The type of defense they have, whenever they're out there, they have the opportunity to win. It's the National Football League."

The Broncos, emerging from their bye week at 3-1, have been installed as nearly two-touchdown favorites at home against the 0-5 Giants, who will be without at least three of their regular wide receivers, a top cornerback and, potentially, a number of other players at key positions.

Denver, meanwhile, is fully healthy. Only wide receiver Cody Latimer missed practice Thursday.

But Miller said that can't change how the Broncos approach the game.

"You have to be desperate for a win or it's not going to happen," he said.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph said it's easy for outsiders to look at newcomers to the Giants' wide receiver position and see players who aren't capable of performing its requirements at the NFL level. But he cautioned that, at certain positions, the gap between players on a 53-man roster and those trying to forge a spot behind them isn't always that wide.

Joseph pointed to Tavarres King, a former Broncos draft pick who was on the Giants' roster for two weeks this season before being waived. King was signed by the Giants again this week after Odell Beckham Jr., Brandon Marshall and Dwayne Harris all suffered season-ending injuries.

"He's tall and can run so I think players understand that," Joseph said. "I think the media sometimes don't think players get it, but they watch the tape, he's 6-foot-2, he runs a 4.4 (40-yard dash), he can catch the football."

Plus, Joseph has been quick to remind his players that the Broncos have aspects of their game in need of improvement, and a game stage, regardless of the opponent, is the only way to gauge that progress. On Thursday, Joseph moved the team's red-zone drills, normally held at the end of practice, to the top of the workout's schedule, drawing more focus to a problem that has plagued the Broncos the past two weeks.

“We all understand as an offense what we have to do to clean those things up,” Broncos offensive coordinator Mike McCoy said. “We just have to eliminate the pre-snap penalties. I can help them with certain things and we’ll do that.”

Miller was on hand in Houston on Sunday night as the AFC West-leading Chiefs moved to 5-0 with a victory over the Texans. The standings alone are a motivator for the Broncos this week. They can ill afford to not take seriously a game they need to win to keep pace in their own division.

“Look at the games won and lost every week,” Miller said. “It doesn’t matter how stacked the other team is. The Buffalo Bills went into Atlanta and beat Atlanta. That’s the kind of league we’re in. That’s what makes it beautiful. You have to be desperate for a win each and every week.”

Broncos WR Emmanuel Sanders on targets: “You can’t be frustrated when you win.”

By Nick Kosmider
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Emmanuel Sanders watched the Broncos pound the ball with success during the first four games of the season and saw an offense built for the cold weather of the season’s closing stretch.

“I’ve been on two Super Bowl teams, and in the months of December and January, you’ve got to be able to run the football because of the weather conditions,” the wide receiver said. “That’s just smashmouth football.”

That doesn’t mean Sanders and fellow top receiver Demaryius Thomas don’t want to see an increased role in the offense after catching a combined five passes (four of them by Sanders) for 38 yards in a 16-10 win over the Raiders.

Teams through the first four games of the season have often blanketed Thomas and Sanders with their coverage, leaving a successful running game as the team’s most viable offensive option.

“Me and Demaryius and the entire wide receiver crew, we know that when we get our opportunities, we have to make the most of it,” Sanders said. “Obviously, teams are playing us to say, ‘Hey, run the ball — we’re not going to let the receivers beat us. As frustrating as it is, you can’t be frustrated when you win.”

Thomas has yet to catch a touchdown pass this season, and his emergence could help the Broncos in the red zone, where they’ve scored a touchdown on just one of their last seven trips. But when it comes to striking a balance between taking what the defense gives them and getting their top receivers involved, offensive coordinator Mike McCoy said the Broncos have to remain loyal to one mission.

“We’re trying to score points any way we can,” he said. “There’s only one football out there, and we’ve got two of the best wide receivers in the league. Everybody knows that. I think we’ve efficiently moved the ball up and down the field in the first four weeks of the season with balance in everything we do.”

Honoring cancer survivors. The Broncos will honor 125 survivors of various cancers before Sunday’s game against the Giants, part of the organization’s “Fight Like A Bronco” campaign.

Whereas October has traditionally been observed as Breast Cancer Awareness month in the NFL, the league and the American Cancer Society have partnered this season to create an all-inclusive cancer platform. Players are able this year to accent their game day uniform with colors that represent various cancers.

The Broncos will present each survivor with a towel of a color that corresponds with the cancer they have fought.

“This is just our great way on game day to bring awareness by celebrating those who have survived,” said Allie Pisching, the Broncos’ executive director of community development.

Broncos warn of counterfeit tickets

By Mike Klis

9 News

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The Denver Broncos have an important warning to fans looking to buy tickets to home games.

The organization announced Thursday morning that there has been an increase in counterfeit tickets in the secondary market.

These fake tickets have been discovered in hard copy and PDF form and are unaffiliated with the Broncos or the NFL.

The Broncos say they are working with the Denver Police Department in the investigation of counterfeiting in the Denver area.

Fans are urged to take extra precaution when purchasing Broncos tickets from sites not authorized by the NFL. Ticketing questions should be directed to the Broncos Ticket Office at 720-258-3333 or tickets@broncos.nfl.net.

The Broncos' next home game is Sunday night at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

How getting spurned by Rodgers-Cromartie led the Broncos to Aqib Talib

By Mike Klis

9 News

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To think, when the Denver Broncos decided to pull out of negotiations with their own cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, and move on to trying to sign Aqib Talib during free agency of 2014, Talib was considered the character risk.

Funny how it turned out.

Talib is now a Broncos' captain. Rodgers-Cromartie has been suspended and will not play Sunday when his Giants play Talib's Broncos at eventually to be renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

"Hey times change," Talib said. "You live and you learn. I'm happy. Hopefully, the Broncos are happy."

NFL free agency had opened for business on March 11, 2014 and by 5 p.m., the free-agent Talib had not yet heard from the Broncos.

Until that point, the Broncos were confident they could wrap up negotiations with their own cornerback, Rodgers-Cromartie, on a six-year, \$54 million contract.

"When you know a guy is as productive as DRC was, you want to try and keep him," Talib said. "And they did try and that's what they should have done. He was productive, he was here, he still could run. He was a good player. He's been a good player since he's been in the league, for Arizona, for the Giants, for the Broncos."

But Rodgers-Cromartie's agent – Eugene Parker, one of the best in the business who died last year at 60 -- didn't like that the Broncos' proposal was only fully guaranteed for one year and \$10 million. There were provisions in the contract proposal that made it likely Rodgers-Cromartie would earn \$24 million over three years. But in football, tremendous value is placed on the word "guarantee."

Broncos general manager John Elway, as he often does during these frenetic, free-agent periods, went as far as he could go and when it wasn't good enough, he moved on.

To Talib, a free agent who was coming off his first Pro Bowl season following his first full year with the New England Patriots. Initially, Talib was in Rodgers-Cromartie's position: Trying to re-sign with his current team. But the Patriots offer to Talib, as he understood it, was a series of one-year options.

Talks between Talib and the Broncos began a little after 5 p.m. March 11, and by 9:15 p.m., the deal was essentially done. Talib got six years and \$57 million. Talib's full guarantee was one year and \$12 million - \$2 million more than the Broncos offered DRC. And Talib wound up collecting roughly \$27 million over his first three seasons with the Broncos -- \$3 million more than DRC would have made had he re-upped with Denver.

“He wound up getting a deal he wanted with the Giants and I wound up getting a deal I wanted in Denver,” Talib said. “We both ended up happy.”

Rodgers-Cromartie wound up signing a five-year \$35 million contract with the Giants that because of a \$10 million signing bonus that was double what the Broncos were offering, fully guaranteed him \$10.75 million in year one and all but guaranteed him \$22 million through three seasons (\$2 million less than what the Broncos offered him, although, again, there was a greater risk he would not see year 3).

How did it turn out? First, give credit to both Talib and Rodgers-Cromartie as each made it to the non-guaranteed portion of their respective contracts.

Talib in this, year 4 of his contract, is making \$11 million. Rodgers-Cromartie is making \$7 million this season (not including potential wages he may lose with the suspension). Both salaries are now considered team friendly as nine cornerbacks are making more than Talib this year and 23 are getting larger paychecks than DRC.

But Talib has unquestionably been the better player for the money. He has three Pro Bowls in three seasons with the Broncos; Rodgers-Cromartie has one Pro Bowl with the Giants. Talib has 11 interceptions with six returned for touchdowns for the Broncos; Rodgers-Cromartie has 11 picks with one returned for a touchdown with the Giants, although he also scored on a fumble return.

Talib plays with a fire that ignites the personality of the Broncos' No. 1-ranked defense. Rodgers-Cromartie is a far more docile sort, even if Giants head coach Ben McAdoo would beg to differ.

The Broncos have gone 36-16 and won a Super Bowl with Talib; the Giants have gone 23-30 with Rodgers-Cromartie.

This is most likely Rodgers-Cromartie's final season with the Giants. Talib has no guarantees past this season but the way he's been playing, his \$11 million salary in 2018 and \$8 million in 2019 – even at the relatively advanced ages of 32 and 33 – are tremendous values.

The moral of the story is, sometimes it's better to take it than leave it. And a team is better off when it goes to plan B.

Broncos biggest favorites in three years

By Mike Klis

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Not since the Peyton Manning days have the Broncos been such a huge favorite as they are for their game Sunday night.

Most sports books have the Broncos favored by 12-point favorites against the Giants, who despite all their problems still have Eli Manning at quarterback.

The trick for the Broncos is to know how to act.

“I forgot what movie that was where they had the Giants versus the Cowboys and they were little kids. They were the Little Giants,” said Broncos star linebacker Von Miller. “We could be playing the Little Giants right now. It could be Sunday Night Football and I would still be up for it. That’s just how it is. They have weapons over there. Eli with the football in his hands, they have an opportunity to win.

“The type of defense they have, whenever they’re out there, they have an opportunity to win. It’s the National Football League at the end of the day. You have to be prepared for whatever. You have to be desperate for a win or it’s just not going to happen.”

The last time the Broncos were such big favorites was the final game of 2014. They were 14-point favorites against the Raiders that day. Peyton Manning threw for 279 yards. C.J. Anderson rushed for three touchdowns and the Broncos won 47-13.

Three years later, only 13 players are still here for the Broncos, seven starters. None of them are named Peyton Manning, by the way.

Still, so long as they don’t turn the ball over, the Broncos should be able to handle Eli’s Giants, even if the only time we see Peyton is in commercials.

Broncos prepare for the 'dangerous' Giants

By Rod Mackey

9 News

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There may be no such thing as a sure thing in sports, but does anyone really believe that the 0-5 New York Giants -- a team that last four wide receivers to injury last Sunday -- can beat the Broncos in their back yard?

The Broncos promise they won't look past anyone.

"There's no upsets," quarterback Trevor Siemian said. reiterating a message Head Coach Vance Joseph had shared with the team. "There's no favorites in the NFL because anything can happen every week. You see plenty evidence of that every Sunday.

The Giants are going to come in here with a chip on their shoulder. It's going to be a great challenge for us. They have a bunch of great players. They have a Hall of Fame quarterback. They have a great team. We have to be ready to play."

CJ Anderson also believes the Giants can be a dangerous team.

"If you don't show up in this business every week, you're going to get your butt kicked," Anderson said. "One thing holds true, we know the Giants are 0-5. But, we also know they have Pro Bowl players. Their goal is to come in here and get a W. Our goal is also to win. Both teams have one thing in common."

The players may see things differently than the fans do.

The Broncos fans see 0-5, but the Broncos players like tight end AJ Derby give New York a lot more credit.

"In our mind, they're a playoff team," Derby said. "They're coming off of a playoff year last year. We think they have a lot of talent. They're a good team. We're hoping that they can't put it together against us. We're just trying to make sure that doesn't happen."

If Trinidad and Tobago can knock the U.S. out of the World Cup then anything is possible. There is no thing as a sure thing in sports.

Ready or not, Broncos see best pass-rushers week after week

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Since he's the guy the league's pass-rushers are chasing when they face the Denver Broncos, quarterback Trevor Siemian has a rather good view of how things have gone this season.

And when Siemian says "it feels like every team we play has two great rushers," it isn't really an exaggeration.

Through Week 5, 19 players in the NFL had at least four sacks. One of those is the Broncos' Von Miller, and of the other 18, Denver has already faced four.

That total includes the league sacks leader in Dallas' DeMarcus Lawrence (8.5) and the player who is No. 2, the Chargers' Melvin Ingram (7.5). The Broncos have also already faced the Chargers' Joey Bosa (4.5) and the Raiders' Khalil Mack, who is among the crowd of players tied at four sacks.

And the beat just goes on. Sunday brings the New York Giants' Olivier Vernon and Jason Pierre-Paul; it's Bosa and Ingram again in Week 7, followed by the Chiefs' Justin Houston (tied for fifth after five games with 5.5 sacks) the week after that and the Eagles' Brandon Graham (3.5) to open November.

While there are certainly the elite speed rushers in that mix, Broncos coach Vance Joseph sees greater variety in how those rushers all go about their business. The days of a speed rusher on the defensive right going against the left tackle and a more powerful player on the defensive left going against the right tackle have long passed.

"I see teams looking for just rushers, not a stout guy who plays the left side, that's where the ball's being run, and right side is the quarterback's blind side, so that's the speed rusher," Joseph said. "Those days are over. Same with offensive tackles: It used to be the left tackle was the pass-protector and the right tackle was the run-blocker; now you need two guys who can block speed because the game has changed so much."

It's at least part of the reason the Broncos went through a rather extreme makeover on the offensive line. So much so that when Allen Barbre has rotated into the game at left guard -- he splits snaps with Max Garcia -- the Broncos have four new starters up front compared to last season. It has usually fallen on the shoulders of rookie left tackle Garrett Bolles and right tackle Menelik Watson to handle the growing list of edge rushers the Broncos have faced.

The Broncos had hoped Bolles would be ready to start when they made him the 20th overall pick of this year's draft. Bolles confirmed that almost from the moment the team put on pads in training camp.

"He's done fine so far; as a first-round pick, you would hope he can play early for you," Joseph said. "After about a week of training camp he was our best pass-protector. It was about him earning a job. If he wasn't ready to play and wasn't one of our best tackles he wouldn't have been a starter."

"I know the NFL is filled with great players, you just have to be ready to face somebody great every week," Bolles said. "I get to practice against the best in the work in Von Miller. I just try to get better every day."

On the opposite end of the offensive line, the quickest rushers have been able to catch Watson leaning. But Joseph has said he likes the way Watson has competed to this point and that the Broncos would try to give both Watson and Bolles some help if needed.

The Broncos have showed a steady diet of two-tight-end looks as well as two-back formations that can give them a little more bulk in protection. But both offensive coordinator Mike McCoy and Joseph have said there simply will be times when Watson and Bolles have to win one-on-one matchups in pass protection.

"We can't help them all the time," Joseph said.

The Broncos can use play-action -- particularly if they continue to average anything close to the 143 yards rushing per game they have during their 3-1 start -- to slow QB-seeking opponents as well. And Siemian has said he has "to be quick with the ball sometimes, too."

"We always want to protect our quarterback," Bolles said. "I take that personal."

So far, Broncos defense has made quality first impression

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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The Denver Broncos' defense always wants to close the deal, but four games into this season, the group has shown it has a little better opening act than it did last season.

"We always want the game in our hands at the end; that's how we like it," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "But so far this year, we've been better getting started. We have to keep that going, but we've done it so far."

In their four games, heading into Sunday night's game against the New York Giants, the Broncos have forced teams to punt on their opening possession in all four games. In two of those games, they forced their opponents to punt on their first three possessions.

And while that might not sound like cause for confetti, of all the good things the Broncos did on defense last season, starting fast was not one of those things. In 16 games, opponents scored on the first possession nine times – seven touchdowns and two field goals. The Broncos forced punts just six times on those first possessions and had one interception.

Six of those opening-drive touchdowns came on drives of seven plays or longer. And those early struggles were part of the slight makeover the Broncos gave the defense in the offseason.

Make no mistake, the Broncos were plenty good on defense last year, given they finished No. 4 in total defense, No. 1 against the pass and No. 3 in sacks. And often the team's defense, other than its struggles in run defense in many games, gathered itself after opponents scored on the opening drives to play with most of its usual edge.

But while they've kept most of the framework of what they've done in the previous two seasons, they feel like they've added a sliver of unpredictability to what they're doing this time around.

"I feel like last year, you probably could've guessed what we were going to run our first five plays of the game," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "[Defensive coordinator] Joe [Woods] does a good job of switching it up and keeping guys off balance. We're not just coming out running one or two defenses for the first 10 plays of the game. Joe is doing a good job switching it up and it's definitely working for us."

There is plenty of the story still to be told this season, but Vance Joseph's arrival as the team's head coach and Woods' promotion to replace Wade Phillips – both have been assistants under Phillips – has brought a few defensive changes. The Broncos play some additional zone looks on defense, mixed in with their still-steady diet of man-to-man. The linebackers attack the line of scrimmage a little more in run defense, and they have played with a little more variety.

That includes the use of a five-defensive back package – a nickel – for 20 snaps against the Oakland Raiders in Week 4. That total was more than the Broncos lined up in a nickel package all of last season.

"It's strictly game planning," Joseph said. "If you give a team something different in the first couple of series and force them to adjust, that's a problem for most offenses. If you give them the same thing they practice all week, that's a problem for you. It's really Joe and his staff's game plans to throw out our curveballs the first couple series. Even in the second half, to save a curveball for the second half of the football game. Give them something different and make them readjust."

The Broncos would still like to create more turnovers – they have four interceptions to this point, but no fumble recoveries – and offenses have found the occasional big play in the passing game. But their starts have made a good start so far.

"We just have to keep it going," Harris said. "We know we can do more to be that defense we want to be. But you like to make those plays right away, set up the game right from the start."

Broncos will be patient with Paxton Lynch as he begins throwing program

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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The Denver Broncos will continue to take it slowly with quarterback Paxton Lynch's return from a right (throwing) shoulder injury he suffered in the Broncos' preseason win over the Green Bay Packers.

Lynch, however, has done some light throwing this week, the first time he has thrown on the field since he suffered the injury. The Broncos signed Brock Osweiler, who spent four seasons with the Broncos before he signed with the Houston Texans in free agency in 2016, as Trevor Siemian's backup just before the start of the regular season.

Osweiler's experience both as a starter as well as his previous work with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy, when both were together in Denver during Osweiler's rookie year in 2012, allows the Broncos to be as patient as they want to be with Lynch.

Asked after Wednesday's practice about the quarterback's potential return, Broncos coach Vance Joseph said: "Paxton doesn't have a timeline, he threw for the first time [Wednesday], really short, short throws, like five or seven yards. Again, it's a right shoulder injury, it's his throwing shoulder so we want to be careful with that."

Asked if there was still a possibility Lynch could require some kind of surgery if his current rehab work doesn't get him back to full speed, Joseph added "I can't say, I'm a football coach."

Lynch was the Broncos' first-round pick in 2016. He spent his rookie year as Siemian's backup and started two games last season when Siemian missed one game with a left shoulder injury and one game with a foot injury.

The two quarterbacks split time with the starters throughout the offseason program and deep into the preseason before Siemian was officially declared the winner of starting job for the second consecutive year.

Broncos concentrate more on Eli Manning than Giants' 0-5 start

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 13, 2017

Even for Denver Broncos players who routinely say they try not to read or watch what's being said about approaching games outside of the team's walls, the New York Giants' current turmoil is difficult to avoid.

Especially since some of it involves a couple of former teammates for many Broncos. The Giants have indefinitely suspended cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, who played for the Broncos in 2013, heading into Sunday night's game in Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

And after the Giants placed three wide receivers on injured reserve this week, including Odell Beckham Jr., they signed Tavarres King, who was a fifth-round pick by the Broncos in 2013. As a result, Broncos coach Vance Joseph continues to pound away the post-bye-week message home: Don't let the Giants' troubles affect your work, and look beyond their 0-5 record.

"It's Eli Manning," Joseph said when asked about the chances of a potential letdown. "... They've lost three out of their five games in the fourth quarter. Again, the players don't think that way, I don't think that way."

Joseph added: "I think players understand that, I think the media sometimes thinks players don't get it. For a player ... it's a hard business and every guy they play on Sunday is the best in the world at what they do."

The Broncos are as healthy as they've been since the end of training camp given wide receiver Cody Latimer (knee) is the only regular who has been held out of practice this week due to an injury. The Broncos also already find themselves in a race in the AFC West with little or no margin for error given the Kansas City Chiefs are off to a 5-0 start. The Chiefs already have a road win at New England and a win over the 4-1 Philadelphia Eagles on their resume.

"It's no difference if you were playing the Chiefs who are 5-0," running back C.J. Anderson said of the team's work this week. "[The Giants] are just as hungry. You want to win every week. Nobody likes losing. We don't want to be the first to give that up."

"We're hoping that they can't put it together against us," tight end A.J. Derby said. "We're just trying to make sure that doesn't happen."

Broncos QB Paxton Lynch throwing again, aims to return soon

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
October 13, 2017

Paxton Lynch has resumed throwing after almost seven weeks and said that he aims to return to action this season.

"Yeah, yeah, for sure," Lynch said, dismissing any notion of this being a "redshirt" year for him.

The former first-round draft pick sprained his right shoulder Aug. 26 in an exhibition game against the Green Bay Packers shortly after he was officially beaten out by Trevor Siemian for the starting job.

That injury led the Broncos to re-sign Peyton Manning's former backup, Brock Osweiler, and for just \$750,000 because the Cleveland Browns are on the hook for the remaining \$15.25 million on Osweiler's contract.

Coach Vance Joseph said Thursday that Lynch began throwing short passes this week but the Broncos will remain patient and there's still no timeline for his return.

As he has numerous times over the last few weeks, Joseph pointed out that the injury was to Lynch's throwing shoulder, "so we want to be careful with that and make sure he's right before he comes back to play."

Last year Siemian sprained his left (non-throwing) shoulder and only missed one start, although he was hampered by the injury for several weeks and needed surgery once the season was over.

Siemian has led the Broncos to a 3-1 record heading into Sunday night's game against the winless New York Giants (0-5).

Although this is the most serious injury he's experienced in his career, Lynch said he's never considered it a potential season-ender and doesn't believe he'll need surgery although "that's up to the doctors."

The Broncos could find themselves needing to make a couple of roster moves soon as linebacker Shane Ray (wrist) and rookie tight end Jake Butt (knee) resume practicing next week in hopes of returning to the active roster later this month.

Lynch said he hasn't experienced any soreness or pain for several weeks while rehabbing and doing his physical therapy, and he said that didn't change this week.

Lynch said he threw several short passes of 10 to 15 yards on Wednesday and pushed that distance to 25 yards on Thursday without any pain or soreness.

He said he has no idea when he'll be able to play again "especially because I just started throwing this week. That's really the only time I've been able to feel how it feels."

Lynch said the last seven weeks haven't been a waste, though.

"You get a chance to kind of get into it more mentally because you can't do anything physically," he said.

"You're sitting around a lot in the training room ... and looking at the playbook and all that."

Loss of OBJ steals some thunder from Giants-Broncos game

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
October 13, 2017

Aqib Talib is bummed out, although not nearly as much as Eli Manning.

Like so many football fans, the star Denver Broncos cornerback was eager for his marquee matchup with Odell Beckham Jr. before the Giants star receiver broke his left ankle against the Chargers last week.

"I love going against the best, and just to see him go out like that is just ugly," Talib said. "I don't even like to think about it. I definitely was looking forward to the matchup. Maybe next year."

The Giants (0-5) stagger into Denver (3-1) a team in turmoil.

They lost four wide receivers last weekend, and three of them, Beckham, Brandon Marshall (ankle) and Dwayne Harris (foot), underwent season-ending surgery during a tumultuous week in which the feud between Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie and Ben McAdoo boiled over .

The Giants' indefinite suspension of the veteran cornerback forced them to juggle their defense in addition to their offense. It raises the possibility the second-year coach is losing his locker room along with all those close games.

The tension was evident in McAdoo's voice when he was asked during a conference call with Denver media "how's Eli hanging in there with your 0-5 start?"

"Which Eli?" he replied, as if there is great interest in what second-year cornerback Eli Apple thinks of the situation.

Not Apple, Manning.

"Eli Manning? Eli, he's steady as steady can be," McAdoo said. "He doesn't flinch. He doesn't waver. He's a good of a preparer as any player or coach as I've been around. He's dialed in each and every week. He never blinks."

Manning spent the week getting Tavarres King, Travis Rudolph and Ed Eagan up to speed .

"The good thing is most of them were here during training camp," Manning said. "When you start getting brand new guys who are new to the system, that's when it's tough."

Manning will likely lean more on running backs Paul Perkins and Shane Vereen anyway, along with rookie tight end Evan Engram, who leads the team in receptions.

Here are some other subplots to the prime-time matchup that looks so much like a mismatch:

SECONDARY ISSUES: DRC's suspension means the defense is dealing with plenty of changes, too. The 31-year-old started the last two games and he plays the slot on passing downs. Apple and Janoris Jenkins will start, and expect Ross Cockrell to move into the slot. Michael Hunter, inactive the last two games, probably will play. If not, the Giants promoted Donte Deayon from the practice squad Thursday. New York has intercepted one pass all season. Safety Darian Thompson had it last week.

OVERLOOKING UNDERDOGS: The Broncos were also prohibitive favorites in Week 3 when they lost at Buffalo, so Von Miller said there's no chance they take the winless Giants lightly.

"They still have Eli Manning," Miller said. "... Eli can bust the game open at any given time."

So can Miller, who insisted he's not exactly salivating over the prospect of facing struggling left tackle Ereck Flowers.

"No, I lick my chops every week," Miller said. "It doesn't matter who we're playing. That's my job. It doesn't matter who they line up out there, I'm coming with it."

FOURTH-QUARTER FOLLIES: The Giants' defense carried the team to an 11-5 record and the playoffs last season. This year, the unit has failed at the worst time. The last three losses came after the defense failed to hold fourth-quarter leads.

The run D, among the best a year ago, is giving up an average of 139 yards, 29th in the league. Third downs have hurt. Opponents are converting at better than 42 percent, including 12 of 34 when the situation is third-and-6 or more yards.

WIDE RECEIVER PURGATORY : 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.

They've combined for just 38 catches and two TDs, not the kind of production expected from a pair of receivers pulling in a combined \$15.25 million this season.

Sanders and Thomas aren't complaining and their coach isn't, either.

"We're 3-1 and I'm not concerned about the numbers," Vance Joseph said. "If we go 4-1 on Sunday and we throw it for a ton or we run it for a ton, that doesn't matter. We're concerned about collective results, and that's winning together."

Broncos rank near bottom in passing categories, but not first in complaining

By Troy Renck

KMGH

October 13, 2017

The Broncos rank second to last in passing first downs this season. Yet, they don't rank first in grousing. Unlike a year ago when he "panicked" over his nosediving statistics, receiver Emmanuel Sanders believes in the balance of this year's offense. It represents another example of the "we vs. me" mentality developing this season.

"I'll tell you what, it feels good to have a running attack. We're built for December and January. I have been part of two Super Bowl teams. And in those months, you have to be able to run the ball and play smash mouth," Sanders said. "Me and Demaryius know that when we get our opportunities we need to make the most of it."

In truth, the offensive numbers represent more of a fantasy concern than a reality problem. The Broncos rank third in rushing yards per game at 143.0. Teams continue to dare the Broncos to stay on the ground, and they have responded by imposing their will. To win in the NFL, a team must pass effectively. But forcing passes -- as seen last Sunday in Pittsburgh -- remains a recipe for failure. The belief is that teams will eventually center on stopping the running game, opening up routes in man coverage.

As it stands, Sanders and Thomas have been targeted 64 times, the same number as league leader Antonio Brown. With similar stats last year, Sanders and Thomas complained, raising eyebrows given their lack of support for first-year starter Trevor Siemian. This season, everything feels different.

"They want to win. And they also want the ball. All superstars do. I should get it to them. But with our roster, we have a lot of players (deserving)," offensive coordinator Mike McCoy said. "I just love the way they work."

Sanders and Thomas have combined for eight straight 1,000 yard seasons. History says they will flourish. The team, however, already is.

"They're going to get their chances. It's only a matter of time," Siemian said. "When you are losing a bunch of games, it makes it harder on everybody. But we're winning. I am not worried. Those guys are going to get their touches."

Footnotes: McCoy said he wished every rookie had tight end Jake Butt's "mindset." Butt expects to begin practicing Monday and could play as soon as next week. Defensive players are already talking about the rookie making an impact in the red zone. ... Paxton Lynch threw from 5-to-7 yards on Wednesday, testing his right shoulder. He has been brought along cautiously, and remains a candidate for injured reserve given Brock Osweiler's grip on the backup job. The Broncos will require two roster spots to activate Shane Ray for the Chiefs game and Butt. ... Defensive coordinator Joe Woods on catalyst nose tackle Domata Peko. "He comes to work with a smile on his face everyday. He loves playing football. He's been great for us in the locker room, and in the classroom." ... The Broncos plan to continue to rotate left guards Max Garcia and Allen Barbre.

Denver Broncos warn of counterfeit tickets being bought through unofficial vendors

By Blair Miller

KMGH

October 13, 2017

The Denver Broncos are warning fans to be wary of tickets bought from secondary markets and websites, as some fans are being left out of hundreds of dollars after buying counterfeits.

The team said Thursday that it has recently seen an uptick in the fake tickets, which have been printed both on Ticketmaster stock and sent in PDF form.

It is reminding fans that they buy tickets from unauthorized sites at their own risk, and that the only sure-fire way to get a legitimate ticket is to buy them at Ticketmaster, the NFL Ticket Exchange, at the Denver Broncos Box Office or at Broncos events.

The team says it is “working closely” with the Denver Police Department to investigate the counterfeiting schemes.

One person who bought \$600 worth of tickets for the Oct. 1 Broncos-Raiders game from scalpers found out at the gate they were fakes, they told Denver7.

The Broncos confirmed to Denver7 that "several hundred" counterfeit tickets were created for that game.

After he filed a police report with DPD, the department worked with the Broncos and its security to secure the group new seats, but the Broncos say people buying from unauthorized sites do so at their own risk.

Denver7 has reached out to Ticketmaster for further comment, but the request were not immediately returned. DPD says the Broncos and its team are handling the counterfeit situations.

The Broncos ask anyone with questions about their tickets to contact the ticket office at 720-258-3333 or at tickets@broncos.nfl.net.

Broncos Injury Report: Paxton Lynch works on short throws

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
October 13, 2017

Quarterback Paxton Lynch did not practice Thursday, but did work on some short throws in the "5-to-7-yard" range Wednesday, Head Coach Vance Joseph said.

The throws were the first for Lynch since he suffered a sprained right shoulder in the Broncos' preseason win over the Green Bay Packers on Aug. 26. The Broncos continue to exercise caution with Lynch given the nature of his injury.

"We don't have a time frame for Paxton," Joseph said. "It's his throwing shoulder, so we want to be careful with that and make sure he's right before he comes back."

Lynch and wide receiver Cody Latimer (knee) were the only Broncos who did not practice Thursday. Nose tackle Domata Peko Sr., cornerback Aqib Talib and running back Jamaal Charles all returned to practice after receiving rest days Wednesday.

Broncos focused not just on winning, but meeting 'extremely high' standards

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
October 13, 2017

It's not about simply winning on Sunday.

For President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway, it's about making sure that the Broncos' effort meets the standard they've set for themselves every day of the week.

"We've got to go out and live up to our standards, set our standards of how we go out and practice day in and day out, and then when we come out in the football game, hold ourselves to our standards to how we expect to go out and perform each week," he told Orange and Blue 760 on Tuesday.

"This is a key step for us this week and to find out really where we are and as far as our maturation of how we expect and play to our standards."

So that leads to an obvious question -- what are the standards within the Broncos' locker room?

"We have to play our best football," said quarterback Trevor Siemian.

"Just play at a high level, man. Good energy. Assignment sound. A focused group playing at a high level, playing like a 4-1 football team," cornerback Aqib Talib said.

"That's what John meant -- to play like we know we can play. Limit the mistakes."

But the Broncos feel their best football isn't simply about being a contender and avoiding the self-inflicted wounds that marred some of their earlier efforts.

That's where the lingering memories of the 2015 season matter. Yes, most of the players on the 53-man roster were not with the organization for the 24-10 win over the Carolina Panthers in Super Bowl 50; 29 of the 53 players on the active roster have joined the team since that game.

The newer players take their cues from their elder teammates. More than enough institutional knowledge and leadership remains to keep the standards and expectations at that level, even through the inevitable changes that have followed.

The "standard," as it stands, is lofty.

"I think it's extremely high," running back C.J. Anderson said. "I've been here for five years, and the standard is to win a championship every year. And it's not just cliché, like every other team in the league who says, 'Win a championship.' It's the actions we show behind it.

"And us playing to a standard is going out and doing what we do best, which is dominate football games. That's what we do. We find ways to dominate football games in the way where we play harder, we play

faster and we play longer than our opponent, and I just think that is something that we have to do this week to prevail to victory. We have to prevail longer and harder than they do, and that's something that we preach on our team as an offense and as a standard and as a culture on this team.

"'VJ' [Head Coach Vance Joseph] says it all the time: 'We play harder than them, and if you keep fighting and you keep punching, you'll get your results.'"

An example of the standard being set? Being the No. 1 defense in football, as cornerback Bradley Roby noted. In terms of total defense, that's where the Broncos stand after five weeks.

Reaching that standard starts with attitude.

"We've got nothing but a bunch of relentless savages on this team, period," safety Will Parks said.

"Everybody on this team is relentless and plays with a savage kind of mood. And it's crazy because you don't really see that everywhere. I played on teams in college and high school where I sensed it, but here, there's a sense of urgency, and the standard's at an all-time high."

The reverse is failing to score a touchdown in the red zone against Oakland.

"That's definitely not," Anderson said. "Not dialed in. Not focused. Not detailed. Whatever the case may be of why you're 0-for-4 in the red zone, or going to Buffalo on the road [and losing]."

"We don't accept in victory what we wouldn't accept in defeat, and we mean that. So if we're 4-for-4 in the red zone against Dallas and we won, that felt good. We won the game against Oakland, but we're 0-for-4 in the red zone. We definitely don't accept that. So that's the standard that we uphold here."

And that's exactly what Elway meant -- a focus on standards that aren't tied to simply winning or being just good enough to beat that week's opponent.

"I think each week, it doesn't really matter who you're playing, but you have to play your best football. You want to be a tough out every week," Siemian said. "I think we can be that."

Broncos' defensive stars saddened Odell Beckham Jr. will miss Sunday matchup

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
October 13, 2017

Denver's defensive All-Pros were probably more excited to see Odell Beckham Jr. than perhaps most Broncos fans.

But after Beckham suffered a season-ending ankle fracture a week ago, what could have been a thrilling matchup against the "No-Fly Zone" and the rest of the defense is no more. And though his absence obviously puts New York at a great disadvantage, Von Miller, Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr. are disappointed Beckham won't line up Sunday night.

The members of the secondary had gotten a taste of what kind of opponent Beckham is from facing him in previous Pro Bowls, but they all knew playing him in a regular-season game wouldn't be the same. And they both were salivating at the challenge.

"We weren't really going," Talib said. "He was just running fades and stop routes, really. We was running like two or three routes. That definitely wasn't the real Odell, you know what I'm saying?"

The real Odell was what Talib and Harris were both preparing for, and that was who they wanted to see, not to mention fellow Giants starter Brandon Marshall, who also suffered a season-ending injury.

"I wanted that competition," Harris said. "I wanted to see him and [Sterling] Shepard and Brandon [Marshall], all three of them. I mean, that's how you get those accolades, those Pro Bowls and All-Pros — going against the best."

The same goes for the man who was designing the defensive concepts to stop Beckham.

"For me, I want to go against the best," Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods said. "That's just what's in me. So any team we play, I hope that they're full strength, we're full strength and we go play and see who can win. Those guys — Talib, Chris Harris, Darian Stewart, all those guys — they're very competitive, so they want the best from the other team. But with those guys not being there, we have to make sure that we handle our business."

Missing Beckham isn't just about missing the competition, though. Beckham's energy and personality on the football field is infectious, even for his opponents. These Broncos saw that firsthand at the Pro Bowl during the game and the week leading up to it.

And for Miller, the disappointment goes even further. Beckham is one of his close friends, and the two had never played a regular-season game against one another.

When Miller was asked what he'd miss not being able to play against Beckham, his answer was simple: "Everything."

"I think we were both looking forward to this game," Miller said. "Right when we saw the matchup at the beginning of the year when schedules came out, I was like, 'Yeah, I can't wait for this one.' I don't even really circle games, but this one was one I had circled.

"But life happened."

Broncos celebrate 'Fight Like A Bronco' campaign for second straight year

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
October 13, 2017

For the second consecutive year, the Broncos will celebrate their “Fight Like A Bronco” campaign that recognizes survivors of all forms of cancers.

The Broncos, partnered with The American Cancer Society, will honor 125 cancer survivors through a halftime ceremony during Sunday’s game against the Giants — and the efforts will continue throughout the month of October.

The celebrated cancer survivors will also visit with President/CEO Joe Ellis during a special pregame reception at the stadium.

The NFL has also taken steps toward honoring more survivors, and the league will focus this year on looking at all cancers that can be battled by early detection through its Crucial Catch program.

“For about a decade, the NFL has really focused on breast cancer awareness,” Executive Director of Community Development Allie Pisching said. “Pink has become synonymous with October, which is great. It shows the platform that the NFL has to tie this in. I think with the inclusion of all cancers, we’re really tying into that month where fans are already expecting to see colors, messaging, commercials and promotions from not only our players, but our clubs as to ways that we can help people battling cancer and also early detection. It’s a great way to tie everything in together.”

Each participant will have the opportunity to select a rally towel of a variety of colors — reflective of the NFL’s multi-colored “Crucial Catch” moniker — to shed light on the variety of cancers represented. The organization hopes to raise awareness regarding these various forms of detectable cancer.

Though the Broncos will honor many people Sunday, it is a personal connection that helped this transformation come about.

“Our Assistant Turf Manager Luke Kellerman has been with the team for a number of years and he is currently battling cancer himself,” Pisching said. “He was actually the one that approached our community development department about a way to incorporate all cancers and was really the reason that we started this transition last year. Luke is a very special member of our Broncos’ family. He’ll be with us at the game on Sunday which will be a great treat for him and his family. We really see him as the co-founder of the ‘Fight Like A Bronco’ campaign and we’re proud to incorporate him into our game day activities.”

During the game, fans will be treated to video-board messages from players and coaches whose families have been impacted by the disease.

The “Fight Like A Bronco” campaign began in 2016 with a \$60K donation from Denver Broncos Charities. The organization donated \$20K to Susan G. Komen Colorado in honor of breast cancer survivors, and the

remaining \$40,000 went to the American Cancer Society to help fund pediatric cancer research and colorectal screenings.

More than 12,000 people gained screening opportunities as a result of the donation.

If fans would like to make their own donation to help fund cancer research, they may visit www.crowdrise.com/crucialcatch.

Broncos issue ticket reminder for fans attending home games

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

October 13, 2017

The Denver Broncos remind fans to acquire tickets from team-associated outlets such as Ticketmaster, NFL Ticket Exchange or in person at the Denver Broncos Box Office for all Broncos events.

Following an increase in counterfeit tickets making their way through secondary markets unaffiliated with the team or the National Football League, the Broncos are urging fans to take appropriate measures to ensure the authenticity of their purchases. Fraudulent cases included tickets in PDF form as well as Ticketmaster stock.

As a reminder, the Broncos ticket office cannot verify tickets purchased from unaffiliated secondary markets prior to entry on gameday. Ticket purchases from any unauthorized sites are purchased at the buyers own risk.

Fans with questions about tickets are asked to contact the Broncos Ticketing Office at 720-258-3333 or by emailing tickets@broncos.nfl.net.

The Broncos are working closely with the Denver Police Department's investigation into recent cases of ticket counterfeiting in the metro area.

The NFL's veneer of unity is cracking

By Ken Belson
New York Times
October 13, 2017

Editor's note: This story is available as a result of a content partnership with The New York Times. Subscribers will see stories like this every day on our website (and in our daily emails) as an added value to your subscription.

By appearances anyway, the NFL was one big family two weeks ago. After President Donald Trump urged owners to fire players who did not stand for the national anthem, everyone from Commissioner Roger Goodell to the 32 team owners to the players and coaches locked arms, in many cases literally, in defiance and unity.

That unanimity has all but vanished. As the president continues to harangue the league over the anthem, and a number of fans across the country express displeasure with the handful of players who continue to kneel during the anthem, a growing pool of owners are trying to defuse the politically charged issue, even if it means confronting the players they previously sympathized with.

One of the most powerful owners in the league is now speaking openly about benching players who do not stand for the anthem, and Goodell, who said previously that players had a right to voice their opinions, is siding with the owners opposed to letting the players demonstrate. The owners plan to meet next week to establish what to do about the anthem gestures.

"Like many of our fans, we believe that everyone should stand for the national anthem," Goodell said in a letter sent to owners on Tuesday.

He added that the league cares about the issues the players are trying highlight, including social injustice and police brutality toward African-Americans. But, he said, that "the controversy over the anthem is a barrier to having honest conversations and making real progress on the underlying issues."

The league might find resistance from players for any new directive on the anthem, setting the course for more public tension.

Martellus Bennett, a tight end for the Green Bay Packers, was quick to question the commissioner's motives, writing on Twitter: "@nflcommish really bruh? It's hard trying to play both sides of the fence when it comes down to injustice and your money huh?"

Goodell's letter was sent two days after Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones — a leader among owners, a supporter of the president and never one to bite his tongue — said in no uncertain terms that he would bench any players who "disrespect the flag."

"If we are disrespecting the flag, then we won't play. Period," Jones told The Dallas Morning News.

On Twitter, the president congratulated Jones for his stance.

Jones may be the most strident owner on this issue, but he is far from alone.

Miami Dolphins owner Stephen M. Ross, who had backed the players' right to protest and even set up a nonprofit group last year to foster race relations, appears to be changing his stance. He told The Miami Herald that while many players insist their protests are about raising awareness of racial injustice, the president has "changed that whole paradigm of what protest is" by turning it into a statement on the flag and support of the military.

Put another way, Ross is telling his players that they are hurting their cause by not standing for the anthem.

This about-face should not be shocking.

First and foremost, the owners, particularly those who have paid hundreds of millions of dollars for their teams, want to make money. From their point of view, anything that draws attention from the game, whether it is bullying in the locker room, domestic violence, or sitting or kneeling during the anthem, could put the television networks that broadcast the games and the league's corporate sponsors in an awkward spot.

"At this moment, Jerry Jones has made a business decision," said Frank Zaccanelli, a former part owner of the Dallas Mavericks who knows Jones well. "He's in Dallas, Texas, and owns America's Team. If any business took a 10-12 percent business hit, red lights would be going off. If you've got 50 percent of your people against you, you are going to have drastic changes."

The owners, however, also want to avoid a showdown with the players' union, and even some of their best players. After Jones threw down the gauntlet on Sunday, the NFL Players Association issued a statement defending its members' right to free expression.

"We should not stifle these discussions and cannot allow our rights to become subservient to the very opinions our Constitution protects," the union said.

On Tuesday, Jones doubled down on his views during his radio show on KRLD-FM (105.3 The Fan). By threatening to bench players, Jones said his goal was to remove the Cowboys from the debate over whether players should or should not stand for the anthem.

"I don't want there to be any misunderstanding as to where I want the personnel of the Cowboys to be when we're at the No. 1 workplace we have, which is the field and the sideline on game day," Jones said. I want to do everybody a service, as I should in leading the team, and let's be really clear about what our expectations are."

The president's tweets aside, the issue is in some ways taking care of itself. Hundreds of other players who protested two weeks ago, apparently more piqued at a president telling them what to do than the underlying causes the kneeling is supposed to highlight, are now back in line and standing for the anthem. Three players on the Dolphins who had knelt for the anthem in prior weeks, chose on Sunday to stay in the locker room, which was also in defiance of league policy. They were not fined.

That may not be enough for some owners, particularly when nearly two dozen players on the San Francisco 49ers have continued to kneel. It was the former quarterback of that team, Colin Kaepernick,

who ignited the round of anthem demonstrations by kneeling during the anthem last season to draw attention, he said, to racial oppression and fatal shootings by the police of African-Americans.

The 49ers chief executive officer, Jed York, has not only stood by his players, but also made a \$1 million donation to the team's community fund to highlight his support for Kaepernick.

The controversy has spilled into the broader football community, with some former players lashing out at current players who refuse to stand. Mike Ditka, a Hall of Fame player and head coach, said Monday that he did not believe that he has seen any oppression in the United States in the last century. "All of a sudden, it's become a big deal now, about oppression," he said.

Other former players, including wide receiver Steve Smith Sr., quickly reminded Ditka of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. "Great coach, clueless person," Smith wrote on Twitter.

The Cowboys and other NFL teams, as private businesses, can limit what employees can say or do while working. To date, the league has not enforced its rule that players must be on the sideline for the anthem and should stand while it is being played, though the wording in the league manual does not make standing a requirement.

The collective bargaining agreement, though, requires that these and other rules cannot be changed after the start of training camp. Joe Lockhart, a league spokesman, said no fines have been issued for players not on the sidelines but he declined to say if penalties, which could inflame tensions between players and owners and attract the kind of attention the league would rather not have, would be levied going forward.

If the league suddenly began fining, benching or suspending players who do not stand for the anthem, it may prompt the union to file a lawsuit, said Michael LeRoy, who teaches sports law at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

"There's a basic fairness issue when you change a rule during the season, especially when you are getting browbeaten by the president," LeRoy said. "On paper, it's not a change in the rule, but in reality it is."

Still, Lockhart, hinting at potential action by the owners, added, "everyone here is frustrated by the process, and particularly the politics around this."

The owners, he said, would be meeting next week in New York and will be discussing what steps to take next including, potentially, strengthening the language in its game operations manual.

"There's a strong feeling at every level," Lockhart said, "that we ought to be getting back to football."

Chargers' Okung Issues Call to Action for N.F.L. Players

By Ken Belson
New York Times
October 13, 2017

In an unusual and public call to arms, a Los Angeles Chargers lineman said he would post a letter online Friday morning urging the league's 1,700 players to take a unified stand against pressure from N.F.L. team owners to curb demonstrations during the national anthem before games.

"We can either wait until we receive our respective marching orders, speak up individually, or find a way to collaborate, and exercise our agency as the lifeblood of the league," the player, Russell Okung, wrote, according to a copy of the letter provided to The Times.

Okung's nearly 900-word manifesto takes N.F.L. owners to task for making decisions on anthem demonstrations, which have typically involved players kneeling or sitting during the anthem, without broadly consulting players. The owners plan to meet next week to discuss the demonstrations, which were originally intended to draw attention to racial inequality and police shootings of African-Americans.

But that initial message has become blurred, and owners could be prepared to issue restrictions on the protests, especially after drawing condemnation from President Trump and a number of fans in recent weeks.

Trump has said that players who kneel or sit during the national anthem are disrespecting the flag and the military, though many players say it is their patriotic duty to bring attention to social injustice and other ills in society.

In a phone interview on Thursday, Okung said he wrote the letter as a way to move players' focus away from the president's agenda and back toward their own goals of addressing inequity.

"I'm about shifting the narrative. We can't be distracted by what he is trying to do," Okung said of the president. "We're honing our voice. We're not unified against Trump, we're unified against social injustice."

In his letter, Okung, an offensive lineman who was named to the Pro Bowl after the 2012 season, lamented that the original message of the protests, which were started last season by Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback, had gotten muddled and had exposed divisions among players, fans and owners.

"As Kap's message has now been distorted, co-opted and used to further divide us along the very racial lines he was highlighting, we as players have a responsibility to come together and respond collectively," wrote Okung, 30, who is African-American and has Nigerian heritage.

In a letter to N.F.L. executives this week, the league's commissioner, Roger Goodell, said he and the owners wanted the players to stand for the anthem. The owners will meet next week in New York,

where they will consider whether to enforce league rules that state players must be on the sideline during the national anthem and should stand while it is being played. To date, the league has not penalized any players for kneeling, sitting or remaining in the locker room during the anthem.

The commissioner and the owners have been meeting small groups of players about the issue at the league's headquarters and in various cities. About 10 players will also be attending the owners meeting.

Some players have reacted scornfully on social media to the suggestion they might be forced to stand. But Okung's letter is a rare example of a player trying to unite all his peers in defiance of the league, and it sheds light on the frustration many athletes have only privately expressed regarding recent events.

"Things have clearly gotten out of control," he wrote. "As a pragmatist, I will admit, I initially doubted the merits of Colin Kaepernick's protest and questioned the strategy. I was wrong.

"There is now no doubt that what he started was courageous, prophetic, self-sacrificial act that has captivated a nation and inspired a powerful movement," he added. "If I had his cell phone number, I would tell him that."

Players routinely speak to teammates and to friends on other teams. Last year, players on several teams coordinated via text messages how to approach the anthem on the first Sunday of the season, which fell on Sept. 11.

Broader conversations across multiple teams, though, have not been possible, Okung wrote, adding that the N.F.L. Players Association was ill-suited to facilitating larger discussions because the players are also competitors and "the system is designed to keep us divided and stifle our attempts to collaborate."

Okung said in the phone interview that his immediate goal was to identify players across the league who want to do more, then discuss their next steps.

In his letter, Okung invited players to contact him on Twitter and when they do he will send them instructions on how to communicate as a larger group. He said he hoped that his letter reached as many players as possible, and that it "acts as a catalyst to convene a conversation among those of us who are uncomfortable having these important decisions made without us in the room."

"While I don't have all the answers as to how to ensure we are not robbed of this moment, I am convinced that we will never make progress if we do not find a way to come together and take action that represents the will of the players," Okung wrote. "What we have is strength in numbers."

Von Miller still thinks Odell Beckham Jr. should be highest-paid

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
October 13, 2017

The Giants aren't going to get anything else out of Odell Beckham Jr. the rest of this season.

But one of his peers believes they should put plenty into him before next year.

Via Jordan Raanan of ESPN.com, Broncos outside linebacker Von Miller said he believes the Giants wide receiver still deserves to be the league's highest-paid player when he comes back.

"Odell should be the highest-paid player ever in the National Football League," Miller said. "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 said this summer he wants to be the highest-paid player in the league, which could make the pending negotiations difficult for the Giants. The Giants seem to understand they're going to have to cough up plenty of bucks, though owner John Mara knows that the positional bias will likely keep Beckham from taking the top spot on any salary list.

Miller has spoken to Beckham since he had surgery Monday to repair a broken ankle, and Miller knows first-hand about coming back from injury.

A torn ACL in 2013 didn't prevent him from getting 14.5 sacks in 2014 and winning a Super Bowl MVP after the 2015 season.

"I talked to him, and it's just a tough situation," Miller said. "Every elite player in the National Football League has to overcome some type of injury once or twice in their career. The type of person that Odell is — I know him personally, so I know that he's going to come back even stronger and better."

Miller got his payday after his injury. And he clearly thinks Beckham deserves a special one after his.

Paxton Lynch resumes throwing after shoulder injury

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
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Paxton Lynch wasn't able to win the Broncos' starting quarterback job this preseason, and then he wasn't even able to suit up because of a shoulder injury.

And while Trevor Siemian has taken the job and run with it, Lynch is at least able to get back to work.

According to Mike Klis of KUSA, Lynch resumed throwing after practice Wednesday, his first on-field work since a preseason sprain of his right shoulder.

"For Day 1, it felt good," Lynch said. "I just know it's OK to start throwing and the doctor said we'll progress from there."

It wasn't a full workout, a total of 15 throws, so he's not going to be pushing Brock Osweiler out of the backup job anytime soon.