

Kiszla: Broncos have bigger problems than QB. Their names are C.J. Anderson, Demaryius Thomas

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
November 5, 2017

Huddle 'em up, Brock Osweiler. And take a seat, Trevor Siemian.

The switch at quarterback was a bright idea, even if it dawned on coach Vance Joseph two weeks after everybody else in Broncos Country. But, truth be told, this move might be slapping a Band-Aid on an offense that's already dead.

After making a no-brainer decision to bench Siemian in favor of Osweiler, Joseph uttered what might be the most telling words of a frustrating NFL season in Denver.

"The offense was designed for our skill players, in my opinion," Joseph said. "It wasn't designed for a quarterback's certain skill set."

And there's the rub. With 127 points in seven games, the Broncos rank 24th of 32 NFL teams in scoring. There's plenty of blame to go around. From running back C.J. Anderson to wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, the skill-position players on this team have stunk.

As much as Siemian's well-duh mistakes have chafed everybody from cornerback Chris Harris to angry spectators in the South Stands, quarterback is only the beginning of the problems from a unit that even John Elway in his prime would find challenging to lead on touchdown drives.

There's at least a 50-50 chance Siemian has started his final game as quarterback in Denver. If benching him doesn't start the Broncos on a run, there will be other prominent offensive players run out of town.

The list begins with Anderson. His competitive spirit is beyond question. His status as the centerpiece of Denver's rushing attack is very much in doubt.

In an offense Joseph insists should be run-first, Anderson's average of 4.4 yards per rush is inferior to backups Devontae Booker (5.2) or Jamaal Charles (4.7). After Denver lost 29-19 at Kansas City, I asked the hyper self-critical Anderson to assess his performance.

"I played terrible. I didn't score and missed some opportunities. That's on me. I just have to get better," said Anderson, whose longest run against the Chiefs was 12 yards.

"The scouting report says I'm not a home run threat. Let's prove them wrong," Anderson said. "I'm a home run threat, (expletive deleted). Let's make it happen."

The Broncos are running out of patience, waiting for Anderson to stop plodding along in a cloud of dust. If he is again slow to get on a roll Sunday against Philadelphia, do not be surprised if Joseph turns to Booker, eager for a bigger role after slowly rounding into shape from a wrist injury that made him a nonfactor early in the season.

What's more: Terms of Anderson's contract would make it extremely easy for the team to say goodbye to him in 2018. The pressure is not only on Anderson to retain his starting job. His future in Denver is iffy, as well.

While right tackle Menelik Watson has become the scapegoat for apologists that coddle Siemian, kindly note that although he joined the Broncos on what was announced as a three-year contract, the financial details make it little more than a one-year tryout. The offense's real big-bucks bust has been Thomas, whose productivity has steadily declined since he signed a five-year, \$70 million pact in 2015, which I warned ahead of time would be a deal the Broncos would eventually regret.

Not to suggest Peyton Manning made Thomas money he doesn't deserve, but D.T. has caught only five touchdown passes in the 23 regular-season games since Manning retired, and has not reached the end zone since November 2016. That's a streak of an unlucky 13 games without a touchdown.

"I'm determined to end it," Thomas said.

Thomas, however, will turn 30 years old on Christmas. It's not too early to wonder: Is D.T.'s best football behind him?

It might be a stretch to suggest this year's version of Denver's defense is equal to the nasty bunch that made Carolina quarterback Cam Newton a whining loser in Super Bowl 50. But Von Miller, Aqib Talib and the gang should be enough to win on any given Sunday.

This offense was never expected to produce Star Wars numbers, which made me supremely confident of a prediction made in early September: If Denver scored 375 points in 2017, a postseason berth would be guaranteed.

All I asked was an average of close to 24 points per game. Through seven games, the Broncos have given us 18 points per game

What's wrong is bigger than the quarterback. Yes, Siemian deserved to lose his job. Without a significant improvement in offensive production, however, there will be bigger changes down the road.

Kickin' it with Kiz: How did the Broncos get in this QB mess? Well, it all started with the 2012 NFL draft.

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
November 5, 2017

The Broncos and John Elway need to do everything possible to get quarterback Kirk Cousins from Washington during the offseason.

– David, Cardiff

Kiz: Well, I knew Denver had a quarterback problem, but was unaware it had escalated into a global crisis, keeping a man from Wales up at night with worry. Fun facts to know and tell: Not only did John Elway pass on Russell Wilson to draft Brock Osweiler in 2012, he took the Wizard of Oz over Cousins, as well.

If Osweiler can outrun the pressure coming from the right side of his offensive line, he might have a chance as the team's starting quarterback.

– Winston, pro Wii bowler

Kiz: The mischievous staff here at Kickin' It Headquarters thinks it might enhance the telecast of Broncos games if every sack of Osweiler was accompanied by a sound effect of crashing bowling pins. Is that mean?

How about this? The Broncos feed Osweiler to the wolves the next two games, then let Paxton Lynch finish the season as the schedule gets a little easier.

Mr. U, dances with wolves

Kiz: When coach Vance Joseph declared in training camp that Trevor Siemian was his permanent starting quarterback, anyone who believed the decision wasn't subject to change was incredibly naïve. Osweiler gets two starts. Lose them both, and it will be time for the Broncos to decide if Lynch has a future in Denver ... or should be discarded as a draft bust.

Four years ago, I wrote you about your appearance on a Philadelphia radio station, when you said the Eagles had no chance. You wrote me back after the game to gloat. What say you now? This time, the Eagles will be the team that scores 55 points. Thanks for the inspiration.

Kiz: Wow, four years is a long time to harbor bitterness, which might be worse for a healthy heart than a greasy cheesesteak. Yes, way back in 2013, I did predict the Broncos would hang 50-plus points on the Eagles, and it made some folks in Philly more irritable than usual, especially when Denver won 52-20. What say I now? If Osweiler doesn't commit a turnover, the Broncos will have a fighting chance. But Carson Wentz is my main man, so I've got to go with the Eagles to win a 20-17 squeaker.

When is Elway going to pull the trigger and fire Joseph as coach?

Daniel, Denver

Kiz: Welp. Is it safe to say the honeymoon's over? Firing a coach after one season would be a little harsh, don't you think? But if the Broncos crater, and finish with a 5-11 record, let it be noted that Elway treats his coaches like disposable razors. As soon as they're not sharp, he pitches them in the trash.

And today's parting shot is a happy reminder it's actually possible to dial back negative social media comments from full blast.

Ouch! I hate when I agree with you, Kiz. Good analysis in weighing the merits of Eric Bledsoe vs. Jamal Murray and Emmanuel Mudiay.

Randy, opposed to a trade

Brock is back and the Broncos' QB carousel continues to spin. When will it stop?

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
November 5, 2017

Gary Kubiak sat at a round table inside the sprawling Boca Raton Resort and Club alongside a horde of reporters, all hanging on his every word as he attempted to calm a swirling storm.

It was a Tuesday morning in March 2016, mere weeks after he guided his patchwork Broncos on a rollercoaster to a Super Bowl 50 victory, and just days after his top two quarterbacks bid farewell. Peyton Manning called it a career at 18 years — a good number, he said — and his groomed successor, Brock Osweiler, defected to Houston with a \$72 million contract.

The team had just traded for veteran Mark Sanchez, whom Kubiak and general manager John Elway repeatedly hyped, while negotiations continued in the background to try to acquire Colin Kaepernick. Broncos fans know how that ended for both sides. They know the panic that ensued back in Colorado as the reigning champs were suddenly without a clear future or plan at quarterback.

“Now it’s time for us to find the next Brock Osweiler, the next young player for our football team to come in and compete with Mark and whoever we bring in,” Kubiak told reporters then. “That’s what we plan on doing.”

Fast forward nearly 20 months and the next Brock Osweiler is apparently Brock Osweiler. The Broncos, a franchise whose three championships came with quarterbacking greats Elway and Manning, are now the home of quarterback disarray.

Trevor Siemian, the seventh-round pick who won the starting job in consecutive offseasons, has been benched for Osweiler, a second-round pick, who is seemingly holding the spot for Paxton Lynch, a first-round pick, or maybe Chad Kelly, the “Mr. Irrelevant” of the 2017 draft who is still recovering from injuries. It’s not at all clear if any of them will be the team’s quarterback for the long term.

Sunday, the Broncos head to Philadelphia to take on a team that stars the second-year standout Carson Wentz, who has guided the Eagles to a 7-1 start and is in the early phase of a potential MVP season. The juxtaposition will be jarring, as the Broncos look to end a three-game losing streak and most eyes monitor their quarterback carousel that spins round and round, this time without a Hall of Famer on board.

“It came down to what’s best for our football team and, quite frankly, what’s best for Trevor’s future,” coach Vance Joseph said of benching Siemian. “The team was OK with it. They trust Brock. He’s been here before under the same situation. It’s very similar. This is why we signed him.”

“All good quarterbacks are game managers ...”

Three months ago, the Broncos’ current state at quarterback seemed impossible. But the team with a knack for surprising did just that when it re-signed Osweiler to a one-year contract for a veteran’s

minimum. Lynch, their “future,” suffered a shoulder sprain in preseason and would be on the mend for at least two to three weeks.

Or eight.

Denver sought a veteran, and Osweiler knew Broncos offensive coordinator Mike McCoy, knew the system, knew the players and cost mere pennies, thanks to Cleveland. The Browns, home to the largest revolving door of quarterbacks in the league, is paying the Broncos’ newly appointed starter \$15.225 million of his \$16 million salary. Bargain.

But still, this seemed impossible — just as Trevor Siemian, the darkhorse of 2016 winning the starting job seemed impossible. Just as Mark Sanchez losing out to Siemian seemed impossible. Just as Lynch not grabbing hold of the starting job two years in a row seemed impossible.

“There’s so much to learn for young quarterbacks with what these defenses are doing these days,” McCoy said. “There’s a number of different reasons why certain plays struggle at certain times. How is the team playing around you? Are guys winning outside? Are we running the ball efficiently? How is the protection? There’s so many things that go in the evaluation and a lot of times when you grade a quarterback people just want to look at the mistakes and not look at why did certain things happen.”

Joseph called Siemian and Osweiler into the team’s headquarters Tuesday to inform them of the latest change that seemed days in the making after three turnover-filled losses.

For the seventh time over the last three years, be it because of injury or performance issues, the Broncos were onto a new quarterback, though they emphasized their woes on offense didn’t rest solely on Siemian’s shoulders.

“On offense, everyone has to play better,” McCoy said. “We have to coach better. We’re all in this together. It’s not one guy. You’re not looking at one position saying this is the reason.”

In seven starts this season, Siemian went from a quarterback drawing comparisons to Manning for his poise and smarts in the pocket to one being ridiculed for his mistakes, his 10 interceptions and his 19.0 quarterback rating under pressure, according to Pro Football Focus (PFF).

The fall was sharp and the change unavoidable.

“All of the good quarterbacks are game managers,” Joseph explained. “That’s a negative term in football, but it shouldn’t be because to be a quarterback, you have to manage the football game. That part, he’s been struggling with. In my opinion, for his best interest, he needs to take a step back to watch Brock operate in meetings and on gameday. It’s going to help his future.”

Interestingly enough, in Osweiler’s seven starts for Denver in 2015, he went from a quarterback drawing comparisons to Manning for his similar stat line in his Bronco debut, to one being ridiculed for taking sack after sack. The critics only grew louder in Houston last year as his interception total (16) topped his touchdown total (15) and he took 27 sacks. Under pressure, Osweiler had the sixth-worst quarterback rating (49.9) in 2016 and sixth-most interceptions (seven), per PFF.

“Maybe in that situation I was trying to do too much. I think like smart players .. you would learn from that and you’re not going to replicate that,” Osweiler said. “... I feel sometimes the best thing to do with a quarterback when he’s not playing well or he’s going through some tough times is pulling him out of the fire and making him the backup or the third string, and letting him observe. That’s what I’ve been able to do.”

And that’s what Siemian is involuntarily doing now. But as Osweiler takes over, he does so under the cloud of Lynch, the quarterback with the largest salary-cap hit.

Lynch has started two games in his young career and resumed practice in recent weeks. But he will remain inactive for the second-consecutive game Sunday. When he returns to full health and “football shape,” the calls for him to start will be loud, sending the Broncos’ quarterback quandary into greater chaos.

“I’m tired of losing ...”

Broncos all-pro cornerback Chris Harris Jr. has experienced three three-game slides in his career: two that bookended the Manning era, and the one the Broncos are experiencing now — the one that seems to be the most frustrating of Harris’ career.

When the Broncos fell to the Chiefs last Monday, Harris, as usual, was brutally honest with his assessment of the team’s play and rising tensions.

“I’m tired of losing. I’m tired of losing the same way every game,” he said. “... There’s high tension. We’re not winning. We’re not taking care of the football. We’re giving the games away. We had some crucial chances to make a stop to give us a chance. We got back on the turnovers, which was a positive. Other than that, it was an ugly game.”

The Broncos have insisted there’s no division between the offense and defense but there’s no denying the obvious: For the past two-and-a-half years, the defense has carried the offense as it’s struggled to score and secure the ball.

“(It’s) kind of an ‘it is what it is’ reaction,” outside linebacker Shane Ray said of the latest switch at quarterback. “Defensively, we try not to get wrapped up in everything that goes on with the offense. We try to focus on doing us. What’s best for the team is what’s best for us. Whatever they feel like is necessary for us to stop turning the ball over so we have a chance to win — that’s the upstairs guys and the coaches. We just have to play.”

The reality is the defense is growing tired and the offense is increasingly frustrated. While a jumpstart is needed and a quarterback swap may provide just that, a few wins here without a clear future is merely a Band-Aid on a deep wound.

The Broncos of 2017 are looking eerily similar to the one reeling from the loss of Elway in 1999.

The carousel is still spinning. Hop on.

Broncos rookie TE Jake Butt still dealing with soreness in knee

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
November 5, 2017

The Broncos are zeroed in on Sunday, but when they return from Philadelphia coach Vance Joseph and his staff will have a pair of decisions to make.

And these won't be about their quarterbacks.

Denver has until Monday to activate rookie tight end Jake Butt and quarterback Chad Kelly, or leave them on the non-football injury list for the remainder of the season. Joseph already indicated that Kelly, who is coming off knee and wrist surgeries, would remain on NFI; the Broncos can't keep four quarterbacks on the roster.

However, Joseph had been hopeful Butt would be a contributor after more than nine months of recovery from his second anterior cruciate ligament surgery on his right knee.

Though he returned to practice in mid-October, Butt has experienced soreness in his first couple of weeks on the field, and Joseph's once-optimistic tone has lately been one of uncertainty. He said Thursday that Butt "is still working through" and "getting into football shape" and that the team is "figuring it out."

"It's a process. Like V.J. said, I've just been dealing with a little bit of soreness," Butt told The Denver Post on Friday. "It's a tough thing. I feel like I've been away from football for a long time, so as much as I think I can be Superman and just walk in and play, that's just not the reality. The big thing — and what I appreciate from everyone around here — is that my health is a priority and everyone is making sure that if I'm sore we're not putting me out there where I'm going to be at risk.

"There's definitely frustration. For me, I've been a quick healer my whole life and everything I've come back (from), I've been able to come back with no problems. But it's also teaching me some things. Patience is a big thing."

A Mackey Award winner as the nation's top tight end, Butt first tore his ACL, as well as his meniscus, during a winter practice at Michigan in 2014. At the time he was told that he would likely be facing a redshirt season, but he was back on the field six-and-a-half months after surgery.

He suffered the second ACL tear during the Orange Bowl on Dec. 30, the final game of his college career, and underwent surgery in January. When the Broncos drafted him in the fifth round in April, both he and the team hoped he'd be able to play in his first season, though they expected a delayed start.

But Denver has been especially cautious as he recovers from ACL surgery No. 2.

"I'm close," Butt said. When you first come back, you're not going to be 100 percent. The first time I came back I was like, 'I feel good. I feel like I'm 100 percent.' But I didn't know until that following spring

or that next season, 'Oh, this is 100 percent.' That being said, I'm out there and I'm making cuts. I'm running, I'm cutting, I'm catching the ball, I'm blocking. So I'm doing things that I'm supposed to be doing, but it's just being able to do that on a consistent basis without soreness."

Throughout the summer and the start of the regular season, Butt was limited to film study, meetings and work in the weight room while trying to learn Mike McCoy's offense and "earn" his place on the team.

"There's a certain level of comfort that you can gain from studying the playbook and studying film," Butt said. "But it's a lot different when you get out there and you got to hear from the quarterback and see the defense get off on the snap count. That's something where, as I've been practicing, it's becoming faster and faster for me.

"Since the day I stepped on the football field, I've been a starter. So this has been completely new for me. You're trying to make a first impression on these coaches and it's hard to do that when you're not practicing. That's why for me the meetings are so important and the lifts and extra work is very important for me."

The Broncos have a full 53-man roster, so if Butt is activated next week, the team will have to make a corresponding move. But the latest signs point toward their young tight end waiting a bit longer for his NFL debut.

"Soreness isn't something you want to just brush off to the side in a situation like mine, coming back from two ACLs," Butt said. "I just appreciate that. In college it was go, go, go. If you're hurt, let's push through it. There's a fine line: You want to help the team, but you also have your health to worry about, too. And for the first time I'm surrounded by people that are weighing both — we're thinking long-term health, but we also want to help the team."

Broncos Q&A with Will Parks: Second-year safety eager to return to home city

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
November 5, 2017

There's no mistaking the love Will Parks has for his home city. Philly Will, as the Broncos' second-year safety is known, bleeds Philadelphia. The city's blue-collar mentality, he attests, is what's helped carry him to the NFL and into a prominent spot on one of the league's top defenses. So has his family back home. Parks has collected 20 tickets for friends and relatives to come see him play against the Eagles on Sunday, and he knows he'll hear them on the field, no matter where they are sitting. Parks, in an interview edited for length, spoke to The Denver Post this week about returning home, his favorite local haunts and his journey from the City of Brotherly Love to the NFL.

Q: When you first saw the schedule come out for this season and saw a trip to Philadelphia on it, what was the feeling?

A: "It was a dream come true to play against the home team. When I'd seen that, man, words can't describe what I was feeling. I was just excited. That's what popped up. I was even more excited about playing against them. That's a team that passed up on me (in the 2016 NFL draft), and I actually talked with them (before the draft). It's going to be very emotional for me. We're going there to get a win, first and foremost."

Q: You say you weren't necessarily a fan of the Eagles, but did you go to games?

A: "I've never been to an Eagles game. I've only been to one Phillies game. My cousin Malcolm took me. Other than that, I've never been down to "The Linc." I've been to Wells Fargo Arena (home of the NBA's 76ers) about one time. Being from the city, none of us really went to Eagles games. We were always just trying to stay out of trouble, trying to make it, trying to go to school. We didn't really have time to get tickets. If we did, we won them for free. It's going to be special."

Q: What's going to be most special about playing at home?

A: "When I was coming out for college, I had an offer from Temple. Then there were issues as far as people saying I was too slow, too stiff. I ended up going to Arizona and then coming here. The Eagles ended up being on the schedule and I have my opportunity to show not just them, but a lot of people, they shouldn't have passed up on me."

Q: So settle the debate: what's the best cheesesteak place in Philly?

A: I'm getting a lot of questions about that. The best cheesesteak for me, where I live, it's called Max's. It's on Broad and Erie. Then you have Ishkabibble's on South Street. Then you have Dalessandro's, which is actually on the corner of where I played little league football for the Wissahickon Braves. So I might get a chance to go up and see them play for a little bit on Saturday when we've got some time off. I might go up there and visit my old stomping grounds.

(Parks went on to talk more about his love for Philadelphia's cuisine.)

A: "Lorenzo's has a pizza that is the size of, like, three footballs. Philadelphia has great food, great people, great places to shop. It's got a lot of landmarks. You have the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, City Hall, Penn's Landing, Delaware Avenue. There's so many things in Philly that is out there. It's going to be nice."

Denver at Philadelphia: Who has the edge?

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
November 5, 2017

Three things to watch

Do no harm. The objective for Brock Osweiler has been laid out: protect the football at all costs. But avoiding turnovers for the Broncos this season has been far easier said than done. Will starting a new QB be the difference in addressing Denver's most glaring weakness?

Keeping with the run. The Broncos bounced back from consecutive poor rushing performances by gaining 177 yards in Monday night's loss to the Chiefs. Philadelphia boasts the league's top rushing defense (70.4 yards per game), but that can't deter Denver from being patient while finding a consistent rotation among C.J. Anderson, Devontae Booker and Jamaal Charles.

Tight end troubles. Four of the 12 touchdown receptions allowed by the Broncos this season — only one fewer than they surrendered all of last season — have gone to tight ends. The Denver defense faces another challenge at the position Sunday in Zach Ertz, who leads Philadelphia with 43 catches for 528 yards and six TDs.

Game Plan

When the Broncos run. Booker, who rushed for a 6-yard touchdown Monday, is beginning to look like the featured back the Broncos believed they drafted in the fourth round in 2016. If he can remain healthy, it appears he has a chance to grab a bigger role. The Eagles have given up more than 100 rushing yards only once this season, to Kansas City. Edge: Eagles.

When the Eagles run. Looking for another option behind veteran LeGarrette Blount, the Eagles traded for Miami RB Jay Ajayi, a Pro Bowl selection last season. That will eventually give the Eagles two physical options in the backfield, though it's unclear if Ajayi will dress Sunday. Denver limited NFL leading rusher Kareem Hunt to only 46 yards on 22 carries on Monday night. Edge: Broncos.

When the Broncos pass. Osweiler will make his first start since January, so don't expect a game plan that calls for him to throw the ball all over the field. Having Emmanuel Sanders return from an ankle injury, as he's likely to do Sunday, would be a big boon. The Broncos' don't have a TD reception from a wide receiver since Sanders' two scores in Week 2. Edge: Eagles.

When the Eagles pass. Wentz has completed 72-of-117 passes (62 percent) for 1,005 yards and 13 touchdowns in his last four games. He's simply been on fire. His top target, Ertz, who is expected to play despite dealing with a hamstring injury this week, but Wentz has proved capable of spreading the ball around. Edge: Eagles.

Special teams. Things went from bad to worse for the Broncos on special teams Monday when rookie Isaiah McKenzie muffed a punt deep in his own territory. Though Brandon McManus snapped a slump with two made field goals against the Chiefs, there haven't been many bright spots for the unit this season. Edge: Eagles.

Broncos' Brandon McManus is your guide to Philly, kicking

By Mike Klis

9 News

November 5, 2017

Like all people who hail from Philadelphia, Denver Broncos kicker Brandon McManus knows his cheesesteaks.

During a sitdown interview with 9News this week, his knowledge was quizzed.

With onions?

“Of course.”

The difference between a good cheesesteak and a bad cheesesteak is:

- A. The Bun
- B. The Bun
- C. The Bun
- D. All of the above.

“Yes,” McManus said. “A lot of the bun is the way they toast it. I don’t know if it’s the water in Philadelphia or something that makes it so good. People always say New York bagels are the best. Well, Philadelphia rolls are the best with the cheesesteaks.”

The Broncos are playing Sunday against the 7-1 Eagles in the hometown of McManus, safety Will Parks and linebacker Zaire Anderson.

McManus was born in Philly, raised 25 miles north in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, went to high school in the neighboring town of Lansdale, and played his college ball at Temple University, whose campus is set within the city of Philly proper.

Philly is like an older brother. It’s OK for people who live there to complain about their city, but don’t you do it.

I have yet to meet anyone from Philly who hasn’t bragged about hailing from Philly. Parks’ twitter handle is PhillyWill11.

“A lot of people bash Philadelphia but I loved it growing up,” McManus said. “It obviously isn’t the cleanest city but I loved it growing up – just the passion of the sports town that they have and ... the fans, unfortunately just lay it on the professional sports teams because they haven’t won a lot but they’re still passionate and it’s just a great place where I grew up and hold near and dear to my heart.”

It's different for Eagles fans this year. They all have Carson Wentz fever as the second-year quarterback has played well in leading Philadelphia to six consecutive wins and a 7-1 record entering their game Sunday (11 a.m. MST kickoff) against the Broncos.

McManus is going to have 136 friends and family there specifically because he'll be kicking for the other guys. He returns just in time as it appears he has his leg swing back.

McManus has uncharacteristically missed a few this year. He missed only five out of 45 field goal attempts in 2015. He made all his big kicks, too, as he was 10 of 10 during the Broncos' four-game postseason run that ended with a Super Bowl 50 ring on his finger.

He only missed five of 34 field goal attempts last year. This year, he's missed five of 15. The good thing -- and it is a good thing -- he's been through this before. He struggled enough in 2014 to lose his job, although the Broncos kept his strong leg and young talent around for kickoffs and further development.

After not getting a chance two weeks ago in a 21-0 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers, he made relatively short field goals of 27 and 34 yards and a 33-yard extra point in the tricky windy conditions of Arrowhead Stadium on Monday night.

"I feel good," he said. "I knew I had a couple bad kicks. I wasn't mentally worried about myself or my confidence. I just unfortunately had some bad kicks that resulted in misses."

The new contract extension he received the day of the Broncos' season opener, he said, had nothing to do with his below-par start to the season. Speaking of par, that's what it is. Just like the golf swing can come and go, consistency of swing is what separates NFL kickers from the others.

"There's a lot of similarities with golf and kicking," he said. "Obviously, golf is more of an upper body rotation where kicking is lower body. But it's such a mental game more than a physical game with kicking. Each kick you've got to go out there and think, 'I only have to make this kick. I don't have to worry about making 10 in a row, or I've got to get to a certain percentage or something.' You've just got to worry about making that specific kick that your approached with at that time."

Here's something even a weekend golfer may not know.

"One interesting point is, if you miss the kick by maybe a centimeter on the ball, 20 or 30 or 40 yards down the field it's going to miss by yards," McManus said. "That's how specific we are."

It's not easy being a kicker. It's not easy being a quarterback. The Broncos arrive in Philly with a shakeup at the most important position in team sports. Trevor Siemian has been benched for the first time after 21 career starts, replaced by Brock Osweiler.

In the Broncos' locker room, the three specialists (McManus, punter/holder Riley Dixon, long snapper Casey Kreiter) dress a couple stalls down from quarterback row.

"Kickers and quarterbacks are good friends a lot of times so obviously it's tough to see someone lose their job like Trevor," he said. "Obviously, he knew he could play better and wasn't putting up the points we needed to the way our defense has been playing."

“We’re familiar with Brock and he’s familiar with the offense with (offensive coordinator Mike) McCoy being here earlier.”

Come to think of it, sometimes it’s not easy being anybody. In McManus’ second professional season of 2014, first with the Broncos, he co-founded an anti-bullying group with a friend.

McManus was a good athlete in high school and athletes generally aren’t bullied. Then again, social media was only just beginning to grow its fangs.

“Not that I’ve ever really been bullied when I was younger, but at the kicker position you miss a kick you’re going to get crucified on social media,” he said. “That’s how a lot of bullying happens nowadays. A lot of kids in schools and social-media-wise.

“So, I wanted to create a platform for these kids to feel safe to talk to. Sometimes they don’t want to talk to their parents and be a tattletale so we wanted to create some way that these kids to talk to a guidance counselor or somebody at school.”

North Penn High School and Temple get one of their former students back this weekend. The Broncos arrived Friday night for the game Sunday, but McManus won’t run the Rocky steps at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Been there, done that, over and over again.

“Playing college football at Temple, we ran those steps a lot for early mornings, 4 a.m. conditioning,” he said.

Ah, Philly. The Liberty Bell. Independence Hall. The Rocky stairs. Betsy Ross’ sewing room. The Delaware and Schuylkill rivers.

Cheesesteaks.

“Best place is Dalessandro’s, by far to me,” he said. “It’s a little bit outside the city. But the best one in the city is Jim’s on South Street.”

Denver7 Keys to Broncos victory vs. Eagles

By Troy Renck

KMGH

November 5, 2017

"Rocky" is a washed-up, loser boxer given an improbable chance to fight for the title in a rags-to riches story.

"Brocky" is a recycled, rejected passer given an unlikely opportunity to fight to reverse a riches-to-rags story.

Their season teetering on the brink of relevance, the Broncos turn to Brock Osweiler to snap a three-game losing streak and deliver the team's first road win this season. The opponent is the NFC's best team, the upstart 7-1 Eagles.

Talk about being caught between a Brock and a hard place. Osweiler as a savior was not in the script this season. However, with Trevor Sieman undermined by shaken confidence and 10 interceptions, Broncos coach Vance Joseph made the appropriate call to the bullpen.

Osweiler takes over with a simple mandate: show leadership (which he has done well) and don't turn the ball over. Give the defense a fair chance, and the Broncos believe the season will make a U-turn.

A look at my Denver7 keys to a Broncos' victory over the Eagles:

1) Protect the Rock

Osweiler put it perfectly: "Ball security is job security." The Broncos are even in turnover margin in their wins and minus-12 in their losses. It's on Osweiler to manage the game, win field position and make a few plays in the air. An ideal line is 15-for-25 yards, 225 yards, 2 TDs, zero picks.

2) Reception problems

The Broncos have averaged 12.2 points over the last five games, going 1-4. No one is blameless. Part of the issue, however, is ghost production from receivers. Emmanuel Sanders will return after a two-game absence, and his reliability is welcomed. Demaryius Thomas needs to awaken from his scoring hibernation. He has not scored a touchdown in 13 games, and has one in his last 16. The good news? When Osweiler started seven times in 2015, he connected on five scores with Thomas.

3) Start fast

In their four losses, the script remains the same. The Broncos have not led at any point. Any advantage can help the defense, making the Eagles more predictable and willing to take chances.

4) Run it again. And again

Go back and watch Osweiler's 2015 wins, and there was a common thread. The Broncos ran the ball with authority. Despite the spree of turnovers in Kansas City, the Broncos nearly won because of a

powerful ground attack, averaging 5.71 yards per carry. The Eagles are stout up front. But the Broncos must stay stubborn, even on 3-yard gains, to set up chunk yardage through play action.

5) Special in name only

This would be a hell of a game for the special teams to figure it out. Coach Brock Olivo falls on the sword, blaming himself this week for not creating "a culture of (bleep)-kickers." Accountability is delightful. But it needs to extend to the players. If Isaiah McKenzie even looks like he's going to muff the punt, replace him. He has four fumbles. Be prepared to go to Jordan Taylor, or in my ideal world, Aqib Talib. Brandon McManus must stay on track after a horrible start. And Riley Dixon's misfire line drives can no longer be excused. If it surfaces again have three punters working out on Tuesday in an open competition. The special teams are an example of the team overthinking things, and allowing young players to become comfortable with delusions of adequacy.

6) Contain Carson on third down

Carson Wentz is the midseason league MVP. He is a human Red Bull who gives the Eagles' offense its wings. He plays with joy of a kid in the back yard. To win, the Broncos must stymie him in big moments. He owns the league's top passer rating (118.8) on third down with eight touchdowns and two picks.

7) Blanket Ertz

Wentz will scramble, he will hold onto the ball. The Broncos' rushers welcome this after facing quarterbacks who catch the snap and release in roughly two seconds. Yet, it won't matter if the Broncos don't improve coverage against tight ends, where they rank 27th overall, allowing six catches and 77 yards per game. Travis Kelce again worked them last week. Ertz is elite, but while Kelce uses shimmy, Ertz leans on physicality at the top of routes to create space. If it means using Talib on Ertz, the Broncos must keep an open mind. If Ertz has a big day it's an indictment of the game plan.

Let's be clear, everything about this game screams loss. The Eagles are well-coached, Wentz is a blossoming star, the Broncos are on their second quarterback, and have lost three straight games by double digits. But what if Brock is better at executing the blueprint required for this Broncos defense to win? The Broncos should lose. If they win the turnover battle, they will win. In other words, play like the New York Giants did at Mile High three weeks ago. Hello, reverse-lock theory. Or is it reverse-Brock theory?

Renck's prediction: Broncos 23, Eagles 20

Three Keys to Broncos-Eagles

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 5, 2017

With Brock Osweiler under center, the Broncos will step onto Lincoln Financial Field on Sunday for the first time in nearly eight years, searching for their first road win of 2017 and a triumph that will allow them to avoid their first sub-.500 record at midseason in six years and their longest losing streak in nearly seven years.

Osweiler has the starting assignment in place of Trevor Siemian for one reason above all others: because the offense couldn't stop giving the football away with Siemian at quarterback. Three interceptions last Monday night sealed the choice, and now Osweiler goes into the lineup with one priority above all: "Protect the football."

"The saying is, 'Ball security is job security,'" Osweiler said. "If you protect the football, you're going to stay out there on the field."

And if you do that, the team will have a better chance of winning. The Broncos have posted a minus-3 turnover margin in three consecutive games and have lost them all; they are 1-23 since 2003 in games with a turnover margin of minus-3 or worse.

When Head Coach Vance Joseph was asked what needed to change to snap the Broncos out of their recent road woes, his answer reflected the understandable frustration regarding the recent spike in turnovers.

"One adjustment: Don't give the ball away. How about that? Let's start with that adjustment," he said. "The rest will take care of itself."

So protecting the football is clearly the first key to the game. What are some of the others?

1. Don't fall behind early

Denver hasn't had a lead in any game since its Week 4 game against Oakland, which has allowed opposing offenses to play more conservatively, get the ball out quickly and avoid situations that force opposing quarterbacks to challenge Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr.

In each of the the last three games, some combination of turnovers and other gaffes -- including a low, line-drive punt that was returned for a touchdown -- have put the Broncos in two-score holes by the midway point of the second quarter.

"We need to keep doing what we're doing, play the run strong, but when we're playing from behind, in situations like that, it changes the entire plan of what you can do," outside linebacker Shane Ray said, "because now teams are first down, second down, run or pass, and then on third down, they're going to get it out quick, and they're okay with punting because they're ahead."

"We've got to protect the football [and have the] offense help the defense, defense help the offense."

2. Establish the run

Philadelphia enters the game as the NFL's leader in run defense, but that ranking is a bit deceptive and is built off the fact that teams run less often on the Eagles because they soar to early leads. The Eagles have allowed just 18.4 rushing attempts per game so far this season; no one else has permitted fewer than 21.8.

Philadelphia's run defense is above-average in more illuminating metrics like average per carry (12th, 3.83 yards per attempt) and first-down rate (ninth, with one of every 5.25 attempts).

Continued solid work on the ground can also help Osweiler find his footing as he steps in as the starting quarterback.

"It doesn't matter who's in there, we have to do our job to make sure that whoever is playing quarterback that things are flowing in the right direction, going the right way and making the job easier for him," running back C.J. Anderson said. "Hopefully we just do our job that much better and we're not putting [Osweiler] in the same position that we put [Siemian in]."

3. Make the Eagles one-dimensional

Some of that starts with getting a lead, but it also relies on the defense continuing to do its usual work against the run. Last Monday night, the Broncos' front seven gave Kansas City's Kareem Hunt little room to run, holding him below 100 yards from scrimmage for the first time in his pro career.

Denver's run defense ranks second in yardage per carry and first in first-down rate; similar work Sunday will force the Eagles out of the run-pass balance that has made their offense so effective this season.

Mason's Mailbag: The statistical impact of giveaways

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 5, 2017

You can tweet questions to me with the hashtag #AskMase or use the submission form to your right (if you're viewing on a standard browser) or at the bottom of the page if you're on the mobile site.

Another week, another tight end. What might be different against Zach Ertz than it was against Travis Kelce or the other tight ends the Broncos have faced?

-- Bill Ross

First of all, some of the success of opposing tight ends is due in part to opponents' reluctance to test Chris Harris Jr. and Aqib Talib -- which is understandable, given that they represent the first pair of first-team All-Pro cornerbacks from the same team in at least five decades. Quarterbacks will look inside first, and that often leads them to tight ends.

But tight ends like Ertz of the Eagles, Kansas City's Travis Kelce, Hunter Henry of the Chargers and Evan Engram of the Giants are "matchup problems," as Head Coach Vance Joseph noted.

"They're too big for corners and too fast for linebackers, and sometimes too fast and too big for safeties," he said. "We have to do a better job with those guys."

If the Broncos want different results, it might start with the pass rush being able to build off what it did last week against the Chiefs, particularly with packages such as the one that utilized Shane Ray, Shaquil Barrett and Von Miller together. The Broncos used that formation seven times in Ray's 2017 debut, and they could use that more to generate quick interior pressure to force some errant throws.

"We have some coverages where you can bang them and double-team them. Then you just try to go get the quarterback," Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods said. "With that combination, you hope you can have success. Against [Kansas City], it didn't work that good. We had two busted coverages and then really poor technique on the [Kelce] touchdown. We just have to improve in those areas, but that will be the plan."

There are quite a few OTs being traded right now. But none to the Broncos! How come?

-- Stephen Leonard

One offensive tackle was traded in the two weeks before the deadline: Duane Brown from Houston to Seattle. Under no reasonable definition can "one" be considered "quite a few."

And as with any instance in which a trade isn't made, the answer is usually simple: The options available weren't deemed to be able to improve the team while also having proper value on the trade market. It's unwise to make a trade and surrender more than a player's worth just to get by for nine games.

You have a rookie at left tackle in Garrett Bolles who is growing with every game and every repetition. At right tackle, Menelik Watson is returning to health after missing a game with a calf injury. Both have done some particularly good work in the run game, helping the Broncos rank in the league's top 10 in rushing yardage on a per-game and per-carry basis.

Since it seems from your broadcast like you have a stat for everything, riddle me this: What is the connection between turnovers, turnover margin and win-loss record?

-- Mike Powers

Here you go, with numbers culled from pro-football-reference.com:

Let's take the last 20 years to get a good sample size. In that span, here are the records of teams that had various turnover totals:

0 turnovers: 1754-509-4 (.775)
1 turnover: 1946-1306-6 (.598)
2 turnovers: 1128-1452-5 (.437)
3 turnovers: 413-1119-1 (.270)
4 turnovers: 118-635-2 (.158)
5 turnovers: 28-260-0 (.097)
6 turnovers: 7-80-0 (.080)
7 turnovers: 1-26-0 (.037)
8 or more turnovers: 0-8-0 (.000)

So just think of it this way: A single giveaway drops your chances of winning by 17.7 percentage points. A second one drops the chances by another 16.1 percentage points.

Now, let's go to turnover margin (obviously, you can flip these to the positive side and see what the various positive margins reveal):

Even: 1047-1047-2 (.500)
Minus-1: 603-1263-6 (.324)
Minus-2: 223-1056-1 (.175)
Minus-3: 73-637-1 (.103)
Minus-4: 14-323-0 (.042)
Minus-5: 113-4-0 (.034)
Minus-6: 1-28-0 (.034)
Minus-7 or worse: 0-10-0 (.000)

These numbers do not present a conclusion you couldn't probably deduce on your own, but they illustrate the impact of giveaways and show the degree to which the Broncos have sliced into their chances of winning in recent weeks.

Can Jake Butt play guard or tackle?

-- Ed Macbig

No. There is no NFL market for 246-pound offensive linemen.

When will we see Jake Butt on the field?

-- Clarence Thurman

That remains up in the air. The next big date is Monday, when the Broncos must decide whether to move him to the 53-man roster or keep him on the non-football-injury list for the rest of the season. If he is placed on the 53-man roster, it seems likely that he would make his game-action debut at some point in the next few weeks.

"We're figuring it out," Joseph said Thursday.

How do you feel after picking the Jets to [beat] the Bills when your radio co-hosts didn't?

-- Bronco Bob

Like a blind squirrel that found an acorn.

Paul Klee: Brock? Trevor? Luck? Mayfield? Denver Broncos next quarterback hope is not in the building

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
November 5, 2017

The Broncos say their latest quarterback switcheroo “feels like 2015,” a year in which they back-and-forth’ed between Peyton Manning and Brock Osweiler on the road to a Super Bowl.

I say this feels like the day Kate Upton leaves World Series champ Justin Verlander for a sports columnist.

We’re all friends here. Let’s get real about Denver’s merry-go-round at quarterback. Sliding from Trevor Siemian to Brock Osweiler (he’s back!) is like 2015 in one respect only: the quarterback of the future won’t be known until after this season. Benching Siemian for Osweiler is substantial proof.

The next Frank/John/Jake/Peyton isn’t in the building, the Paul D. Bowlen Memorial Centre (spelled “centre” due to the family’s Canadian wildcatting ties. Perhaps the next QB is playing in the CFL, eh?). Their QBs are Average Joes.

I expect the Broncos to play better with Brock. Devontae Booker should find his way onto your fantasy bench; Demaryius Thomas will catch his first touchdown pass since November 2016, a span of 14 games. The coaches will dumb down the offense to play to their strength, a running game, not one that seeks to score the coordinator a head-coaching job. Mike McCoy didn’t land a head gig after his run-heavy, Tim Tebow-led Broncos paced the NFL in rushing yards. That happened the following year, when McCoy’s offense averaged 30.1 points with Peyton Manning’s high-flying passing game. These Broncos are 3-0 when they call more running plays than passing plays.

Osweiler’s pit stop in Houston wasn’t a total bust. It was in Texas the Broncos’ ex learned his arm needn’t be the star of the show: “Maybe in that situation I was trying to do too much,” Osweiler said.

This quarterback maze has us all turned around.

"I'm sure a lot of people are surprised by this," Osweiler said of returning to a city where he was booed. "Very rarely does a player leave to go to another team and he's back with his previous team in a year's time, let alone a quarterback."

Up is down, left is right, the winner is the loser. The Broncos are stuck between a Brock and a hard place. Siemian has been labeled the loser, despite having won the competition. Hmmm. Sounds familiar.

Vance Joseph, the already embattled head coach, said they won’t have to pare down the playbook in Osweiler’s eighth start (first since ’15) for the Broncos.

“As far as the offense,” Joseph said, “he’s got it.”

The Broncos don't have it at quarterback. Paxton can't play. Siemian's seeing ghosts. Brock's been here before. Denver's out is outside the building. For brevity purposes, we'll pare down this QB contest to two — one college, one pro: Mayfield, the amateur from the University of Oklahoma; Luck, the Indy millionaire with a murky future.

With Mayfield, there are quarterbacks projected to go higher in the 2018 draft. That's a good thing; the Broncos right now would have the 12th pick of the first round. There are quarterbacks who stand taller than Mayfield; at 6-foot-1, Mayfield raises the same questions that hovered over Russell Wilson.

"No," Broncos center Matt Paradis said Thursday when asked if he must adjust his shotgun snap, going from an average-sized quarterback, Siemian, to a taller quarterback, Osweiler.

No, the Broncos shouldn't fear Mayfield's size, foundation (a college walk-on) or fiery leadership.

The professional option is Luck. He would come with even more questions. Luck has a bum shoulder that put the 28-year-old quarterback on injured reserve. Is it smart to take a shot on the only quarterback who's grounded the "No Fly Zone"? Could they convince the Colts, a 2-6 team with myriad needs, to divorce their furry franchise face in exchange for two first-round picks?

A former Stanford quarterback flourished here before. So did one who, as a Colt, plagued the Broncos and arrived with a sketchy injury. It seems worth a phone call, at least. The payoff can be golden.

And we are wise to keep Redskins free-agent-to-be Kirk Cousins on Colorado's wish list.

To his credit, Osweiler spent last week encouraging the locker room and Broncos Country not to pull the plug on this season. His bedside manner is soothing, like a pilot's announcement during heavy turbulence.

"On a personal note, it's hard to really put it into words, just because of how much love I have for this organization, my teammates and this city," Osweiler said.

The cheese was thicker than a Philly cheesesteak.

"I felt (the love) from my first day back," Osweiler said. "It wasn't handshakes. It wasn't, 'Hey, good to see you.' It was hugs."

What year is it?

"It kind of feels like 2015 again," Von Miller said of the quarterback swap.

Agreed. It feels like the Broncos won't know their quarterback until after the season.

Paul Klee's Broncos vs. Eagles report card and predictions

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
November 5, 2017

Klee's Scorecard

Offense

Who's ready to Brock? The Broncos are. This, from Vance Joseph, shows they still believe - after all the drops, interceptions and whiffed blocks - that their offense can be dangerous: "I'm anxious to see where we are if we don't turn the ball over to see how good we can be."

Advantage: Eagles

Defense

Here's the No. 1 issue for the Broncos - against any defense - with rolling with Osweiler at QB: subbing for Peyton Manning in the '15 Super Bowl season, the Brock Lobster was sacked 20 times in seven games. Philly ranks fifth with 22 sacks. His pocket awareness will be tested.

Advantage: Broncos

Special teams

He seems like a sweetheart of a man and attacks every practice with enthusiasm previously unknown to mankind. But there's one development that would rate a 10 on the Surprise Scale: Brock Olivo returning for a second year as Broncos special teams coordinator. It's been a dud.

Advantage: Eagles

Coaching

Excepting Kyle Shanahan, charged with a total rebuild of the 49ers, a fair comparison for Vance Joseph is other first-time coaches. The Bills' Sean McDermott (5-3) and Rams' Sean McVay (5-2) own playoff contenders. Anthony Lynn's Chargers shut out the Broncos, 21-0.

Advantage: Eagles

Intangibles

When John Elway signed Brock Osweiler a second time, the GM said the quarterback needed "football rehab." As he returned to the Broncos' huddle, Osweiler said: "Guess I'm checking out." Expect Osweiler to inspire a listless huddle, for a week, but not enough for the upset.

Advantage: Broncos

Klee's prediction: Eagles (-8) 20, Broncos 16 (Overall record: 5-2, ATS record: 6-1)

-Paul Klee

Woody Paige: Osweiler's odd road back to Broncos

By Woody Paige

Colorado Springs Gazette

November 5, 2017

How long for the Wiz of Os this time?

Brock's back.

Do the Broncos have Brock's back? Can they support it?

Brock Osweiler will be the Broncos' starting quarterback Sunday for the first time in 22 months and 26 games.

Weirdly enough, two other Broncos' quarterbacks had longer spans between starts — Steve Ramsey (27 games) from 1972-74 and Gary Kubiak (66) from 1984-1988.

Osweiler's last start was Jan. 3, 2016.

Weirdly enough, the coach who removed Osweiler with 8:18 remaining in the third quarter, the series after the Chargers grabbed a 13-7 lead, was Kubiak. Osweiler received credit for the victory when Peyton Manning and the Broncos came from behind to win 27-20. Osweiler didn't play in the postseason, but received a Super Bowl ring, as did Manning, the man he replaced that season, and Siemian, the man he replaces this season. Oh, the ironies of irony.

Osweiler has been on a hiatus.

Similar situations have happened for four NFL quarterbacks — including two who once played for the Broncos. After Brian Griese was John Elway's successor at quarterback from 1998-2002, he would start for the Buccaneers in 2004-05 and returned to Tampa Bay to start again in 2008. Steve DeBerg, who started 12 games in Denver in 1981-83 as Elway's predecessor, played for the Bucs from 1984-87 and went back to that team in 1993, starting one game.

It had been assumed Osweiler was a one-season wonder as Broncos starter.

However, The Most Hated Athlete in Colorado since Carmelo Anthony departed becomes The Great Brock Hope in his comeback.

Twenty-five of Osweiler's former teammates (active roster, injured reserved, practice squad) are current Broncos.

One veteran, who asked not to be named, told me: "We got Brock's back. He's a great dude. He looked really comfortable lately, even better than two years ago. ... Forget that (stuff) of last year. He's matured from what he went through. He can handle this offense and knows us. This ain't nothing against Trevor, but change does us good. Brock did this before. We shoulda won all the games he played that year. What he did when Peyton was hurt and all, we wouldn't have won the Super Bowl. We got to catch fire, and he can help us do that."

Brock's starting record (including the Chargers' game) in '15 was 5-2.

He took over for Manning on Nov. 13 in the third quarter as the Broncos trailed the Chiefs at home 22-0. After flinging an interception, Osweiler guided the Broncos to two touchdowns in the 29-13 defeat.

In his first start at Chicago (when temperatures dropped into the teens), Osweiler connected with Demaryius Thomas on a 48-yard touchdown, and the Broncos were ahead throughout, winning 17-9 as the Bears got a rubbish score late.

The next week at home was Brock's most critical examination — vs. the Patriots. The Broncos were down 21-7 in the third quarter, but went up on a Brock TD toss with 64 seconds remaining in regulation. New England tied the game at 24 on a last-play field goal, but the Broncos scored on their first overtime possession on a 48-yard C.J. Anderson dash.

In San Diego the Broncos scored twice in the opening quarter and casually beat the Chargers 17-3. But, at Mile High Stadium against the Raiders, the Broncos didn't score a touchdown while losing 15-12 after Brandon McManus bounced a field-goal attempt off the upright. Osweiler threw for 308 yards, but couldn't push the Broncos in from the red zone three times.

The Dec. 20 game in Pittsburgh was a tale of two halves — the best of times and the worst of times. In the first half Osweiler threw for three touchdowns and ran for one as the Broncos went up 27-10. But the Steelers replied with three touchdowns in the second half while the Broncos had zero points. Osweiler fronted another overtime triumph (20-17) against the Bengals to give the Broncos an 11-4 record.

The finale against the Chargers and coach Mike McCoy was the last game Osweiler started for the Broncos — until this Sunday.

As I wrote here recently, he is one of only three active NFL QBs to have the opportunity to be on a playoff team from 2012-2017.

Brock's back to the future.

Jerry Jones, Robert Kraft, Bob McNair to be deposed in Kaepernick collusion grievance

By Mike Jones

USA Today

November 5, 2017

Proceeding with their collusion grievance against NFL owners under the collective bargaining agreement, quarterback Colin Kaepernick's legal team has demanded the deposition of a group of owners that includes the Dallas Cowboys' Jerry Jones, the New England Patriots' Robert Kraft and Houston Texans' Bob McNair, a person with knowledge of the situation confirmed.

The person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the ongoing dispute, said Kaepernick's team is also looking to depose Seattle's Paul Allen and San Francisco. And Baltimore Steve Bisciotti is among a group of other owners that Kaepernick has requested discovery items from in advance of deposition. Officials from other teams also have been targeted for questioning.

The owners will be asked to turn over e-mails and cell phone records. The investigation, which is moving at an expedited pace under provision of the CBA, requires an arbitration hearing.

Kaepernick, who last season began kneeling during the National Anthem as a protest against police brutality and racial and social injustice, has remained unsigned since opting out of his contract with the 49ers during the spring. San Francisco general manager John Lynch, who was hired this offseason, had said that even had Kaepernick not opted out, the 49ers would have released the quarterback.

Kaepernick, who led the 49ers to a Super Bowl appearance at the end of the 2011-12 season, generated some brief interest from the Baltimore Ravens during the preseason, but after receiving a backlash from the public, the team opted against signing him.

This season, the NFL has seen a higher number of starting quarterbacks suffer season-ending injuries. That group includes Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers, Arizona's Carson Palmer, Miami's Ryan Tannehill and Minnesota's Sam Bradford. However, Kaepernick didn't generate any interest from those teams. Teams like the Tennessee Titans and Oakland Raiders saw their quarterbacks suffer short-term injuries, and they signed less accomplished quarterbacks than Kaepernick, which only added to the suspicion that the quarterback is being blackballed because of his political stances.

Kaepernick filed the collusion grievance against the NFL's owners on Oct. 15. He chose to file his grievance without the help of the NFL Players Association, but instead hired attorney Mark Geragos to represent him.

In a statement issued on Oct. 15, Geragos said, "If the NFL (as well as all professional sports leagues) is to remain a meritocracy, then principled and peaceful political protest – which the owners themselves made great theater imitating weeks ago – should not be punished and athletes should not be denied employment based on partisan political provocation by the Executive Branch of our government. Such precedent threatens all patriotic Americans and harkens back to our darkest days as a nation. Protecting all athletes from such collusive conduct is what compelled Mr. Kaepernick to file his grievance.

“Colin Kaepernick’s goal has always been, and remains, to simply be treated fairly by the league he performed at the highest level for and to return to the football playing field.”

This past week’s quarterback-related drama only further strengthened Kaepernick’s argument.

The Indianapolis Colts placed quarterback Andrew Luck on injured reserve, and the Houston Texans had to place Deshaun Watson on IR as well. Meanwhile, the Cleveland Browns sought quarterback help but botched a trade.

However, Kaepernick’s phone remained silent.

Reassessing the QB Market in a Garoppolo-49ers World, the Browns and the Worst of Both Worlds, Deshaun Watson and the World of the Future

By Gary Grambling
MMQB
November 5, 2017

1a. Don't get carried away, but it's O.K. to be a little bit giddy about the Jimmy Garoppolo trade if you're a 49ers fan. We don't know exactly what Garoppolo is going to be (well, aside from unsettlingly handsome in a Brandon Routh-as-Superman way). He was quite reigned in when New England beat the Cardinals in last year's opener (his big plays were a result of obvious coverage busts), and then he looked sharp in executing a more aggressive, expansive game plan the next week against Miami before getting hurt. Basically, there's two quarters of film to go off of.

But the Patriots' body language is encouraging. Bill Belichick seemed desperate to keep him, which suggests he believes a coach can design an expansive offense around Garoppolo. The physical tools are there, so the question is whether he can find the coach that makes him comfortable and the system that allows him to play with confidence and ultimately thrive. It's in Kyle Shanahan's hands now.

The 49ers have everything working in their favor in terms of a contract. They can sign Garoppolo to a long-term deal that's entirely to their liking, because since they're sitting on a Browns-like amount of cap space for 2018 they can franchise-tag him with little consequence. And if they tag him and then they have to give him a record contract because he played like Aaron Rodgers in 2018, that's not the worst problem to have. As far as the second-rounder they gave up, they still have their first-round pick, and if it ends up being a top-two pick they can cash it in for a load of picks as teams try to get their hands on Sam Darnold or Josh Rosen, the consensus clear-cut top-two QBs right now.

On top of that, the 2018 draft is shaping up to be one that lacks elite non-QB talent but has good depth throughout. The Niners still own four picks likely to be in the top 75, as they own the Saints' second and the Bears' third. So it's good to be the Niners right now. At least as long as you don't pay attention to any of the games they play in 2017.

1b. Garoppolo is the first domino to fall in what should be an awesomely outrageous QB market this offseason. With Garoppolo and the 49ers crossed off the list, here's how it's shaping up:

IN DESPERATE NEED

Cleveland
Denver (probably, Paxton Lynch is the wild card)
Jacksonville
Minnesota (unless they retain Bradford or Bridgewater)
New Orleans (unless Brees gets long-term deal)
N.Y. Jets
Washington (unless Cousins gets long-term deal)

COULD (SHOULD?) BE CONSIDERING A LONG-TERM CHANGE

Baltimore
Buffalo
Cincinnati

SHOPPING FOR QB OF THE FUTURE

Arizona
L.A. Chargers
N.Y. Giants
New England
Pittsburgh

Veteran QBs potentially available: Drew Brees, Alex Smith, Kirk Cousins, Sam Bradford, Teddy Bridgewater, AJ McCarron, Tyrod Taylor

2. I have questioned the Browns front office on their overall approach (putting together a group that goes 2-30 or so over two seasons and then expecting an eventual turnaround with that same nucleus seems like a bad idea). And on the specifics of it (no matter what your spreadsheets say, \$33 million for Kenny Britt and a second-round pick is not money well spent). But the fact remains: Jimmy and Dee Haslam put the organization on this path. They have to give it more than two years to play out.

Whatever happened with Sashi Brown and Co. with the doomed AJ McCarron deal email they sent from clevelandbrowns1@hotmail.com, I have to think that two picks for AJ McCarron was not in the front office's rebuild plans. Because if the rebuild plan is we're gonna pass on Carson Wentz and Deshaun Watson and then trade two picks for AJ McCarron, that's a bad plan. (One clue that McCarron maybe isn't worth the price: the Bengals were more than willing to send McCarron, whom they've never given a chance to unseat Andy Dalton, to a division rival. Well, division opponent. I'm not sure the Browns are anyone's rival right now.) This was obviously a Hue Jackson move, and that's troubling.

Was Jackson ever really on board with the front office's approach? Or did he simply get impatient when Wentz and Watson turned out to be stars? Is Jackson going rogue, and/or are the Haslams going to stick their hands in this again? And if they do, isn't that the worst scenario possible: Ownership interfering with the rebuild to make a questionable long-term plan a half-baked plan as well? Right now, it feels like the Haslams are in front of King Solomon as he says, "Cut the child in two," and they're just like, "Yeah, we're cool with that."

3. As soon as Adam Gase took the job in Miami two winters ago, I thought Jay Ajayi was a goner. He wasn't this regime's pick, and he wasn't a fit for a coach who deep down wants to throw, throw, throw. Good on Ajayi for performing so well that Gase had no choice but to keep feeding him.

Of course, Ajayi's disappointing performance this year opened the door for the Dolphins to make the move. Last year he had five rushes of 35 yards or more, including three of 50-plus. This year, his season long run is 21 yards. I'm not sure what he is long-term, but it feels like his 2017 numbers are probably a little more indicative of his future than his '16 stat line.

4a. The reaction to the Deshaun Watson ACL tear was a bit over the top. Like the kind of reaction you'd expect if everyone in the world's dogs simultaneously passed away.*

It's disappointing, for sure, as Watson was an absolute joy to watch. (Will Tom Savage be able to replicate Watson's rare brand of athletic playmaking? Only time will tell.) But it's a torn ACL. In an unlikely and absolute worst case scenario, a slow recovery and conservative approach to rehab, he's not back until the 2019 opener. At which point he'll be a week or so shy of his 24th birthday.

But the injury does move up a conversation that we were going to have in January or February: What's next for Watson? Everything the Texans have done since Week 3 has been brilliant and worked almost perfectly. It's been heavy on motion and misdirection though, and it's fair to expect opposing defenses to handle it better with a full offseason to break it down.

Whether it's paranoia or not, Houston now has a franchise player with a, let's say, "less than Cam Newton" frame and a tendency to be reckless with his body, coming off a torn ACL. It's not just a matter of limiting designed runs, it's the question of whether they can get the ball out of his hand quickly on a consistent basis.

The good news is that the Texans will have a full offseason to cook something up. The better news is that Watson improved at breakneck speed as a passer, and coming into last year's draft people in the league seemed to love everything about him from an intelligence and intangibles aspect. Plus, as our Albert Breer consistently points out, at Clemson Watson already had to go through the process of having opposing defenses adjust over an offseason and take parts of his game away. The future is promising, even if we'll miss him over the course of the next nine games.

* — GAMEDAY 10 THINGS POP CULTURE CROSSOVER UNDENIABLY TRUE FACT BROUGHT TO YOU BY SHASTA COLA: Everyone in the world's dog dying simultaneously was actually the original plot for the film *All Dogs Go to Heaven*. Lars von Trier, fresh off the breakthrough success of *The Element of Crime*, was on board to direct a film examining the darkness of the master-pet dynamic and normalization of grief. But the suits at Disney—always with the notes!—decided it was not going to be the heart-warming children's film they had hoped for and put the film on hiatus before reviving the project as an animated film. As always, be sure to share that fact at your next social gathering and insist that it is true. And drink plenty of Shasta Cola, now available in a single-serving four-liter bottle.

4b. I don't want to imply that this has some bigger, deeper meaning, but this is my favorite play of Watson's rookie year. This is a third-and-14 from last Sunday in Seattle. He takes off with the ball, and three Seahawks defenders have eyes on him. There is no way he should get to the sticks here:

And yet:

It's like, after six quarters, he had managed to fully recalibrate and adjust to the speed of the NFL and can now map out these escapes on the fly. Or maybe he was just incredibly lucky here. Either way, it was neat.

4c. I was fairly sure the Watt/Mercilus injuries ended the Texans' playoff hopes, but now the Watson injury surely does. Which is disappointing, because with the animosity between players and management in Houston right now, I was looking forward to the Texans attempting to Major League this thing. I like to think that, somewhere in a storage room at NRG Stadium, there's a life-sized cardboard cutout of Bob McNair with peel-away clothes. (Wait, I don't like the thought of that at all.)

5. Vance Joseph toggling back and forth between Siemian and Osweiler early Tuesday morning:

The offensive line and the run game have been a disappointment again, even after investing two big free-agent deals and a first-round pick to help up front. They have two game-manager quarterbacks in Siemian and Osweiler, but don't have the run game to prop up either one. Paxton Lynch was expected to be a multi-year project, but Denver never found the right bridge guy (remember the heady days of Mark Sanchez: Denver Bronco?). All of this is out of Lynch's control, but he needs to get back on the field and show something in the second half of the season. Because if he doesn't prove he can be the answer, the Broncos have to make another move at quarterback this offseason. They can't waste another year with a D this good.

6. A public service announcement: There have already been 45 fumbled punt returns this season, on pace for 96 on the year, which would be the most in a season since Sport Radar360 started tracking the stat in 2000. Last year there were only 50 all year. There is a fumble once every 25.1 punts this year. Last year it was once every 46.7 punts.

Make no mistake: This is an epidemic. Should you or a loved one encounter a punt this weekend, do not try to engage with it. If you can, run away while screaming hysterically in order to warn others of the danger. If it's too late to run, curl into a fetal position and stay as still as possible, like you would if you encountered a T-Rex. (Well, a T-Rex from the Jurassic Park films; in reality a T-Rex likely had very good if not excellent eyesight.)

In conclusion: An absurd number of punts are being fumbled, and Jurassic Park needed more stegosaurus, which is the best dinosaur. Stay safe out there.

7. Richie Incognito is the latest player to point out the obvious: Thursday Night Football is even crappier for players than it is for fans.

Of course, it's good for owners, who like the money it generates in the short-term (even if the over-saturation of the product and consistent crumminess of a primetime game has consequences). So that said, here's the solution that works for everyone when the league and the players sit down to negotiate the next CBA:

a) The players agree to extend the regular season one more week, creating a second bye week for all teams. Thursday Night Football continues, with the matchups confined to teams who did not play the previous Sunday or Monday.

b) The owners agree to eliminate the personal-conduct policy, doing away with a kangaroo court that is often unfair to the players and, more importantly, has fueled a PR nightmare for the league. Individual teams can handle off-the-field incidents and deal with the fallout themselves.

Both sides win. And calculating the billable hours (one-fifth of an hour) at my rate, both sides now owe me a bag of candy corn.

8. The first week of November is, without a doubt, the best time of the year. Because it's when you're going to get your best deals on candy corn.

I've seen all the objectively incorrect candy corn takes, including from Mike Leach, the now-disgraced (as far as I'm concerned, because of both the candy corn take and incorrect use of the phrase "begs the question") head coach at Washington State:

So I wanted to take a moment to clear up a couple of misconceptions:

a) Candy corn is served only seasonally for quality-control reasons. Big Candy Corn (your Brach's, your Jelly Belly, to a lesser extent your Sunrise) could produce it year-round to keep up with the demand, but the product would suffer.

b) A lot of people claim they can't eat a lot of corn because they get sick. That's only if you quit too early. With candy corn, once you get the first wave of nausea, the only way you can offset it is with more candy corn. You have to power through to your second wind. (But at that point be careful, because if you eat too much you will get violently ill.)

Some would argue that not liking candy corn is actually a sign of cowardice. And they would be correct. If you'd like to learn more, I teach a candy-corn eating class at the learning annex every Tuesday night during the spring and summer.

9. I was gonna write something on Papa John this week, but I'm still wrapping my head around this. The guy's poor PR people now have to deal with being branded the go-to pizza of white supremacists. I'm not a multi-millionaire and don't plan on becoming one, but between John Schnatter and Jerry Jones, I wonder if there is a certain amount of wealth you accrue after which point you no longer realize that your words have consequences.

10. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Sparta!

Injuries: Emmanuel Sanders (ankle) to play vs. Eagles

By Staff

NFL.com

November 5, 2017

Brock Osweiler will have a key piece of the Denver offense to throw to when he makes his first start of the season for the Broncos today.

NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport reported wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who missed the last two weeks with an ankle injury, will play against the Philadelphia Eagles.

Here are other injury notes we're tracking early this morning:

1. Dallas Cowboys receiver Cole Beasley will play against the Kansas City Chiefs despite suffering a concussion last week against the Washington Redskins, Rapoport reported.
2. The newest Philadelphia Eagle, running back Jay Ajayi, will suit up just days after being traded from the Miami Dolphins, Rapoport reported. Rapoport added to expect only a small package of plays for the new Eagle RB.

Eagles tight end Zach Ertz (hamstring) is also expected to play.

3. Baltimore Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco (concussion), Miami Dolphins quarterback Jay Cutler (ribs) and Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Jameis Winston (shoulder) are all set to play today, even though they were listed as questionable on their respective injury reports, Rapoport reported.
4. Washington Redskins running back Rob Kelley (ankle) is expected to play against the Seattle Seahawks, though he won't have a full workload, Rapoport reported.

Broncos Week 9 Injury Report: Denver Broncos Are Mostly Healthy To Play The Philadelphia Eagles

By Rick Brown

CBS Local

November 5, 2017

The Denver Broncos (3-4) will be bringing a mostly healthy squad to Lincoln Financial Field on Sunday to play the Philadelphia Eagles (7-1). There are only three Broncos players listed as questionable and one player that has been ruled out for Sunday's contest.

The Broncos offense is ranked near the bottom of the league so it needs all the help it can get. Unfortunately, the team may be without Emanuel Sanders and Ron Leary. Sanders has missed the last two weeks and the team's big play potential has suffered. Newly anointed starting quarterback Brock Osweiler needs Sanders' speed on the outside to get defenses to stop stacking the box. The Broncos' run game may take another step backward if Leary is not able to suit up on Sunday.

Denver Broncos Mix And Match Offensive Line Players

The last three weeks have been a real test to the Broncos' offensive line as at least one player has been ruled out. This week is no different, as Donald Stephenson will be missing his second game. Additionally, Leary is questionable, and if he misses the game it will cause a lot of shuffling along the offensive line. This unit has been tasked with protecting Osweiler, who has not started a regular season game this year. There is some talent up front, but the line cannot seem to produce consistent good play. The line has given up 17 sacks through seven games – that is two sacks a game.

Cody Latimer and Menelik Watson also appeared on the injury report, but were full participants in Friday's practice.

It appears that all but one starter will be healthy on the defensive side of the ball.

Broncos Defense Looks Healthy And Ready For Eagles

There are only three Broncos defensive players listed on the injury report. Todd Davis is officially listed as questionable. Shane Ray and Will Parks both showed up on the report, but were full participants in practice all week long. Expect Davis to be a game-time decision.

Questionable:

(ILB) Davis, Todd (Ankle) – Limited Participation In Practice

(G) Leary, Ron (Elbow) – Limited Participation In Practice

(WR) Sanders, Emanuel (Ankle) – Limited Participation In Practice

Out:

(T) Stephenson, Donald (Calf) – Did Not Participate In Practice

How science is moving toward diagnosing and treating the NFL's biggest problem: Brain injuries

By Ronni Jacobson

CNBC

November 5, 2017

The announcement in September that former New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez had severe Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE, when he took his own life in prison last spring at age 27, was tragic, but not necessarily surprising.

CTE is linked with both a heightened risk for aggression (Hernandez had been convicted of killing his former roommate) and suicide. He joined a growing list of athletes whose brains revealed evidence of CTE, according to scientists at Boston University's CTE Center, who examined him post-mortem.

That same month, scientists at Boston University's CTE Center announced that they had identified a potential biomarker that could possibly be used to detect CTE in living patients. Currently CTE, the term for brain damage that occurs after repeated head trauma such as from football tackles, can only be diagnosed in autopsy.

The discovery could lead to "a potential therapeutic target," but ultimately treatments and even diagnosis stemming from the discovery are "too far out to speculate," said Jonathan Cherry, a postdoctoral fellow and lead author on the paper.

But is there anything that can be done for patients now? In fact, a biomarker or blood test is not needed to diagnose severe traumatic brain injury, or TBI, which directly causes CTE when built up over time, as in football, according to Cherry and other researchers. It can be detected in living patients. Every single NFL player whose brain has been found to be afflicted with CTE has displayed symptoms of traumatic brain injury while alive. Both are characterized by problems with thinking and regulating emotions, often manifesting as anger and irritability.

Friends and family can usually tell something is wrong. In one recent study of 111 NFL players' brains, all but one of which had CTE. Ninety percent displayed behavioral symptoms, such as depression, anxiety and anger, while living, according to relatives. Ninety-five percent had cognitive symptoms, such as problems remembering.

Traditionally, treatments for TBI have focused on the cognitive symptoms, improving memory and problem solving. Recently, however, there has been a surge in interest in tackling the emotional problems associated with both TBI and CTE.

"It's a really hot topic," said Tessa Hart, Director of the Moss Rehabilitation Research Institute TBI Clinical Research Laboratory. "If you can't remember things and if you can't express yourself and if you can't comprehend what people are saying to you, you are going to get really frustrated," Hart said. Inability to control one's emotions, especially anger, can often drive people away. This is especially problematic as social support is a major component in rehabilitation.

The emotional problems of TBI

The most recent issue of the journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation was dedicated entirely to treating the emotional and anger issues related to traumatic brain injury. Researchers are especially excited about the prospect of delivering therapy via telemedicine, including text messaging and apps, as many people with TBI are isolated, with limited access to health care, and currently receive no treatment for TBI-related anger or other emotional issues.

There are few current app-based interventions specifically for people with TBI, although there are a plethora of general cognitive behavior therapy and de-stressing apps that people may benefit from, including Behavior Tracker.

Hart recently conducted the largest and most rigorous clinical trial testing an intervention for emotional and anger issues related to TBI. In it, 90 people with moderate to severe TBI attended an hour and a half long therapy session once a week for eight weeks aimed at teaching participants skills like self-monitoring and problem solving, while another control group of people with TBI participated in generic talk therapy. Both groups improved significantly.

"Where the field is going is in technology," Hart said. She wants to redesign her treatment into a text-message based therapy. "Many people with traumatic brain injury don't have computers, but they have smartphones," Hart said. "Telemedicine would cut down on expensive face-to-face therapy," and address the social isolation many people with TBI feel.

Another study from the same issue tested a web-based group intervention for people with TBI — 91 individuals were put into random groups of three or four and participated in group therapy via videoconference, in hour-long sessions twice weekly for 12 weeks. Compared to their scores before, after the intervention participants made significant improvements in a host of issues, most dramatically in impulse control, followed by problem-solving, goals, clarity and awareness. Sessions were facilitated by GoToMeeting; participants clicked on an email link to join an anonymous chat.

Without the typical impulse-control mechanisms that get damaged in TBI, "the anger all people regularly experience translates into aggressive behaviors," said Theodore Tsaousides, neuropsychologist at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine who conducted the study. Not everyone with TBI becomes aggressive, however. One of the biggest predictors is alcohol abuse, which factor into the lives of up to two-thirds of people with TBI, and increases the risk of violence dramatically.

"Telemedicine would cut down on expensive face-to-face [traumatic brain injury] therapy."
-Tessa Hart, Director of the Moss Rehabilitation Research Institute TBI Clinical Research Lab

In addition to therapy, there's evidence that psychotropic drugs such as lithium, a mood stabilizer prescribed for bipolar disorder, may have protective effects on memory and cognition in TBI patients. Medical marijuana has also been found to be helpful; in one study people with TBI who used medicinal marijuana had a 2.4 percent mortality rate compared to nearly 10 percent mortality rate of people with TBI who did not partake.

"We talk a lot about the negative and problems that need to be solved. One thing I can say about brain injury is that people almost never totally give up," Hart said. "There's an incredible resiliency to a lot of people" with TBI, who are eager for treatments, she said. "I think a lot of professionals underestimate

the ability of people with brain injury. People can recover for years and learn lots of new things even if their brain is different."

What the NFL is doing

Neither Hart nor Tsaousides' studies included former NFL players as participants, as far as they are aware. Tsaousides did not ask participants about the nature of their injury, a decision he regrets. But Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, where Tsaousides works, is one of six medical schools around the nation partnered with the NFL Player Care Foundation neurological program, which evaluates and treats "possible neurological conditions" in retired players, with specialized care coordinated by a neurologist. Tsaousides recruited participants partly by posting fliers around the facility; it's possible some former NFL players participated, though he notes most were recruited online.

The NFL has historically sidestepped the link between CTE/TBI and the mental and emotional problems experienced by current and retired players. Lately there have been some encouraging steps: NFL Chief Medical Officer Allen Sills recently voiced support for exploring medical marijuana for treatment of TBI, a previously controversial stance within the organization. In addition to the neurological program, the NFLPCF, which looks after the affairs of retired players, offers free monthly screening sessions.

There is also the NFL Life Line, a free, confidential hotline open to all current and former players in crisis, who can call (800) 506-0078 and speak with a trained, licensed mental health counselor who can often help connect them with resources. Common topics include "relationship issues, financial stress, difficulty with transition, depression, anxiety, bereavement, chronic pain or suicidal thoughts," Life Line program director Ciara Dockery wrote in an email, noting that such issues are also present in the general population. Retired players and their families are also entitled to eight free therapy sessions, although it is unclear how many avail themselves of this resource.

"So many of these guys are taught from an early age that asking for help means admitting 'weakness,' something they have worked so hard not to show on the field," Dockery wrote. "We are trying to make it okay for them to ask for help, to show them that getting support for themselves is actually a sign of extreme strength."

Even more important, the NFL launched Play Smart, Play Safe, an initiative to drive progress in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of head injuries. It also aims to improve the way the game is taught and played. The league has pledged \$100 million in support for independent medical research and biomechanical research to improve helmet technology.

Still, Chris Kluwe, who retired from the Oakland Raiders in 2013 after previously playing for the Minnesota Vikings and Seattle Seahawks, and has since had a successful writing career, says that the NFL does not provide enough support to departing and retired players. Their struggles have been well documented — about 78 percent go bankrupt within two years of retirement. In addition, there are harrowing individual stories of current and former players detailing suicide, violence and substance abuse.

NFL insurance coverage extends for five years after retirement, after which players are mostly on their own, Kluwe said. Upon retirement, the NFL also provides a modest lump sum for medical expenses, but CTE is a chronic, degenerative disease requiring long-term rehabilitative care, which can stretch players to the limit financially. The NFLPCF does not pay for treatment in the neurological program, although

players can apply for grants. It also does not currently offer any telemedicine-counseling services that researchers are pushing for, according to Dockery, the Life Line director, other than technically the Life Line itself, which players can access by calling on the phone.