

Kiszla: Peyton Manning ain't walking through that door. The Broncos need to dumb down offense.

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
November 9, 2017

A four-game losing streak is bad enough. But it gets worse. The Broncos are uncertain how they want to win. Can you say identity crisis?

"I wouldn't say there's one thing that we can really hang our hat on right now," quarterback Brock Osweiler said Wednesday.

Well, alrighty then.

With the NFL season halfway gone, Denver on the brink of tumbling from playoff contention and Tom Brady on his way to our dusty old cow town, it's probably a little late for Vance Joseph and his coaching staff to be spitballing on what kind of team they want the Broncos to be.

But here we are, stuck with a 3-5 record and linebacker Shane Ray sitting in the Denver locker room, offering a blunt assessment of a team searching for answers.

"Our formula is off right now," Ray said.

The formula for Denver is not as complicated as the 11 secret herbs and spices of Colonel Sanders. There's nothing subtle about the Broncos. They run the rock on offense, and they get after the quarterback on defense. Or else they lose.

Those dramatic fourth-quarter comebacks? They retired with Peyton Manning.

Yes, the last time Osweiler started against New England, the Broncos did rally from a 21-7 deficit in the final 14 minutes, 50 seconds of regulation to record an overtime victory that kicked Denver's run to Super Bowl 50 into high gear. But, Osweiler admitted, "That game was a long ways back."

This Denver team is built to play from ahead, and it courts disaster whenever playing from behind.

While there are certainly more advanced metrics to analyze how the Broncos have unraveled, the most revealing statistic of this frustrating season is brutally simple.

When the Broncos began the season with a 3-1 record, they outscored opponents 27-0 in the first quarter.

During the 0-4 slide, the Broncos have been outscored 41-3 in the first quarter.

Maybe this defense isn't quite what it used to be. When the Broncos can take an early lead, however, Von Miller and Ray can tee off on the pass rush, while harried quarterbacks are forced to take chances against cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Chris Harris.

Denver's seven takeaways (five interceptions, two fumble recoveries) through eight games rank 28th among 32 NFL teams. Even worse, the minus-12 in turnover margin places the Broncos tied for dead last with Cleveland.

"When we're playing from behind, you're fighting an uphill battle. On first and second down, you're probably going to get runs. And on third down, if they're up by 21 points, the quarterback doesn't have to throw the ball down the field," Ray said. "As a defense, that destroys our entire chemistry of what we're trying to do."

Far too often the game plan devised by offensive coordinator Mike McCoy seems to have been devised as if he were still coaching veteran quarterback Philip Rivers in San Diego.

Five members of Denver's staff — general manager John Elway, QBs coach Bill Musgrave and adviser Gary Kubiak, as well as Joseph and McCoy — played quarterback in college and/or the pros. Maybe it's time for those men to swallow a little pride and dumb down the offense.

Early in the season, Talib bragged McCoy was operating the same offense that made Manning the NFL's most valuable player in 2013. The problem? Denver no longer has one of the most beautiful minds in football history playing quarterback.

I'm not suggesting the playbook be pared back to the remedial level presented to Tim Tebow in 2011. But let's see a four-quarter commitment to the run, more touches for running back Devontae Booker, use of an unbalanced offensive line to bludgeon the Patriots, an emphasis on blocking over receiving for the tight end and fewer decisions to be made by Osweiler on the field, both prior to the snap and from the pocket.

Denver has not enjoyed a seven-point lead in a game since Oct. 1. It might be nice for a change if the Broncos started fast.

"That's going to give our team a ton of momentum," Osweiler said.

How to do it?

The Broncos have two choices: KISS (keep it simple, stupid). Or kiss any hope for the playoffs goodbye.

Why Patriots Week is a barometer for a Broncos team on the brink

By Nicki Jhabvala
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As the Broncos took a beating in Philadelphia on Sunday, New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady was napping peacefully in a hammock on a beach in the Bahamas, getting the most out of his bye week before traveling to Colorado.

Though he told Boston-area WEEI radio that he included some film study of the Broncos on his tropical recess, Brady really didn't need to witness the team's latest disaster to understand what he'll be facing Sunday in Denver.

The Broncos are on the brink, still looking for answers to their myriad problems and still hoping they have time to save their sinking ship. And in recent seasons, their meetings with the Patriots have been the tipping points, either resurrecting a year in question or breaking a Denver team teetering on the edge.

"We've had a tough stretch here, so it's a perfect occurrence to play a team like this," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "It's the best of the best, so for us to get our good feeling back, it's the perfect opponent, and on national TV. So I'm very excited for Sunday night."

Denver's narrow window to right the season could close Sunday at the hands of Brady and the NFL's top offense. Or it may reopen, inviting renewed hope and creating a foundation of change for a team sorely in need.

"The best time to turn it around is against a team like this that's not going to beat themselves," running back C.J. Anderson said. "They're going to be very disciplined, very detailed and focused on their jobs and we can definitely take something from that."

The power of the Pats in Denver is real, and the Broncos don't need to look too far back for reminders.

In 2015, with quarterback Peyton Manning nursing a foot injury, Brock Osweiler guided the Broncos to a 30-24 victory in Denver that included 179 yards rushing and the game-winning score on a run check in overtime. The loss was the first for the Patriots that season and tilted the scale in Denver's favor as they embarked on a Super Bowl run. Two months later, in the AFC championship game in Denver, the Broncos' defense pummeled Brady with 17 hits and four sacks to punch their ticket to Super Bowl 50.

But in Week 15 of 2016, the Broncos experienced the other extreme. Brady and the Patriots' seemingly broke a tenuous Broncos locker room as frustration and losses piled up. Denver's defense held Brady to only 188 yards passing and zero touchdowns, but its offense couldn't find the end zone or snuff out the victory.

The Patriots clinched the AFC East with a 16-3 victory that Sunday. The Broncos went on to lose a third straight game, against Kansas City, and watched their playoff hopes crumble.

“Anytime you lose a game to the Patriots or a rival game, everybody is frustrated,” cornerback Chris Harris said afterward. “We feel like we played almost good enough defense to win that game. I don’t know if I’ve ever kept Brady under 16 points, and we did that today.”

What Harris didn’t reveal at the time were the rising tensions between cornerback Aqib Talib and offensive tackle Russell Okung that went down minutes earlier in the locker room.

Brady and the Patriots — perhaps simply being Brady and the Patriots — have a knack for tilting the scale in Denver.

“A lot of times, it’s not even who you play; it’s when you play them,” Patriots coach Bill Belichick told local media this week. “When you play a team at one point in the season and when you play a team at another point in the season, you’re not really getting the same team. That could actually be from week to week, too.

“But certainly teams go through phases where they’re playing well and then sometimes things happen and it drops off a little bit, or vice versa, a team looks like they’re not. The Chargers last week — they lost their first games and then came back and played very well and are playing really good football. To me, it seems like that way every year. It seems like that way every week, to be honest with you. It doesn’t really matter who you play.”

By that standard, the Patriots probably believe they’re arriving in Denver at the right time. The Broncos are reeling after a difficult three-game stretch on the road.

But the Broncos are heading into Sunday with a similar belief, that the timing and location are on their side. They’re finally home. And home has historically been good to them when facing the Patriots.

“I would like to think that. I would like to say we beat the Patriots, let’s go win these other seven games for a playoff berth. But that’s not realistically how the NFL works,” outside linebacker Shane Ray said. “Every week, you have to come out and win every game. Every game is going to come down to the fourth quarter. So this game right here is our sole focus, on trying to dominate this team and get this win. If we can get this win, then we can move to the next week and we build on our morale. But we have to put everything under a microscope right now. What can we do right now to fix this season. Next week, we can’t worry about that. Right now is the most important thing.”

In 31 meetings in Denver, including the postseason, the Broncos are 21-10 against their AFC East rival. Brady is 7-9 all time against the Broncos and 3-7 when playing them in Denver.

But when the Broncos prepare to face New England, those numbers are rarely considered — if ever. The Patriots’ consistency and winning history take precedence. The notion that they do have the power to make or break a season, even a team, is remembered.

“Every game is important,” Anderson said. “This is just as important as the last one. We definitely want to stop the streak that we’re on, losing-wise, and who better to do it against than the Patriots on ‘Sunday Night Football’? This is like a division game for me. I’ve played them so many times. They know me, I know them and the way they play the game, the way they approach it, how they’re coached — it’s perfect for us.”

Broncos place Menelik Watson on IR, sign OT Cyrus Kouandjio

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The Broncos' offensive line shuffle continues.

On Wednesday, the team placed starting right tackle Menelik Watson on season-ending injured reserve and signed former Buffalo Bills tackle Cyrus Kouandjio. Watson, who had been dealing with a calf injury that sidelined him for the Broncos' Week 7 loss at Los Angeles, injured his foot last Sunday in Denver's loss at Philadelphia.

"He had a torn tendon in his foot, so it's two options: with conservative treatment it would have been six-to-seven weeks, with surgery he was done," coach Vance Joseph said. "So we thought as a team it was best for him to go down and to bring a fresh body in for us."

Joseph said surgery for Watson isn't a definite, and that's it up to him. But for the season, he was going to need an extensive amount of time to recover.

The Broncos signed Watson as a free agent in March to take over the starting job from Donald Stephenson, a 2016 free-agent acquisition who struggled in his first season with the Broncos with injury and performance. Watson signed a three-year, \$18.375 million contract that included \$5.5 million guaranteed at signing and an average annual salary of \$6.125 million.

Watson spent the first four years of his NFL career in Oakland, where he dealt with a string of injuries that limited his time on the field. When he arrived in Denver, he expressed hope that the Broncos' training staff could help him get physically healthy and stay on the field.

"Some players work through those issues, and most of his issues were soft-tissue stuff. It was hamstrings, it was calf injuries," Joseph said. "So those things are preventable, so I wasn't overly concerned when we signed Menelik because of his past of soft-tissue injuries."

In his seven starts this season, Watson was charged with 7.5 sacks allowed, per STATS LLC.

Stephenson, who restructured his contract during the offseason to increase his guaranteed money to \$2.5 million for 2017 and eliminate his salary for 2018, has missed the last two games because of a calf injury. And earlier in the season, the Broncos placed backup lineman Billy Turner on injured reserve with a hand fracture.

The spate of injuries on the line leaves Elijah Wilkinson as the Broncos' only other fully healthy backup at tackle. Wilkinson was promoted to the active roster when Turner was placed on IR and has been active for one game but has played zero offensive snaps.

Kouandjio, a second-round pick by the Bills out of Alabama in 2014, started seven of 25 games in Buffalo over his first three seasons and was charged with only two sacks. The 6-foot-7, 325-pound veteran

started five games at left tackle in 2016, helping an offense that finished first in the NFL with 2,630 rushing yards and 29 rushing touchdowns.

“He is a big guy, a talent,” Joseph said. “A former second-round pick. He’s a young guy. It’s definitely worth bringing him in and looking at him. He’s a young guy with no miles on him.”

In June, Kouandjio signed a one-year contract with the Lions and competed with the team in preseason, but he was cut in late August as Detroit pared its final roster.

Having joined the Broncos only four days before the team faces the Patriots, Kouandjio appears unlikely to see much time at right tackle on Sunday. In Watson’s absence, the Broncos are considering veteran Allen Barbre, who started in the lone game Watson missed, as well as Stephenson and Wilkinson among potential starters at right tackle.

The Broncos on Wednesday also re-signed offensive lineman Dillon Day to the practice squad and waived receiver Tim Patrick. Day signed with the Broncos as an undrafted free agent in 2015 and spent most of his two-plus seasons on the practice squad. He was waived Oct. 24 as the Broncos’ shuffled their roster to account for injuries, and was claimed by the Colts. Indianapolis waived Day on Monday.

Broncos insist they are determined to get back to run-first formula vs. Patriots

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
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The Broncos rushing formula isn't complicated. In its three victories this season, Denver has rushed the ball an average of 35.6 times for 153.7 yards. In its five losses: 21.8 carries per game for 87.6 yards.

The only outlier was a 177-yard performance in a 29-19 loss to the Chiefs, the only game during Denver's four-game losing streak the Broncos had a realistic chance to win in the fourth quarter.

Large early deficits have played a role in the slumping rushing production in defeats. But the Broncos insisted Wednesday they can't allow circumstances to excuse an inability to run the ball, particularly given the team's consistent struggles in the passing game.

"We know when we run the ball we get a better chance (to win)," running back C.J. Anderson said. "We're not one-dimensional. That's what we want to do. We want to run the football. We want to be efficient while we're running it. Whether the o-line is playing really great that day, the running backs are playing really great that day or we're both playing (poorly) that day, it's up to us in our room to make more plays."

The Broncos are coming off their worst rushing performance of the season in their 51-23 loss to the Eagles on Sunday, tallying just 35 yards on 19 carries.

Denver hasn't passed more than 32 times in any victory this season. It's averaging 40.6 pass attempts in its losses.

"That's not what we're good at," Joseph said of pass-heavy totals. "We're good at running the football, controlling the clock and having manageable third downs."

Vote of confidence. No member of the Broncos' defense had ever been a part of a performance like Sunday's while playing in Denver.

The 51 points the Broncos allowed were the most since 2010, and none of the defensive players from that roster are still with the team.

The letdown against the Eagles was a rare sight for a defense that has been among the league's best for the better part of three seasons, which is why Joseph said he isn't concerned about the group's confidence heading into Sunday's game against New England and its top-ranked offense.

"I'm not concerned with that group," Joseph said. "It's a confident group. It's been a dominant group for a long time. It's a group that believes it can play well all the time."

Shane Ray, the Broncos' third-year linebacker, said there's "no question" the Broncos still possess one of the best defenses in the league.

“We’re not even worried about that,” he said. “We’re just worried about getting our chemistry back.”

Injury report. The Broncos switched up their practice routine Wednesday, with Joseph opting for a “jog through” because of numerous injuries on the both sides of the ball. The Broncos typically conduct a more full-speed practice on Wednesdays.

Wide receivers Demaryius Thomas (hamstring) and Bennie Fowler (ankle) joined offensive lineman Matt Paradis (back) and Ron Leary (elbow) as players who missed practice because of injuries.

Running back Jamal Charles and defensive tackle Domata Peko missed practice with their weekly veteran’s rest day.

The Broncos also had five players who were limited Wednesday: Anderson (ankle), linebacker Todd Davis (ankle), wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders (ankle), offensive tackle Donald Stephenson (calf) and safety Darian Stewart (thigh).

Broncos to place Menelik Watson on IR with foot injury, sign OT Cyrus Kouandjio

By Mike Klis

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The Denver Broncos will place starting right tackle Menelik Watson on season-ending injured reserve Wednesday and replace him on their 53-man roster by signing former University of Alabama and Buffalo Bills' offensive tackle Cyrus Kouandjio, sources told 9News.

Watson, who had battled calf problems in recent weeks, suffered a severe foot injury Sunday during the Broncos' 51-23 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles at Lincoln Financial Field.

Maybe, next year, the Broncos will try investing \$7 million annually in a right tackle.

The Broncos signed the free-agent Watson to a three-year, \$18.375 million contract in March, even though the injury-plagued tackle averaged just 7 games a season in his previous four years with the Oakland Raiders.

Although a strong run blocker, Watson struggled in pass protection in the seven games he played this season.

Watson replaced Donald Stephenson, who was signed as a free agent in 2016 to a three-year contract that paid him \$6 million in year one.

With Watson finished, he will be replaced at right tackle Sunday night by either Allen Barbre, a left guard by trade, or Stephenson, who has barely played in his second season with the Broncos and missed the past two games with a strained calf.

Kouandjio, 24, is a 6-foot-7, 322-pound former All American who was the Bills' second-round draft pick in 2014.

He started five games for the Bills last year, but then suffered a fall at his home in January that resulted in a hip injury that required surgery to repair.

He was released by both the Bills and the Lions this year.

Ageless Tom Brady reaches prime at 40

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Where do you stand with Tom Brady? Do you hate him? Do you hate, Tom Brady?

I can't. I'm too fascinated by greatness.

Supposedly, this was a sixth-round talent. Yet, 18 seasons later, he is the NFL's all-time winner. A 189-54 record in the regular season. A ridiculous 25-9 mark in the postseason. An 5-2 record in Super Bowls.

Nice scouting system, NFL.

"I just love his competitive spirit," said Broncos' quarterback Brock Osweiler, who was 1-0 against Brady in 2015, but 0-2 last year when he was with the Houston Texans. "Maybe the best example was probably in the Super Bowl. He's never going to quit. He plays with a lot of fire. A lot of passion. That makes him a lot of fun to watch."

Yes, the comeback from 28-3 against the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl LI was impressive. Or maybe the best example of Brady's fire was his end zone spike against the Broncos in a 2011 game that was so vicious, it punctured Tebowmania.

You'll hear the Broncos say things they have to do to beat the Patriots this Sunday night (6:30 kickoff, 9News). Truth is, their chance may be if Von Miller knocks the wind of the Brady early in the first quarter, and he can't play again until next week.

Otherwise, Brady is too good. He's too handsome. He's too ageless.

I don't get it. Peyton Manning reached the finish line at 39 with nothing left. Tom Brady is 40 and in the last two seasons he has 44 touchdown passes against 4 interceptions.

"I don't see a drop-off at all," said Broncos head coach Vance Joseph. "He's obviously a smart football player. His arm talent is excellent. His ball placement has been excellent. His poise in the pocket. Obviously, he's one of the best all-time."

We've heard it said that in sports, Father Time is undefeated. He's meeting his match in Tom Brady.

Wide Receivers times two on the Broncos Huddle

By Rod Mackey

9 News

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If the Broncos are to upset the Patriots at home on Sunday night, there's no doubt that their offense will need to do a better job keeping up.

The Denver defense has been great in every game but their last game in Philadelphia, but its rare that a team totally slows down Tom Brady. On the Broncos Huddle on Wednesday night, it was wide receivers times two with both Emmanuel Sanders and Cody Latimer on the show.

Latimer was one of the few Broncos who played well against the Eagles. Latimer had two big catches for 51 yards, including a team best 32 yard reception. The former Hoosier is in his final season with the Broncos, so some believe he has to keep stepping up like this for the Broncos to "show him the money."

Still Latimer has made his mark as a special teams star. He demonstrated several tricks to the trade on the Huddle.

Broncos D out to prove that loss to Eagles was just a bad day

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Somewhere in the middle of the numbers, the touchdowns and a four-game losing streak is the truth about the Denver Broncos defense.

The group, which has spent much the past six seasons among the league's best, is currently ranked No. 2 overall, No. 5 against the run and No. 4 against the pass. It has the No Fly Zone secondary, it has Von Miller and plenty of swagger, yet its members don't seem all that happy.

"If you are not good and you are losing and teams are putting up 50 points against you, you just have to figure something out," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said.

That is what a soul-crushing 51-23 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles has done to them. Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz tossed four touchdown passes against the Broncos last Sunday before sitting out the fourth quarter because of the lopsided score.

It was the first time the Broncos had surrendered at least 50 points since the 2010 season, a season the Broncos finished 4-12. It was so bad that, as linebacker Shane Ray said Wednesday, "It was embarrassing, [the network] switched the game, that's embarrassing to lose like that."

Now, after weeks of hearing the narrative that the Broncos' defense was tired of pulling the team's struggling offense through the season, a two-ton elephant may or may not be in the room. Was Sunday's loss to the 8-1 Eagles just one of those days, or did Philadelphia crack the code on the team's best unit?

The Eagles, with 419 yards of offense, are the only team to have topped 276 yards against the Broncos this season. Philadelphia's 197 yards rushing was the highest total, by 49 yards, against the Broncos this season. The Eagles are one of only two teams to have rushed for more than 80 yards against Denver.

The Eagles were prepared and precise with an MVP candidate at quarterback. The New England Patriots -- the Broncos' opponent Sunday night -- have made a dynasty-long living of being prepared and precise and have their own perennial MVP candidate at quarterback in Tom Brady.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph believes his group can rise to the occasion in prime time.

"It's a confident group. It's been a dominant group for a long time," Joseph said. "It's a group that believes it can play well all the time. It happens. [The Eagles] had a great game plan."

The Patriots also feature one of the best tight ends, a position that has given the Broncos trouble, in Rob Gronkowski. He has three career 100-yard games against the Broncos with seven career touchdown catches (playoffs included). He's second on the Patriots' offense in catches (34) this season and tied for the team lead in touchdowns (five).

The Eagles held Zach Ertz, who is their leading receiver, out of Sunday's game with a hamstring injury, yet their tight ends still combined for five catches, 80 yards and a touchdown. The week before that, Travis Kelce of the Chiefs had 133 yards receiving and a touchdown. Earlier this season, the Giants' Evan Engram had 82 yards and a touchdown, and the Cowboys' Jason Witten had 97 yards receiving and a touchdown.

Even as the Broncos were ranked as the league's top overall defense for much of the first eight weeks of the season, their propensity to allow a big play was far more noticeable than in the previous two seasons, when they finished No. 1 in pass defense. Last season, for example, they surrendered 34 completions of 20 or more yards, and just three of those plays were touchdowns.

This season they've already surrendered 20 completions of at least 20 yards in eight games, and seven of those have been touchdowns. Overall, the Broncos have surrendered 16 touchdown passes -- one for every 9.3 completions -- three more than they did all of last season.

Some of the Broncos believe the frustration of losing five of the past six games has some of the players on defense trying too hard to make a game-changing play outside of their assignments. Against the Patriots they simply have to play more assignment-responsible football or Brady will do what Wentz did and more.

"The problem is everybody hasn't done their job," Ray said. "... I jumped offsides twice [against the Eagles] ... that cost the team ... I'm so frustrated I'm trying to do this and that. I can't do that. That's me out of character, that's me freelancing. I need to do my job ... we all do."

Broncos' battered offensive line once again filled with injury questions

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Yet again the Denver Broncos have reached the halfway point of season unable to consistently keep the same lineup in the offensive line.

It was an issue in the team's Super Bowl season in 2015, was an issue last season, and it is certainly an issue now. And a glimpse at Wednesday's practice made it clear there are plenty of question marks to be found with half a season still on the docket.

Right tackle Menelik Watson, who has dealt with a calf injury this season, went to injured reserve Wednesday after he suffered a torn tendon in his foot in Sunday's loss to the Philadelphia Eagles. Also Wednesday center Matt Paradis, who despite offseason surgery on both of his hips has never missed a start, was held out of practice with a back injury, and right guard Ron Leary was held out of practice with an elbow injury.

That's three of the opening-game starters up front who did not practice Wednesday as the Broncos prepare for their ninth game of the season. And Watson's backup, Donald Stephenson, was limited in practice as he continues to recover from a calf injury. The Broncos once again added center Dillon Day, who has been on the their practice in each of the last two seasons, to their practice squad as insurance for Paradis.

Stephenson has been a gameday inactive for each of the last four games. Broncos coach Vance Joseph said Allen Barbre, who started in Watson's place at right tackle in the Broncos' Oct. 22 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers, or Stephenson was the most likely candidate to start Sunday night against the New England Patriots.

The Broncos also signed tackle Cyrus Kouandjio, a former second-round pick by the Buffalo Bills in 2014. The 6-foot-7, 325-pound Kouandjio was easy to spot at Wednesday's practice, but Joseph said he was uncertain Kouandjio would be ready to play by this weekend.

"He is a big guy, a talent, former second-round pick, a young guy," Joseph said. "Definitely worth bringing him in."

Joseph added the decision to move Watson to injured reserve was made because if he had surgery to repair the tendon, Watson's season would be over and that if he tried to rehab the injury without surgery Joseph said it would be at least "six, seven weeks."

Asked if Watson, who now has not played more than 12 games in any of his five NFL seasons, would have surgery, Joseph said: "not sure, they're both going to be long-term."

Menelik Watson's bid for a healthy season ends as foot injury sends him to Broncos IR

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Add it to the list of things that haven't gone the way the Broncos had hoped, but right tackle Menelik Watson's attempt to have "a good, healthy season" ended Wednesday when Denver moved him to injured reserve.

Coach Vance Joseph said the injury that moved Watson to IR is a torn tendon in his foot, although Watson is also dealing with a calf injury.

Watson, who had never played more than 12 games in any of his previous four seasons in the league because of a variety of injuries, had consistently expressed the hope that his work with the Broncos' training staff would improve his odds.

But Watson originally suffered his calf injury in the Broncos' Oct. 15 loss to the Giants and then missed the following game -- against the Chargers. He had been limited in practice in the weeks since, but had started the Broncos' last two games -- losses to the Chiefs and the Eagles.

After Sunday's 51-23 loss to the Eagles, when Watson injured his foot, he was clearly in discomfort as he limped from the training room through the locker room. The Broncos have signed former Buffalo Bills tackle Cyrus Kouandjio to the roster.

Kouandjio started seven games in 2015 and 2016 combined for the Bills. The Broncos had started Allen Barbre in Watson's right tackle spot against the Chargers, in what was a difficult day for Barbre and the Broncos' offensive line overall in the shut-out loss.

Watson was one of the Broncos' first targets in free agency this past offseason, along with guard Ron Leary, when he signed a three-year, \$18.75 million deal with the team. He has flourished at times in the run game but has been inconsistent in pass protection as the Broncos have struggled to protect their quarterbacks.

The Broncos have allowed 28 sacks in eight games -- tied with the Texans for the third-highest total in the league.

In four previous seasons with the Raiders, Watson missed time in every season with injuries, including previous calf and groin injuries to go with a ruptured Achilles tendon that cost him the entire 2015 season. But when he signed with the Broncos, he said he hoped he had left those issues behind him.

"That is why I'm here," Watson said back in March. "We've got the best strength staff in the world. I've talked diligently with those guys. Me moving forward in my career, I've done a lot of learning my first four years in the NFL ... I'm putting myself in the best place, along with their assistants, are some of the greatest in the world. We can put all of those things in the past and just move on, focus on getting on the field and just smashing heads together."

Garett Bolles learning on the job as leader of Broncos' rookie class

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN
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Here's a look at the first-half impact of the Denver Broncos draft class:

Garett Bolles, T, first round: Bolles was put into the starting lineup in training camp and has showed the athleticism worthy of his draft status. But he's found some tough sledding, as expected, against pass-rushers such as Melvin Ingram and Justin Houston, and will need to bounce back more quickly from difficult plays over the long haul. **Grade:** Above average.

DeMarcus Walker, OLB/DE, second round: This is a player who had 26.5 sacks in his last two years combined at Florida State but was inactive for the Broncos' losses in Kansas City and in Philadelphia. He's learning a new position at outside linebacker, so that's hindered him some, and he won't get in the lineup more until he's better on special teams. **Grade:** Below average.

Carlos Henderson, WR, third round: Henderson fractured his hand in the preseason and went to injured reserve when rosters were trimmed to 53 players just before the regular season. He would have likely found a role on special teams, but it was clear he has some work to do in the offense. **Grade:** Incomplete.

Brendan Langley, CB, third round: Langley is a big cornerback (6-foot, 199 pounds) with elite speed, so the Broncos like his upside. He's played in six of the eight games and has become a regular on special teams. **Grade:** Average.

Jake Butt, TE, fifth round: Butt was on the non-football injury list -- he tore an ACL in his last game at Michigan -- for the first eight games of the season, but after he had practiced the past three weeks for his potential addition to the roster the Broncos thought he still wasn't ready and moved him to injured reserve for the remainder of the season. **Grade:** Incomplete.

Isaiah McKenzie, WR, fifth round: McKenzie was named the team's top punt returner in training camp and has had some spot duty in the offense. It's clear his speed could have an impact, but he has to handle the ball better in the return game and not give up so much ground when he has it. **Grade:** Average.

De'Angelo Henderson, RB, sixth round: Henderson showed big-play pop in the preseason, but he finds himself at the most crowded position on the depth chart, behind C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles and Devontae Booker. He has just one carry this season -- on a failed fake punt attempt -- and has been inactive five times. **Grade:** Incomplete.

Chad Kelly, QB, seventh round: Kelly, who had a knee injury during his senior season at Mississippi and then a thumb injury during his pre-draft workouts, had been on the non-football injury list and like Butt, was moved to injured reserve for the remainder of the season. **Grade:** Incomplete.

OTL: Jerry Jones threatens to sue NFL if Roger Goodell's contract extension is approved

By Don Van Natta Jr. and Seth Wickersham

ESPN

November 9, 2017

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has threatened to sue the National Football League if a contract extension for commissioner Roger Goodell is approved by the league's compensation committee, sources told Outside the Lines.

A team owner and a team executive told Outside the Lines that Jones has hired David Boies, the famed New York lawyer who represented Vice President Al Gore in the deadlocked 2000 presidential election -- and who led the NFL's court case during a dispute over the 2011 collective bargaining agreement negotiations. More recently, Boies defended Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein against sexual assault allegations.

The New York Times first reported the development on Wednesday.

The sources told Outside the Lines that Jones has been exploring the lawsuit option through Boies, if Goodell's contract is extended after the 2018 season as is being considered. Boies also represents DraftKings, the daily fantasy company in which Jones was an early investor.

Jones has not identified the grounds of such a lawsuit, but one source said Jones is exploring whether a requirement that two-thirds of owners must approve a commissioner's contract could be increased to three-fourths of owners. Another source said that Boies also might be asked by Jones to produce a report showing the negative economic impact that Goodell's major decisions, including player discipline, have had on clubs.

A lawyer who has close ties to the NFL praised Boies' skill as a lawyer to OTL but said that his hiring was likely a "scare tactic" because there doesn't appear to be an obvious legal challenge to Goodell's contract negotiations, a process that Jones voted in support of earlier in the year. Jones "probably knows he doesn't have a strong claim," the lawyer said.

Neither Jones nor Boies could be immediately reached for comment. NFL spokesman Joe Lockhart declined comment.

The Times reported that Jones, in a conference call last week with the six owners on the compensation committee, told them that legal papers were drawn up and would be served Friday if the committee did not scrap its plans to extend Goodell's contract. The Times also reported that after Jones spoke to the committee, the owners revoked Jones' status as an ad hoc member of the compensation committee and then spoke to the other 25 owners who are not on the committee to notify them of what Jones had said.

The six members of the committee, led by Falcons owner Arthur Blank, asked Jones to leave the discussions after they learned he had hired Boies, sources told Outside the Lines.

Sources told Outside the Lines that Jones is one of "four or five owners" who believe Goodell should not continue as commissioner. Another half-dozen owners were called "fence-sitters" by one source -- the exact group that Jones wants Boies to target.

"If he amasses 12 or 15 people, how does Roger survive something like that?" an executive asked. "I don't know how he'd be able to continue if that many owners express a lack of confidence in him."

A person who spoke recently with Goodell said the commissioner is "furious" about Jones' and other owners' insistence that his next contract's compensation should be more performance-based, including incentives that would allow him to be paid at roughly the same level of his current deal. "He feels as if the owners have made a lot of money and he should be compensated accordingly," the source said. "The incentives thing really angers him."

Goodell has earned a total of more than \$200 million since he was elected commissioner in August 2006, including \$44 million in 2014 and \$34 million in 2015. In May, at the league's spring meetings in Chicago, Jones joined his fellow owners in authorizing the compensation committee to work on extending Goodell's contract. But at the owners' meetings in New York last month, Jones told his fellow owners that Goodell's proposed next contract "is the most one-sided deal ever."

Through this season, Jones has expressed growing dissatisfaction with Goodell's job performance and has said in recent weeks that the league needs to hire a new commissioner, sources said. The reasons include Goodell's handling of the player protests staged during the national anthem; the league's pending six-game suspension of Cowboys star running back Ezekiel Elliott for violation of the league's domestic violence policy; and the league's handling of the relocation of two teams to Los Angeles, which Jones helped engineer. Many owners are also angry with Goodell because they believe that he has given Jones too much power.

"Most owners would admit that Roger has done a terrible job handling the anthem controversy and a terrible job explaining the [TV] ratings declines, a terrible job on any number of other issues," a long-time team executive said.

Several sources told Outside the Lines that owners believe the NFL league office suffers from "dysfunction," and at least two owners have said they wouldn't replace Goodell because they don't know who they'd replace him with.

A silent majority of owners believe Goodell's performance has been poor but still support him because they prefer to have Goodell lead the owners' side in labor negotiations with the players' union. The current collective bargaining agreement expires in 2021.

"Roger is seen as having done a great job in the labor negotiations last time -- that fact alone saves him with some owners," an executive said.

Jones is not a member of the NFL's six-member compensation committee. Jones has called himself the "ombudsman" of the committee and has become a de facto seventh unofficial member who attended a recent conference call of the committee.

If Jones decided to follow through with his threat, it would be the second time he has sued the NFL. In the mid-1990s, Jones filed a \$750 million antitrust lawsuit against the NFL over its insistence that teams do not enter into separate sponsorship agreements; Jones and the league later settled that claim.

Sources said, though, that Jones has lost potential support because he has his own candidate to replace Goodell. Sources said they did not know the identity of the candidate.

"Then Jerry will be completely in control of the league," one source said. "It's turning off some owners."

Another executive said he believes that Jones' insistence to inject himself into the process has increased Goodell's resolve to sign a long-term deal.

"Well, \$45 million a year is a lot to just walk away from," the executive said.

Boies has come under criticism this week for helping Weinstein use private investigators in an attempt to block a New York Times story about him while at the same time Boies was representing the Times.

In April 2011, Boies represented the NFL in a St. Paul, Minnesota, courtroom to present the NFL's argument against the players' request for an injunction to stop the league's lockout of its players.

Grading first-year NFL head coaches: Sean McVay near perfection

By Staff

ESPN

November 9, 2017

NFL stands for “Not For Long” if you don’t win and win right away as a new head coach.

So as the 2017 season turns the midseason corner, our NFL Nation reporters grade the performance of the league's six new hires:

Sean McVay | Los Angeles Rams (6-2)

What he has done right: Well, everything. But the main thing is McVay, who also calls the offensive plays, took an offense that was last in the NFL in yards each of the past two seasons and turned it into what appears to be, well, a juggernaut. Jared Goff (2,030 yards, 13 TDs, 4 INTs) suddenly looks legitimate as a second-year quarterback, Todd Gurley (686 yards, 7 TDs) is an elite running back once again, and the offensive linemen and wide receivers are clicking in ways they haven’t in a long time.

What he needs to do better: We’d be splitting hairs here, but let’s give it a shot. McVay has been burning a lot of early timeouts, but special teams coordinator John Fassel, who assists him on game day, will tell you he has been using them to get out of bad plays. So that’s fine. McVay also has found himself diagramming the next offensive series while his team is on defense, but that’s intentional because he has so much faith in defensive coordinator Wade Phillips. No problem there, either. So, this section will merely present an opportunity to point out what makes McVay special: He’s a natural leader who came in with a clear message, held players accountable and ultimately changed the culture.

Overall grade: Near perfection -- Alden Gonzalez

Sean McDermott | Buffalo Bills (5-3)

What he has done right: McDermott has brought a much-needed culture change to Buffalo after two years of Rex Ryan’s loose style of coaching. He has created what many players believe to be a more cohesive locker room in which teammates are more familiar with one another, even outside of their position groups. On the field, McDermott has led a team that did not fall behind by seven points in any game until last Thursday’s sloppy loss to the Jets. Despite three turnovers in that defeat, Buffalo still leads the NFL with a plus-11 turnover margin. The Bills are in line to receive the No. 6 seed in the AFC playoffs, which would end the franchise’s 17-year postseason drought.

What he needs to do better: The Bills rank 26th in yards gained on offense per game (303.8) and 21st in yards allowed on defense per game (344.6). They are one of six teams to rank 20th or worse on both sides of the ball and the only one with a winning record. The Bills played only one team in the first half of their schedule that had a winning record after Week 9 -- the Panthers, a loss -- but will have four games against teams (Saints, Chiefs, Patriots) with winning records over the second half of the season. That could point to a late slide by the Bills, who have seen negative trends in recent weeks. The Bills allowed a league-low 14.8 points per game from Weeks 1-5 but have allowed 25 points per game since

Week 6, tied for 14th-worst in the NFL. The Bills also have been the second-most penalized team over the past two weeks, with 22 penalties for 194 yards.

Overall grade: Above average -- Mike Rodak

Doug Marrone | Jacksonville Jaguars (5-3)

What he has done right: The most important thing Marrone has done is change the culture. He preached toughness and accountability from the moment he was hired and put the Jaguars through a grueling training camp. Players weren't thrilled with the long days and more physical practices. One player estimated they did three times as many team snaps as they did under former coach Gus Bradley. It has paid off, though, because the Jaguars lead the NFL in rushing (166.5 yards per game) and are playing the kind of smashmouth football Marrone and executive vice president of football operations Tom Coughlin envisioned. Marrone's deactivating running back Leonard Fournette for violating a team rule was partly a message to the Jaguars that anything other than full commitment will not be tolerated.

What he needs to do better: Until the past two games, the Jaguars hadn't won consecutive games since October 2016. That's the kind of consistency the franchise has to develop if it is truly going to compete for the AFC South title. Good teams stack up victories and take advantage of the teams they are supposed to beat. The franchise has been so bad for so long that it's taking time for the players to not only learn how to win, but learn how to win consistently. That's part of the culture change, but it's something the players have to experience to fully understand. Marrone has made progress in this area but it's something he will have to fight the rest of the season.

Overall grade: Above average -- Michael DiRocco

Vance Joseph | Denver Broncos (3-5)

What he has done right: The Broncos responded to Joseph's up-front, no-nonsense approach throughout the offseason, into training camp and into the regular season. Players praised his ability to communicate and his approach on a day-to-day basis. And at times -- at least until the complete cave-in against Philadelphia this past Sunday -- the Broncos' defense had shown signs it could finish better than it did last season, when it ranked No. 1 against the pass but struggled mightily against the run. With the initial adjustments Joseph and defensive coordinator Joe Woods added to the mix, the Broncos sported the No. 1 run defense early in the season and held Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch to 95 combined yards in Denver's 3-1 start.

What he needs to do better: In a nutshell, the Broncos need to rebound from mistakes, something former coach Gary Kubiak had a difficult time with last season. The Broncos of 2015 were as mentally tough as a team could be; the two teams since, including this one, have not shown those tendencies when things go bad in a game. The current team is guilty of plenty of bad body language, so either the players don't believe in what's being put in the game plans, or the message isn't getting through between the coaches and the locker room. The Broncos also seem to have no answer if it's clear their initial game plan isn't going to work. Their ability to adjust to what happens in the opening 10 minutes of a game is in question right now, amid their longest losing streak since 2010.

Overall grade: Below average. -- Jeff Legwold

Anthony Lynn | Los Angeles Chargers (3-5)

What he has done right: Although the Chargers started off 0-4, players didn't turn against Lynn and still believed in his no-nonsense approach. The result has been the Chargers winning three of their past four games and still having faint postseason hopes. Lynn has done a good job changing the players' training regimen so they're healthier midway through the season than in previous years. And quarterback Philip Rivers has done a better job of protecting the football under Lynn, with just six interceptions through eight games. Rivers had a league-high 20 interceptions last season.

What he needs to do better: Lynn could do a better job of managing in-game situations, which is not surprising for a first-year head coach. He has won just one of three challenges. And the Chargers are eighth worst in the league with 61 accepted penalties. Four of the Chargers' five losses have come by one score or less, so playing mistake-free football and better managing the game should be points of emphasis for Lynn during the second half of the season.

Overall grade: Average -- Eric D. Williams

Kyle Shanahan | San Francisco 49ers (0-9)

What he has done right: Despite all the losing, including an NFL-record five consecutive defeats by three points or fewer, Shanahan has been the type of leader the Niners need as they embark on a massive rebuild. He has taken the long view with this team while also offering the right type of leadership. At least publicly, he has managed to be the same every day and offer a steady hand for a team going through a rough season. Perhaps more important, he and general manager John Lynch are on the same page, building a much-needed bridge between the coaching staff and front office that had been missing in recent years.

What he needs to do better: From an X's and O's standpoint, it's hard to judge Shanahan because the Niners are facing a talent deficiency at this stage of their rebuild. However, the team's offensive struggles have been frustrating for 49ers fans given Shanahan's background and the expectation that he would be able to offer a substantial upgrade in that area. Through nine weeks, San Francisco is 24th in the league in yards per game (309.4), 29th in yards per play and 30th in points per game (15.9).

Overall grade: Bring on 2018. -- Nick Wagoner

Broncos have long viewed Patriots as their best barometer

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
November 9, 2017

The defending champion New England Patriots wouldn't seem like an ideal elixir for a team that's lost its way along with four consecutive games.

The Patriots, though, have long been the Denver Broncos' best barometer.

"We've had a tough stretch here, so the perfect cure is to play a team like this," coach Vance Joseph said after listing 14 players on his injury report Wednesday. "I mean, it's the best of the best. So, for us to get our good feeling back it's the perfect opponent, on national TV, so I'm very excited for Sunday night."

Despite a rash of injuries to key players, the Patriots (6-2) behind Tom Brady and Bill Belichick come to Colorado planted on their customary perch atop the AFC East.

Behind a porous O-line and sloppy quarterback play, the Broncos (3-5) are adrift under their rookie head coach and mired in a four-week funk in which they've been outscored by an average of 31-13.

"The best time to turn it around is against a team like this that's not going to beat themselves," Broncos running back C.J. Anderson said. "They're going to be very disciplined, very detailed and focused on their jobs and we can definitely take something from that."

John Elway has measured his team's success against the Patriots both on and off the football field since taking over as head of football operations in 2011.

Either the Patriots or Broncos have earned the AFC's top playoff seed in all six seasons since then with the Patriots winning three conference championships and two Super Bowls and the Broncos winning two AFC titles and one Super Bowl.

In his first season in Denver, Elway watched Belichick and Brady twice school Tim Tebow, convincing him he had to make a play for Peyton Manning in free agency.

After a loss at New England in Week 5 dropped Manning to 2-3 in his comeback season, the Broncos reeled off 11 straight wins before Rahim Moore's blunder led to a double-overtime loss to Baltimore in the playoffs.

In 2013, an overtime loss at Foxborough sparked Denver's Super Bowl run that included a 26-16 win over New England in the conference championship.

The Patriots' trips to Colorado the last two regular seasons also served as harbingers for the Broncos' playoffs hopes.

Brock Osweiler , who will be under center again Sunday night, replaced an injured Manning on Nov. 29, 2015, and led Denver's comeback in a snowy 30-24 overtime win.

Manning was back starting two months later when the Broncos again hosted the Patriots and battered Brady in a 20-18 win that propelled Denver to its third Super Bowl title.

Manning called it a career a month later and Osweiler bolted to Houston, leaving Trevor Siemian to win the quarterback job.

He wasn't up to the task when the Patriots visited Denver last year and Denver's defense limited Brady to 16 completions and the Patriots to 16 points but the Broncos managed a mere field goal.

When Gary Kubiak asked afterward if anyone had anything to say, tackle Russell Okung rose and was shouted down by Aqib Talib, the fissure between the team's all-star defense and anemic offense erupting in hot-tempered fury.

The Broncos were eliminated from the playoff race a week later and Kubiak decided to step down for health reasons. So, while Brady and Belichick were on their way to their fifth Super Bowl triumph, Elway was conducting his third coaching search in four years.

At 40, Brady remains as good as ever despite losing Julian Edelman and Malcom Mitchell to knee injuries.

Osweiler returned to Denver after an 18-month odyssey that included Houston's hard-fought 34-16 loss to Brady in the playoffs.

A dozen turnovers sent Siemian to the bench last week and Joseph decided to stick with Osweiler this week despite his pair of interceptions that led to touchdowns in Denver's 51-23 flop at Philadelphia.

"I don't expect them to play like that against us," Patriots running back James White said. "Every time we play them, it's a four-quarter football game, not very high-scoring."

Brady is seeking just his fourth win in 11 trips to Denver.

"There's little margin of error when you go out there," Brady said. "We're going to have to play good. They have a great defense. They have great players on both sides of the ball. You can't go out there and make a bunch of mistakes and expect to win."

Desperate to save their season, these Broncos are as tough a challenge as the ones that were always jockeying with the Patriots for the AFC's top playoff seed, Brady said.

"You learn a lot from losses," Brady said, "and everyone wants to get the bad taste out of their mouth."

Broncos put right tackle Menelik Watson on IR

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
November 9, 2017

Menelik Watson chose Denver in free agency not just for the \$18-plus million contract over three years but also the chance to work with the Broncos' renowned training staff.

Yet, Watson's first season in Denver was marred by injury just like his four years in Oakland were and the Broncos placed him to injured reserve Wednesday with a torn foot tendon he sustained Sunday in Philadelphia. He was also bothered by a strained calf that sidelined him against the Chargers last month and limited him at practice.

When Watson signed he said he was lured by the chance to work with the Broncos' training staff led by strength and conditioning coach Luke Richesson: "That is why I'm here," Watson said in March. "We've got the best strength staff in the world."

Yet, after a series of injuries in Oakland limited him to an average of just 6.75 games a year with the Raiders, Watson played in just seven games this season in Denver.

Although he was dominant at run-blocking, Watson struggled in pass protection like the rest of Denver's O-line. The Broncos' 28 sacks allowed are among the most in the league.

Coach Vance Joseph insisted Watson's long injury history wasn't a red flag when the Broncos targeted him in free agency even though he'd been hurt every year in an NFL career dotted with calf and groin injuries and a ruptured Achilles tendon that sidelined him all of 2015.

"Most of his issues were soft tissue stuff. It was hamstring, it was calf injuries. Those things are preventable," Joseph said. "So, I wasn't overly concerned when we signed him."

Joseph said Watson would have missed at least six weeks with conservative treatment plan and surgery would end his season, so "we thought as a team it was best for him to go down and to bring a fresh body in for us."

So, the Broncos signed free agent tackle Cyrus Kouandjio (pronounced KWAN-jo), who was Buffalo's second-round pick out of Alabama in 2014 but struggled for playing time with the Bills and also dealt with injuries.

"He is a big guy, a talent and a former second-round pick," Joseph said of the 6-foot-7, 325-pound newcomer. "He's a young guy. It's definitely worth bringing him in and looking at him. He's a young guy with no miles on him."

Kouandjio had hip surgery in January after falling at his home and the Bills released him in May, a month after police found him partially clothed wandering in a field.

"I'm excited about Denver. I like Denver. It's fun, it's a nice city and it's high altitude," Kouandjio said. "I think it's the first team I ever played Madden with as a child."

Joseph, who wasn't sure if Watson would elect to have surgery, said it would be hard for Kouandjio to play Sunday when the Broncos (3-5) host the New England Patriots (6-2). So, 10-year veteran guard Allen Barbre is expected to make his second start at right tackle this weekend.

Swing tackle Donald Stephenson returned to practice Wednesday after missing a month with a torn calf although center Matt Paradis (back) and right guard Ron Leary (elbow) were held out.

NFL HALFWAY: Rams, Bills, Jags succeeding with new coaches

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
November 9, 2017

Of the half dozen first-year NFL head coaches, Vance Joseph inherited what was widely considered the best situation: a team just one year removed from a Super Bowl parade with a championship-caliber defense and a renovated offense.

Unlike the other five teams that averaged 4.4 wins last season, Denver was coming off a 9-7 season and the job only came open because of Gary Kubiak's health concerns.

Yet, it's the Broncos (3-5) who are spiraling with five losses in their past six games while Sean McVay's Rams (6-2), Doug Marrone's Jaguars (5-3) and Sean McDermott's Bills (5-3) are primed for playoff pushes.

Even Anthony Lynn's Chargers (3-5) are on the rise after a winless first month that included three losses by a field goal or less.

While the 49ers are an NFL-worst 0-9, Kyle Shanahan could end up being the biggest winner of them all with his team jockeying for the top pick in next year's draft.

"Of course it wears on you," Shanahan said of all the losing. "If you sit there and you think about those words and the record too much and, yeah, it will affect you big time.

"But sitting and dwelling on that and worrying about your ego and things like that, it's not going to make you play better."

The dive has started to fray nerves in Denver, where calls for offensive coordinator Mike McCoy's job fill the airwaves.

Suddenly, all that winning ugly over the past couple of years, highlighted by Denver's defense carrying a diminished Peyton Manning to victory in his Super Bowl 50 farewell, looks pretty good in retrospect.

When Kubiak quit, defensive coordinator Wade Phillips joined McVay in L.A. and offensive coordinator Rick Dennison joined McDermott in Buffalo.

Phillips is having his customary first-year effect with the Rams, who sport the largest point differential in the NFL, and Dennison is directing an offensive turnaround with the Bills, who could end the league's longest playoff drought — they haven't qualified since 1999.

The Rams have missed out every year since 2004 and the Jaguars every season since 2007. If they continue their resurgence, the Chargers might get in for the first time since 2009.

Even the Broncos haven't lost hope because they're only 2 1/2 games behind the Chiefs, losers of three of four (but with a favorable schedule the rest of the way).

"We have time," Joseph said, "but time's running out. So, we've got to fix it right now."

The problems in Denver are mostly on offense, where Joseph spent his first eight months on the job pondering whether Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch would be his quarterback only to see Brock Osweiler emerge as his best bet.

Joseph has seen his team average an NFL-worst 14 points since Week 3, suffer its first shutout in a quarter century and get blown out at home coming off a bye week by the battered Giants.

After a 51-23 loss at Philadelphia on Sunday that shattered the defense's not-my-fault aura, defensive end Derek Wolfe said the "Broncos are beating the Broncos" with too many mistakes, turnovers, drops and flags before the snap and after the whistle.

Joseph acknowledged the coaching staff has to clean up its act, too.

Joe Woods' defense is having too many breakdowns in coverage, Brock Olivo's special teams are too sloppy and McCoy stubbornly sticks to a steady diet of three-receiver sets even though his quarterbacks have 18 sacks and 10 turnovers out of that formation over the past six games.

"It's a league that's really built and operated to have equal parts. So, the difference sometimes is the coaching. The difference is the scheme and play calling," Joseph said.

"So, when you don't win, absolutely you have to coach better. And that starts with me. Because in this league coaching is very important and the better-coached teams win."

Right now that includes the Bills, Rams and Jaguars.

BILLS: McDermott is doing more with less than his predecessor Rex Ryan. Fewer than two dozen players remain from last year's roster and the losing culture is finally fading in Buffalo. McDermott has gotten the most out of QB Tyrod Taylor and the Bills lead the NFL with a plus-11 turnover margin.

The next four games are critical: road games against the Chargers and Chiefs sandwiched in between home games against the first-place Saints and Patriots.

RAMS: With help from McVay and a better supporting cast, former top overall draft pick Jared Goff has made a huge jump this season. After failing to win the starting QB job until halfway through his rookie season, Goff is undergoing a sophomore surge not unlike Carson Wentz's in Philadelphia.

The Rams hit the halfway point in first place in the NFC West. Down the stretch, they'll be tested by fellow NFC division leaders Minnesota, New Orleans and Philadelphia.

JAGUARS: Having spent the previous two years as Jacksonville's O-line coach, Marrone knew exactly what he had with turnover-prone QB Blake Bortles. So he built a run-first team that could control the clock, limit Bortles' passes and play to an already-stout defense.

Drafting RB Leonard Fournette and LT Cam Robinson beefed up the ground game, and DE Calais Campbell has proven to be the NFL's best free-agent signing. The Jaguars looked poised for a strong finish and their best season in a decade.

49ERS: Shanahan arrived with a lot of optimism as he brought his deep offensive knowledge and playbook from Atlanta to a team in need of a change. But San Francisco got off to the worst start in franchise history.

QB Brian Hoyer went from starter to the bench before getting cut when GM John Lynch acquired Tom Brady's longtime backup Jimmy Garoppolo. The only drama down the stretch will be if they can avoid 0-16 and get a good look at Garoppolo before determining whether to draft a quarterback with a premier pick in April.

CHARGERS: The relocated Chargers didn't leave their heartbreak in San Diego when they moved to L.A. They've already lost four games by eight points or fewer. McCoy's last two teams in San Diego lost 17 games by that same one-score margin.

They've once again had stretches of strong play and a string of solid victories with an undeniable collection of veteran talent. But narrow losses due to poor late-game execution and bad breaks have kept them from rising to the top of the AFC West.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones threatens Roger Goodell deal after Ezekiel Elliott ban

By Barry Wilner
Associated Press
November 9, 2017

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has threatened to sue the NFL over a proposed contract extension for Commissioner Roger Goodell, a dispute apparently sparked by star running back Ezekiel Elliott's six-game suspension over alleged domestic violence, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Jones told the six owners on the compensation committee he had hired high-profile attorney David Boies and was prepared to sue if the group voted to extend Goodell's deal, the person told the AP. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because no one has been authorized to reveal details.

Jones also has expressed disapproval with the structure and compensation in the contract extension, another person familiar with the proposed lawsuit says. That person also spoke on condition of anonymity for the same reason.

The actions of Jones were first reported by The New York Times.

All 32 owners voted in May to extend Goodell's contract and authorized the compensation committee to work out the details. Goodell suspended Elliott in August after a yearlong NFL investigation. Prosecutors in Ohio declined to pursue the domestic violence case.

Jones, who is not on the compensation committee but is one of the most powerful owners in the league, has expressed frustration over the NFL's pursuit of criminal matters with its own investigators.

Asked on his radio show last week if he wanted Goodell to remain commissioner, Jones avoided a direct answer and said Elliott was a "victim of an overcorrection" because of the NFL's mishandling of former Baltimore running back Ray Rice's domestic case involving his then-fiancee.

Goodell's initial suspension of two games was sharply criticized because of a video showing Rice dragging an unconscious Janay Palmer from an elevator. Another video later surfaced of Rice punching Palmer in the face, and he was suspended indefinitely. The suspension was lifted by an arbitrator, but Rice never signed with another team.

"I can show you many positive things that this commissioner, Roger, has done, is doing and I can show you some of the things that he wants to take back," Jones said on his radio show Oct. 31.

"This is a very example of it. I'm sure he'd like to take back his initial Ray Rice stance and a few others. He's in the process of having tried to correct that and in doing so, Zeke is a victim of an overcorrection."

The NFL hired former New York prosecutor Lisa Friel to help shape the stronger policy on domestic violence that came out of the Rice incident. The updated policy included the league's ability to investigate cases on its own regardless of law enforcement's involvement.

Prosecutors in Elliott's case cited conflicting evidence when deciding not to pursue the case. The NFL's probe continued for a year after that decision. Jones said his running back has been treated unfairly, and Elliott has denied the allegations of his ex-girlfriend under oath.

"I am very troubled by the swings that we've had," Jones said on his radio program. "His swing of judgment has been unbelievable from the Ray Rice thing all the way up to one or two games, all the way to the six-game suspension when you've truly got a debate. In our legal system it has to be stronger than that for somebody who has done it."

Goodell's decision to suspend Elliott prompted weeks of twists and turns in courtrooms from Texas to Louisiana to New York. A three-judge panel in New York has a hearing Thursday to consider another injunction to stop the suspension. Elliott, on his third legal reprieve, has played all eight games for the Cowboys.

"We make the commissioner in the NFL the most powerful person that I know of as to the organization and it's constituency, so it's a big deal not only when we're hiring, but when we extend him," Jones said after a game in Washington two weekends ago. "So there's a lot of consideration to it, and it shouldn't surprise anybody."

Broncos place right tackle Menelik Watson on season-ending injured reserve

By Troy Renck

KMGH

November 9, 2017

With the Broncos saddled with 3-5 record and a four-game losing streak, change is inevitable.

Wednesday marked a shift along the Broncos' offensive line. Right tackle Menelik Watson, who experienced a forgettable year after signing as a free agent, landed on the season-ending injured reserve with a foot injury.

The Broncos signed tackle Cyrus Kouandjio for depth at the position. Kouandjio played for the Buffalo Bills for several seasons, but failed to make the Detroit Lions roster this summer. As it stands, the Broncos' options at right tackle include Donald Stephenson, who has been out for three weeks with a calf injury, Allen Barbre, a guard by trade who was overwhelmed outside against the Chargers, and rookie Elijah Wilkinson.

Watson signed a three-year, \$18.75 million deal this offseason with \$5.5 million guaranteed. He brought an edge, and tough mentality. However, the injuries that haunted his past resurfaced. Watson appeared uncomfortable physically, and struggled mightily in pass protection.

Watson missed the Chargers game with a calf injury and part of the Giants' game. He joins tackle Billy Turner on the sideline as Turner's season-ended with a broken hand against New York.

Broncos Injury Report: Donald Stephenson returns to practice

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 9, 2017

- Right tackle Donald Stephenson practiced for the first time since injuring his calf on Oct. 19, as the Broncos began on-field preparations for Sunday night's game against the New England Patriots.

Stephenson was one of five players who saw limited repetitions Wednesday. He was joined by safety Darian Stewart (thigh), wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders(ankle), running back C.J. Anderson (ankle) and inside linebacker Todd Davis(ankle).

As Stephenson returned, right guard Ron Leary (elbow) and center Matt Paradis (back) sat out Wednesday's work. Wide receivers Demaryius Thomas (hamstring) and Bennie Fowler (ankle) also did not practice.

Nose tackle Domata Peko Sr. and running back Jamaal Charles received veteran rest days.

Wednesday's work took place at a "jog-through" pace, which was unusual for work on that day of the week. Head Coach Vance Joseph said he dialed back the work because of injuries at the offensive line and wide receiver. He expects the Broncos to return to full speed Thursday.

BMW Ultimate Performance: Cody Latimer shines downfield and on special teams

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 9, 2017

When Head Coach Vance Joseph talked in August about the potential of Cody Latimer being an "All-Pro gunner," it was games like Sunday that he foresaw in the fourth-year veteran.

"As a gunner, he was exceptional again," Joseph said Wednesday.

On Riley Dixon's first punt, Latimer started the play by facing a pair of Eagles at the left gunner position, from which he eventually worked his way inside. Latimer sprinted diagonally across the field, which placed him in perfect position to prevent punt returner Kenjon Barner from cutting right and into the open field.

Latimer and Justin Simmonsthen teamed up to make the tackle, holding Barner to a 2-yard return and getting a 46-yard net out of the punt.

Dixon's second punt saw Latimer get a free release in one-on-one blocking from the left flank, and he made Barner and the Eagles pay. He rocketed downfield at the snap, but with Dixon clobbering a 55-yard blast, he was still 8 yards away from Barner when he fielded the punt at the Philadelphia 17-yard line.

Coming from Barner's right, Latimer's pursuit forced the returner to go left. Latimer maintained his pursuit while Bennie Fowler III, who was the gunner from the other side, cut off Barner's path upfield. Latimer then dove to make the tackle after a 7-yard return, giving Dixon and the punt-coverage team a net of 48 yards on the punt.

Brendan Langley was the left-side gunner on Dixon's third punt, a 49-yarder that ended in a 4-yard Barner return and a Philadelphia penalty.

On the fourth punt, Latimer was back in the game and again capitalized on the presence of only one Eagle in front of him, sprinting past him to get in position to lunge at Barner right after he fielded the 52-yard punt. Latimer dove and missed, but caused Barner to stumble, buying a half-second for the rest of the Broncos' coverage team to arrive, ensuring a net of 44 yards.

Latimer's special-teams work was not limited to punt coverage, even though he did not handle kickoff returns. On Isaiah McKenzie's 44-yard return to set up a Brandon McManus field goal, Latimer turns back inside and delivers a key block on Corey Clement, helping clear the right flank for McKenzie to sprint into the open field.

All this is stacked on top of his career-high 51 receiving yards on two receptions. In the two games since he returned to the lineup from a knee injury, Latimer has the two highest single-game yardage totals of his career.

It is also notable that Latimer's single-game career-high for yardage and his first professional touchdown both came in games quarterbacked by Brock Osweiler. If Osweiler can do enough to stay in the lineup, Latimer could be a beneficiary.

"Cody's one of those guys, given his opportunities, he's certainly going to make the most of them," Osweiler said, "because he's a smart player, he's physical, he's strong, he's fast, he can jump."

Broncos place Menelik Watson on injured reserve, sign T Cyrus Kouandjio

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 9, 2017

The Broncos will have to make do up front without right tackle Menelik Watson.

Denver placed the five-year veteran on injured reserve Wednesday. He had missed the second half of the Week 6 loss to the Giants and all of the Week 7 game at Los Angeles because of a calf injury.

Watson is the second right tackle to go on injured reserve in the last month. Backup Billy Turner, who relieved Watson against the Giants, suffered a hand injury in that game and was placed on injured reserve a day later when he underwent surgery.

Donald Stephenson is listed as the second-teamer behind Watson, but he has not practiced since Oct. 19 because of a calf injury he suffered in practice. Rookie Elijah Wilkinson is listed as the third-teamer behind Watson and Stephenson.

With injuries to Watson, Turner and Stephenson, the Broncos started guard Allen Barbre at right tackle against the Chargers before Watson returned to the lineup a week later.

In the wake of Watson's move to injured reserve, the Broncos signed free-agent tackle Cyrus Kouandjio to the active roster.

Kouandjio is a fourth-year tackle who played three seasons with the Bills, who selected him in the second round of the 2014 NFL Draft. On June 15, 2017, he signed with the Lions, but he was released during roster cuts on Aug. 29.

That's What They Said: Patriots HC Bill Belichick, WR Brandin Cooks

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

November 9, 2017

A challenging Broncos' defense

On Von Miller:

Bill Belichick: "You just do the best you can. It's not any better on the other side with [OLB] Shaquil Barrett or [OLB Shane] Ray. It's not any better inside better with [NT Domata] Peko, [CB Chris] Harris Jr., [DE Derek] Wolfe and [DE Adam] Gotsis. Wherever you go you're not really going away from anybody, you're just going into somebody else. It's a tough problem. Miller can do it all; he can play the run, he's a great edge setter, and he's a great speed rusher--good counter move, good speed to power rush. He's seen double teams and things like that, he knows how to deal with them. He has a good inside spin and has the power to get away from those types of techniques. He's a good pass rusher and he's as good a player as there is in the league."

On Aqib Talib:

BB: "Aqib's a great player and a tremendous competitor. I have so much respect for him. He's just a great football player. Tackles well, tough and is really smart. Great ball skills, can handle the big receivers and can handle the quick receivers. Very crafty in his disguises and some of the techniques he uses out there, he's a very tough guy for the quarterback to read or to fool. He's as good as we play against. Honestly [it's] really, really challenging to throw a ball in their secondary, period, but especially Talib. He's just an outstanding player."

On Chris Harris Jr. and Aqib Talib:

Brandin Cooks: "You're talking about two of some of the best corners in our game that [are] playing at a high level and have been doing it for years. Guys like that are very patient. They're smart players. You watch them on film, [and] they seem to be at the right place at the right time, often. You give them a lot of credit."

The Patriots' offensive weapons

On playing with quarterback Tom Brady:

BC: I think it's been going well. We've still got a lot of work to do to be able to play our best ball together, but I think we're headed in the right direction. What I admire about him — I mean, his work ethic and attention to detail is unbelievable. You've got to respect that for a guy that's been playing this game for so long.

On tight end Rob Gronkowski:

BC: "He's a dominant player, a guy who works hard, as well. As far as putting pressure on defenses, he's just one of those guys you've got to account for every Sunday."

New England's defensive improvement

BB: "We're just trying to improve every week — fundamentals, overall execution and techniques. We're trying to coach better. Just a lot of little things, probably."

BC: "Really we've just [been] growing every week and kind of stopping with the penalties and some of the things that hurt ourselves. I watch from the other side of the ball, [and] they're just playing complementary football and they're playing together. I think that's one of the big differences."

On how the Broncos' offense could challenge the defense:

BB: "The receivers are explosive. The backs are good. They have a lot of fast players. A lot of guys that are hard to tackle. A lot of guys that are really, really good in space. [TE Virgil] Green has made some plays going down the seam, too. They're a very talented team. They're explosive in the kicking game and defensively, too. Honestly, they can be on offense when they're not on offense. Their return game is very explosive. [On defense, they're] taking the ball away and strip sacks. Talib had the interception return for a touchdown. They can do a lot of damage on any play if you're not alert or make a mistake. They have great players in all three phases of the game who can take advantage of it."

Jerry Jones threatens to sue NFL over Roger Goodell contract negotiations

By A.J. Perez and Kevin Spain

USA Today

November 9, 2017

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has retained the services of one of the nation's top litigators to potentially sue the NFL and some of its owners to block commissioner Roger Goodell's extension, according to multiple reports on Wednesday.

Jones, upset with the Goodell's six-game suspension levied against Ezekiel Elliott, told six owners at a recent meeting that he had hired David Boies, who recently has come under fire for representing Harvey Weinstein as the now-disgraced movie producer fought sexual harassment claims.

The New York Times was the first outlet to report Jones' potential legal fight with the NFL.

For the past few months, NFL owners and Goodell have been working on a contract extension, a five-year deal to kick in when his current deal expires in 2019.

Jones also has expressed disapproval with the structure and compensation in the contract extension, another person familiar with the proposed lawsuit says.

All 32 owners voted in May to extend Goodell's contract and authorized the compensation committee to work out the details. Goodell suspended Elliott in August after a yearlong NFL investigation. Prosecutors in Ohio declined to pursue the domestic violence case.

Jones, who is not on the compensation committee but is one of the most powerful owners in the league, has expressed frustration over the NFL's pursuit of criminal matters with its own investigators.

Boies and his firm's spokesperson did not immediately return messages left by USA TODAY Sports on Wednesday night.

Boies represented Al Gore in the 2000 election challenge, the Department of Justice in its antitrust case against Microsoft and helped in the courtroom battle to legalize gay marriage in California.

But Boies has faced criticism for his representation of Weinstein in recent days.

The New Yorker reported on Monday Boies executed the contract between Weinstein and an intelligence firm he hired to spy on accusers and journalists working on stories about the producer's history of alleged sexual harassment and assault.

At the same time, his firm represented The New York Times in other matters. The newspaper terminated its contract with Boies' law firm on Tuesday.

The Associated Press, USA TODAY's Jayme Deerwester and Maria Puente contributed to this report.

Bob Costas on the future of football: 'This game destroys people's brains'

By Tom Schad
USA Today
November 9, 2017

As far as longtime sports broadcaster Bob Costas is concerned, the future of football in the United States is clear — and bleak.

“The reality is that this game destroys people’s brains,” he said Tuesday night.

Speaking at a roundtable discussion at the University of Maryland, Costas, who hosted Football Night in America on NBC for more than a decade, said the sport could collapse over time, barring a development in technology to make it reasonably safe. He said the decline of football, which was once “a cash machine,” is the most significant story in American sports.

“The cracks in the foundation are there,” Costas said. “The day-to-day issues, as serious as they may be, they may come and go. But you cannot change the nature of the game. I certainly would not let, if I had an athletically gifted 12- or 13-year-old son, I would not let him play football.”

Costas spoke alongside USA TODAY Sports columnist Christine Brennan and ESPN’s Tony Kornheiser and Mike Wilbon at the university’s annual Shirley Povich Symposium, named after the late Washington Post sports columnist. The panel touched on a wide range of topics, including Jemele Hill’s suspension at ESPN and the ever-changing landscape of sports journalism, but the future of football became a recurring theme.

Kornheiser likened football's trajectory to that of boxing, saying that safety concerns could make the game obsolete in the coming decades.

“It’s not going to happen this year, and it’s not going to happen in five years or 10 years,” Kornheiser said. “But Bob is right: At some point, the cultural wheel turns just a little bit, almost imperceptibly, and parents say, ‘I don’t want my kids to play.’ And then it becomes only the province of the poor, who want it for economic reasons to get up and out.

“If they don’t find a way to make it safe, and we don’t see how they will ... the game's not going to be around. It's not.”

Wilbon said football also lacks the international appeal of sports such as basketball and soccer, in part because it has sought to control its personalities.

“Football wants to distance itself and put a moat between itself and its fan base. It doesn't want to talk to them,” Wilbon said. “‘Well, Tom Brady's available on Tuesdays to talk.’ Well, LeBron (James) is available every damn day. He’s available every day on Instagram, on Twitter, on whatever it is. And it's not filtered.”

Costas said the NFL's apparent defense mechanism — to seek more information and continue to study the dangers of the sport — will only hurt its own cause. "The more information (that) comes out, the worse it looks," the 28-time Emmy Award winner said.

He added that existing literature and research will eventually lead families to what he called a "common-sense conclusion," that children should not play tackle football until they're 18, if they play at all.

"But then where's the talent pool for college? What happens to college football?" Costas continued. "The whole thing could collapse like a house of cards if people actually begin connecting the dots."

Jerry Jones reportedly threatens to sue NFL, owners over Roger Goodell's contract

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

November 9, 2017

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has not taken the NFL's decision to suspend Ezekiel Elliott six games well. He's made that pretty clear through very public comments. A new report from The New York Times sheds even more light on Jones' reaction and just how far he might be willing to go to get back at the league.

Just when you thought this story couldn't get any stranger, it somehow managed to do exactly that on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, The New York Times' Ken Belson reported -- citing three sources -- that Jones has threatened to sue the NFL and some owners over NFL commissioner Roger Goodell's contract negotiations. According to The Times, Jones told six owners on the compensation committee last week that he hired attorney David Boies. Belson reported that the dispute stems from Elliott's suspension, which the league handed down after Elliott was accused of domestic violence. Of course, Goodell's handling of the demonstrations during the national anthem could also be a factor considering Jones' stance on the protests (he's against them).

From The Times' story:

"Jones said in a conference call last Thursday with the six owners — those of the Chiefs, Falcons, Giants, Patriots, Steelers and Texans — that legal papers were drawn up and would be served this Friday if the committee did not scrap its plans to extend Goodell's contract."

As for Boies, if that name sounds familiar, it's probably because you read about him in The New Yorker's recent in-depth story on film executive Harvey Weinstein, who has been accused of sexual assault and sexual harassment by numerous women. In that story, Ronan Farrow reported that Boies -- one of Weinstein's lawyers -- helped hire a private investigation firm to "attempt to uncover information that would stop the publication of a Times story about Weinstein's abuses, while his firm was also representing the Times, including in a libel case."

The Times cut ties with the firm and released a statement Monday night.

"We learned today that the law firm of Boies Schiller and Flexner secretly worked to stop our reporting on Harvey Weinstein at the same time as the firm's lawyers were representing us in other matters," the statement read. "We consider this intolerable conduct, a grave betrayal of trust, and a breach of the basic professional standards that all lawyers are required to observe. It is inexcusable and we will be pursuing appropriate remedies."

Back to Jones. It's no secret that he disagrees with the NFL's six-game suspension of Elliott, which is still on hold as the matter plays out in court.

"Zeke has in no way, by any standard in this country, done anything wrong," Jones said at the end of October, per the Dallas Morning News' Brandon George. "He's done nothing wrong. The league has tried to say that he's done something that we disagree with. We all don't agree with that. I want him to get a fair shot and he deserves that."

It's also no secret he's tried to hijack Goodell's extension talks. In late October, CBS Sports NFL Insider Jason La Canfora reported that "Goodell's new contract is done as a practical matter and that Jerry Jones' effort to 'hijack' the process in a conference call among some owners on Thursday is not feasible." But based on The Times' report, Jones still doesn't appear to be willing to simply let Goodell get his extension.

As for Elliott's suspension, he might find out on Thursday if he'll be eligible to play for the remainder of the season or if he'll be forced to start serving his six-game ban immediately. So far, he's yet to miss a game this season as the court battle drags on and on and on.

Jerry Jones Threatens to Sue NFL Owners Over Roger Goodell Contract: How We Got Here

By Albert Breer
MMQB
November 9, 2017

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones' final day as an ad hoc, non-voting member of the NFL's compensation committee was an eventful one.

That was last Thursday, and it was then that Jones advised the six voting members—Atlanta owner Arthur Blank, Kansas City's Clark Hunt, New England's Robert Kraft, Houston's Bob McNair, the Giants' John Mara, Pittsburgh's Art Rooney—that he had retained powerful attorney David Boies and had papers drawn up. And if they wouldn't listen to him on commissioner Roger Goodell's extension, he'd sue them.

Jones was vague about what the basis of his suit would be, but clear that he planned to challenge the committee's authority. And so it was that the NFL's most powerful owner declared war on the league's chief executive, via legal action against the committee empowered to extend Goodell's reign.

"When it came to league (office) staff, or Roger's compensation, he had some other owners saying that he was right," said one source connected to the committee and the commissioner. "Or when he said 'the deal shouldn't be structured that way' or that the league had gone beyond its mandate as a sports league on off-field issues, there were people agreeing. But when he sues the owners, that's crossing the Rubicon."

The rest of the owners were informed on Friday and Saturday of Jones' intent to sue, and Jones was informed by the committee that he'd no longer have any role in Goodell's contract negotiation.

"He's threatened to sue us before, so it's not like we haven't been down this road," said an owner, speaking on the condition of anonymity, on Wednesday night. "I can think of two other occasions off the top of my head."

This owner said there was the case in the '90s over licensing and another, "more recently," and he declined to elaborate. Still, this wasn't expected. "It was a surprise," said the owner.

How did we get here? Back in May, Jones was one of the owners leading the charge in empowering the compensation committee to go forward with a new deal for Goodell, whose current deal expires in 2019. And Jones was among those voting through the resolution, by a 32-0 count, to grant the committee full authority to do a deal.

That in effect was Goodell's re-election. At the point, Jones was asked to join the process in the aforementioned ad hoc role. Typically the rest is logistical, with the committee charged with negotiating the terms and structure of the contract.

What's followed has been far from normal. Two sources informed of the negotiation indicated that Jones was supportive in moving the deal forward, but pointed to the Aug. 11 suspension of Cowboys

star Ezekiel Elliott as the turning point. After that, the sources said, Jones began raising concerns with the power of the league office, the commissioner's compensation, and staffing within 345 Park.

On Oct. 18, on the second day of the league's fall meeting, Falcons owner Blank spoke for roughly 10 minutes during a special privileged session to update the owners on the talks with Goodell. Then, Jones seized the floor and spoke for 10 minutes, and was impassioned on the subject.

"But you have to understand, he's a grandstander, he can be over-the-top passionate," said another ownership source. "So it can be hard to differentiate."

A week later, on Oct. 26, Jones convened a conference call of 17 owners, none of whom were on the compensation committee, to discuss Goodell's contract situation and options if a deal they didn't like were pushed through. And it was a week after that, on Nov. 2, that Jones dropped his threat of the lawsuit to the six owners on the committee.

To be sure, there has been growing sentiment that Jones has become too powerful over the past few years, and that his forcefulness in pushing through franchise relocations to Los Angeles and Las Vegas served as a breaking point. Five members of the compensation committee (Hunt, Kraft, Mara, McNair and Rooney) also served on the league's six-man Los Angeles committee.

Conversely, there's a feeling among some that Jones' anger is rooted in not getting his way—after winning on L.A. and Vegas—on the issues of players standing for the anthem and the Elliott situation. Some of the challenges the league faces business-wise (both with the in-stadium and broadcast product) have only exacerbated that.

A source familiar with Jones' thinking countered by insisting Jones' resistance is focused on the compensation and structure of Goodell's contract, and has nothing to do with Elliott. The source added that Jones viewed his role as an ad hoc member of the committee to be the voice of the 26 other owners, and that, based on the Oct. 26 call, he's confident he has support and is no lone wolf hijacking the process.

Both Blank and Jones declined to comment, when we reached out to them. As for Goodell, the latest word was estate issues were being worked through in his contract negotiations, and Blank said publicly at the fall meeting that he and the committee—again, fully authorized now to do a deal—were moving forward.

Now? It seems like everyone's waiting for Jones' next move. And with the promise out there that the lawsuit is coming at week's end, it would seem that his finger is hovering over the nuclear button.

Report: Jerry Jones Hiring Lawyer David Boies, Could Sue Over Roger Goodell's Contract Extension

By Chris Chavez

MMQB

November 9, 2017

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is considering suing the NFL and other team owners over contract negotiations to extend commissioner Roger Goodell's contract, The New York Times reports.

Jones reportedly told several other NFL owners that he hired prominent lawyer David Boies to represent him. The New Yorker reported this week that Boies did legal work for movie executive Harvey Weinstein, who has been accused of rape and sexual harassment by multiple women.

Jones has been upset with Goodell over a six-game suspension for Ezekiel Elliott's violation of the league's domestic violence policy. No domestic violence charges were filed against Elliott in court, but the league suspended him in August.

Jones has reportedly been communicating with other owners to slow down Goodell's pending contract extension. Jones has claimed Elliott is a victim of a suspension "overcorrection" by Goodell.

The Times reports that Jones has spoken with owners of the Kansas City Chiefs, Atlanta Falcons, New York Giants, New England Patriots, Pittsburgh Steelers and Houston Texans to inform them that legal papers have been drawn up and could be served on Friday, if the league's compensation committee did not scrap its plans regarding Goodell's contract. Goodell's current contract expires at the end of the 2018 season.

No lawsuit has been filed as of Wednesday.

Boies has argued several high-profile cases in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, but he made headlines this week after a story in The New Yorker revealed he allegedly helped Weinstein use private investigators to block a negative article about him in the New York Times. At the same time, Boies was also providing outside legal counsel for the newspaper. He has claimed there was no conflict of interest. The New York Times said it is ending its relationship with Boies's firm.

Jerry Jones hires lawyer and threatens to sue over Roger Goodell extension

By Frank Schwab
Yahoo! Sports
November 9, 2017

Jerry Jones isn't happy with NFL commissioner Roger Goodell anymore, and the feud might get ugly for the NFL.

According to the New York Times, the Dallas Cowboys owner has hired lawyer David Boies (who finds himself involved in the Harvey Weinstein scandal) and has threatened to sue the league and some team owners over the negotiations over Goodell's contract extension. The Times reported there was a conference call with Jones and the NFL's compensation committee — owners from the Chiefs, Falcons, Giants, Patriots, Steelers and Texans — and Jones told them legal papers were drawn up and would be served this Friday unless the committee drops its plan to give Goodell an extension. Goodell's contract expires after the 2018 season.

While nothing has happened yet, it's a growing issue for the league.

While there are plenty of criticisms of Goodell, including questions about television ratings and much of the attention for this season on player anthem protests, it's easy to wonder if Jones is getting back at Goodell for suspending his star running back Ezekiel Elliott. The NFL suspended Elliott six games in August over an alleged domestic violence incident, after Jones was adamant there was no evidence against him. Elliott has continued to play while the issue works its way through the courts, but Jones still seems to have turned on Goodell over the suspension. The New York Times report said the threats over Goodell's extension "stems from Jones's anger over the commissioner's suspending" of Elliott.

Goodell has faced heat from the outside, but it has been rare to hear any owners rip him publicly. The league has grown to unprecedented financial success under Goodell. But with so many negative off-field stories dominating the action on the field recently, the tide seems to be turning.

Goodell and the NFL did what they thought was right in suspending Elliott. In doing so, it seems the commissioner made a very powerful enemy.

DPD Fraud Unit Tackling Fake Broncos Tickets Problem

By Karen Morfitt

CBS Local

November 9, 2017

A high demand for tickets to see the Denver Broncos play has also made Denver a target for ticket scammers.

Hundreds of fans have reported showing up to Sports Authority Field at Mile High only to find they spent big money for nothing.

"Somebody is already in the seats," one couple told CBS4 after leaving the customer service office at the stadium.

Donna George and her family thought the site they used was legitimate.

"It looks exactly like what we've used in the past," she said.

Sergeant Steve Kimberly with the Denver Police Department's Fraud Unit says it's a problem, and Denver is attracting these types of criminals.

"Suspects that we've identified have traveled from out of state for high profile games," he said

23-year-old Justin Novoa is one example.

He came to Colorado and was busted in Downtown Denver after trying to sell four fake tickets to the Denver versus Dallas game.

The total cost for those tickets was \$900 and investigators found five more tickets in his car.

"When we think of fake tickets we think of the scalper standing on a corner somewhere near the stadium holding up a sign 'I have a tickets for sale.' That's' generally not the norm anymore," Kimberly said.

Instead, things have moved online and scammers are using fake websites and apps that are constantly changing.

"Make sure that you're the one seeking out that site, and that you're the one that's typing in that address in," he said.

However, advances in technology are two-fold. In one instance, it's making it tougher for consumers to identify a fraudulent ticket.

"The tickets that are being sold today, the fraudulent tickets are extremely high quality. I've seen lots, and I could not tell they were fake" said Kimberly.

It has also been a tool for investigators. In the Novoa case, a photo captured by a victims smart phone camera helped identify him.

“If they get away, they’re getting away with a lot of hard earned money from people in Denver, so we do take it very seriously” Kimberly said.

Novoa, who was from out of state, did not make his last court appearance and has a warrant out for his arrest.

Police and the Denver Broncos say the way to avoid getting fake tickets is to use a site that offers a guaranteed entry or money back.

Vance Joseph: Refusing to change would be 'insane'

By Jon Schlosser

Atlanta Journal Constitution

November 9, 2017

Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph is looking for ways to change the team's fortunes this season. As he tinkers with things, he knows that he has no choice. Not only are they now on a four-game losing streak, but he's worried they can't break it by continuing to do what they're doing – even if it worked at the beginning of the season.

"Well, you have to change something," Joseph said, per Tim Lynch of Mile High Report. "We can't continue to go down the same path and expect different results. That's insanity, right? We have to change something, whether it's personnel, whether it's how we gameplan or how we call plays or how we play as a football team together—offensively, defensively and teams together. That's also a thought. I have to figure it out. That's obviously being explored. How do we win as a team? And win cleaner and play a cleaner, competitive game on Sunday."

Just being competitive in the game might be a step in the right direction after getting blown out by a Philadelphia Eagles team that put up 51 points or getting shut out by the Los Angeles Chargers.

The first change was to swap out quarterback Trevor Siemian for Brock Osweiler. That led to the blowout in Philly. That's not all on Osweiler, of course, but it was clear that just a quarterback change wasn't enough.

The Broncos really need to change their mentality. They did not look confident against the Eagles, and now they face Tom Brady and the New England Patriots on Sunday. If they don't believe they can win, they won't, and it's up to Joseph to make them believe.

The post Vance Joseph: Refusing to change would be 'insane' appeared first on All 22.

Jerry Jones Is Said to Hire David Boies to Block Roger Goodell's Contract

By Ken Belson
New York Times
November 9, 2017

The N.F.L., the \$14 billion-a-year sports juggernaut that dominates TV ratings as well as the national conversation most Sundays, has ascended to its position of supremacy in recent years with an ownership group that often works in lock step. The men and women who control the league's 32 teams might disagree sometimes, but rarely do they publicly reveal any discord.

Now the league, already wobbling under the strain of presidential and public aggravation over players' kneeling during the national anthem, is coping with what amounts to an all-out war between one of its most powerful owners and its commissioner, Roger Goodell, who has been rewarded for the N.F.L.'s success with annual compensation that has topped \$40 million.

Jerry Jones, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, has escalated a feud with Goodell, threatening to sue the league and some fellow team owners over negotiations to extend Goodell's contract, according to three people with direct knowledge of the situation.

Jones told the six owners on the league's compensation committee last week that he had hired David Boies, the high-profile lawyer under fire in the Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment case, according to the people, who declined to speak publicly about internal league matters.

Through a team spokesman, Jones declined to comment. An N.F.L. spokesman declined to comment, and a spokesman for Boies's law firm referred all questions to the Cowboys.

The dispute between Jones and Goodell stems from Jones's anger over the commissioner's suspending of Ezekiel Elliott, the Cowboys' star running back, who was accused of domestic violence by his former girlfriend. Goodell gave Elliott a six-game suspension, though no charges were filed in the case.

The suspension, announced in August, has since undergone a dizzying array of rulings and court appeals that has, for now, kept Elliott on the field. Jones has called the suspension an "overcorrection," a gibe at Goodell, who has been criticized for his handling of player discipline.

Jones appears intent on holding up Goodell's contract extension and potentially pushing him out. He is in the minority among owners. While some are unhappy with how the commissioner has handled issues related to player conduct and the national anthem controversy, only a few owners are prepared to replace Goodell, who has been commissioner for more than a decade and has worked at the league since the early 1980s.

The battle within the league is unusual for an organization that prides itself on order and unanimity and oversees the most popular sport in the country. But the N.F.L. is in the middle of one of its most tumultuous seasons because of players kneeling during the national anthem to protest social injustice, a wave of injuries to star players, and a television ratings dip that has fed debate over whether football is declining.

Jones said in a conference call last Thursday with the six owners — those of the Chiefs, Falcons, Giants, Patriots, Steelers and Texans — that legal papers were drawn up and would be served this Friday if the committee did not scrap or delay its current plans to extend Goodell's contract.

As of Wednesday, the owners and the league had not been sued.

Jones, who has owned the Cowboys since 1989, has been a nonvoting member of the committee that is considering Goodell's contract, which expires at the end of the 2018 season. He has fought to have a say.

After Jones's conference call last week, the six owners revoked his status as an ad hoc member of the compensation committee, which decides on pay packages for the top league officials.

Over the past several days, the six owners have been speaking to the other 25 owners who are not on the committee to notify them of what Jones had said.

At a meeting in May, all 32 owners — including Jones — voted to extend Goodell's contract and authorized the compensation committee to work out the details. But after Elliott was suspended, Jones began lobbying the committee to undermine the deal.

Jones, known for brassy talk and bold moves, may be making his most audacious maneuver yet in taking on fellow owners, with whom he normally holds considerable sway in matters like the relocation of teams and how the league spends its money.

Jones's threat is reminiscent of steps taken by Raiders owner Al Davis, who successfully sued to the league in the 1980s to win the right to move his team from Oakland to Los Angeles. Jones has also sued the league, in the 1990s, over sponsorships.

But his latest move is potentially more volatile because he has not only threatened to sue the league, but also is trying to prevent the commissioner from getting a new contract.

Boies is a prominent lawyer who has argued before the Supreme Court and represented corporations and executives in high-profile cases.

He drew widespread criticism this week after The New Yorker reported on the legal work Boies did for Weinstein, the movie mogul facing allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The article reported that Boies helped Weinstein's effort to use private investigators to help block a negative article about him in The New York Times while Boies's firm was providing outside legal counsel for The Times.

Boies denied there was any conflict of interest with his work for the newspaper. In a statement, he said he believed the investigators had been hired solely to determine the facts related to the accusations against Weinstein, which Boies believed would be to The Times's benefit.

The Times said it was ending its relationship with his firm.

“We never contemplated that the law firm would contract with an intelligence firm to conduct a secret spying operation aimed at our reporting and our reporters,” The Times said in a statement. “Such an operation is reprehensible.”

Boies has also worked for the N.F.L., representing the league in federal court in 2011 after the players association decertified as a union. Boies has worked with several owners, some of whom now feel blindsided that he agreed to help Jones potentially sue the league.

Jones has publicly questioned Elliott’s suspension as well as the commissioner’s role in handing down player penalties.

“Zeke is a victim of an overcorrection,” Jones said in a radio interview in October, a day after Elliott lost his bid for a preliminary injunction that would have stayed the six-game ban for violating the league’s personal conduct policy.

“Even this judge said it shows that very reasonable people could possibly come down on both sides of this,” Jones added. “Well, under our legal system it has to be stronger than that for someone to have done it.”

Jones has also been the most vocal owner to urge players to stand for the national anthem. Jones and other owners are upset that Goodell has not done more to stop players from kneeling or sitting during the anthem. The issue exploded into a national debate when President Trump took aim at the owners for not forcing the players to stand.

NFL ratings turnaround hits big speed bump

By Richard Morgan
New York Post
November 9, 2017

The NFL's ratings comeback has stalled.

The TV audience for NFL games, down sharply from last season, had been closing the gap with 2016 for the last seven weeks — until last weekend.

NBC's "Sunday Night Football" game between the Oakland Raiders and the Miami Dolphins attracted 14.4 million viewers, down 22 percent from SNF's Week 9 game last year, according to data compiled by Sports Media Watch.

The game produced the third-lowest viewership of an NFL game since 2011.

The Carolina Panthers-Atlanta Falcons earlier in the day drew 14.2 million viewers, down an even more troubling 29 percent.

Sunday's two laggards reduced viewership for all six NFL national telecasts of Week 9 to 79.1 million — 9.2 percent fewer viewers than the 87.1 million who tuned into Week 9 games last season.

The poor Week 9 ratings dragged down average NFL viewership season-to-date.

The average nationally televised NFL game this season is down 5.7 percent from last season.

After the first week this season, viewership was down 11.8 percent.

Since then, the gap had narrowed each week to where it was off just 5.6 percent through Week 8.

But then the disaster of Week 9 happened.

It doesn't get any easier for the NFL from here on. Last season, audiences were tamped down, in part, because attention was diverted to the raucous presidential campaign.

Ratings picked up last season with Week 10, the first post-Election Day slate of games — an increase in viewership that may be hard to match this year.

NFL seeks to reduce effects of concussions with high-tech gear

By Evan Grossman
New York Daily News
November 9, 2017

THE FATE OF FOOTBALL: Part 4 of 4

The NFL is learning a lot from a bunch of dummies.

Using the same crash test simulations that make cars safer, the NFL is using the dummies implemented by the auto industry to learn more about football collisions in an effort to one day make the game safer.

If you've ever stood on the sideline of an NFL field, the comparison to cars is apt; the speed and force of a pro football game is akin to standing on the side of a highway, with players whizzing by and crashing into opponents no different than automobiles on a road.

An even better way to think about it is that NFL football right now is where the auto industry was in the 1970s. Back then, car makers knew much less about auto safety and impact science as they do today. The results of their research have made driving much safer than it once was.

Over the last 40 years, cars have been made safer with better seat belts, padded dashboards, airbags, and more sophisticated engineering. In 1979, there were 22.7 crash deaths per 100,000 people, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. By 2015, that rate was cut in half, to 10.9, thanks largely to what scientists learned from those crash test dummies.

Those same dummies are now being used to make football safer. Last year the NFL used dummies to measure on-field collisions. The data compiled during those tests continues to be implemented in simulated laboratory tests and is also being used to create safer equipment, says Dr. Jeff Crandall, chair of the NFL Head, Neck and Spine Committee's Engineering Subcommittee.

Crandall has a background in auto safety research and through an improved understanding of how impacts occur on the field, the NFL hopes to help entrepreneurs and innovators make the game safer for brain injuries. Every documented concussion is dissected on video and more than 100 variables, including helmet type, play call, impact location, are charted in a massive database the league shares with equipment manufacturers.

This effort is part of the NFL's "Play Smart. Play Safe." initiative established last year to "drive progress in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of head injuries, enhance medical protocols and further improve the way the game is taught and played by all who love it," according to the league. "Play Smart. Play Safe." is throwing a ton of money at football's brain injury problem: the NFL pledged \$100 million to make the game safer with \$60 million of that reserved for what is known as the Engineering Roadmap, with the remaining \$40M earmarked for medical research.

The Engineering Roadmap is almost like the NFL's version of "Shark Tank," part of which is a series of Head Health Tech Challenges designed to marry the big ideas of private innovators and academics with

the research the NFL is compiling from actual game collisions and the ones it creates in a lab. GE and Under Armour also sponsor the challenges.

The program is overseen by Jeff Miller, the NFL's senior vice president for health and safety, who famously made headlines last year speaking before congress when he became the first NFL executive to acknowledge a link between football and brain injuries like chronic traumatic encephalopathy, better known as CTE.

Just how safe football can ever get is up for debate. According to Dr. Bennet Omalu, who discovered CTE in 2002 and whose research and life story was the subject of the Will Smith movie "Concussion," smoking is actually safer for kids than playing football because, he says, lungs can repair themselves after you stop smoking but the human brain can never fix itself after sustaining a concussion.

The NFL has had three Head Health Challenges that focus on cultivating advances in material science and protective equipment. The challenges received more than 1,000 submissions from entrepreneurs and innovators, Miller said. In the first round, he said, the NFL funded around 30 new initiatives that promise to improve helmet and protective equipment construction.

Better Helmets

One of the products the NFL chose to invest in through the Head Health Challenges is Vicis, which makes helmets that are designed to lessen the impact on players' skulls. The Zero1 helmets are built with four layers of protection including an outer shell that "deforms like a car bumper on impact, slowing impact forces before they reach the head," according to Vicis CEO Dave Marver.

The Zero1 has performed better than any other helmet on the market in testing conducted by the NFL. More than 50 NFL players, including Chiefs quarterback Alex Smith, are wearing them this season, but the helmets are designed to only limit concussions, not prevent them entirely.

Earlier this year, Houston linebacker Brian Cushing suffered a concussion wearing one, proving that even with advanced technology, brain injuries may never be totally eradicated from football.

"Equipment innovations like the Zero1 can make a big difference as part of a multifaceted approach that includes better tackling techniques, rule changes and increased vigilance," Marver said. "Traditional helmets were designed to prevent skull fracture. The Zero1 borrows proven innovations from automotive safety that reduce impact forces more effectively than traditional helmets. ... And, it's the first of many innovations in head protection you can expect from Vicis."

And these innovations don't come cheap. While an average helmet sells for anywhere from \$60 to a couple hundred bucks, the Zero1 sells for a whopping \$1,500.

Vicis is just one of many helmet innovators getting assistance from pro football. Clearly, the NFL sees advances in protective equipment leading to a safer game. Other Tech Challenge winners include VyaTek Sports and Guardian Innovations, which won grants from the NFL to galvanize existing helmets. VyaTek is developing shock-absorbing pads that fit inside helmets, while Guardian is working on a helmet cap designed to do the same thing.

Winners of the second Tech Challenge include 2nd Skull, which makes a skull cap that reduces impact forces; Baytech Products, which is developing a multi-component helmet system concept; and Windpact, led by former NFL cornerback Shawn Springs, which is refining its Crash Cloud, a helmet liner system.

The third Tech Challenge accepted entries through the end of September.

Based on all of this research and development, Crandall said the goal is to have a new and improved all-purpose helmet developed after three years and a position-specific helmet after five years.

However, helmets do not prevent concussions, says Omalu, but in actuality may increase the risk of them because players can “weaponize” their heads, using them to hit opponents. Also, he said, helmets make a child’s head bigger, heavier and add more energy to collisions, all of which can increase the chances of sustaining a brain injury.

“Are we making progress? Of course we are,” Omalu said. “But you’re asking me if fire can be made safer.”

The NFL isn’t just focused on helmets. Viconic, a company developing an impact-absorbing layer for underneath synthetic turf, was also named a Challenge winner.

The Q Collar

Last year, Carolina linebacker Luke Kuechly, one of the game’s toughest and best, was carted off the field with tears streaming down his cheeks and his brain scrambled from another concussion. He had missed nine games over two years because of concussions, and when he was taken off the field on that cart, he put a terrifying face on the NFL’s brain injury problem.

This season, Kuechly is wearing an innovative device called the Q Collar, which its creators believe can cut the risk of concussions. The idea behind the collar, which wraps around the back of the neck and puts slight pressure on blood flow, increases the blood volume in the brain to create a cushion that may limit its movement inside the skull. Concussions are caused when the brain bounces off the inside of the skull, and by producing more fluid between it and the brain, researchers think just may limit concussions.

The Q Collar, designed by Q30 Innovations, has enlisted former Giant Carl Banks and former New York Rangers goalie John Davidson as advisors.

Dr. David Smith, who invented the collar, said the idea came from woodpeckers, which are known to bash their heads against a tree and come away without any negative effects on their brains. Woodpeckers use their tongues to wrap around its head and neck on the inside prior to impact, applying pressure to the jugular while pecking away. The Q Collar was born from that bird-brained idea.

But how successful is the Q Collar?

Kuechly, the lone NFL player wearing the experimental device this season, suffered his third known concussion Oct. 12 on Thursday Night Football against the Eagles.

SyncThink

There is no college more closely connected to football than Notre Dame. And while the school has produced seven Heisman Trophy winners, its storied history also includes the tales of Pete Duranko and Dave Duerson.

Duranko, a defensive end for the Irish in the mid-1960s, contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's Disease, and died in 2011 at age 67. Duerson put a gun to his chest and pulled the trigger, a method of suicide used by players such as Chargers Hall of Famer Junior Seau, in order to preserve the brain for examination. Postmortem studies of both Duerson's and Duranko's brains showed the existence of CTE.

In response to these sad events, a group of influential Notre Dame alumni has been working behind the scenes in an effort to push the school to become a leader in concussion prevention and research. The group raised \$300,000 earmarked for concussion treatment. Part of that grant went into participating in a new technology some researchers believe will help to identify concussions in real time.

SyncThink is a startup that's developing technology that uses eye movements to diagnose potential concussions. Using SyncThink, teams can pull a player off the field immediately after a head hit and monitor their eyes to tell if he is disoriented, a telltale symptom of someone who has suffered a concussion.

The science behind the technology hinges on an element of predictive timing and physical orientation researchers believe is commonly disrupted by concussions.

"In the concussion space, no one has been able to provide hard metrics for making decisions about the status of the athlete," SyncThink Chief Customer Officer Scott Anderson said. "We are able to evaluate how well the athlete orients himself to time and space."

Anderson said the disruptive SyncThink, which is now used at Notre Dame, Texas, Stanford, Iowa State, and Florida, among others, "takes the guesswork out of determining if an athlete is impaired, if the athlete should go back out on the field or not."

Athletes are fitted with a pair of virtual reality goggles modified with cameras and sensors. Players are asked to follow a red dot inside with their eyes. A healthy brain should be able to track the dot closely. An athlete shaken up or disoriented from a collision will have difficulty following the dot. Every eye movement is recorded and can be used to not only diagnose disorientation, but also to chart the process of recovery.

"There is a specific biological signal of someone becoming disinhibited through this test or when they have a concussion; their eyes jump ahead of the target," Anderson said. "They've lost the ability to hold back the motor response. We're able to capture this with our cameras and prove the person has become disinhibited, and as a result, has become disoriented in time and space and can't protect himself."

The technology has not yet reached the NFL, but Anderson indicated the company may be poised for explosive growth in the coming weeks.

“We’re a startup,” he said. “We’re just entering the space. There’s overwhelming interest we can’t keep up with. It’s a matter of time before this is on every sideline.”

Analytics and New Data

Since 2004, helmet manufacturers have been trying to use accelerometers to signal too-hard head hits. Accelerometers measure speed and force and are the same technology used to deploy airbags. In 2013, two NFL teams tested the technology but the league eventually abandoned it citing its unreliability.

But data collected by accelerometers was the basis behind the NFL moving the kickoff up to the 35-yard-line, reducing the number of returned kicks, one of almost 50 rules changes designed to make the game safer. The results of using the 35-yard-line has been a 40 percent decrease in the number of concussions reported on kickoffs since the change, Miller said.

In addition to new technology, protective equipment, medical research, and overall awareness of the lurking danger of brain injuries in football, another component of making the game safer may come from teaching how to play the game better. Enter Atavus, a Seattle-based startup that wants to help teams refine tackling and develop what it calls “instinctive athletes.”

The theory is that efficient tackling not only creates better tacklers; it produces safer tacklers, too.

“Thankfully for the game of football and for us, the technique that puts you in position to create a dominant tackle and puts you in a position to optimize power and control is also the same technique and body position that keeps you in a safer head position,” said Atavus Director of Football Operations Kerry Carter, a former NFL player.

Atavus gives coaches a better understanding of which players tackle better than others and is just one element in overhauling safety in football. The Seattle Seahawks and a handful of college teams have experimented with the monitoring technology.

Concussions may never be taken out of football entirely, but it seems that the game will get safer for head injuries only through the implementation and combination of many of these ideas. In addition to galvanizing helmets, the road to a safer game of football is also paved by science and technology.

Football safety won’t just come from better gear or greater awareness. Total safety may never be achieved in a violent collision sport, but the NFL may get a little safer for players through the confluence of many of these ideas. From protective equipment to softer turf to better medical monitoring to the implementation of new and undiscovered technology, the game can only get safer than it has been.

Cars were once far deadlier than they are today. Using a lot of the same science that made our roads safer for drivers, the NFL hopes to make the field safer for athletes.

“The rules changes, technology, scientific, research and advancement are all going to lead to a safer game and one that advances player health and safety over time,” Miller said.

There is no denying that playing football can be hazardous to your health and to your brain.

However, the game can be safer. And the NFL is relying on a couple of dummies, and some very smart entrepreneurs and innovators, to do that.

NFL COMMENTATOR: FOOTBALL WILL DIE BECAUSE IT DESTROYS BRAINS

By Carlos Ballesteros
Newsweek
November 9, 2017

Emmy Award-winning sports anchor Bob Costas said that football “destroys people’s brains” and will slowly vanish from American life if safety concerns are left unchecked.

“[Evidence of brain trauma] leads you to the common sense conclusion that you shouldn’t play tackle football at all until you’re 18-years-old at a minimum,” he said at a symposium of sports journalists at the University of Maryland on Tuesday night.

“But then where is the talent pool for college football? The whole thing can collapse like a house of cards if people actually begin connecting the dots.”

Costas, who made a name for himself covering National Football League for over two decades, added that while the sport is still generating huge revenues despite recent controversies, the long-term future of the sport is uncertain.

“The cracks in the foundation are there,” he said. “You cannot change the nature of the game. If I had an athletically gifted 12- or 13-year-old son, I would not let him play football.”

At the center of the issue is not only chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, but also the NFL’s well-documented reluctance to confront the issue. CTE is a degenerative neurological disorder caused by repeated head trauma, with symptoms including early onset amnesia, depression, and loss of consciousness. The disease was first connected to the NFL in 2002 by Dr. Bennet Omalu, a forensic pathologist who discovered CTE in the brain of former Pittsburgh Steelers’ center Mike Webster after he committed suicide.

Since then, multiple studies have only strengthened the medical connection between CTE and playing football. A recent study of 202 football players’ brains found that 88 percent of the late NFL players suffered from, a degenerative neurological disease caused by multiple head traumas. Of the 111 brains examined, 110 of them had CTE.

Echoing Costas’ concerns, ESPN’s Tony Kornheiser said football risked facing a similar fate as that of boxing, which has declined in popularity in recent years.

“It’s not going to happen this year, and it’s not going to happen in five years or 10 years,” Kornheiser said. “But Bob is right: At some point, the cultural wheel turns just a little bit, almost imperceptibly, and parents say, ‘I don’t want my kids to play.’ If they don’t find a way to make it safe...the game's not going to be around.”

The NFL did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Not a single NFL sponsor or pizza chain will say it's losing sales after players' national anthem protests — except Papa John's

By Kate Taylor
Business Insider
November 9, 2017

NFL sponsors and other pizza chains are refusing to follow in Papa John's footsteps after the company's CEO slammed the professional football league.

Business Insider reached out to 18 other NFL sponsors to ask whether they were reevaluating their sponsorship deals and whether national anthem protests were impacting business. Not a single company told us that they were considering ditching the NFL or that sales had been negatively affected.

"We have many long-term sports partnerships, including our NFL sponsorship, and while we may not agree on everything, we still believe in the power of sport to bring people together and overcome their differences," Budweiser and Bud Light parent company AB InBev said in a statement. "We have no plans to end our NFL sponsorship."

Pizza chains have been similarly unmoved by Papa John's argument that low NFL ratings are hurting sales.

"I can only speak to the third quarter, the results of which we released on October 12," a Domino's representative told Business Insider. "Nothing we reported in the quarter included commentary about the NFL because we saw no reason to call it out."

Pizza Hut said in a call with investors that the chain's business had not been impacted by the protests or the league's ratings. Wingstop, another chain that heavily relies on orders from NFL viewers, said the same thing. And, frozen pizza brand DiGiorno implied on Twitter that Papa John's problem wasn't the NFL — it was that the chain's pizza tastes like "dog s---."

Last week, Papa John's founder and CEO John Schnatter slammed NFL leadership and blamed players protesting during the national anthem for dragging down the pizza chain's sales. The pizza chain told the Wall Street Journal on Friday that it was reevaluating its NFL sponsorship — a deal that the company currently allocates a "huge percentage" of its fall and winter marketing budget toward.

Broncos place Menelik Watson on IR, sign Cyrus Kouandjio

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
November 9, 2017

The Broncos signed Menelik Watson to a two-year contract as a free agent this offseason, but he won't be helping them in the second half of his first season in Denver.

Mike Klis of KUSA was the first to report that the Broncos are placing Watson on injured reserve Wednesday and the team announced it a short time later. A calf injury is to blame for the end of Watson's season.

Klis also reports that the Broncos will sign Cyrus Kouandjio to replace Watson on the roster. The 2014 Bills second-round pick spent time with the Lions this summer, but was cut before the start of the regular season. He joins Donald Stephenson as tackle options with Watson out of action.

While quarterback has been the focal point in most discussions about the struggling Broncos offense, the line has been a major problem as well. Watson's play contributed to that and the Broncos will need better work from his replacement if things are going to get better over their final eight games.