

Kickin' it with Kiz: So you're saying there's a chance? Here's how the Broncos can upset New England

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
November 12, 2017

Against New England, offensive coordinator Mike McCoy and the Broncos must look to the game plan he designed for San Diego in December 2013, when the Chargers won 27-20 at Denver. In that game, San Diego rushed for 177 yards on 44 carries, had no turnovers and possessed the football for nearly 39 minutes.

R.S.H., dreamer and schemer

Kiz: Let's be blunt. McCoy has been too cute by half when designing offensive game plans in 2017. McCoy, however, does have a blueprint for pulling an upset against New England, if he cribs his own notes from San Diego's upset of Peyton Manning four years ago. And let's be honest. While Tom Brady is one beautiful man, he regularly gives ugly performances in our dusty old cow town. This game is about heart. This is the last chance for romance in Denver's season, because if our hometown heroes break the hearts of fans one more time, it's all over except the bickering in Broncos Country. After pouring over the analytics and consulting the Magic 8-ball at Kickin' It Headquarters, our crack staff gives Denver about a 30 percent chance to beat New England. Outlook not so good? Yes. But I'm saying there's a chance. The pick: Patriots 24, Broncos 20.

You want to take a U.S. military veteran to a Broncos game? My 89-year-old dad was a lieutenant in the Air Force. Growing up, father and son spent many years watching the Broncos together on television. He now refuses to watch the NFL due to the anthem protests. He is not computer literate and has no e-mail address and is unable to drive at night due to poor vision. By the way: He does not like you. Good luck.

John, Phoenix

Kiz: In my search to find a vet that would like to attend the home game against Cincinnati, my heart has been touched by more than 50 requests, many filled with inspirational stories of patriotic service. But, for some reason, this request tickled my funny bone. Dear John: I will be taking some other vet to the game, but sincerely hope this doesn't cause your father to like me even less.

I have three extra tickets to the Bengals game that I would be happy to donate to a veteran, if you see fit to award the tickets to a family. Kiz, you will undoubtedly get some pretty compelling stories from military heroes that want to join you, but only one can go with you. So I'd like to give a military family the opportunity to attend the game.

Randy, representing the 303

Kiz: Wow. You're the best, Randy. And everything that's good about Broncos Country.

The only people that look at Brock Osweiler or Trevor Siemian and think they should be a starting NFL quarterback are their parents.

L.I., Evergreen

Kiz: And folks think I'm harsh.

And today's parting shot is a pat on the back.

I like reading your columns, because you say things that are absolutely true, even if we fans don't want to hear them. Keep it up, Kiz.

K.G., Denver

Kiszla: After QB Sam Darnold beat the Buffs, John Elway should've issued him a Broncos jersey

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
November 12, 2017

Boulder — This is what a real NFL quarterback looks like, Broncos Country.

Sam Darnold stopped by Colorado for a brief visit Saturday, and casually dropped 329 yards passing on the Buffaloes during a 38-24 victory by Southern Cal. If Broncos executive John Elway was smart, he never would have allowed Darnold to leave the state.

So how much money could Elway had offered Darnold as a bribe to stay, and put on a Broncos uniform for the Sunday night showdown against New England? How about \$20 million? You say more like \$35 million?

OK, deal. Let's pass the hat in the parking lot at Sports Authority Field. I'm in for 17 bucks. (Hey, that's all the cash in my wallet.)

Darnold is a painful reminder of what the Broncos lost when Peyton Manning retired. Elite quarterbacks win the Super Bowl. If Darnold decides to declare for the 2018 NFL draft, the speculation about which player will be selected No. 1 overall will end immediately.

Darnold is everything that Brock Osweiler and Trevor Siemian are not. They try to manage the game, while fans pray the Denver quarterbacks don't invent a way to mess it up.

Darnold moves like a Maserati, if a Maserati were equipped with a rocket-launcher. The 20-year-old redshirt sophomore is built like a linebacker and has a mop of California-cool hair. Close your eyes and dream, Broncos Country. Know what you see? Elway 2.0.

USC held its postgame news conference in a room so small that brooms might be offended if you called it a closet. Darnold stepped into the claustrophobic quarters created by 20 reporters, squeezing into a microscopic space with his back against the wall, alongside his head coach and teammate Ajene Harris. With barely room to breathe, Darnold eyed the situation and announced: "This is perfect."

He lives in a fish bowl. Darnold's passes are so strong they can break the glass of tight windows. His scrambling ability produced a 24-yard touchdown run against CU. But it will be how Darnold handles life while hearing 100-decibel cheers for his every touchdown, while also getting criticism from the whole worldwide web each time he throws an interception that determines if he succeeds or fails at the NFL level.

"I have really enjoyed his leadership, whether it's good times or bad," said Trojans coach Clay Helton, who has watched Darnold tear apart Stanford in September and get stomped by Notre Dame in October.

“Can you imagine? We all know. ... When you’re the quarterback at USC, to have that much pressure on you, and to do it with that much class and character on a weekly basis whether things are going good or bad, and perform for his brothers, he’s the definition of team success over individual success. That’s what I appreciate most about him.”

Even if Denver craters during the back half of the NFL season and the number of losses pile up to double digits, it’s hard to conceive how the Broncos are awarded any of the top-five picks in the draft. Sorry, the No. 6 selection won’t land them Darnold. Not even close.

Of course, there’s speculation his decision to stay at USC or go pro might be determined in part by which team drafts No. 1 overall. Maybe getting beat up in Cleveland isn’t Darnold’s idea of a dream job.

After all the damage Elway has done to the Browns through the years, think there’s any chance they would trade him the chance to draft Darnold?

His 11th game of the 2017 season was the first time Darnold did not commit a turnover. As Elway could attest, one of the hardest things for a supremely gifted young quarterback to learn is when to save being a hero for another play.

After a roller-coaster ride for these Trojans, they have emerged with a 7-1 conference record, and firmly re-established they, not Colorado, are in charge of the Pac-12 South. Darnold checks off the way he has grown along the way:

He has picked up teammates after ego-shattering losses. His deep ball accuracy is more consistent. There’s more patience in the pocket, resisting the urge to scramble at the first sign of trouble.

“There’s still some room to grow,” Darnold said.

Can I guarantee he will be the next great NFL quarterback?

Nope.

Standing next to Darnold for seven minutes after one big road victory allows no more than a glimpse into his composure or how hard he’s committed to work toward being elite on the pro level.

But would Denver stand a better chance to beat New England if Darnold stayed in Colorado and started at quarterback instead of Osweiler or Siemian?

No doubt about it.

Broncos Q&A with A.J. Derby: Denver's leading tight end eager for matchup with old team

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
November 12, 2017

A.J. Derby was still learning the Patriot Way when he was told to head to the airport. The tight end, who is in his first full season in Denver, was sent to the Broncos ahead of the trade deadline last season. Derby is an understated member of the Broncos' locker room. He's courteous yet concise. A hunt for bulletin board material wouldn't begin at his locker. Yet, Derby made it clear this week. He's eager to face the team that sent him packing last season. He spoke with The Denver Post about playing the Patriots, becoming a new father and honoring the military ahead of Sunday's Salute to Service game.

Q: I think a lot of people don't take into account the personal toll on a player when he gets traded in the middle of a season. What was that like last year?

A: It was midseason, so it was really tough. My wife was a champ for it because I just took the first flight out the next morning after I found out. She was just left with the whole house and all the furniture and everything to get moved across the country. It's just not easy learning a new playbook and learning guys. But it's been good and I'm happy to be here. I'm excited to play the Patriots.

Q: So is playing the Patriots business as usual?

A: I wouldn't say that. In my mind, I'm super competitive. Every time I play against them, I'm going to think they messed up by getting rid of me. That's my mentality. That's how I'm going to go into the game and approach it.

Q: You spent your off day last week visiting active-duty service members in Colorado Springs. How did that go?

A: It was a great experience. We got to sit there and eat lunch with the guys, shoot the crap and really see what they've been through. It was really cool. It really puts into perspective their work ethic and how much they do for us.

Q: You've often jumped at the opportunities to spend time with service members. Why is that?

A: I'm just very appreciative of what they do. At the end of the day, we couldn't do what we do without them. They are the reason we are so free as a country and are able to do what we want and speak how we want. We're just, overall, super thankful for them giving their lives and going over there.

Q: I understand you are going to honor the military during the "My Cause, My Cleats" Game? (That game, in Week 13, allows players to wear customized cleats in support of charities or causes of their choice.)

A: Yeah, I'm going to be using mine for TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors), which is a great organization. I'm really excited about it.

Q: You recently became a father for the first time. What's that been like? (Derby and his wife welcomed a baby girl named Charlie Jo.)

A: It's been great. At the end of the day, you have a little more to play for, a little more to think about. You're playing for a little baby that doesn't know anything, and in the future you get to talk to her and show her the way. I'm just really excited to be a dad and just show her the way.

Q: I've heard guys say that has the ability to put long days, losing games and things like that into perspective.

A: Yeah, it really helps you get away from football. Obviously, you have your stuff you have to study and everything like that. But it helps get your mind off it because when you're home, I just really want to spend time with my daughter. Then, when she goes to bed, I get back into the film. But it just really gets your mind off it for those couple hours she's awake.

9 reasons why Broncos can beat Patriots

By Mike Klis

9 News

November 12, 2017

As they prepared for their 2017 season, had John Elway and Vance Joseph gone through all the worst-case scenarios, none of them would have been as bad as where the Denver Broncos are now.

Four straight losses by an average score of 31-13, and here comes Bill Belichick, Tom Brady and the mighty New England Patriots.

The Broncos are a stunning 7.5-point underdog at home for their game Sunday night at eventually-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High (kickoff 6:30, 9News).

Such times call for an adjustment. Rather than 9NEWS coming up with the usual 9 keys to the game, the Pats call for a more aggressive approach.

Here are 9 reasons why the Broncos can win:

Brady has struggled in Denver

Tom Brady is the NFL's all-time winningest quarterback with 214 – 14 more than runner-up Peyton Manning. Yet, Brady is 7-9 lifetime against the Broncos, 3-7 in games played in Denver (counting playoffs). He and the Patriots did win here last year, 16-3. He has never won two in a row here.

Pride

The Broncos were embarrassed last week at Philadelphia. They are expected to give it their all Sunday night so they won't be humiliated in front of their home crowd and won't be shamed on national television (has it been mentioned the game can be seen on 9News?).

Bye-week blues

The past two seasons, the Broncos appeared to be a top 5 NFL team going into their bye week. Each time, they fell apart after their week off. The Patriots were hot going into their bye, winning four in a row. A week off can only cost them their edge. Don't be surprised if they're a little flat Sunday night.

Von Miller

The Broncos' star pass rusher has had some of his best games against the Patriots. In eight games against them, he has 7.5 sacks, a fumble recovery return for a touchdown, and an interception.

With Pats' right tackle Marcus Cannon out with an ankle injury, Miller is expected to face backup LaAdrian Waddle.

Belichick and offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels may counter with a conservative game plan that is heavy on the run and quick passes. But even if that plan neutralizes Miller, a low-scoring game could help the struggling Broncos' offense keep up.

No Julian Edelman

In his past three regular-season games against the Broncos (2016, 2014, 2013), New England's clutch receiver combined for 24 receptions, 274 yards and 3 touchdowns. The Patriots won all three.

Edelman suffered a season-ending knee injury during the preseason. The Pats also won't have another top receiver, Chris Hogan, who is out with a shoulder injury. The Denver defense can double cover tight end Rob Gronkowski, who probably will have a big game, anyway, but maybe not a monster game.

C.J. Anderson is healthy

The Chiefs' Kareem Hunt went for 148 yards against the New England defense and the Chargers' Melvin Gordon picked up 132 on just 14 carries. Other backs like the Saints' Mark Ingram, Bucs' Doug Martin and Falcons' Devonta Freeman had nice games.

The 5.1 yard per rush allowed by the New England defense ranks No. 32 in the league.

Anderson, the Broncos' lead back, has played well in his four games against the Pats, combining for 219 yards and two touchdowns off 37 carries (5.92 yards per attempt). Anderson was injured and didn't play against New England last year.

Brock is back

The Patriots rank No. 32 in the league in pass defense, allowing 295.5 yards per game.

Broncos quarterback Brock Osweiler has faced the Patriots three times the previous two seasons.

He played well in helping the Broncos defeat New England, 30-24, in overtime in a 2015 game played in Denver.

His Texans lost twice in Foxborough last year, but in a playoff game he threw a touchdown pass that brought Houston within, 14-13, midway through the second quarter.

Altitude fright

Belichick is treating altitude as if it's an opponent. Besides playing at 5,280 feet above sea level on Sunday night, Belichick will have his team spend next week practicing down the road at the Air Force Academy, where Falcon Stadium regularly boasts of its 6,621 feet of altitude. And then the Pats play the following week in Mexico City, where the altitude is 7,300 feet-plus, against the Raiders.

This special attention to altitude can constantly remind the players altitude is a serious challenge.

Brandon McManus wins kicking duel

In the Broncos' lopsided defeat at Philly, McManus made field goals from 53, 52 and 24 yards. With his good leg swing back in business, he becomes an offensive threat as soon as the Broncos cross midfield.

Patriots kicker Stephen Gostkowski made four field goals in his previous game but he also missed twice from 43.

Reeling Broncos hope they can find way to add to Patriots' struggles in Denver

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

November 12, 2017

The Denver Broncos are currently wading through a difficult stretch of football unlike most of the team's players have seen the Broncos experience before.

Only wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, their first-round pick in 2010, was with the team the last time it suffered a four-game losing streak. And that was in 2010 when the Broncos had both a four- and a five-game losing streak on the way to a 4-12 finish.

So, the Broncos are surly, a bit confused, and have committed far too many penalties and turnovers. And Sunday night they get Tom Brady across from them for their troubles.

That's a lot for a first-year coach like Vance Joseph to have on his plate as the Broncos stand at 3-5 with half a season left to play. But this week Broncos linebacker Von Miller said there's still time to make it all right, giving Joseph an endorsement and saying it's on all involved to dig out.

"Tough situation for all of us, not just the head coach, losing in the National Football League, that's not good," Miller said. "Whatever you want to do Monday through Saturday... if you go out there and win, you're doing something right. If you lose you're doing something wrong. VJ's been phenomenal. The record truly doesn't say what type of coaching, what type of team, that we have. VJ has been 100 percent phenomenal."

So, with that in mind, some things to watch for in Sunday night's game against the New England Patriots:

Brady, of course: In what is a bit of quirk in the career resume of a five-time Super Bowl winner, the Patriots are 3-7 in Brady's 10 career starts in Denver (playoffs included). He's thrown nine interceptions and been sacked 16 times in those games. Brady is again powering a Patriots team with some blemishes with his MVP-worthy work. He's got 16 touchdowns this season to go with just two interceptions and has the second-most attempts in the league to this point with 309 -- 38.6 per game. For the most part, the Broncos held opposing quarterbacks check in the first seven games of the season and then Philadelphia's Carson Wentz tossed four touchdown passes in three quarters of work last Sunday. Pressure has always been key for the Broncos on Brady and they have to find a way to get him at least a little unsettled in the pocket.

Plug the leak: The one matchup the Broncos defense has consistently had difficulty with this season is against opposing tight ends. Jason Witten had 97 yards receiving and a touchdown. Evan Engram had 82 yards and a touchdown. Travis Kelce had 133 yards and a touchdown. And even with Zach Ertz out of the lineup with a hamstring injury last Sunday, the Eagles' tight ends still combined for 80 yards and a touchdown. That makes the Patriots' Rob Gronkowski a tall order for the Broncos, especially when the Patriots open the formation and Gronkowski is isolated on a Broncos safety or linebacker. Gronkowski has three 100-yard receiving games against the Broncos, two of those in playoffs.

Keep your composure: The statistics will scream the Broncos should throw the ball early and often given the Patriots are last in the league in total defense and last in the league in pass defense. But the Broncos haven't shown over the last six games that they can pass protect well enough to spread the field and go into throw-first mode. Eighteen of their 22 sacks allowed over the last six games have been in the three-wide receiver set and eight of the 10 interceptions came during that span. The Patriots are also 25th against the run and that's where the Broncos have to find their tempo. The Patriots have been among the league's worst defending runs in the middle of the formation -- 4.6 yards per carry on runs over the offense's left guard, 5.1 yards a carry on runs over the center and 5.3 yards on run over the right guard.

Make a special teams play: Broncos special teams coordinator Brock Olivo's enthusiasm and intensity about the job has not translated into any sort of consistency to this point. The Broncos have had special teams bobbles almost every week and the Patriots are just the kind of team to make you pay for any and all of your mistakes. Olivo has said he's tried to build "a culture," but the Broncos are still in search of a game-changing play that powers them toward a win rather than an error that takes their momentum away. "That's on me to get that confidence in those guys, to get them to believe in the scheme, get them to believe in their ability," Olivo said. "That's on me. I've been all talk up to this point, man, we've got to perform."

Where Are They Now: Gene Mingo

By Jim Saccomano
DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2017

In the case of Gene Mingo, the time before the Broncos joined the NFL means just about everything, because he was among the few who were there at the very beginning, at the start of the American Football League.

He also was one of very few players with no college experience at all, and beyond that — and most significantly — Mingo was the first African-American placekicker in pro football history.

He did not go to college but played on a service team while in the United States Navy.

“Playing in the service, when you go against the Marines, Army, or even another Navy team, it was almost like playing against the Raiders or the Chiefs,” Mingo says.

The rosters in those days were heavily stocked with former college and even pro players, and that kind of fierce competition gave Mingo the experience he needed to become a pro.

With tonight's opponent being the New England Patriots, Mingo's significance is most notable, as he returned a punt 76 yards for a touchdown to score the winning points in the first Broncos — and AFL — game ever played, at Boston on Sept. 9, 1960. It was the first game-winning touchdown and the first punt-return touchdown in Broncos and AFL history.

He did not start off the night as the punt returner, but first-half injuries thrust him into the role at halftime.

“I was so nervous that night, but I was excited, too,” he recalls.

Boston took a 10-7 lead late in the third quarter, but on their next possession, the Patriots were forced to punt. Mingo caught it at the Denver 24 and took off.

“I can still see it now,” Mingo says. “I made like I was making a move to my left, then back to my right. I picked up my blockers and just ran down the sideline. When I got there, I was so tired that I couldn't kick the extra point. I kicked a big divot out of the ground. My leg was dead.

“When I was going down the sideline and I could see the coach and some of the guys waving me on, that was one of the best feelings. Here's a kid who did not go to college and now he's starting a pro career than nobody really expected him to have, let alone score the winning touchdown on a punt return. That can never be broken.”

He played five seasons with the Broncos (1960-64) and during the first four seasons in team history, he ranked third in pro football with 375 total points, leading the AFL in scoring in 1960 and 1962. His point total in that five-year span trailed only Hall of Famer Paul Hornung and Patriots wide receiver/kicker Gino Cappelletti.

Besides of his significant role as a pro football's pioneer African-American placekicker, Mingo was a multi-talented weapon during the formative years of the franchise. He played a total of 10 seasons, including stops in Oakland, Miami, Washington and Pittsburgh after his historic time in Denver.

An All-Star selection in 1962, Mingo had the rare distinction of being the only player in AFL history to tally scores of 50 yards or more by rushing, receiving, passing, punt return and field goals.

Mingo later served as an honorary captain for Denver's "Legacy Game" against the Patriots on Oct. 11, 2009, commemorating the franchise's 50th season. I arranged for both Mingo and Cappelletti to be honorary captains for their respective teams that day, and their 50-yard line reunion was as emotional as it was symbolic.

Mingo worked for many post-football years as an alcohol and drug counselor and is mostly retired today, but he has the kind of experience and desire to help others that still keep him active when asked.

"People would call me and I talked to the family members, got them together and worked out a plan to confront this person in what is called an intervention," Mingo says. "These are the things that inspired me and kept me going, and I have always been willing to assist."

Mingo has also been active in the Denver Broncos Alumni Association, too.

"I have traveled a long route," he says. "I understand what football players go through and I have the experience to help them understand what happens after football."

He was inducted into the Ring of Fame in 2014 for his great career on the field and as a pioneer for the Broncos and in the AFL.

"It was a very fulfilling moment for me and my entire family," he says with pride.

A significant part of the Denver community on and off the field since 1960, Mingo summarizes it all, succinctly: "I have had a lot of good things happen in my life, and I'll always be a Bronco."

Mason's Mailbag: Special teams looks to build off strong game

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2017

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

Is the special-teams unit back on track?

-- Tom Rodriguez

You don't want to jump to conclusions based off of one game, but last week's loss to Philadelphia saw what was likely the best overall performance on special teams, with only a penalty on a first-quarter kickoff return marring the unit's performance.

What was interesting from Special Teams Coordinator Brock Olivo's question-and-answer session Friday was how he wants his unit to push for more. For example, when he was asked about Isaiah McKenzie's 44-yard return, he noted that if McKenzie had taken another angle as he sprinted upfield, he could have gone the distance.

"If Isaiah stays outside, hits the sideline and just trusts his speed, it's a house call, it's a touchdown," Olivo said. "We're right there, but it's not good enough. We have to get over the hump and once we do that, then the hope is that that will be contagious and that will spark the cultural change.

"We have to believe every time we take the field that we're going to score and we have that opportunity. If we do that, then that will lead to that."

Olivo's reference to "cultural change" came a few minutes after he talked about how the culture of "guys who take pride in special teams" hasn't been created yet.

"We have a couple [of those players]," he said, citing examples that included wide receivers Cody Latimer and Bennie Fowler III, tight end Virgil Green, fullback Andy Janovich and safeties Will Parks and Justin Simmons. "But it needs to be contagious. It needs to spread throughout that meeting room and be translated onto the practice field. That's on me. I have to create that and that's why I'm here, I've realized that. I've come up short up to this point. I owe it to the franchise, this staff and this team to get that thing rolling."

Good day to you -- so I have been watching or listening to or looking at Broncos football since 1960. I believe this is the first time anyone has put over 50 points on the Broncos since 2010. But that is memory not fact. I played (not well) and love the game of football. When someone puts 50 or more points on a team I think a coach has lost his team some time ago -- what do you think?

-- Dudley Gardner

With all respect, I think your theory is not supported by facts.

In the last decade, five teams have made the postseason after allowing 50 or more points at one point during the season, including one that went to the Super Bowl and another that was coached by a Hall of Famer (the 2007 Redskins, coached by Joe Gibbs, lost 52-7 at New England). In 1998, the Jacksonville Jaguars won a playoff game just two weeks after losing 50-10 to the Minnesota Vikings. Heck, the 2013 Philadelphia Eagles lost 52-20 to the Broncos in September and were 3-5 at midseason, then went 7-1 in the second half of the campaign to claim the NFC East crown.

Will Chad Kelly be considered a Broncos QB in the future?

-- Berni Spradley

He'll have the chance to develop and grow as a pro quarterback. The rest will not only depend on him, but how the competition at the position shapes up next year and beyond. It's too early to do anything but guess as to his long-term potential.

What can new linebacker Joseph Jones bring to the linebackers?

-- Kevin Grant

Speed. There aren't many linebackers with 4.5 speed like Jones possesses, and if he develops, he has the chance to be used strategically in matchups against tight ends and quick running backs out of the backfield. For now, his speed is likely to be used on the special-teams units first.

Submit a question for the next Mailbag!

Three Keys to Broncos-Patriots

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2017

You know the names: Tom Brady, Bill Belichick, Rob Gronkowski. You know what they've accomplished together, including last year's Super Bowl LI win and a current 11-game road winning streak. Of course, the Patriots' last road loss was in Denver -- in the 2015 AFC Championship Game. And in Brady and Belichick's time together, the Patriots are 3-7 in Denver, including three postseason games.

Given that playoff games against New England at home have brought out the Broncos' best, perhaps it's a positive that some players have taken the approach that this week's showdown has similar weight, given that the Broncos have shrunk their margin for error in the rest of the season because of a four-game losing streak.

"This is a playoff game," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We know we've got to win. There's a lot at stake with the way the Chiefs are playing and everybody else in our division is playing."

And the challenge of containing the Patriots starts with neutralizing the Brady-to-Gronkowski connection. In a script that has repeated itself over the last four weeks, another Broncos opponent brings at least one game-breaking tight end to the equation. But Gronkowski is the current standard-bearer at his position.

"You see Gronkowski, he's a man," Ray said. "Him and [Kansas City's] Travis Kelce are the top two tight ends in the league."

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. had to go one-on-one against Gronkowski late in the 2015 AFC Championship game after injuries decimated the Broncos' safety corps.

"[There] is really nothing you can do," Harris said. "You can just try to slow him down and try not to let him get going full speed. Other than that, there is nothing you can do to stop that man when he's rolling."

That means a defense must find ways to prevent him from getting rolling in the first place.

"The biggest thing with Gronk, you don't want to get him moving down the field," Ray said. "You don't want to allow him to have free releases and run down the field on your safeties and linebackers. There's always an emphasis on that guy. When we play him, it's always get hands on him, know where he's at. It's the same game plan -- attack the tight ends, try to take away Tom's favorite weapon and play it from there."

But the Patriots' array of targets is far more than just their tight end, which is where this week's Three Keys begins:

1. Don't over-focus on one target

One of the reasons why the Patriots' offense leads the league in net yards and first downs per possession is that New England is the only team in the league that has seven players with at least 300 yards from scrimmage. No other team has more than five players from among their running backs, wide receivers and tight ends with 300 yards from scrimmage, and the league average is 3.8.

Brady's willingness to trust any target in any situation prevents teams from focusing too much on Gronkowski; he will take the matchup with running backs James White or Dion Lewis or wide receivers Brandin Cooks or Chris Hogan (although Hogan has already been ruled out for Sunday because of a shoulder injury). The addition of Martellus Bennett gives Brady another option if the veteran tight end is healthy enough to play; he was listed as questionable on Friday's injury report.

"The issue lies in that you can't double one guy every play," Head Coach Vance Joseph said. "From time to time you have to have your guys cover one-on-one. If it's first-and-10, no one's going to be in a defense where you're doubling a tight end. That makes no sense because you have the run game to account for.

"From time to time our backers and our safeties have to cover the backs and tight ends one-on-one. That's just part of it and we have to win there. Third downs, especially downs there where the ball should go to that guy, we have a plan to defend those guys with coverage and with leverage. But if it's first-and-10, how do you do that without someone covering someone one-on-one?"

2. Control the tempo with the ground game

New England's defense has allowed at least 4.5 yards per carry in six of eight games so far this season, and it has been gashed for 120 or more rushing yards five times. Meanwhile, the Broncos are 3-1 this season when rushing for at least 120 yards.

The key statistic for Denver is rushing first downs; the offense has accounted for 23.5 points per game when it gets seven or more first downs via the ground, and just 10.5 points per game when it fails to meet that mark.

3. Protect the football

It is not a coincidence that the Broncos' last win was also the last time that they had a positive turnover margin; in three of their last four losses, the margin was minus-3 or worse. Meanwhile, the Patriots have won 81 of their last 82 games in which they had a turnover margin of plus-2 or better; they had a streak of 81 in a row that was snapped in their 33-30 loss to Carolina on Oct. 1.

"Ball security is job security," Broncos quarterback Brock Osweiler said before the Eagles game. But it's more than that: It gives the team a fighting chance against the defending champions.

Salute to Service: The stories behind the Broncos' helmet stickers

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2017

For Salute to Service month, each Broncos player had the option to represent a specific military service branch on the back of their helmets with the logo sticker of their choice. Many players didn't have personal connections to the branches they picked, but some did. These are some of their stories.

P Riley Dixon

My grandpa was a Marine. He served however many years ago. Both my grandfathers were veterans. My grandfather on my dad's side was a pilot in the Air Force during World War II, and my other grandfather was a Marine during World War II, too. My cousin is actually stationed in Okinawa, [Japan] right now in the Marines. And then one of my college roommates, and I actually went to high school with him, Jack Johnson, he's heading over to Okinawa here pretty soon, so I've got a lot of friends and family in the Marines.

It's awesome. I always let [him] know, "Hey, I've got the Marines sticker on the back of my helmet," and he's super jacked up about it. Last year I had my camo cleats with the USMC on the side. He loved those. I haven't worn them yet this year. I might pull them out this week. Him and my grandpa both love the support, and they're both just huge Marine Corps guys.

TE Virgil Green

My dad was in the Army. He served about 10 years in the military. I just remember being on the Army base, seeing those guys going to work and just thinking about how tough and courageous those guys were. My dad fought, so I support the work my dad did.

It's important because those guys are fighting for the freedoms we have today, the freedom to speak up, the freedom to live our life. It's life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, and that's what those guys are fighting for.

DE Derek Wolfe

I picked the Navy because my brother-in-law is in the Navy. He's actually running out of the tunnel with me this game. I've got a family member in the Navy, and I've got a lot of respect for Navy SEALs as well. I think they're a bunch of badassess.

ILB Brandon Marshall

I picked the Navy because my grandfather was in the Navy. He was a great man, my only role model in my life, I feel like. ... I think he served in World War II. So that's why I picked the Navy.

I'm just grateful for everybody who's sacrificing their lives so we can have our rights and we can be free and have a democracy. It's a beautiful thing, and I'm extremely appreciative of it.

ILB Todd Davis

One of my older cousins is in the Navy, so I picked them to honor him and what he's doing for our country and his service.

I think it's just thanking all the men and women that put their lives on the line for us to live this free life, this carefree life that we're able to live here in America.

CB Brendan Langley

It means a lot, actually. I have a lot of family that have served in the service, in the military. So having that connection with it, I think I have a personal bond with it. I chose ... to represent the Navy on the back of my helmet just because the grit that they have. I've never actually been around them, but all you ever hear is about how dedicated and hard-working SEAL Team Six is. So I feel like when you think about top players in the league, you think about Von, you think about top notches in the military, you think about the Navy. So that's kind of why I chose them.

CB Bradley Roby

I felt like it was only right that I picked something that my brother did. He was in the Air Force, served for at least five or six years. So it's only right.

Every game I like to go in and honor my family by performing good, but the Salute to Service game is definitely a big game, just to [show] our appreciation for the military. There's real problems in the world, real life, real war going on, so thankfully we don't have to worry about that because of them. It's definitely a good opportunity to represent for those guys.

CB Chris Harris Jr.

My father-in-law's in the Navy.

Just recognizing those guys and all those who put their lives on the line for us so we can be able to play. I just salute those guys and being able to do the dirty work for us to be able to have our freedom to do what we want to do out here.

S Darian Stewart

A good friend of mine I grew up with is in the Navy and has been there for about 11 years now. That's the reason I chose them.

It means a lot, just because I appreciate them for serving the country and it's just a part of me, because that's one of my best friends since third grade.

WR Jordan Taylor

It's not anything in-depth other than one of my really good friends growing up from elementary all the way through high school joined the Marines. So I just wanted to show some support for him. That's a small way to do it, obviously.

It's awesome because he represents us year-round and that's what he does for a living. He allows us to do what we do. I can't thank him and everyone else in every branch enough for what they do.

Paul Klee: This one is going to hurt — unless Von Miller saves the Broncos' season vs. the Patriots

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
November 12, 2017

We've seen Von Miller in 1,000 different lights.

He's pitched deodorant in his underwear. He's expertly explained the difference between layers and fryers at his Texas chicken farm. He's sack-danced the "Sexy T-Rex." He's one of a kind, a one-and-only.

We've never seen him like this.

"I'm in Year 7. I don't want to have a losing season in my prime. I don't want to have a team score 51 points on us," Vonnie Football said almost a week after the Eagles blasted the Broncos into a stark reality, 51-23. He's not over it.

The hype train for Broncos-Patriots usually hums out of control. This edition felt like a buildup to a beat-down, Sunday night at Sports Authority Field.

Lost in the losses is Miller's electric season. After arriving at training camp in superhero form, Von is the highest-rated pass-rusher in the NFL, according to Pro Football Focus. It seems no blocker can hold him down. After six seasons covering the most dominant defensive player to suit up for the Broncos, I was convinced no situation could bring down his mood, either. Even after the Broncos lost 43-8 in Super Bowl XLVIII, a game Von didn't play due to injury, Miller found his way to the party scene, a Manhattan nightclub where the Seahawks were celebrating.

But under bluebird skies alongside the Dove Valley practice fields, Miller delivered a heartfelt, gloomy state of the union on the Broncos. Four straight losses turned Colorado's signature smile into a frown. It's the worst losing skid of Von's career — high school, college or professional. And for a competitor who could be playing the best ball of his career, the losing hurts.

Deeply.

"I'm looking at the scoreboard (in Philadelphia) and we're down by like 30 points," Miller said in a rant long on explanations, short on answers. "They have (backup quarterback) Nick Foles in."

"It's one of the biggest losses of my career. I don't think it's something that you just totally forget," he said. "I'm sure as a team and I'm sure as a defense, you forget stuff like that. But me being the guy I am, I'll always remember that because I never want to experience that again."

Here it's Patriots Week, a game that had become an event. Now it's the birthday party you'd rather skip: Who wants to see your ex when you look like this? The Broncos and Patriots have represented the AFC in the past four Super Bowls. Until Sunday, their epic duels had all the pomp, circumstance, history and star power of a new Star Wars release.

Manning vs. Brady.

The NFL's greatest offense vs. its greatest defensive mind, Bill Belichick.

Von's leather vests vs. Handsome Tom's sweaters.

Their matchups never disappointed. The games were better than advertised, if anything, a true feat considering the buzz they brought. The Broncos defense once referred to Brady as a crybaby. Defensive lineman Derek Wolfe once told Brady he would eat Brady's children. The Patriots once erased a 24-0 deficit to beat the Broncos, 34-31, on a face-numbing night in Foxboro. (It marked the biggest comeback of Brady's career until the Patriots erased a 28-3 deficit to win Super Bowl LI in February). The Broncos once hit Brady 20 times in a game. (It marked the most quarterback hits by one defense in the entire NFL season.) It wasn't until last season — 17 years into his Foxboro reign — that Bill Belichick was able to lift his record against the Broncos to .500 (9-9).

Denver was New England's only true threat. And when these teams went, they went big.

Only one man can prevent the Broncos from going down, big, on Sunday night: Von Miller. His is one of the few matchups that favors the Broncos — a backup offensive tackle, LaAdrian Waddle (No. 68), against an All-Pro, Miller (No. 58). His success against the Patriots is one of the few reasons to believe the Broncos can right their season. Since 2011, Miller has 7.5 sacks of Brady, the most of any player. He needed just eight games to do it. The Broncos usually get the better of Brady. They're 9-7 against him, 3-0 in the playoffs.

"He's the G.O.A.T.," Miller said.

"There's two different types of emotions you can have going against the best," he added.

One is to play scared, as if Brady is too cool to be schooled.

"Or you can have an emotion like, 'I'm going against the best. I'm going to go out here and I'm going to play lights out so I can show everybody what we're about,'" Miller said.

Sunday night, the Broncos' success against the Patriots is a curse more than a blessing. Once the Broncos were bullies. Now they're being bullied. Barring a signature show from Vonnie Football, this one is going to hurt.

Woody Paige: Brady, Patriots won't bring presents when they come to Colorado Springs

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
November 12, 2017

You better watch out! You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why. Guess who's coming to town.

Nope.

The rich and the famous, the powerful and the legendary all have visited Colorado Springs. President Franklin Roosevelt and the King of Siam, Clark Gable and John Wayne, The Eagles and Charles Lindbergh, Jack Nicklaus and Michael Jordan.

The GOAT will be arriving late Sunday night.

Tom Brady is coming to the Springs with Bill Belichick, Gronk and the Patriots after their game with the Broncos.

The 300 members of the Pikes Peak Pats Fan Club will be delirious at the Fox & Hound, and Patriot Motors probably will have a big sale on used cars.

But don't expect the city's Chamber of Commerce to roll out the Patriots-red carpet or hold a parade.

This is Broncos Country – win or ... well ... win.

The Patriots are NFL enemy No. 1 to Broncos loyalists, despite what the Raiders believe. The Broncos and the Patriots have despised each other since the first game played in the old American Football League on a Friday night in 1960. Even though they've never been in the same division, these adversaries seem to play almost every season – 10 times in the last seven years. The Broncos lead the series 30-22.

For the Broncos, the Patriots act like Lord Voldemort, Nurse Ratched, The Joker and Snidely Whiplash combined.

The Patriots hail from the Dark Side. In an exchange on social media the past week between Brady and Von Miller, the Broncos' linebacker referred to Jedi Knight (presumably himself). He has earned 7 ½ sacks in eight games vs. Brady.

New England will be practicing Monday-Friday on the plush Air Force Academy playing fields and adjusting to altitude for its game next Sunday against the Raiders in Mexico City. The Patriots probably will be dining at Salsa Brava, too. They'll bus down from Denver and stay at a high-end resort. (Four are sold out, so you can figure out where they'll be easily enough.)

The Patriots flew to Colorado in their own swank 767 jet sporting five Super Bowl trophies painted on the plane's tail.

Although the Patriots will be in your backyard all week, they probably won't be touring Garden of the Gods.

This is Brady's 11th trip to Colorado. Twelve, if you count when he was a groomsman at Wes Welker's wedding in Aspen.

But this is not Brady's favorite paradise destination.

The Greatest of All Time has been a goat several times in Denver.

Brady doesn't have a losing record against any team in the NFL – except the Broncos. He is 3-7 overall in Colorado, falling in his Mile High Stadium debut in 2001 30-21 (four interceptions) – and in all three of his playoff games, and three of his past four appearances here.

In his mid-week conversation, Brady spoke vanilla, as usual, in his praise for the Broncos, despite their current predicament.

The eight men in the Colorado Springs area named Tom Brady probably won't be confused for the quarterback this week when they use credit cards. Especially 90-year-old Thomas H. Brady.

Brady did turn 40 recently, but is playing as if he were 30. He has 16 touchdowns and just two interceptions with 2,512 passing yards.

He will become the seventh quarterback 40 or older to start in Denver against the Broncos. Five of the previous six, including Warren Moon and Doug Flutie, lost, and only the ancient George Blanda, primarily a kicker in his last several seasons, won in his final QB start for the Raiders in 1968.

The defending champions are playing the Super Bowl 50 champions, but they are streaming in opposite directions. At the midway juncture the 6-2 Patriots are the AFC choice to return; the 3-5 Broncos aren't choice or prime.

How in the wide world of sports do the Broncos beat the Patriots? No turnovers would be helpful. The Broncos have won 31 straight when winning the turnover stat. However, this season they are tied for last in the league in takeaway-giveaway differential (minus-12) with the Browns.

Brock Osweiler did get a victory against the Patriots in overtime in 2015.

But Santa Claus won't drop in Sunday. Patriots 30-17.

And the Patriots will enjoy their vacation in Colorado Springs.

Five NFL Week 10 matchups to watch: Can Cowboys cope with Ezekiel Elliott out?

By Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz

USA Today

November 12, 2017

The day the Dallas Cowboys hoped never to see has arrived.

With Ezekiel Elliott's six-game suspension setting in after the running back was denied an injunction, an offense centered on his contributions now will have to look elsewhere during a crucial stretch. Starting with a matchup against the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday, the Cowboys' next four games (all before Elliott's expedited appeal hearing on Dec. 1) could determine whether the team can secure a second consecutive playoff berth for the first time since 2007.

Quarterback Dak Prescott undoubtedly will shoulder some of the additional offensive burden, but coaches said they don't plan to divert from their ground-focused attack. Yet there's little precedent for replacing Elliott, who has 191 of the 215 carries by Dallas running backs this season.

Alfred Morris, Rod Smith and Darren McFadden are all in line for work in a potential committee approach. Morris, however, looks like the best fit to take over a bulk of the action, as his one-cut running style translates well to the Cowboys' zone approach.

The absence of all-pro left tackle Tyron Smith, who was ruled out with a groin injury, will serve as another significant obstacle in establishing a rhythm for the run game.

At 4-4 and fading in the NFC playoff picture, the Falcons are in a similarly precarious spot. Atlanta's run defense ranks in the middle of the pack, but it gave up 201 rushing yards to the Carolina Panthers last week. Defensive tackle Grady Jarrett's statistics belie how disruptive he has been, but he and Dontari Poe could have a tough day going up against two all-pros in center Travis Frederick and right guard Zack Martin.

Jacksonville Jaguars DE Calais Campbell vs. Los Angeles Chargers QB Philip Rivers

With a league-high 11 sacks, Campbell has paved the way for the NFL's best pass rush in "Jacksonville." The 31-year-old is proving to be one of free agency's best signings, as the former Arizona Cardinals standout has the 5-3 Jaguars in the hunt for their first playoff berth since 2007.

But the Chargers have won the last six games in the series, all by an average of 19 points. In his seven career games against the Jaguars, Rivers has completed 71.1% of his passes with 19 touchdowns and just four interceptions.

Los Angeles has provided Rivers with improved protection this year, with its 11 sacks allowed tied for sixth fewest. Campbell should be a difficult matchup for the Chargers offensive tackles, but he could do the most damage against an inexperienced interior line when he kicks inside on third downs.

Minnesota Vikings DE Everson Griffen vs. Washington Redskins offensive line

With 10 sacks, Griffen trails only Campbell for the NFL lead this season. If he tallies another against the Redskins, he'll break the Vikings franchise record for consecutive games with a sack at nine.

Griffen is listed as questionable with a foot injury, but coach Mike Zimmer said he will play Sunday. Emerging as a defensive player of the year candidate, Griffen has made life difficult on opposing offenses while helping push Minnesota to the top of the NFC North pecking order. And he could set the tone in what is shaping up to be a favorable matchup for the Vikings' defense.

Four starters on Washington's offensive line have missed the last two games. The injuries have left undue pressure on Kirk Cousins, who took six sacks and 11 hits in last week's win over the Seattle Seahawks. The outlook could be even more imposing if the Redskins are without tight end Jordan Reed, who is listed as questionable with a hamstring injury.

New England Patriots TEs Rob Gronkowski vs. Denver Broncos DBs Darian Stewart and Justin Simmons

Despite giving up 51 points to the Philadelphia Eagles last week, the Broncos' defense waved off questions of an imminent demise. No matter what the result, facing the rival Patriots and the top-ranked offense should serve as a proving ground for Denver.

The Broncos have struggled to defend talented tight ends, and they need no reminder of the danger Gronkowski poses. Ranking second on the Patriots in catches (34) and receiving yards (509) this year, Gronkowski has three 100-yard games against Denver and seven touchdowns.

Stewart and Simmons will be counted on to patch up the problems Denver has had in giving up big plays. The Broncos have given up 20 passing plays of 20 yards or more, and letting Gronkowski rip through the middle of the defense could prove lethal.

New Orleans Saints RBs Mark Ingram and Alvin Kamara vs. Buffalo Bills' front seven

Riding a six-game winning streak, the Saints have shown they're not the same team as in previous years. After three straight 7-9 seasons, Sean Payton has shifted the offense to a more even-handed approach. Ingram and Kamara have thrived as a result, with the duo combining for 231 total yards last week against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

That's troublesome news for Buffalo, which gave up 194 rushing yards and three touchdowns on the ground to the New York Jets in a Thursday night thrashing in Week 9. After the time to regroup, the Bills need to show Sean McDermott's defense is built for the stretch run. If Buffalo is to end the NFL's longest active playoff drought, it needs to have an answer for offenses like the one it faces Sunday.

With frigid conditions Sunday and the Bills ranking second with 17 takeaways, Payton could tilt the attack toward the running game again. But Drew Brees also might look to Kamara to lift the passing game early. The third-round rookie from Tennessee has the third-most receiving yards (341) of any running back, and his ability to evade defenders in the open field could challenge the Bills' linebacking corps.

'Jerry Wants to Overthrow Goodell'

By Peter King

MMQB

November 12, 2017

The six owners who comprise the NFL's Compensation Committee were stunned to hear what Jerry Jones said on a Nov. 2 conference call, when the committee was trying to iron out some final details of commissioner Roger Goodell's contract extension.

According to a source with knowledge of the call, the Dallas Cowboys owner said he had "papers drawn up" in the event that the current proposed Goodell deal was finalized. That deal would extend Goodell's contract through 2024, (if completed, it would make his commissioner's tenure 18 years). Jones, it was clear from this call, wanted the committee to take the unprecedented step of sending the finalized deal back to the entire membership for possible adjustment or cancellation.

"Are you telling us you're prepared to file litigation against us?" committee member John Mara of the Giants asked, according to the source. Jones, a former disciple of the late, contentious Raiders owner Al Davis, said he was, per the source.

Mara spoke. Committee member Art Rooney II of the Steelers spoke. The committee chairman, Arthur Blank of the Falcons, spoke, and said this, per another source who heard the call: "I'm shocked. I'm disappointed. We may have differences, Jerry, but this is not the way we resolve them. This is not the way we do things in the NFL."

On Saturday, I had a conversation with a source who had spoken to two members of the committee since that Nov. 2 conference call, and I asked what the feelings of the Compensation Committee members were after they got off the call. "Shocked," the source said. "Totally shocked. Emotional. Angry. In disbelief. This was an owner [Jones] who, earlier this year, voted in favor of authorizing the committee to do the deal with Roger. He was still in favor early in August."

Jones has consistently denied that he turned anti-Goodell after the Aug. 11 suspension of star Dallas running back Ezekiel Elliott for six games after a yearlong domestic violence investigation. But in an Aug. 9 dinner meeting the source refers to, Jones, connected to the meeting via telephone, did not raise concerns about the Goodell extension, the source said. "Once the suspension came down," another source with knowledge of the committee's deliberations said Saturday, "Jerry's attitude changed completely. That tipped him against Roger."

It is not that simple. Jones, quietly, got involved earlier this year as an ad hoc Compensation Committee member—a role that was rescinded last week when he threatened to sue—and grew to believe Goodell was overpaid, with annual compensation around \$35 million. The new contract proposal addresses that concern, with, as the New York Times reported Saturday, 88% of Goodell's new deal set to be incentive-based. But because of the vague parameters of the incentives, I am told Jones believes that regardless of the performance of the league, Goodell will make close to the same money in the new contract as he did in the old one. There were other things that Jones and some owners didn't like about Goodell's recent performance. Why didn't this commissioner have the juice to make the approximately 16 current players who have not been standing for the national anthem—only 1% of the league's active players,

but enough to drive fans and major sponsors batty—end their demonstrations? Why was Goodell so suspension-happy, particularly in cases (Tom Brady, Elliott) that had significant doubt?

According to someone close to Jones, the suspensions, even before Elliott's, riled him. The Hall of Fame owner has been angry that Goodell came down hard on players even when overwhelming evidence did not exist. Still, in that fateful conference call Nov. 2, after Jones' threat, the source with knowledge of the call said Patriots owner and committee member Robert Kraft told Jones words to this effect: *Jerry, my franchise got killed for a BS incident with so-called deflated footballs. We lost our quarterback for 25% of the season. We got fined a million bucks. We lost first- and fourth-round picks. For hogwash! But I took it. My fans killed me for it, but I try to be a good partner.*

Jones was unmoved. Six days after the contentious conference call, ESPN's Chris Mortensen reported that Cowboys attorney Jason Cohen sent a letter to the Compensation Committee, claiming that NFL owners have been "unquestionably misled" by Blank as chair of the committee. The letter says Blank reneged on his commitment that the six members of the committee would be unanimous in their support of the Goodell extension—a charge I am told Blank denies. It is believed that Jones is adamant that the Compensation Committee's proposed contract for Goodell be sent back to the full membership for possible adjustment. The committee would surely take that as an affront and object; the long tradition of the committee is that it is empowered to make a deal with the standing commissioner and the other owners will approve it. And in this case, the committee would object because owners voted unanimously to empower the committee to work out a Goodell extension last spring, and one owner source said the six committee members have gone back to their fellow owners "a minimum of two additional times this year" to update them and gauge their reactions. The committee has found consistent support for a new Goodell deal. But that hasn't stopped Jones. As his 28-year ownership history shows, he is not afraid of taking an unpopular stand—and of angering his peers—when he feels he is right.

"There is little question in my mind," said one ownership source, "that Jerry Jones wants to overthrow Roger Goodell."

.....

At the heart of the dispute between Jones and the league is guaranteed money. And he is right about the current contract Goodell has: The guaranteed compensation, with no performance aspect to it, seems excessive bordering on avaricious. A little history is in order.

Months ago, when the Compensation Committee was beginning its work in earnest to extend Goodell's contract, he made an unexpected offer to the committee. Two sources told The MMQB that Goodell said he would give up the vast majority of guaranteed money in his next contract, because he knew some owners had become uncomfortable in guaranteeing virtually all of the compensation on Goodell's pact.

"I'm willing to bet on myself," Goodell said in that meeting.

As one source who has seen Goodell's contracts—the current one and the one being negotiated with him now—said Saturday, his existing deal was just as one-sided as Jones has charged. This is how that source described it: There was a provision in the old deal that mandated Goodell receive an average of \$25-million per year in guaranteed bonuses in a rolling three-year period over the life of the deal. If

Goodell did not receive \$25 million in bonuses in one year, it would have to be made up over the next two years, and in each three-year period, he'd be guaranteed approximately \$75 million in bonuses.

Particularly in a time of uncertainty—TV ratings are down, player protests during the national anthem are roiling fans and advertisers—Goodell's offer was welcome. But how would it be administered?

Goodell, the committee devised, would get a base salary of almost \$4 million. And the rest would be incentivized—88% of the contract would consist of money Goodell would earn on the basis of the league's performance.

How Goodell's compensation would be figured, according to one ownership source who has been briefed on the proposed deal, is highly complicated. "It will be very discretionary," the ownership source said Saturday. As he described it, NFL committees with more than half the current owners on them will all play a part in recommending bonuses for Goodell that the Compensation Committee will be empowered to approve. The MMQB could not determine exactly how the bonus protocol would work for Goodell under the new contract, but this is how it was put by the ownership source: If the TV ratings in 2018 continue to tank, Goodell would get a lower bonus in the first year of his new deal. And if in 2021 the next labor negotiations go positively and no games are missed, the committee of owners who negotiate the collective bargaining agreement will recommend a relatively larger bonus for Goodell than if games are missed. Although Jones would not comment for this story, it's believed he thinks Goodell's annual compensation will be relatively close to his current pay almost regardless of league performance.

"Roger is taking a leap of faith," another owner who is familiar with the talks said late Saturday. Jones believes he wouldn't be, really. Goodell might simply be getting less rich than he was before.

Two more points. One: Many have asked if there's a contract on Goodell's desk ready to sign currently. There is not. The Compensation Committee and Goodell are still cleaning up some points, and I'm told the committee wants to get this done promptly but it's not just a case of dotting some I's and crossing some T's. It could take a couple of weeks, particularly now that Jones is throwing up these legal smoke bombs.

Finally, there's this point to make: Jones has taken the unpopular side on several occasions in his ownership career. A quarter-century ago, he fought the NFL's TV Committee as it proposed to give money back to the money-losing networks. Jones won, and the lucrative marriage between FOX and the NFL was born. In 1995, the NFL attempted to enforce its exclusive rights under the NFL Trust to prevent the Cowboys from pouring Pepsi in Texas Stadium instead of the league's cola, Coca-Cola, among other sponsorship deals. Jones countersued, and he ended up settling with the NFL to maintain his deals with Pepsi and other non-NFL partners.

So do not underestimate Jones. He has won when it has appeared darkest before. As one league insider said Saturday night, as Goodell's image nosedives, do not be surprised to see Jones find some kindred souls. But there is one difference between this fight of Jones' previous ones: Despite how tarnished Goodell is, Jones doesn't have many partners—at least now—in trying to overthrow the current way of doing business.

Brady vs. Osweiler: This Time It's Personal (Or Something), Four Teams Poised for a Second-Half Run, Not So Fast Teddy Bridgewater

By Gary Gramling

MMQB

November 12, 2017

1a. It will likely be belated by the time you read this, but a happy Veterans Day to all who served our country. There are many worthwhile ways to help veterans with the support they deserve, and if you have the means I strongly encourage you to donate. If you're interested in one with a football connection, Nate Boyer and Jay Glazer have a wonderful program—MVP (Merging Vets & Players)—that helps vets and former athletes cope with the common problem of adjusting to civilian life.

1b. Apologies if I'm missing anyone, but we should see at least three veterans on the field today: U.S. Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade Joe Cardona will long-snap for the Patriots in the Sunday nighter in Denver, former U.S. Air Force First Lieutenant and Colorado Air National Guard captain Ben Garland will likely play some special teams snaps as a utility man when the Falcons host Dallas, and of course, former Army Ranger Alejandro Villanueva will start at left tackle for the Steelers in Indianapolis.

1c. One more thing about Villanueva's proud past: He was a 6' 9" wide receiver at West Point. Here's some footage of him being very unfairly tall.

2. I think we can all agree that Tom Brady has two feats left to accomplish before he can truly be at peace with his career. One is to finally finish authoring that next great YA franchise, about a teenage vampire quarterback who solves mysteries in a dystopian future. (His working title is Tom the Vampire Solves Mysteries in a Scary Future World. We'll see if that sticks.) The other is to defeat Brock Osweiler in a venue located approximately one mile above sea level.

The fact that Osweiler will quarterback his opponent tonight (in a Broncos offense with a sieve offensive line and no run game) works in Brady's favor. But the question is whether the Broncos defense can get the best of him again. We knew there was a chance that the Broncos would stink again on the offensive side of the ball. The real surprise in their 2017 collapse has been their middling play on defense. Their pass rush ranks 16th in Stats Inc.'s pressure index—they ranked first each of the last two seasons. That's especially upsetting because, along with their talent up front, their corners often force opposing quarterbacks to hold the ball a little longer.

But Sunday night is the perfect opportunity for the Broncos pass rush to get back on track. As mentioned earlier this season (and still true, though the O-line has been better of late), Brady is absorbing a ton of hits this year. Part of it is mediocre pass protection, and part of it is the Patriots tweaking their offense to move away from the quick-strike passing game and more toward a vertical attack, meaning Brady has to hang in a beat or two longer than he used to.

The Broncos have gotten the better of Brady and this offense time and time again in Denver because of that pressure. New England has dropped three of their last four in Denver, averaging 18.5 points and topping 20 points only once in those four games. That, of course, includes Osweiler's fourth-quarter

comeback in an overtime victory on a Sunday night two years ago (a game in which the Patriots were without Julian Edelman then lost Rob Gronkowski mid-game).

But Sunday night is the perfect opportunity for the Broncos pass rush to get back on track. As mentioned earlier this season (and still true, though the O-line has been better of late), Brady is absorbing a ton of hits this year. Part of it is mediocre pass protection, and part of it is the Patriots tweaking their offense to move away from the quick-strike passing game and more toward a vertical attack, meaning Brady has to hang in a beat or two longer than he used to.

The Broncos have gotten the better of Brady and this offense time and time again in Denver because of that pressure. New England has dropped three of their last four in Denver, averaging 18.5 points and topping 20 points only once in those four games. That, of course, includes Osweiler's fourth-quarter comeback in an overtime victory on a Sunday night two years ago (a game in which the Patriots were without Julian Edelman then lost Rob Gronkowski mid-game).

The most likely scenario is that this game plays out like the one last December in Denver, when the Broncos held New England to 16 points and Brady to 188 passing yards but still lost 16-3 with Trevor Siemian under center. There's a path to victory for the Broncos though. And, considering they start the second half of the season two games back of a wild-card spot, it's a victory they need.

.....

3. I don't want to be the guy who makes a bunch of excuses for the Atlanta Falcons, so instead let me offer a number of semi-legitimate reasons as to why they're better than their record suggests.

Last week in Carolina was a perfect illustration of all the breaks going against Atlanta. The Panthers played that game like it was the seventh game of the World Series of Super Bowls at Wimbledon, rolling out a series of gadget plays that put the Falcons on their heels for just long enough (Carolina's three fourth-quarter possessions resulted in three punts). The difference was bad situational football during a 20-minute span, with the Falcons getting stopped on a fourth-and-inches and a third-and-inches, and Ryan turning a second-and-1 into a third-and-6 by taking yet another unforgivable sack. Then there were the Julio Jones designer deep shots—everyone saw the second one, the kind of drop that makes you lose faith in humanity. But the Falcons won with that play twice, getting Kurt Coleman (not some rookie mark) to bite on the dig route because Julio Jones on a dig route is typically the last thing a defensive back sees before he dies. In the first quarter, Ryan overthrew Julio by about a foot.

For all the ups and downs Steve Sarkisian has had this season, those are two masterful playcalls that were inches away from turning into two long touchdowns. And that's the way it's gone for the Falcons this season. They got away with one in Chicago to open the season. Since then, they've really only played two truly bad games (the home loss to Miami and the Sunday nighter in New England; the home loss to Buffalo involved a Julio Jones injury and a scoop-and-score fumble against them that ranged somewhere in between a missed call and the crime of the century).

Atlanta's luck might be swinging back the other way. Sunday afternoon, they catch the Cowboys for the first game of the Ezekiel Elliott suspension. Next week, they'll go to Seattle and face a Seahawks team that will be without Richard Sherman for the first time since the Matt Hasselbeck era. If they can steal a couple of wins, they wrap things up with four home games and a total of five division games in their final six. That's a recipe for a big finish.

.....

4. Three other teams I like for a potential second-half run: The Titans, because they underachieved on both sides of the ball so far and are still 5-3. Now, they have Marcus Mariota back at 100% health, the young secondary should continue to rise as the year goes on, and their four remaining road games include trips to Indianapolis, Arizona and San Francisco. Stir that goulash and you've got 11 wins.

Similarly, the Lions' second-half schedule is sponsored by our good friends at Charmin', especially if Aaron Rodgers isn't back for the regular-season finale at Ford Field. Detroit gets the Bears twice, winnable road trips to Baltimore, Tampa Bay and Cincinnati and, of course, this Sunday they host Cleveland. They host the Vikings on Thanksgiving Day, and I'm sure they'll appreciate getting that Vikings D on short rest. Matthew Stafford has been absolutely magnificent for a second straight season despite the mediocre-at-best supporting cast, and he gets blindside protector Taylor Decker back for the stretch run (I still insist they should have played a one-armed Taylor Decker over Greg Robinson). And you'd like to think they've learned their lesson in the red zone—for goodness sake, Ameer Abdullah is not the answer down there.

I'm also picking the Chargers to go to the playoffs because I will always pick the Chargers to go to the playoffs every day until die. It makes no sense that they don't win more games. They have the quarterback, the running game and the best pass-rushing tandem in football. They just have to stop doing stuff like turning punt returns into two points for the other team.

5. Mike Zimmer is smarter, wealthier and better looking than me, but I do not envy him on one count: He has to figure out what in the world to do with Teddy Bridgewater right now.

If this was August it wouldn't even be a competition; Bridgewater would be the starter. But the Vikings have a pretty good thing going with Case Keenum under center right now. It's not exactly because of Keenum, of course, but with the exception of the Detroit loss he's been sharp and has kept the offense running on-time. And that's really all you need with what the Vikings have on the other side of the ball.

In theory, Bridgewater could do that too, but he's also coming off of a catastrophic knee injury and hasn't taken a meaningful snap in 22 months and two days. Mid-November is not the time to be kicking off rust. I love Bridgewater (it's an unrequited platonic love) and will be thrilled to see him back on the field, but if Keenum doesn't open up the door with some poor play, I'm not sure I'd make any big, sudden move like a QB change if I was Zimmer.

6. The Bills did not enjoy their Thursday evening in Bergen County and let anyone who was willing to listen know all about it. But watching that game, I'm not sure it was drastically different than any game they've played this season.

The Bills are game flow-dependent, because they're going to have a tough time scoring a lot of points in a short period of time. Their come-from-behind wins have been assisted by opponent turnovers. The first half against the Jets got away from them in large part because two plays that have usually gone their way went against them. First, there was Leonard Johnson letting this gift from Josh McCown bounce off his hands:

And then there was the Jordan Matthews fumble at the end of the half that cost them a chance for three points and a tie game heading into halftime:

Those are things that can happen to any team on any given week, but until last week they're things that Buffalo's opponents were doing on a weekly basis. Sean McDermott has done an unbelievable job in the season's first half, but the tightrope the Bills have to walk on a weekly basis is tough to maintain. And with a second-half schedule that includes two Patriots games, a trip to Kansas City and a matchup with Drew Brees (who has spent many years carving up that Sean McDermott zone D), the climb to the postseason is still quite steep.

.....

7. There are two universal truths about the New York Giants right now: (1) Ben McAdoo's haircut is a good haircut. (A little too much product for my taste, but to each his own. It works.) And (2) It would be outright negligence if they didn't take a look at the top 2018 draft quarterbacks.

There's really nothing controversial about what Jerry Reese is saying. Eli Manning is an older quarterback. He hasn't fallen off yet, but he's 36 and it's likely right around the corner because, unlike Tom Brady, he doesn't eat avocado ice cream, and instead of TB12 sleepwear Eli wears Paw Patrol pajamas to bed (he's a big Marshall guy).

The Giants have picked in the top-10 once since Manning came aboard (2015 when they selected ninth and drafted . . . [audible sigh] Ereck Flowers). If everyone is healthy, they might not return to Super Bowl contention next year, but they certainly won't be sitting near the top of the draft again. They have no choice but to see what's out there in the 2018 QB class. And if they can get their hands on a guy who can be a franchise quarterback for the next 10-15 years, they probably have to take him. Or, at the very least, they have to do their homework and then decide how sentimental they want to be.

.....

8. I went in for my annual physical last Tuesday. I got to my doctor's office, the receptionist told me which exam room I could go to, and at that point I yelled, "I'm fine! I'm fine!" dropped my \$30 co-pay and headed back out to the car.

The Seahawks blowing off concussion protocol on Thursday night is problematic. And it's not really on Russell Wilson, especially in the heat of the moment. He did what 99.7% of players would do there, which is why there are people in place who are supposed to be enforcing the rules. The obvious way to fix this: Once a player is taken off the field for concussion protocol, the independent neurologist has to confirm his examination with an official before that player is let back on the field. (In the meantime, the Seahawks will owe the league a few bucks.)

.....

9. The holiday season is coming up, and all those years of sending my wishlist to Pan the goat god has finally paid off. We talked about this on the 10 Things Podcast a couple of times this offseason, and skycam—or, as it should be known, "Madden camera"—should be the primary camera angle for all NFL broadcasts. It's not just because people play a lot of video games and are therefore used to it. Madden camera adds a whole new dimension to watching the run game because you can actually see the splits between offensive linemen and the resulting running lanes. And you really don't lose much in the passing game because any receiver going downfield disappears off the screen on the 50-yard-line angle anyway. And now, NBC is going to go ahead and use Madden camera as its primary view for the TNF broadcast of Steelers-Titans. So rejoice, because Madden camera is awesome and will make watching traditional angles feel like watching a game on the radio.

.....

10. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Guns N' Roses!

NFL Week 10 schedule: Broncos need to be fighters, Falcons must find offensive spark

By Pete Prisco
CBS Sports
November 12, 2017

Here's the schedule for the rest of Week 10, as well as 10 things about it that intrigue me:
Schedule

Sunday

Chargers at Jaguars, 1 p.m. ET on CBS (GameTracker)
Steelers at Colts, 1 p.m. ET on CBS (GameTracker)
Browns at Lions, 1 p.m. ET on CBS (GameTracker)
Jets at Buccaneers, 1 p.m. ET on CBS (GameTracker)
Saints at Bills, 1 p.m. ET on Fox (GameTracker)
Bengals at Titans, 1 p.m. ET on Fox (GameTracker)
Vikings at Redskins, 1 p.m. ET on Fox (GameTracker)
Packers at Bears, 1 p.m. ET on Fox (GameTracker)
Texans at Rams, 4:05 p.m. ET on CBS (GameTracker)
Cowboys at Falcons, 4:25 p.m. ET on Fox (GameTracker)
Giants at 49ers, 4:25 p.m. ET on Fox (GameTracker)
Patriots at Broncos, 8:30 p.m. ET on NBC (GameTracker)

Monday

Dolphins at Panthers, 8:30 p.m. ET on ESPN (GameTracker)

Can Saints defense play at a high level for seventh straight week?

During their six-game winning streak, the Saints' defense has given up 12.6 points per game. That's why they are winning games. They are tied with the Los Angeles Rams for ninth in scoring defense at 19.4 points, which is almost 10 points better than last season. They face a Bills offense that will want to run the ball with LeSean McCoy. The Saints are 19th against the run, which will make slowing McCoy a challenge. If they do that, they should win the game.

Will Broncos show any fight against Patriots?

The poor play by the offense seemed to get to the defense last week at Philadelphia when they were blown out of the building. The defense looked like a shell of itself against the Eagles, but that can happen when the burden of carrying a team gets too great. I think the Denver defense will bounce back against Tom Brady and company in prime time and play a much better game. It's too bad they still won't get much help from the offense.

Have Giants completely quit?

It sure looked that way last week in the blowout loss to the Rams at home. Guys didn't seem to want to be there. And now comes word that the players are pretty much over coach Ben McAdoo and his ways. He has already suspended top corners Janoris Jenkins and Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie for a game. This thing is getting out of hand, but they have a chance to get a victory against the 49ers on the road. If they lose that one to the winless 49ers, look out.

Can Falcons turn around their season vs. Cowboys?

It helps that they are home after three road games. They play four of the next five at home, so it's time to get it going if they are to be a playoff team. The offense still isn't playing like it did a year ago, and that's not all the fault of new coordinator Steve Sarkisian. Players have to step up. What they should do is go to more no-huddle stuff to allow Matt Ryan to make the calls at the line of scrimmage. That will get them going. If they don't show improvement this week, their season could be done.

Can banged-up Redskins line handle Vikings' ferocious pass rush?

The Vikings have 24 sacks to rank eighth in the league, and end Everson Griffen is third in the league with 10 sacks. He has at least one in every game. The Washington line, which started four backups last week at Seattle, will again face a stiff challenge here if some of the injured don't come back. If it's the same five as last week, which resulted in six Seattle sacks, it could be a long day for Kirk Cousins.

How will A.J. Green respond to being thrown out last week?

The Bengals receiver faces a defense that has had problems at times covering the pass this season, ranking 18th in the league. The fight and ejection are not who Green is as a player. I think he bounces back in a big way against the Titans.

Will Rams continue amazing scoring pace vs. Texans?

The Rams are the No. 1 scoring team in the league, averaging 32.9 points. That's amazing for a team that couldn't do much of anything on offense last season. That's what new coach Sean McVay and an influx of talent has done for the offense. This week, they face a Texans team that is struggling in a big way on defense. That unit is ranked 30th in scoring, which means it could be another big day for Jared Goff and company.

Corners Jalen Ramsey, A.J. Bouye and Aaron Colvin vs. Philip Rivers

The Chargers quarterback has been sensational against the Jaguars in his career. In seven starts, including four in Jacksonville, he has 19 touchdown passes and four interceptions. He has four touchdown passes in each of his past two games against the Jaguars, including four last season in a blowout in San Diego. In his past three games in Jacksonville, he has 10 touchdown passes and no picks. But this Jaguars defense is first in yards passing and yards per pass play. Rivers hasn't been as good this year, but the way he plays the Jaguars, that might not matter.

Edge rusher Von Miller vs. Patriots' right tackle

When the Broncos beat the Patriots in the playoffs after the 2015 season, Miller had 2 1/2 sacks and dominated the game against Marcus Cannon and the rest of the Pats line. But during the regular season

in 2016 last December, Cannon held Miller without a sack while matched up in a lot of one-on-one situations. Cannon hasn't practiced due to an ankle injury and might not be available on Sunday, which improves the outlook for Denver's pass rush. Miller will need to come up big against the Patriots' line and Tom Brady if the Broncos are to have a chance at an upset.

Can Todd Bowles get the Jets to .500 this week?

There were many, myself included, who saw the Jets going 0-16. If they can beat the Bucs this week in Tampa -- the Jets are 10-1 all time against Tampa Bay -- they will be 5-5 heading down the stretch. Dare we say playoffs? The Bucs will be without Jameis Winston and Mike Evans, which should help the Jets. They will face Ryan Fitzpatrick at quarterback. He was the Jets' starter the previous two seasons. This is certainly a winnable game for the Jets.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph knows winning is only way team will buy into his 'culture'

By Stephen Knox

AJC.com

November 12, 2017

Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph has found himself in tough place halfway through his first regular season on the job.

The Broncos started the season 3-1, and have proceeded to lose four games in a row. They very much need a win at home on Sunday, but the New England Patriots are coming to town.

As any boss would want to on a new job, Joseph wants to see his culture in the Broncos. However, there is only way to get the players to buy into it.

"When you're a new coach and you're putting your touch or your culture in place, if you're winning, it helps to kind of spread the culture out because guys believe in it," Joseph said in the week leading up to the Broncos' loss to the Philadelphia Eagles, via The Denver Post's Nick Kosmider. "Players only buy cultures if it's working and they're winning. That's what helps your culture grow. If you're losing and not winning games, your culture kind of suffers because it speaks to us not working. I think winning games helps your culture grow."

Being that the point of playing sports at any level is to win, losing keeps everyone on edge. Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr. admitted that losing has affected their locker room chemistry. Sunday presents a great challenge, but also an opportunity to put everyone in the organization in a much better mood.

The post Broncos coach Vance Joseph knows winning is only way team will buy into his 'culture' appeared first on All 22.

Pressure on John: Elway still haggling over Denver's quarterback issues

By Bill Burt
CNHI Sports Boston
November 12, 2017

John Elway walks through that door of the Denver Broncos practice facility on Broncos Parkway every day. Often seven days a week.

But, as former Celtics coach Rick Pitino informed us during a press conference in 2000 while referring to Larry Bird, Kevin McHale and Robert Parish, Elway is gray and old.

And that's problem. At least one of them.

An elite quarterback, or lack thereof, is the big problem.

The other is finding an elite coach. Elway is now on his fourth head coach since 2011, if you include the firing of Josh McDaniels.

It appeared Elway's former backup Gary Kubiak was "the" guy, beating the Patriots in that incredible AFC Championship which ended with a missed two-point conversion and then winning the Super Bowl.

But the stress of the job got to him, and he resigned on Jan. 1.

Now that stress is on Elway.

Despite the beautiful facility here in Denver, it's not pretty right now. Elway's Broncos, despite having probably the most talented defense in the NFL (No. 2 in yards allowed) are a mess on offense.

And it's not just the quarterback, Brock Osweiler et. al. In fact, the bigger issue might be the offensive line, which has struggled to not only protect the inexperienced signal callers but clear some space for their once-prominent running game.

After a 3-1 start, the Broncos entered this weekend having lost four in a row. In three of those four losses (excluding Kansas City game), Denver rushed 55 times for 150 yards (2.7 average).

In the K.C. loss, five turnovers did them in.

Hands-on approach

Word on the Denver streets is Elway is more involved with the day-to-day coaching of the team than ever before. It was his decision to hire Vance Joseph after only one year as a coordinator (defensive coordinator with the Miami Dolphins).

"John has been great. We talk every day about the roster and the gameplan," said Joseph. "It's all about staying with the process. We've won with these players. We've won with this system. We have to get

back to playing a clean brand of football. We know the issues. It's apparent. It's obvious our issue is giving the football away."

At quarterback, Elway believed he may have found the "next" Bronco standout in the seventh round of the 2015 draft in Trevor Siemian.

He showed some promise, leading the Broncos to a 4-0 start last year and then 7-3, appearing to be real threats against the Patriots. But four straight losses from Thanksgiving weekend through Christmas ruined any playoff dreams.

Another "decent" start to the 2017 season, winning three of four games, all but disappeared with three straight losses, including six Siemian interceptions.

Basically, the Broncos can't afford to live through the growing pains of Siemian's development.

Which is why we are back to the future, with Denver turning to Brock Osweiler under center.

Missed opportunity

John Elway blew \$388 million dollars. It was a gamble that he lost.

Owner Pat Bowlen offered Elway 10 percent of the Broncos for \$15 million in 1998. Bowlen would also give him the option to buy another 10 percent by foregoing the deferred salary (\$21 million) owed to him.

Elway became a team executive in 2011 and led the team to a Super Bowl in 2014. The 20 percent stake Elway rejected, based on a Forbes 2015 valuation of the team at \$1.94 billion. Guess what 20 percent of that is: \$388 million.

Still, Elway has done very well as a businessman.

In 1997, he sold his five auto dealerships, "John Elway Autos" for a whopping \$82.5 million. In 2006, his name was removed from the business, allowing him four dealerships (two in California and two near Denver).

Elway also owns two high-scale steakhouse restaurants, "Elway's."

Patriots hope to create rare winning streak in Denver

By Mike Florio

Pro Football Talk

November 12, 2017

The Patriots under Bill Belichick and Tom Brady have thrived in most places. Except Denver.

Losers against the Broncos in the venue still named for a defunct company both during the 2015 regular season and postseason, the Patriots churned out a 16-3 win last December in Denver, besting Trevor Siemian in his first career start against New England — and preventing him from joining an exclusive club that includes Brian Griese, Jake Plummer (twice), Kyle Orton, Peyton Manning, and Brock Osweiler, each of whom have beaten Brady and Belichick in Denver.

On Sunday night, Osweiler will get his second career start against the Patriots as the Broncos quarterback. Last year, Osweiler faced the Patriots twice as the starting quarterback of the Texans, and it didn't go well. The playoff encounter actually went better for Osweiler, whose team was in the game until Osweiler sailed a pass over the head of receiver DeAndre Hopkins. The ball would be caught by the Patriots, and the game (and Osweiler's time in Houston) would be over.

This year, the Patriots seem to be better on offense, worse on defense. The Broncos are much worse on offense, and as a result also worse on defense, because the bad offense is putting more pressure on the championship-caliber defense.

And so, come Sunday night in Denver, Osweiler may become the only guy with full membership in both clubs: Broncos quarterbacks who have beaten Brady and Belichick in Denver, and those (currently, Siemian, Danny Kanell, and Tim Tebow) who haven't.

Likewise, the 2016-17 Broncos have a chance to join a club that last added a member in 1966 — Broncos teams that lost at back-to-back games at home to the Patriots.