

# Kiszla: How bad are these sad Broncos? “Nobody respects us,” says Derek Wolfe after 41-16 loss to Pats.

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
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Forgive me. But it hurts so badly the only way to begin is with a curse.

Son of a Bum.

Remember when the Broncos had the greatest defense in NFL history? It seems like only yesterday when Von Miller and the gang of orange made Cam Newton quit in Super Bowl 50.

It was a great run for an all-time great defense.

But it's over.

“It's just sad. It's real sad,” Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe said Sunday. “It's sad that we went from a championship-caliber team to a team that stinks and nobody respects us.”

New England quarterback Tom Brady toyed with the Broncos, then destroyed what remained of their faint playoff hopes during a 41-16 victory that pinned a fifth consecutive defeat on Denver.

Beginning with a stunning loss to the previously winless New York Giants in mid-October, the Broncos have surrendered an average of 33 points per game during this losing streak, worst in the NFL during a period that has stripped away the last vestiges of defensive dominance.

“This is new,” said Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall, trying to wipe off the stink of it all in the locker room. “It's new. And it's terrible.”

It couldn't get worse after the Eagles dropped 51 on the defense a week ago, right? Well, it did. Denver had not given up more than 40 points in back-to-back games since December 2011.

“I think we stink,” said Wolfe, who punctuated his disgust with a word not fit for print in a family newspaper.

Asked if he's demoralized, Wolfe replied: “Yeah.”

Denver forced the Patriots to punt only once through three quarters, and even that little victory resulted in Isaiah McKenzie muffing the kick.

Son of a Bum.

Remember when Broncos front-office honcho John Elway refused to pay Wade Phillips what he was worth, and the best defensive coordinator on earth was gone from Colorado within 12 months of our beloved son of Bum rapping to Drake and Future about needing real big rings for his real big team?

If the Broncos can't lean on their defense, what does coach Vance Joseph have?

Not a chance.

"I don't know what the answer is," Wolfe said. "I'm at a loss."

Have I mentioned lately that Joseph and his assistants appear to have absolutely no idea what they're doing?

It's always something with this coaching staff, which seems doomed to get fired. This week, Denver's not-so-special teams fumbled a punt, allowed a kick return that went 103 yards for touchdown and had a punt blocked. All in the first half.

At one point in the second quarter, I glanced at the stadium scoreboard and swear it read: Brock Olivo 20, Broncos 6.

"After the special teams plays, it got a little demoralizing," Denver cornerback Bradley Roby said.

The Broncos have gone from frustrated to angry to broken, maybe beyond repair. The very picture of sadness was young safety Will Parks, bent over in a chair at his locker stall for at least five painful minutes, so hurt he didn't know where to turn.

This is a snapshot of a proud franchise unraveling. It's likely to get worse before it gets better. And, right now, the only two teams in the league definitely worse than Denver are Cleveland and San Francisco. The best option now might be for the Broncos to tank, and get in position to select a quarterback with one of the top five picks in the opening round of the NFL draft.

"We're used to winning. We're a winning organization. And we're losing right now. It's tough. We're not used to it. And nobody's happy," Denver cornerback Bradley Roby said.

Here's one final insult to fans of Broncos Country, who definitely deserve better than the mess Elway has made of a roster that can't block, cover a tight end or field a punt. Standing on the visitors' sideline during the Patriots' rout, palling around with Brady, was our old friend Josh McDaniels.

McDaniels certainly knows a bad Denver team when he sees one. He built one of the most embarrassing teams in franchise history. And this sorry 2017 version of the Broncos is as bad as any Denver team since McDaniels was run out of town.

"I'm tired of being embarrassed," Wolfe said.

Son of a Bum.

# Broncos beat themselves, then lose to Patriots in blowout

By Nicki Jhabvala  
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The phrase “Trust the Process” was born sometime around 2013 in Philadelphia and later adopted as the rallying cry for the NBA’s beleaguered 76ers. “TTP,” as it’s known, has since become emblazoned on T-shirts, tattooed on fans and stamped inside the shoes of the 76ers’ best players.

In recent weeks, the Broncos adopted the term to assuage fans during their losing streak.

But after Sunday night, the Broncos were left begging for more trust and more time. Denver defeated itself with four special-teams gaffes in a 41-16 loss to Tom Brady and the Patriots. The loss, another blowout, was the Broncos’ fifth consecutive defeat since their bye week and was perhaps the final dagger to a forgettable season.

Denver did just as coach Vance Joseph hoped it wouldn’t and ensured an “unfair game” with turnovers and mistakes that proved their downfall.

“It would be nice to play a fair game just one time,” defensive end Derek Wolfe said.

In each of Denver’s losses this year, at least one unit has played especially poor. Sunday, the special teams starred, though the defense deserved credit as a supporting actor with New England scoring 41 points and gaining 396 yards. The last time Denver gave up 40 or more points in consecutive losses was 2011, when Tim Tebow was quarterback and John Fox was head coach.

“Obviously the (special) teams was a glaring issue, but it was all three phases again,” Joseph said. “We talked about when you good play football teams like this you have to win the pre-snap battle — we didn’t do that — and you can’t beat yourself. When you beat yourself it looks that way. So two weeks in a row it looks that way because you’re playing good football teams and you’re not playing good, sound, disciplined football.”

After the Broncos’ held Brady and Co. to a three-and-out on their first possession, Broncos’ receiver/returner Isaiah McKenzie muffed the ensuing punt and the fumble was recovered by New England. The turnover — the Broncos’ 20th this season — handed the ball to the Patriots on the Broncos’ 25-yard line and soon after New England scored for a 7-0 lead.

Four minutes later, Patriots returner Dion Lewis ran back a kickoff 103 yards for a touchdown for a 14-3 lead, sprinting past body after body of the Broncos’ coverage team that lie helpless after missed tackles.

The special-teams trifecta was achieved midway through the second quarter, when Riley Dixon’s punt was blocked by running back Rex Burkhead. Thanks to Denver’s defense, the Patriots had to settle for a field goal instead of a touchdown on that one.

And the grand slam was hit in the fourth quarter, when the Broncos were flagged for having 12 men on the field during a Patriots punt. Another free first down gifted New England seven more points.

“We have to look at personnel, scheme — all of it,” Joseph said. “We can’t fumble a punt return after going three-and-out versus that offense. That’s where it started. We can’t get a punt blocked. We can’t do those things. We have to score in the red zone. It’s, again, all three phases that we have to look at.”

The Broncos entered Sunday’s game having allowed a league-high 71 points off giveaways, accounting for 35.9 percent of opponents’ scoring total this season.

The collective special-teams damage Sunday was astounding and irreparable: Their four blunders resulted in 24 Patriots points, helping them take a 27-9 lead at the break.

The dumpster fire of the special teams masked a decent showing from an offense that had been anything but the previous four weeks. The Broncos ran for 118 yards, quarterback Brock Osweiler connected with receiver Emmanuel Sanders for 137 yards on six catches, and for the first time in a long time, there was no collective gasp of fear before every Broncos snap.

But Denver was still only 1-and-3 in the red zone. Their three first-half scoring drives stalled at the Patriots’ 21-, 15- and 18-yard lines, respectively, and forced Denver to rely on the foot of Brandon McManus for their first nine points.

“I think that starts with me,” Osweiler said. “I’m going to have to watch the tape and see what decisions I could have made differently that could have led to touchdowns. But that’s definitely something that needs to get fixed. If you’re kicking field goals every time you’re in the red area rather than scoring touchdowns, it’s going to be very hard to win football games.”

The Broncos finally found the end zone in the third quarter, as Osweiler sprayed passes to Demaryius Thomas and Sanders, and runs by Jamaal Charles pushed them into the red zone. A 7-yard touchdown pass to Thomas to cap the drive brought the Broncos back within 27-16, and back in the game.

Though not for long.

Brady made a 75-yard scoring drive appear easy as he methodically picked apart Denver’s defense and expanded the lead. Their final touchdown off Denver’s fourth special-teams mistake sealed it, and the fans that booed at halftime fled for the exits with nearly 10 minutes left.

Osweiler finished with a 54.5 completion percentage (18-of-33 passing), 221 passing yards, one touchdown, one interception, zero sacks and a 72.9 rating. But his performance, again, wasn’t good enough to guarantee him the starting job next week. Joseph said he would review the film Monday before making a decision about the starting quarterback for Week 11.

New England’s tight ends — Rob Gronkowski, Martellus Bennett and Dwayne Allen — accounted for 123 of those yards, plus a touchdown.

Brady was replaced by Brian Hoyer with more than four minutes remaining, the final sign of the Broncos’ sharp fall.

“When we get put in those situations, it hurts the team,” outside linebacker Shane Ray said. “That’s been the story of the season so far. We have all this talent and we’re not using it.

“We’ve been beating ourselves all season.”

The Process, for the fifth-consecutive week, didn’t work.

# Vance Joseph addresses QB decision, future of coaching staff after loss to Patriots

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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The Broncos' fifth-consecutive loss was another blowout, this time at the hands of the New England Patriots. The Broncos again had issues in all three phases, but none bigger than the four gaffes by special teams, which resulted in 24 points for the Patriots.

After the game, coach Vance Joseph said fingers deserved to be pointed at all — players and coaches. But he was asked specifically if he believed the team will have to make personnel changes before the season ends, a not-so-subtle way of asking if someone on his staff will soon be fired.

"I'll say this: When you lose like this, it's on all of us," Joseph said. "It's a staff that we chose and that we feel great about. I wouldn't say that; I would say it's on all of us. We have to coach better and play better."

Quarterback Brock Osweiler went 18-of-33 for 221 yards, a touchdown, one interception and a 72.9 passer rating. He engineered three first-half drives that brought the Broncos into or close to the red zone, but each stalled and Denver had to settle for field goals. It wasn't until the third quarter that they punched the end zone with a 7-yard touchdown by Demaryius Thomas.

The performance by Osweiler wasn't strong enough to outright guarantee him the starting job in Week 11.

"We'll see," Joseph said. "We're going to watch the tape (Monday) as a staff and determine who the quarterback is next week."

Joseph insinuated after the Broncos' loss at Philadelphia in Week 9 that players didn't give their full effort, though he quickly changed his tune after reviewing the film a day later. Sunday, Joseph said effort wasn't among the Broncos' many problems against New England.

"We have a good locker room," he said. "We have good leaders there. ... It's the execution. Even tonight, the guys came out ready to play. It's simply execution."

# OT Donald Stephenson among Broncos' inactives vs. Patriots

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
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Receiver Emmanuel Sanders (ankle) and inside linebacker Todd Davis (ankle), both of whom were originally listed as questionable to play Sunday against the Patriots, are active. But tackle Donald Stephenson will need at least another week to recover from a calf injury. In Stephenson's absence, and after Menelik Watson was placed on season-ending injured reserve, veteran Allen Barbre is expected to start at right tackle.

The Broncos' six other inactives are all healthy scratches: quarterback Paxton Lynch, receiver Jordan Taylor, running back De'Angelo Henderson, cornerback Lorenzo Doss, and linebackers DeMarcus Walker and Joseph Jones.

The Patriots earlier ruled out three players — receiver Chris Hogan, offensive tackle Marcus Cannon and defensive tackle Malcom Brown — and on Sunday listed running back Mike Gillislee, cornerback Eric Rowe, offensive lineman Cole Croston and defensive end Cassius Marsh as healthy scratches.

Tight end Martellus Bennett, who was claimed off waivers from Green Bay last week is dealing with a shoulder injury, is active.

"He played with those guys last year so going back and watching the film from last year, they had more two-tight-end sets on third down," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said of Bennett on Friday. "That could be a different deal than we've seen in the last couple weeks. We have a plan for that."

# Grading the Broncos in their 41-16 loss to the Patriots

By Nick Kosmider

Denver Post

November 13, 2017

## Grading the Broncos

**Offense:** C-. The Broncos moved the ball between the 20s with consistency and continued struggles in the red zone kept them from making a comeback.

**Defense:** C-. Though not directly responsible for at least half of the Patriots' 41 points, an inability to pressure Tom Brady allowed the New England quarterback time to engineer to critical touchdown drives in the second and third quarters.

**Special teams:** F. Perhaps a 'Z' would be a better fit. While it will take some time to thoroughly dig through the team's history, it's hard to imagine a worse special teams performance than the one Denver put on the field Sunday night.

**Coaching:** F. Read above. The Broncos were woefully outplayed on special teams and couldn't make adjustments as things fell apart. A 12-men penalty that revived a Brady touchdown drive in the fourth quarter was icing on the cake.

## Game Balls

**Tom Brady, Patriots QB.** Von Miller called him the greatest of all time, and Brady looked like it while throwing three touchdown passes.

**Rex Burkhead, Patriots RB.** Burkhead became the first player since 1977 to catch a touchdown pass and block a punt in the same game.

**Emmanuel Sanders, Broncos WR.** Sanders had six catches for a season-high 137 yards, providing a consistent target for quarterback Brock Osweiler.

# Beleaguered Broncos special teams units produces its biggest disaster to date in blowout loss

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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Brock Olivo has stepped onto a podium at Broncos headquarters nearly every Friday the past two months and offered a mea culpa.

The first-year special teams coach has shouldered blame for his unit's inability to make an impact — a positive one, anyway — during the first half of the season. His weekly addresses are spent explaining myriad plays that went wrong in the previous game.

A fake punt gone south. A slumping kicker. Kick returns going nowhere. A fumbled punt. Poor kick coverage.

Lather. Rinse. Repeat.

"I've come up short up to this point," Olivo said Friday during his most recent news conference. "I owe it to the franchise, this staff and this team to get that thing rolling."

That special teams unit rolled Denver's season straight into the ground Sunday night. Three different phases — punt return, kickoff return and punt — committed catastrophic errors in the first half that led directly to 17 points for New England and a fifth consecutive loss for the Broncos, 41-16.

A special teams penalty in the fourth quarter on a Patriots punt gave Tom Brady a second chance, and he it used to add another touchdown.

"You can't give up 24 points on special teams and expect to win," Broncos safety Justin Simmons said. "It's unacceptable. We hurt ourselves more on special teams than defense."

They were mistakes that overshadowed an improved effort from a defense that had surrendered 51 points one week earlier. They negated the progress of an offense that produced three scoring drives in the first half. All three of those drives ended in field goals, representing the only aspect of the Broncos' special teams that weren't a disaster.

Rookie Isaiah McKenzie began the calamity of errors by muffing a punt at his own 24-yard line just 90 seconds into the game. The Patriots scored two plays later on Tom Brady's touchdown pass to Rex Burkhead.

Two minutes earlier, the Broncos' defense had nearly intercepted Brady on the game's opening drive, settling instead for a quick three-and-out. Denver had deferred upon winning the pregame coin toss so it could put its best unit on the field first, and the defense delivered.

But in the time it took a punt to fly high into the November night, that momentum disappeared. McKenzie watched helplessly as the ball fell out of his hands. Before he could hop on his gargantuan mistake, he was thrown aside by a pair of Patriots players as New England recovered the fumble.

It was the second time in three weeks McKenzie lost a punt on his own side of the field. He made the same mistake in a 29-19 loss to the Chiefs on Oct. 30.

“He’s our punter returner,” coach Vance Joseph said. “That’s his job so he has to do it. Looking forward, if he can’t do the job, we have to change it.”

It was merely the warm-up act to the horror show by the special teams. The Broncos mitigated some of the damage done by McKenzie’s gaffe by engineering an opening drive that ended with a field goal. Then, the “one step forward, two giant leaps back” pattern to the Broncos’ 2017 season revealed another chapter.

Dion Lewis caught the ensuing kickoff by Brandon McManus 3 yards deep in the end zone and burned through a crater-sized hole and up the left sideline. McManus’ attempt to stop Lewis was futile, and when Devontae Booker misplayed his angle toward Lewis, there was nothing left for the Broncos to do but watch the Patriots celebrate in the end zone.

New England led 14-3 and Brady had thrown just three passes. And yet, the Broncos still had more ingredients to mix into a disastrous formula.

“When you play Tom Brady, you can’t spot him anything,” said cornerback Chris Harris.

Trailing 17-6 with 11 minutes left in the second quarter, the Broncos lined up to punt from their own 41-yard line. They couldn’t slow the 5-foot-10, 210-pound Burkhead as he powered through the protection on the left side and blocked Riley Dixon’s punt before it could leave his foot. Long snapper Casey Kreiter recovered at the 30-yard line, turning another short field over to Brady.

“When we get put in those situations, it hurts the team,” linebacker Shane Ray said. “That’s been the story of the season so far. We have all this talent and we’re not using it.”

The defense held Brady and the Patriots to a field goal, but the damage was done.

Well, almost. After forcing the Patriots to punt for just the second time, early in the fourth quarter, the Broncos had too many men on their punt return team. The 5-yard penalty extended the drive for New England.

Giving Brady extra chances is always unwise. And the five-time Super Bowl champion responded by tossing his third touchdown of the night.

Olivo lifted the microphone on his headset and walked along the sideline. There was nothing left to say.

# Broncos' pass rush unable to make Tom Brady feel heat on lengthy touchdown drives

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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Tom Brady arrived in Denver on pace to be sacked more this season, at age 40, than in any other season during his NFL career.

The Broncos had often hassled Brady in Denver, sacking him nine times in his last three trips to Sports Authority Field. It all seemed to present an opportunity for the Broncos to impact Sunday night's game with a pass rush that has been absent for much of Denver's five-game swoon.

But there was little magic Von Miller and company could produce against Brady. Justin Simmons sacked the New England quarterback on third-and-goal in the second quarter — the first sack of Simmons' career — forcing the Patriots to settle for a field goal and a 17-6 lead.

But in the the game's two defining touchdown drives for Patriots — a masterful two-minute march to end the first half and a lengthy answer of the Broncos' touchdown in the third quarter — the Broncos couldn't make Brady feel the heat.

On those two touchdown drives, Brady completed 6-of-8 passes for 96 yards, wasn't sacked and rarely felt pressure. Brady finished 25-of-34 passes for 266 yards and three touchdowns, with no interceptions and a 125.4 quarterback rating in Patriots' blowout win.

Barbre starts at RT. Allen Barbre was handed an unenviable assignment back on Oct. 22 in Los Angeles.

With starting right tackle Menelik Watson and his backup, Donald Stephenson, sidelined by calf injuries, Barbre, normally a left guard, was shifted to the outside while being asked to combat perhaps the NFL's best pass-rushing duo in the Chargers' Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram.

It was a long afternoon for Barbre and the rest of the offensive line in a 21-0 loss, the Broncos' first shutout in 25 years.

But with Watson out again Sunday night, this time for the season with a torn tendon in his foot, Barbre got another crack at manning the right tackle spot, and his second act was part of an impressive night for Denver's maligned offensive line. The line kept quarterback Brock Osweiler upright. Osweiler wasn't sacked through three quarters and was rarely pressured.

The Broncos rushed for 118 yards and Osweiler had completed 18-of-33 passes for 221 yards, a touchdown and an interception.

Official injured. The biggest hit of the game Sunday was absorbed by umpire Jeff Rice.

Patriots linebacker Trevor Reilly inadvertently ran into Rice during a punt play near the end of the third quarter, dropping Rice to the ground. The official remained on the turf for several minutes before he was loaded onto a cart and taken off the field.

Footnotes. In honor of Veteran's Day, the Broncos included 300 representatives from the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard in a pregame celebration. Thirty-five servicemen and women from the Colorado National Guard ran out of the tunnel with Bronco players during introductions. The team held a moment of silence before the national anthem to thank veterans and active-duty service members. There was also a rendition of "God Bless America" performed before the fourth quarter....Sunday's game was the 100th consecutive game played for receiver Demaryius Thomas. The veteran caught his second touchdown pass in as many weeks following a 13-game drought. ... The game was also the 20th primetime appearance for the Broncos at home since 2011, the most of any team. ... Nose tackle Domata Peko extended his starting streak to 118 games, the longest active streak among NFL defensive linemen.

# Broncos Derek Wolfe shares pregame experience with Navy Chief brother-in-law “that will last forever.”

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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The losses are weighing on Derek Wolfe more than the 330-pound offensive tackles trying to put him on the ground.

The Broncos’ defensive end said he was “embarrassed and frustrated” following Sunday night’s 41-16 loss to the Patriots, Denver’s fifth straight.

But even as defeat pounded at his heart, Wolfe wasn’t about it to let it wash away the heartfelt moment he shared before the game with his brother-in-law, Brian Burrows, a 30-year-old chief in the U.S. Navy.

As the two men emerged from the tunnel before the game, they both paused, arched their chests toward the sky and let out Wolfe’s trademark howl.

It was an experience, Wolfe wrote in an Instagram post late Sunday night, “that will last forever.”

“That was the best thing to come out of today,” Wolfe said in the Broncos’ locker room after the game. “It was great for him to be able to experience that feeling. We are talking about a guy who is a chief in the Navy, has done two tours in Iraq and has sacrificed time with his children and his family. He is an all-around great guy. He has been a great brother to me. He has treated me with love from day one.

“For me to give him that experience of running out of that tunnel, to see what it’s like to be in front of 70,000 fans, to howl with me and sprint through that tunnel — it’s big. I am really happy he got to experience that.”

# Brock Osweiler and Emmanuel Sanders finally flash some hope, but the Broncos offense is in trouble

By Nick Groke  
Denver Post  
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A peppering of half-hearted boos fell on Brock Osweiler as he walked off the field at halftime Sunday night, but not intentionally. The Broncos' quarterback is the tallest player on the team. He stands like an umbrella over their troubles.

Denver's 18-point halftime shortfall behind the Patriots was hardly Osweiler's fault alone. The once and possible future answer to the team's woes under center finally found his footing. And between Osweiler and veteran receiver Emmanuel Sanders, the Broncos knitted together a respectable first half for a struggling offense.

Osweiler and Sanders shined in their best games this season and the Broncos offense suddenly, for the first time in weeks, looked something like a competent unit. But in a 41-16 loss to New England that was essentially a blowout from the first quarter on, Denver's issues ran so deep that its mild improvement in the passing game made no difference.

"Everyone is frustrated right now. We've lost a lot of games in a row. It's not for lack of effort," Osweiler said. "If you're kicking field goals every time you're in the red area rather than scoring touchdowns, it's going to be very hard to win football games."

The Osweiler-to-Sanders connection fell into rhythm early. From the shotgun in the first quarter, the 6-foot-7 Osweiler angled a short pass over the middle to Sanders, who darted through the secondary for a 38-yard gain. The eight-play drive ended in a field goal and after the Patriots scored 15 seconds later on Dion Lewis' 103-yard kickoff return, Denver was already down 14-3.

Now 10 weeks into the season, the Broncos are still trying to figure out how patch together a consistent attack, even for a half. They have already cycled through another training camp quarterback competition, then settled on third-year quarterback Trevor Siemian, then cut bait to bring back Osweiler after his dismissal from Cleveland.

Sanders, it seemed, fell victim to the passing turnover. He was producing at his lowest rate in four seasons with the Broncos, averaging 11.4 yards per reception before Sunday. Siemian never discovered a groove with him.

Osweiler did. He threw for 128 yards total through two quarters Sunday. Denver's receiver was the best player on the field in the first half, hauling in five catches for 114 yards (22.8 yards per reception). Sanders' 15th career game topping 100 yards happened before intermission, just the second time in his career he reached triple-digits so quickly.

"Emmanuel is a stud. He's a big-time play-maker," Osweiler said. "He got open. He made my job easy throwing him the ball. He had huge separation, did a great job on the outside."

Their connection, too, was timely. Five of Sanders' six catches Sunday came on third down, for 106 total yards.

Sanders declined to talk at his locker after the game. But Demaryius Thomas offered this on his counterpart: "Hey, he's back."

But if everything was working so well for the Broncos, they would not have lost in another blowout. Sanders was Denver's only weapon. The Patriots quickly picked up on this insight and shut him down. He caught just one pass in the second half.

Plenty of other issues remain. Osweiler navigated just one drive that ended in a touchdown, a 13-play, 75-yard effort in the third quarter that led to a 7-yard touchdown pass to Thomas. The Broncos otherwise settled for field goals. The red zone is their stop sign. Denver this season has scored touchdowns on just 41.9 percent of trips inside the 20-yard line. That ranks 30th in the 32-team league.

Osweiler and Sanders flashed a thin glint of hope for the Broncos offense. But nothing more. The New England defense ranks last in the NFL in yards allowed. Denver scored enough against them to lose big.

"It's something that happened to this offense multiple times this season," Osweiler said of their red zone issues. "That's something that needs to be fixed."

# Tom Brady picks apart Broncos' defense in Patriots' 41-16 rout

By Patrick Saunders  
Denver Post  
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The remarkable Tom Brady — 40 years old, going on 25 — didn't need to play a starring role in New England's 41-16 victory over the Broncos on Sunday night.

Not with the Broncos' fumbling, bumbling, stumbling and troubling special teams giving the Patriots' easy and early scoring chances.

"We did a really good job of running a balanced offense. It's hard to play this team when they get a lead," Brady said. "They start to tee off on you. But our special teams really put us in a good position."

All Brady had to do was steer the ship. He put the Patriots ahead 7-0 with a 14-yard pass to running back Rex Burkhead, just two plays after the Broncos' Isaiah McKenzie coughed up a punt at the Denver 24.

But when Brady got the opportunity to drive a stake in Denver's heart, he did it with precision. And he did it twice.

Near the end of the first half, with the Pats holding a 20-9 lead, Brady led the Patriots on a nine-play, 75-yard drive that concluded with an 11-yard touchdown pass to tight end Dwayne Allen. The drive took just 2 minutes, 11 seconds, putting New England comfortably ahead, 27-9. It was as if Brady was tuning up his two-minute drill for the playoffs.

"That was a big drive (before the half). They had a couple of timeouts, so we wanted to move the ball but not too fast, and give them the ball back," Brady said. "We made some big plays in the passing game and (Allen) made great catch for the TD."

In the third quarter, after Denver trimmed the lead to 27-16, Brady led the Patriots on another 75-yard drive. This one took seven plays and 3:18, ending with an 8-yard run up the gut by Dion Lewis. Patriots 34, Broncos 16. Game, set and match.

As great quarterbacks do, Brady exploited the exploitable. Denver's defense has had issues this season covering tight ends and running backs, so nine of Brady's first 12 completions found those targets. From that point on, Denver's once dominant defense was reeling.

"I thought we had a lot of contributors tonight. Our running backs and tight ends were really involved," Patriots coach Bill Belichick said.

By the end of the night, Brady had put up some rather nifty numbers: 25-for-35 passing for 266 yards, three touchdowns and a passer rating of 125.4. With the game well in hand, Brady gave way to backup Brian Hoyer with 4:32 left.

The Broncos have treated Brady rather rudely through the years. The future Hall of Famer was 6-6 against them in the regular season coming in, including a 3-4 mark in Denver, and just 1-3 in the postseason vs. the Broncos.

But these Broncos are not those Broncos.

While New England improved to 7-2, Denver stumbled to 3-6 with its fifth consecutive loss. In the past, the Broncos' formerly vaunted defense had success by beating up Brady. In the 2015 AFC Championship Game, they decked him 20 times.

Sunday night, Brady was sacked only once for 6 yards and it was tough to find any grass stains on his uniform.

# Horrific special teams doom Broncos in 41-16 loss to Patriots

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Think of all those brain cells wasted on pre-game analysis.

The Denver defense must harass Tom Brady. Gotta cover Gronk. If Brock Osweiler and the offense can prevent turning the ball over, the Broncos might have a chance to snap their losing streak and upset the defending Super Bowl champs.

And then the game begins and Denver special teams – the unit no analyst bothers mentioning – suffers an immediate and disastrous meltdown.

Four poor special teams plays by the Broncos led directly or indirectly to three New England touchdowns and a field goal, pretty much the difference in the Patriots routing Denver, 41-16 before a sellout crowd, most of which had left the parking lots long before the game expired..

The Broncos, 3-1 entering their bye week, are 0-5 since, losing those five games by an average score of 33-14. It's only the second time in franchise history -- and first since 1963-64 -- the Broncos have suffered five consecutive losses by at least 10 points.

The Patriots won their fifth in a row and improved to 7-2.

Vance Joseph, a first-time head coach, took a gamble on entrusting his special teams units to a first-time coordinator in Brock Olivo. And while Olivo is an accountable, likable, intelligent and gung-ho, his units have struggled all season.

They were awful in the first half on a cool Sunday night at eventually-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

With the sellout crowd mixed with a significant percentage of fans wearing Brady No. 12 jerseys, the first mishap occurred when Broncos' rookie returner Isaiah McKenzie flat dropped the left-footed punt of Ryan Allen. New England recovered at the Broncos' 24.

Two quick passes from Brady to running back Rex Burkhead and it was 7-0 Patriots.

The second, hardly special teams blunder was after Broncos' quarterback Brock Osweiler and receiver Emmanuel Sanders answered with a nice drive that ended with a Brandon McManus field goal.

On the kickoff, the Pats' Dion Lewis corralled the ball 3 yards deep in the end zone and ran it back 103 yards down the left sideline for a touchdown. And by the left sideline, it was incredible how two Broncos defenders – McManus, the kicker, and Devontae Booker, the safety – were unable to push Lewis out of bounds.

That made it 14-3 Pats.

The third poorly executed special teams play was when the Broncos' Riley Dixon had his punt blocked by Burkhead, who is the quintessential Bill Belichick-type player.

The Pats had the ball at the Broncos' 30. Their short drive stalled at the 10 and the Pats settled for a short Stephen Gostkowski field goal.

And for special teams snafu No. 4, the Broncos had 12 men on the field during a Patriots punt. The five yards gave New England a first down. Brady finished up the drive with a 6-yard touchdown pass to running back James White.

Broncos' special teams marred a tremendous performance by Sanders, who had six catches for 137 yards midway through the fourth quarter. He and Osweiler connected on the first offensive play of the game for 31 yards and the combo continued to move the ball between the 20s.

But three Broncos' scoring drives stalled at the New England 21, the 15 and the 18, resulting in McManus field goals.

Brady answered late in the first half by finishing a textbook, 75-yard, 2-minute drive with an 11-yard touchdown pass to tight end Dwayne Allen. Brady was 12 of 16 for 136 yards and two touchdowns at the half.

Osweiler did finish a scoring drive to start the second half with a 7-yard touchdown pass to Demaryius Thomas, who was playing in his 100th consecutive game.

But Denver's D suddenly is struggling to stop anyone. After the Philadelphia Eagles hung 51 points on the Broncos last week, the Patriots had 41 early in the fourth quarter Sunday.

Osweiler played well until throwing an interception to Patrick Chung with 6:44 left in the game. At that point, he was 18 of 33 for 221 yards. Brady was better. Brady is almost always better. He was 25 of 34 for 266 yards with three touchdown passes and no interceptions.

Playing at 40 years old, Brady had 19 touchdown passes against just two interceptions. He was replaced with 4:32 remaining by Brian Hoyer -- the second consecutive week the Broncos were clobbered to the point the opponent sent in its backup quarterback for mop-up duty.

# Numbers for Durable Demaryius Thomas: 100 and 89, 90 and 1,000

By Mike Klis

9 News

November 13, 2017

Demaryius Thomas has been big, strong, fast and available.

Josh McDaniels' first-round pick for the Denver Broncos in the 2010 NFL Draft, Thomas will play in his 100th consecutive game, and make his 89th consecutive start tonight against the New England Patriots.

And because he's been Durable Demaryius, he can set out to join Torrey Holt as the only receivers in NFL history to notch six consecutive seasons of at least 90 receptions and 1,000 receiving yards.

Ugly as the past month has been for the Broncos, Thomas has 90 and 1,000 to keep him going.

"Of course, every week I go out and do whatever to help the team win," Thomas said. "That's my main focus. Winning as a group, putting us in a situation to win the Super Bowl or get to the playoffs.

"But as we all know from history, 90 and 1,000 is the mark. And I think it should be my mark from here on out. I think I can do it. I still have the skill set. I still can run. I still have everything I need to do. So, my main focus is to go out every Sunday, Monday, Thursday, whatever day it is and give it my best football and put numbers on the board to help my team."

Thomas' playing streak began with Tim Tebow's first start at Miami in his memorable season of 2011. Thomas' start streak began with Peyton Manning's first game as a Broncos in 2012.

His starting quarterbacks have also included Brock Osweiler for a spell in 2015, Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch in 2016, and Siemian and Osweiler this season.

Thomas averaged 98 catches and 1,374 yards the previous five years to join Holt and Marvin Harrison as the only receivers in NFL history to have five consecutive 90-1,000 seasons.

He reached the halfway point this season with 43 catches and 525 yards so he is slightly off his coveted 90-catch pace. But if he keeps playing, and Osweiler finds his rhythm in his second game since replacing the struggling Siemian, Thomas can join Holt.

"We won some playoff games with Brock, or won some clutch games with Brock when we were making that playoff run," Thomas said. "I remember last week when we were in meetings and certain things when we were in meetings he saw them on film and Brock told coach, 'Wait, what if we had this right here?'"

"Trevor is young. He wants to say it but he'll wait until the last minute at the meetings to say it. The good thing about it is both of them have it in their heads and know what's going on. Brock just says it quicker."

Actually, counting playoffs, Thomas will be playing in his 110th consecutive game and making his 99th consecutive start tonight against the Patriots.

McDaniels, who is now New England's offensive coordinator, picked Thomas in part because he wasn't a troublemaker. McDaniels had run-ins in 2009 with star receiver Brandon Marshall and shied away in the following year's draft from Dez Bryant, another first-round receiver talent but had character concerns.

Thomas has had some big games against New England, none bigger than in the 2013-season AFC Championship Game when he had 7 catches for 134 yards and a touchdown, as Patriots cornerback Aqib Talib was knocked out early by a Wes Welker crossing route/block.

How will Pats head coach Bill Belichick play Thomas tonight?

"I have no idea," he said. "I really don't. I just hope they don't play me too tough and I can go out and have a good game, but you never know. They always throw something different at us.

"Every year the main thing with them is we cannot turn the ball over. If we fix that we'll put ourselves in a great chance to get this win because with Tom Brady, he capitalizes on those. Every time we turn it over they capitalize and run the football on us quick. The main thing is (Belichick) throws a lot of disguises on defense and the quarterback will see that and hopefully we'll be able to pick up and get positive yards off it."

# Broncos to evaluate all areas after rout, Vance Joseph says

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

November 13, 2017

On a night when the Denver Broncos watched most everything go bad, there is no question that the team's special-teams unit was the first domino to fall.

A long list of special-teams' gaffes came early and often, and they resulted in 24 points for the New England Patriots in what turned into a 41-16 rout of the Broncos at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

While the Broncos' offense struggled in the red zone and the team's defense surrendered seven consecutive scoring drives to the Patriots, the special-teams troubles stood out as the team dropped to 3-6 with a sixth consecutive loss.

"Twenty-four points, we gave up 24 points on special-teams alone," Broncos rookie receiver Isaiah McKenzie said. "I made a huge mistake, and we ended up giving up 24 points."

Asked after the game if he had ever seen a worse special-teams performance in his time in the NFL, Broncos coach Vance Joseph simply said, "I have not."

Joseph said everything would be evaluated in the coming days: personnel, scheme and coaching.

The Broncos had a muffed punt, had a blocked punt, allowed a 103-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and had a 12-men-on-the-field penalty that negated a Patriots punt. Those four mistakes led to three Patriots touchdowns and one field goal.

McKenzie, who was named the primary punt returner during training camp, has found the transition to be a difficult one with a growing pile of bobbles. On Sunday night, the Broncos' defense held the Patriots to a three-and-out to open the game, with the crowd at Sports Authority Field at Mile High in a full-throated frenzy.

Then McKenzie dropped the game's first punt, and the Patriots recovered at the Broncos' 24-yard line and scored a touchdown two plays later for a 7-0 lead just 2:24 into the game. It was something the Patriots had almost planned to see.

"I should have fair caught it ... the guy was right there in my face," McKenzie said. "I try to build confidence during the week. I've got to make better decisions. Fair catch it, or just let it go."

As Patriots coach Bill Belichick put it after the game, "That's not the first punt McKenzie's muffed this season."

After the Broncos answered with a field goal, they allowed Dion Lewis to go 103 yards up the Broncos' sideline for a 14-0 Patriots lead 6:36 into the game. Early in the second quarter, Riley Dixon had a punt blocked and recovered at the Broncos' 30-yard line.

Five plays later, that was a Patriots field goal. Then in the fourth quarter, when there appeared to be little more insult that could be added to the whole thing, the Broncos gave the Patriots a second chance after a 12-men-on-the-field penalty negated a punt after rookie cornerback Brendan Langley tried to run on the field and defensive end Shelby Harris tried to run off.

Instead of taking the ball, the Broncos had to send their defense back on the field, and seven plays later that, too, turned into a Patriots touchdown in what ultimately was a 16-play, 94-yard drive.

Much of the public ire is directed at first-year special-teams coach Brock Olivo, who was hired by the Broncos from the Kansas City Chiefs, with whom he was an assistant to the highly respected Dave Toub. Olivo said this past week that there is a transition to going from an assistant special-teams coach to a coordinator.

"That's on me to get that confidence in those guys and get them to believe in the scheme, get them to believe in their ability," Olivo said after Friday's practice. " ... We show them on tape: Look, this is how it's done correctly, and this is how it's not done correctly. Make them understand better what's right and wrong. Again, that's on me, and I've been all talk up to this point. We have to perform."

# Broncos have fallen far, fast and 'nobody respects us'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

November 13, 2017

The Denver Broncos have a locker room full of players with Super Bowl rings -- won in Super Bowl 50 against the Carolina Panthers to close the book on the 2015 season -- and here they are, less than two seasons later wondering how the fall has come so hard, so quickly.

"I don't know, man, it's just sad, it's just real sad," said Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe. "It's sad we went from a championship-caliber team to a team that stinks and nobody respects us."

Said Broncos coach Vance Joseph: "I'll say this, when you lose like this, it's on all of us. It's a staff we chose and that we feel great about ... but I would say it's on all of us."

The Broncos lost their fifth consecutive game Sunday night -- 41-16 to the New England Patriots -- their sixth loss in the past seven games. When they defeated the Oakland Raiders, 16-10, on Oct. 1, they were 3-1 and talking about controlling the division race and getting back to the AFC title game.

Now, they are in last place in the AFC West with six double-digit losses -- the past two being a 28-point loss the Philadelphia Eagles a week ago and Sunday's 25-point meltdown against the Patriots, who seemed to treat the Broncos as a warm-up for something more important. New England, with its five Super Bowl wins under Bill Belichick, including last season's title, provided a stark reminder of just how far the Broncos have fallen.

Even Denver's resident optimist, linebacker Von Miller, was at a loss as he tried to sift through the pieces Sunday night.

"It's still a good football team, but the record and the way we're playing right now is not a clear indicator of that," Miller said. "We've got a good football team in us, but what we put out there (Sunday) is a bad football team, what we put out there last week is a bad football team."

The rub is the Broncos say they prepare well -- "preparation is the last issue ... we're doing everything we possibly can," Wolfe said. They say they have good veteran leaders, that the coaching staff has put them in good position for the most part and that they know what it takes to turn things around. Yet, the Broncos have played six of the past seven games as if they have no veteran leadership to get them through the rough spots, as if they are wildly unprepared and as if they don't know what winning feels or looks like.

That is the gap they have to bridge if they are going to salvage anything from what remains of their season.

"I don't know, I don't know what the answer is," Wolfe said. "I'm at a loss ... It's not easy to come to work when you're losing ... It's not like no one is trying, we are playing hard, we are not giving up."

Joseph and his staff are under the microscope at the moment, especially given that Joseph has two first-time coordinators -- Joe Woods on defense and Brock Olivo on special teams. The defense has spent

much of the season as the league's No. 1 unit overall and was No. 1 against the run early in the season. But opposing offenses keep completing passes to running backs and tight ends week after week as the Broncos have lost the past two games by a combined 53 points.

Not all of those points are on the defense's plate, but the Patriots scored on seven consecutive possessions Sunday night as Tom Brady threw three touchdown passes and was sacked just once. And the Eagles' Carson Wentz was largely undisturbed as he threw four touchdown passes the previous game.

The Denver special teams will have to lift themselves plenty just to get to say things aren't going well, because the group fell below that bar quite some time ago. Sunday night they were a mess, with mistakes adding up to 24 Patriots points.

All this follows the Broncos changing quarterbacks after being shut out for the first time in a quarter century.

The bottom line is that what they've been in recent years doesn't matter any longer and what they'll be this season is still seven games away from being official, so there is only the here and now.

"I'm just going to have to wake up (Monday) and do it all over again and try to get a win," Wolfe said. "We've just got to try to get a win, that's all we can worry about right now is try to get a win, we have to get a win, because nothing's going to change if we don't get one."

# Broncos dish out more of their own misery in loss to Patriots

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

November 13, 2017

Whenever the final words are written or spoken about the Denver Broncos' 2017 season, it's almost a given it will simply be the football year when the Broncos couldn't get out of their own way.

Because, as the vintage thought goes, they have seen the enemy and it is them.

Yes, Tom Brady and the New England Patriots cashed in on virtually any and all charitable football contributions they were given by the Broncos in a 41-16 Patriots win at Sports Authority Field at Mile High, but every attempt the Broncos had to make it a game was stamped out by just one of the parties involved.

The Broncos themselves, for their fifth consecutive loss, their sixth loss in the past seven games, as they sit 3-6 with plenty of self-professed training-camp promise unfulfilled.

"All three phases again," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "... We talked you have to win the pre-snap battle and we didn't do that. And you can't beat yourself, when you beat yourself it looks that way."

For a week leading up to Sunday night's affair, Broncos coach Vance Joseph had spoken of the necessity for Denver to create a "fair" game. As in a game in which it didn't take a week's worth of preparation and flush it with a few minutes of shoddy work when it gift wraps the ball as well as any and all momentum to the team on the opposite sideline.

Clean up the details, fine-tune the fine points; that's all it would take to make a change, Joseph and the Broncos' players said. And then the Broncos constructed another loss, with their own hands, in the opening minutes of another game that got away.

Rookie Isaiah McKenzie, who has seen his first NFL season turn into a bit of a recurring nightmare of dropped punts, muffed the Patriots' first punt of the game, one that came after a stadium was rocking following a three-and-out forced by the Broncos' defense. New England recovered the ball at the Broncos' 24-yard line and had a 7-0 lead two plays later.

The Broncos answered with a field goal drive and then surrendered a 103-yard kickoff return for a touchdown by Dion Lewis. And the defending Super Bowl champs, a team that eats big-game pressure like Tic Tacs and has made taking a crowd out of a game almost a given, had a 14-0 lead with 8 minutes, 24 seconds left in the first quarter thanks to the Broncos' special teams.

"We have to look at personnel, scheme, all of it," Joseph said. "We can't fumble a punt return ... that's where it started."

"It's Tom Brady, man, you can't spot him anything," said Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr. "You've got to be sound in all three phases and he's going to take advantage of our mistakes. ... We're just doing the same thing every week."

Later, the Broncos had a punt blocked, had a touchdown nullified by a holding penalty, McKenzie almost dropped a kickoff and the Broncos had 12 men on the field to negate a Patriots' punt in the fourth quarter. The Patriots turned that second chance into a touchdown, too.

What happened in between, like the fleeting moments when the Broncos' offense had briefly piled up more yardage than the Patriots had, or that Brock Osweiler had thrown for more yardage than Brady, or that Emmanuel Sanders seemed to catch a pass in front of Patriots cornerback Malcolm Butler any time Sanders wanted, didn't matter much. The Broncos may have scrapped well enough at times to have some limited what-if fodder for the coming week, but the folks streaming to the exits in the fourth quarter couldn't bear to watch any longer as Brian Hoyer finished out behind center for the Patriots.

In the end, the Broncos have now limped across the sharp edge of their schedule. They went 0-4 in that stretch with their first shutout loss in a quarter century, an interception-filled defeat in Kansas City that got their quarterback benched, their worst loss since 2010 -- 51-23 to the Eagles -- and Sunday night's gift certificate handed to the team that needed it least in the opening six minutes of a game.

Oh, and just for good measure in all of this, the New York Giants' only win this season? Another one with a bow on it, the Broncos handed out last month.

That is one substantial pile of football misery for the Broncos to sift through and it's only getting bigger. And the Broncos can crunch all of the numbers, grind all of the game video, break it all down as much as they want, but they need only one thing to find the cause of it all.

A mirror.

# Plenty of blame to go around for Broncos

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
November 13, 2017

Quarterback Brock Osweiler takes the blame for Denver's sputtering offense. Brock Olivo keeps saying the unceasing blunders on special teams are his fault.

"My bad," Osweiler said after the Broncos stalled three times inside the New England 21 in their 41-16 loss to New England that continued a season-long trend of settling for field goals.

"It's not the first time we couldn't score touchdowns," Osweiler noted. "But that starts with me. I'm going to have to watch the tape and see what decisions I could have made differently."

Olivo's awful special teams units had their worst showing yet with four foul-ups in Denver's fifth consecutive double-digit loss that dropped the Broncos 3-6.

Might one or both pay with his job?

Rookie coach Vance Joseph wouldn't commit to sticking with Osweiler against Cincinnati next week, saying, "We're going to watch the tape tomorrow as a staff and determine who the quarterback is next week."

He seemed to indicate that he'll be sticking with his rookie special teams coordinator, however.

"When you lose like this, it's on all of us," Joseph said when asked if he'd make a change on his coaching staff midseason. "It's a staff that we chose and that we feel great about. I wouldn't say that; I would say it's on all of us. We have to coach better and play better."

That's the same mantra Joseph has been repeating ever since the Broncos lost to the New York Giants on Oct. 15. Since then, they've been outscored by 97 points, the worst point differential in the NFL in that span.

"We still have a good football team in us," insisted Von Miller, who was once again neutralized by an early deficit. "But what we put out there is a bad football team."

It would seem unlikely the Broncos would turn to Paxton Lynch, who failed even against vanilla defenses in the preseason, as long as they have a pulse in the playoff race, but the Broncos could go back to Trevor Siemian, who was benched two weeks ago.

The problem, however, wasn't so much the sputtering offense as it was their horrific special teams.

For the first time since 1979, the Patriots had a special teams takeaway, a blocked punt and a kickoff return for a touchdown, a trifecta that fueled a comfortable 27-9 halftime lead.

Dion Lewis has a 103-yard kickoff return and Rex Burkhead blocked a punt after catching a touchdown pass.

"That was great," Tom Brady said. "We know the caliber of specialists we have. They do not get opportunities very often and the only got one opportunity tonight. Dion Lewis took it to the house so that was pretty sweet. And then the blocked punt was great and set up for great field position. Those were two huge plays."

He didn't even mention Broncos rookie returner Isaiah McKenzie's muffed punt, his fifth fumble of the season, or the Broncos getting caught with 12 men the next time the Patriots punted, resulting in a first down — and another touchdown.

Other takeaways from the Patriots' first back-to-back wins in Denver in 51 years:

**MORE MCKENZIE?** One of Joseph's first eyebrow-raising moves as coach was to name McKenzie his starting punt returner just when the competition was about to begin. The reasoning was that the Broncos had selected the diminutive receiver in the fifth round out of Georgia for that specific purpose. He's steadfastly stuck with him through all his fumbles, including Sunday night.

"He's our punt returner," Joseph explained. "That's his job, so he has to do it. Looking forward, if he can't do the job, we have to change it."

McKenzie sat alone on the bench for a long time after his latest blunder, which put Denver in another early hole.

"I just have to make better decisions, put up a fair catch," McKenzie said. "I need to stop trying to make a play when it's not there."

**WHAT INJURY?:** Welcome back to New England, Martellus Bennett . The newly acquired tight end didn't take long to fit back in as he caught three passes for 38 yards despite a shoulder injury that led to his release from Green Bay. The Patriots claimed Bennett on Thursday after he was waived.

"Last week I thought I was going to be on IR," Bennett said. "It's just been a surreal week for me."

**THOMAS RETURNS:** After going nearly a calendar year without a touchdown, Demaryius Thomas reached the end zone for the second straight week, catching a 7-yard pass from Osweiler in the third quarter that pulled Denver to 27-16.

Now it's Emmanuel Sanders who is mired in a touchdown-less streak. He hasn't scored since Week 2, a stretch that includes two games he missed with an ankle injury. After catching one pass for 30 yards in his return to the lineup last week at Philadelphia, Sanders had six catches for 137 yards Sunday night.

**ALTITUDE ATTITUDE:** The Patriots aren't going home for another week. They'll train at the Air Force Academy, where the 6,621-foot elevation will help prepare them for their trip to Estadio Azteca in Mexico City where they'll face the Oakland Raiders next week 7,200 feet above sea level.

"We're away from our normal routine, but we've got to make it as normal as possible because we're playing a good team," Brady said. "They're on the road and we're on the road. It's kind of a different type of game. We've never played there, so the only thing we can really control is our effort and our preparation."

# Brady, Patriots send Broncos to fifth straight loss, 41-16

By Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
November 13, 2017

Denver is no longer Tom Brady's House of Horrors and the Broncos sure don't scare anybody anymore.

Brady threw three touchdown passes and the New England Patriots matched their own AFC record with their 12th consecutive road victory, pummeling the Broncos 41-16 on Sunday night.

Brady's 86th regular-season road win broke a tie with Peyton Manning for most all-time.

"It's always hard to win in the NFL, certainly on the road," Brady said. "We found a way to do it last year and we're off to a good start this year."

Not so the Broncos.

These teams have represented the AFC in the last four Super Bowls, and the Broncos (3-6) were hoping a visit from their rivals would help shake them from their funk. Beat Brady, suggested Aqib Talib, and "the swag, the energy in this locker room, it'll skyrocket."

Instead, the Broncos fizzled.

They lost their fifth straight game, their worst skid in seven seasons, and they dropped back-to-back games to the Patriots (7-2) in Denver for the first time since 1966.

Avoiding Von Miller all night and throwing for 266 yards on 25-of-34 passing, Brady improved to 8-9 against the Broncos, the only team he has a losing record against, and he won for just the fourth time in 11 trips to Denver.

The Patriots also won a dozen consecutive road games from 2006-08. The NFL record is 18 set by the Joe Montana-led San Francisco 49ers from 1988-90.

Speaking of historic, the Patriots for the first time since 1979 had a special teams takeaway, a blocked punt and a kickoff return for a touchdown, a trifecta that fueled a comfortable 27-9 halftime lead.

The Patriots went three-and-out to start the game but rookie Isaiah McKenzie's muffed punt led to Brady's 14-yard TD toss to running back Rex Burkhead.

"That's not the first punt McKenzie has muffed this year," Patriots coach Bill Belichick said.

Indeed, it was his fifth fumble, including four muffs.

"It puts us in a big hole," McKenzie said. "I put the blame all on me. If I would've caught that first punt, did anything with it, besides turn it over, then probably ... things would've changed for us."

The Patriots had five touchdowns and a pair of field goals before they'd punt again.

"We knew McKenzie had muffed a couple so we told our gunners to get down there and make it tough on him," Patriots DB Devin McCourty said. "Then we get the blocked punt return."

He's getting ahead of himself, but who could blame him?

After kicking a 39-yard field goal, Brandon McManus failed on the ensuing kickoff to get in front of returner Dion Lewis, whose 103-yard return down Denver's demoralized sideline made it 14-3.

"How are you supposed to win against Tom Brady and Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots when you're starting off" like that? wondered Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe. "You can't."

Then, Burkhead sliced through the line to block Riley Dixon's punt at the Broncos' 30-yard line, leading to Stephen Gostkowski's second field goal and a 20-6 lead.

"I have not," Broncos coach Vance Joseph replied when asked if he'd ever seen a worse special teams performance. "That wasn't the only issue we had. We were 1 for 4 in the red zone. We moved the ball better tonight but we didn't score touchdowns. And defensively they scored on seven straight possessions."

When the Broncos finally forced another punt in the fourth quarter, they were whistled for 12 men on the field, giving the Patriots a fresh set of downs. Brady took advantage of that gaffe by throwing a 6-yard touchdown pass to James White, capping both the blowout and a 16-play, 94-yard drive that ate up more than seven minutes.

"Besides that first series, we couldn't stop them," Miller said.

**BROCK ON:** Brock Osweiler hooked up with Emmanuel Sanders five times for 114 yards in the first half but Denver stalled twice in the red zone and also at the Patriots 21, settling for field goals while the Patriots were scoring touchdowns. Sanders finished with six catches for 137 yards.

Joseph refused to say if Osweiler (18 of 33, 221 yards) would stay the starter.

"We're going to watch the tape tomorrow as a staff and determine who the quarterback is next week," Joseph said.

**BENNETT'S BACK :** Tight end Martellus Bennett was active — and productive — for New England just a few days after he accused the Green Bay Packers of pressuring him to play through a shoulder injury. Green Bay waived Bennett with the designation that he "failed to disclose a physical condition," but Bennett said the Packers were aware of his balky shoulder when they signed him. He said it got worse during the season and he elected to have surgery. When the Packers waived him, the Patriots grabbed him.

His first catch covered 27 yards and he finished with three catches for 38 yards.

"He did a great job to have come in on Friday," Brady said. "I love having Martellus on our team. He adds a lot, he's a great player, and he was for us last year."

MILESTONE WIN: Belichick moved into a third-place tie with Tom Landry on the all-time head-coaching list for wins, with 270. He trails only Don Shula (347) and George Halas (324).

INJURIES: Patriots special teams ace Matthew Slater went out in the first half with a pulled hamstring.

Broncos tight end A.J. Derby was knocked out with a shoulder injury.

Umpire Jeff Rice was carted off in the third quarter after hitting his head on the ground when Patriots linebacker Trevor Reilly bowled him over on during a Denver punt.

#### UP NEXT

Patriots: At Raiders at Mexico City's Estadio Azteca (elevation 7,280 feet). The Patriots are staying in Colorado all week, practicing at the Air Force Academy (elevation 6,621) feet to acclimate to the altitude.

Broncos: Host the Cincinnati Bengals.

# Special teams errors haunt Broncos in 41-16 loss to Patriots

By Pat Graham  
Associated Press  
November 13, 2017

The Denver Broncos weren't just bad on special teams. They were downright hurtful.

To themselves, of course. To an official as well.

A mistake-filled night began with a muffed punt, included a 103-yard kickoff return, blocked punt, and getting a too-many-players-on-the-field penalty on fourth down to extend a New England drive. Even an umpire was run over — and had to leave the game — on a punt by the Broncos.

All told, Denver's lapses on special teams added up to 24 points, which Tom Brady and the Patriots turned into a 41-16 blowout Sunday.

"How are you supposed to win against Tom Brady and Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots when you're starting off 14-(3)?" lamented defensive end Derek Wolfe, whose team dropped its fifth straight game. "You can't. You're not going to win against a good team like that."

The gaffes made things just that much easier for the Patriots against Von Miller and a stalwart Denver defense.

"It helps out tremendously and sparks us," receiver Danny Amendola said. "Hats off to the special teams."

The night actually started just like Denver (3-6) scripted — forcing the Patriots (7-2) to punt on their opening possession.

It went horribly awry after that, with rookie returner Isaiah McKenzie bobbling a punt. New England recovered and cashed in on Rex Burkhead's 14-yard TD catch.

"It puts us in a big hole. I put the blame all on me," said McKenzie, who now has five fumbles this season. "If I would've caught that first punt, did anything with it, besides turn it over, then probably ... things would've changed for us."

There was plenty more blame to spread around.

Minutes later, Dion Lewis returned a kickoff 103 yards down the left sideline for a score. It's tied for the third-longest return the Broncos have allowed.

"It just was bad, man," special teamer/defensive back Jamal Carter said. "Once we made one mistake it just kept going on like a domino effect."

The next domino to fall was when Burkhead blocked a Riley Dixon punt in the second quarter. That led to a Stephen Gostkowski field goal to make it 20-6.

"We can't do those things," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "It's all three phases that we have to look at."

This wasn't a special teams gaffe — just a scary moment. On a punt in the third quarter, Carter was blocking New England's Trevor Reilly when Reilly rolled into the back of umpire Jeff Rice, whose legs were taken out from under him. Rice stayed down for several moments before walking to the cart.

"(Reilly) was trying to bull rush me and I kind of slung him. I didn't know the ref was back there," Carter explained. "It was crazy."

To close out a special teams night to forget, Denver was called for a 12th player on the field early in the fourth quarter on a New England punt. The play was so bizarre that linebacker Brandon Marshall actually was the one who called for a fair catch. The penalty gave New England a first down and Brady took advantage by throwing a short TD pass to James White .

"We have to be better on special teams," cornerback Chris Harris said. "They outplayed us in that area. When you play against Tom Brady, man, you can't spot him anything. ... He's going to take advantage of our mistakes."

Brady did at that, too.

"We did a good job staying balanced," Brady said. "Playing from ahead was really important all night. It's hard to play this team when you're behind and they can just tee off on the rushes. They've got very skilled pass rushers. Special teams played great and we just tried to hold up our end of the bargain."

# Broncos' special teams awful in fifth straight loss to Patriots

By Troy Renck

KMGH

November 13, 2017

Last January as Vance Joseph pieced together his coaching staff, he needed energy. Brock Olivo arrived from Kansas City as a human Red Bull, trumping multiple candidates to land the special teams job. He has spent the first two months of the season pointing a finger in the mirror, unable to foster an effective culture or performance from his group that suggests his position could be in danger.

Sunday proved cringe worthy even when framed by low expectations, a special teams fiasco in a season where the nadir remains a moving target.

On a night that demanded perfection to execute a U-turn, the special teams imploded in spectacular fashion, leaving the Broncos zooming down the interstate to nowhere, falling 41-16 Sunday night for their fifth consecutive loss.

"It's 's like we're a whole new (bleeping) team. It's embarrassing," defensive Derek Wolfe said. "It's sad. It's sad that we went from being a championship-caliber team to a team that stinks and nobody respects."

Early in the fourth quarter, much of the sellout crowd, which began booing at halftime, exited into a parking lot of anger and frustration.

The Patriots produced a special teams takeaway, returned a kick for a score and blocked a punt in a game for the first time since 1979. When the Broncos thought about making a history, this isn't what they had in mind. It speaks how badly the special teams sabotaged the Broncos when Denver had outgained New England by 90 yards halfway through the third quarter and trailed by 11 points.

Afterwardm Joseph was asked if Olivo would be fired.

"I'll say this: When you lose like this, it's on all of us," Joseph said. "It's a staff that we chose and that we feel great about. I wouldn't say that; I would say it's on all of us. We have to coach better and play better."

He is correct. The problem is Joseph has repeated this phrase for five weeks and counting.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. Joseph and the players preached the importance of a clean performance. Brock Osweiler, who performed well, insisted the Patriots were the "perfect opponent" to steer the season back on the rails. Actually the Browns are. But I digress.

Joseph did not commit to starting Osweiler this Sunday against Cincinnati. He played well enough to keep the job, until the team determines the season is lost and plays Paxton Lynch.

"The biggest thing we can do is come in tomorrow," said Osweiler, who completed 18 of 33 passes for 221 yards, "and be honest with ourselves as we watch the tape."

Desperation reeking from each corner at Dove Valley, everything mattered. No detail was too small. Nose tackle Domata Peko admitted guys called each other out. Accountability ruled. Then Isaiah McKenzie, whose presence on the field has drawn questions since August, fumbled a punt. It was his fifth, and second lost, a staggering amount for a rookie who has failed to reward the staff's blind faith in him.

A year ago, Aqib Talib shoved veteran returner Jordan Norwood off the field after a fumble against New England. This was worse, helping drop the Broncos to 3-6 overall.

"It's still a good football team, but the record and the way we're playing right now is not a clear indicator of that," said linebacker Von Miller, who insisted the players had not lost confidence in Joseph or the coaches. "What we put out there was a bad football team. What we put out there last week was a bad football team."

McKenzie's latest mistake came after the Broncos produced their 31st three-and-out drive. Tom Brady showed mortality on the first drive. Then McKenzie let Brady guzzle electrolytes with an unspeakable gaffe, fueling his best performance in Denver and improving his record to 4-7 in Mile High Stadium. Why McKenzie receives opportunities is a sobering question and focuses scrutiny on Olivo's continued employment. Multiple players grouched off-camera at how poorly the special teams played, wondering aloud about McKenzie's spot.

"It put us in a big hole and I put that blame all on me," McKenzie said. "If I would have caught the first punt or done anything but turn it over, we probably would have been in the game."

Two plays after the rookie's fumble, Brady connected with Rex Burkhead on a 14-yard touchdown as tight end Rob Gronkowski drew double coverage.

The Patriots won their fifth straight, outscoring opponents 128-67 during this stretch.

"I think everybody played well. Tom played well, receivers played well, the backs played well, the line, the defense, the special teams, they all played well," said coach Bill Belichick, who tied former Dallas Cowboys legend Tom Landry for third all time in wins. "That makes everybody's job a little easier."

The Broncos' offense, showing new creative formations, raced down the field behind Emmanuel Sanders (114 yards receiving in first half). Denver, averaging 12.75 points over the last five games, settled for a 39-yard field goal, shaving the deficit to 7-3.

Hope flickered in the sellout crowd. Buzz meet kill. The Broncos allowed running back Dion Lewis to race 103 yards on the ensuing kickoff. Lewis zoomed past Shaquil Barret, jukeed McManus, and outran Devontae Booker for the touchdown. The Broncos have been outscored 55-9 in the first quarter and 106-24 in the first half during their five-game losing skid. Denver ranked near the bottom of nearly every important special teams category before the game. It required an archaeological dig to find a new bottom. The shovels appeared in the second quarter.

After the offense shaved the deficit to 17-6, Burkhead blocked Riley Dixon's punt. A Patriots' starter on special teams victimized backups. Imagine that. Beating the Patriots requires flawless execution. It created an odd feeling -- the Broncos were playing fairly well and trailed 20-9 with 2:36 remaining in the first half after McManus' third field goal.

While special teams shoved the Broncos' toward a loss, the defense offered little resistance, with defensive coordinator Joe Woods experiencing another difficult game. Brady played to his MVP status, clinical in his dissection of linebackers and safeties guarding tight ends and running backs. Brady, 40, completed 25 of 34 passes for 266 yards and three scores. So much for his issues in Denver.

"I really do love the game, and I love practicing and playing," said Brady, whose Patriots will practice in Colorado Springs this week as they prep for their upcoming game in Mexico City. "I love being with my teammates and working hard. So it's fun for me. I plan on doing this for a long time."

The Broncos had no answer, their defense's swagger gone. The Broncos have allowed 92 points in back-to-back games. During their Super Bowl season in 2015, they yielded 296 points. It is a defining hallmark of a bad team that when one area gets fixed, another leak springs. The offense showed bursts, and improvement.

And yet there was nothing memorable or special about Sunday night, unless it marks the beginning of job casualties.

"It's tough, but you have got to have pride in yourself, pride in your name, and still compete," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "I am a fighter. I am not going to quit, and I don't expect anybody else on this team to quit."

# Why it happened: Patriots 41, Broncos 16

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 13, 2017

A return to Sports Authority Field at Mile High couldn't get the Broncos back on track.

New England sprinted to a two-score lead in the first seven minutes of the game, and for the fourth time in the five games of their current losing streak, the Broncos never led, ultimately falling 41-16 to the Patriots at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

Why did the Broncos lose?

Because special-teams breakdowns put the Broncos into an early hole

The opening moment of the game had promise for the Broncos; the defense stuffed the Patriots and forced them into a three-and-out. The home crowd of 75,284 was roaring.

And then Isaiah McKenzie muffed the subsequent punt. New England's Jacob Hollister recovered the football at the Denver 24-yard line, and the Patriots scored on a Tom Brady-to-Rex Burkhead touchdown two plays later.

Barely four minutes later, it got worse. After the Broncos had marched 58 yards in eight plays to a 39-yard Brandon McManus field goal, New England's Dion Lewis fielded McManus' kickoff three yards deep in the end zone, darted up the left sideline and dashed for a 103-yard touchdown that put the Broncos behind, 14-3.

The night got worse for the special teams in the second quarter when the protection for Riley Dixon caved in on the left side, allowing Burkhead to block Dixon's punt. New England recovered the football at the Denver 30-yard line, and scored five plays later on a 28-yard Stephen Gostkowski field goal, extending their lead to 20-6.

Finally, in the fourth quarter with the Broncos trying to mount a comeback, a defensive stop was wiped off the board when Denver's punt team was called for having 12 men on the field. The penalty resuscitated New England's drive, leading to Brady's third touchdown pass seven plays later -- a 6-yard toss to James White that concluded the scoring.

Twenty-four of the Patriots' 41 points came on special teams or in the wake of short fields set up by special-teams miscues. Those points ended up being almost all of the difference between the teams.

Because the offense couldn't maximize its scoring chances

For a second consecutive game, the Broncos scored nine first-half points -- all on Brandon McManus field goals. Unlike last week, McManus didn't have to drill a pair of long-range attempts from beyond 50 yards; this time, the Broncos drove inside the New England 25 three times in the first half, but came up with field goals each time.

Because the Patriots seized momentum back in the third quarter

There was a moment midway through the third quarter when the Broncos had a chance to regain traction and get back into the contest. The offense had just mounted its most impressive drive of the night, converting three third downs on a 13-play, 75-yard march to an 8-yard Osweiler-to-Thomas scoring pass.

Denver's defense opened the ensuing series by stuffing Patriots running back Dion Lewis for a 1-yard loss. But on the next two plays, Tom Brady hit Rob Gronkowski and Brandin Cooks for 26 and 25 yards, respectively, quickly pushing New England into scoring range. They scored four plays later, having never faced a third down on the series that allowed them to push their lead back to three scores, at 34-16.

The Broncos' subsequent drive petered out at the Denver 48-yard line, and they trailed by three or more scores from that point forward.

# Injury updates: Broncos vs. Patriots

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

November 13, 2017

The following is a running list of updates regarding the Denver Broncos players who suffered injuries during Sunday's game against the Patriots.

7:52 p.m. MT: Inside linebacker Todd Davis limped off the field late in the first half after suffering an ankle injury on a 2-yard Rex Burkhead run. He was briefly inspected on the field before he headed to the sideline and then the locker room with trainers flanking him on his left and right. Davis has been battling an ankle sprain for the previous two weeks.

7:55 p.m. MT: Davis' return is listed as questionable.

8:15 p.m. MT: Tight end A.J. Derby has a shoulder injury. His return is questionable.

8:20 p.m. MT: Derby returned to the game during the Broncos' first drive of the third quarter.

9:04 p.m. MT: Inside linebacker Brandon Marshall was evaluated for a possible concussion. He has been cleared to return.

# From the Pocket: The Broncos must be honest with themselves after loss to Patriots

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 13, 2017

At the heart of Brock Osweiler's thoughts following Sunday's 41-16 loss to the Patriots were two questions.

One was for the entire team: "Where can you improve to help this team get better?"

And one was for himself: "What can I do to help this football team win?"

A five-game losing streak brings those kinds of questions to the forefront as frustration mounts.

Osweiler addressed that first question by emphasizing that the Broncos cannot linger on those errors too long before shifting focus to the Bengals.

"I think the biggest thing we can do is come in tomorrow and be very honest with ourselves when we watch the tape," Osweiler said. "Be honest with yourself. Where can you improve to help this team get better? And then after that, you've got to push it to the side and you need to come to work Wednesday with a great attitude, with a laser focus on beating the Cincinnati Bengals."

Though Joseph said he'd have to look at the tape before deciding on the starting quarterback for the next game — just as he's done after the previous two games — Osweiler maintains his perspective will remain the same. And that helps Osweiler answer the second question.

"I'm not going to put any pressure on myself either way," Osweiler said. "I think you guys know every single week I'm going to give everything I have to this football team in my preparation, in my leadership and how I play the game. ... Right now my focus is solely on winning football games. What can I do to help this football team win? And I think all that stuff will take care of itself down the road."

Osweiler saw some promising results on the game field on Sunday, as he connected with Emmanuel Sanders time and time again. In the first quarter, the pair connected for 82 yards and Osweiler threw for 93 yards total in the opening frame.

"Emmanuel's a stud," Osweiler said. "He's a big-time playmaker. The bigger the game, [the more] you're going to get the best out of Emmanuel. He did a tremendous job tonight. He got open, made my job really easy, throwing him the ball. I think he had good separation, and the majority of the time I was throwing to him, he just did a great job on the outside. But also credit the offensive line, because without those guys up there playing well, I don't have time to throw to Emmanuel."

But the frustration quickly mounted as mistakes in all three phases compounded upon one another throughout the game.

"I think everyone's frustrated right now," Osweiler said. "We've lost a lot of games in a row, and it's not from a lack of effort. I can tell you that. This football team comes to work with a great attitude every day. We focus in meetings, we work hard on the practice field. So to not see the results on the game field, it's very frustrating."

# Defining Moments: Patriots 41, Broncos 16

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

November 13, 2017

## **Sanders' big evening**

Emmanuel Sanders turned in his best performance since a game against Kansas City last November with a six-catch, 137-yard outing against New England. Brock Osweiler found Sanders early and often, including on a 38-yard pass to Sanders midway through the first quarter. The catch moved the Broncos to the edge of field-goal range, and a C.J. Anderson run pushed them the rest of the way. Though the Broncos would settle for their second field goal of the night, the score kept them within range of the Patriots.

## **The defense holds**

Following the Broncos' third special teams miscue of the evening, the Denver defense held strong. The Patriots, who blocked a Riley Dixon punt and took over on the Denver 30-yard line, looked to take a commanding lead early in the second quarter. Denver's defense would hold the Patriots to a single first down on the drive, though, and New England was forced to settle for a field goal. Stephen Gostkowski's 28-yard field goal gave the Patriots a 20-6 lead, but the defense's big stop made sure the Broncos would remain within two possessions.

## **Thomas scores again**

Denver's offense held up its side of the bargain to begin the third quarter as they traveled 75 yards in 13 plays to score the team's first touchdown of the game. The Broncos used four plays of at least 10 yards to move the ball, and Osweiler once again found Sanders for the biggest play of the drive. Denver, which also converted three third downs on the drive, would score initially on an Anderson run, but the touchdown was called back following an offensive holding call. The Broncos would cash in for real on a 7-yard Osweiler pass to Demaryius Thomas. After nearly a year without a touchdown catch, Thomas has now scored in two consecutive games.

# Derek Wolfe set to honor brother-in-law in Navy ahead of Broncos vs. Patriots

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 13, 2017

For once, Derek Wolfe may not be the toughest guy running out of the Broncos' tunnel.

That's certainly saying something, because the 6-foot-5, 285-pound defensive end is one of the last people you would want to meet on a football field.

He will be joined Sunday night, though, by Brian Burrows.

And Burrows may be even tougher.

Wolfe's 30-year-old brother-in-law serves in the United States Navy, and he'll join Wolfe and the Broncos as they run out onto the field ahead of Denver's game vs. New England.

"I think it's going to be something we're going to remember for the rest of our lives," Wolfe said. "It will be in our family, and we'll get to show pictures of that and video of that forever. It'll be pretty cool."

Wolfe will also don a helmet sticker that honors the Navy — and he chose that military branch with Navy SEALs in mind.

"I think they're a bunch of badassess," Wolfe said.

He'll then line up for the national anthem, and Wolfe said he expects to feel the same pride he always feels.

"For me it's the same as it always is," Wolfe said. "It's always an emotional part of the game. It gets me ready to go. I feel proud. I'm proud to be an American, proud to sing or stand and put my hand over my heart for the national anthem."

Within a few minutes from when Wolfe and Burrows run out of the tunnel, the anthem will end and Wolfe will take the field for the game. It's a small gesture, but it's one Wolfe finds of paramount importance.

"I think it's important for us to recognize them," Wolfe said. "We wouldn't have these freedoms we have if it wasn't for them."

# Paul Klee: The Patriots make it official: Vance Joseph's Broncos are now a bye week

By Paul Klee  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
November 13, 2017

The Broncos can wait to fire Vance Joseph.

They can draft a quarterback with their top-10 (top 5?) pick and see what Joseph does with the kid. Let this thing play out. See if he turns it around.

Maybe VJ's Broncos will learn you play with 11 men, not 12 or 10. Sunday night in another embarrassing loss, this time 41-16 to the Patriots, the Broncos had the Patriots in a 4th-and-5. Flag. Twelve men on the field. First down, Patriots. A couple snaps earlier, the Broncos took the field with 10 men, and the Patriots ran the ball into the end zone for a touchdown.

Maybe coordinator Brock Olivo and the special teams will learn to cover a kickoff (the Pats returned one for a touchdown), catch a punt (the Broncos fumbled one) and properly punt (they had one blocked). Maybe they won't be outscored 58-18 in the first half, as they were in the past two games. Maybe next time Denver and New England play each other — they're not scheduled to play in 2018, by the grace of God — the Patriots won't treat the Broncos like a practice squad. Maybe. But I doubt it.

This season ended Sunday before 75,284 at Mile High. The "VJ" era can't end soon enough.

"We have to look at personnel, scheme, all of it," Joseph said.

Hate to keep beating a dead horse, but Joseph is in so far over his head I'm concerned he can't see the field. His Broncos have become a bye week.

The Patriots will conduct their practice work this week at the Air Force Academy. They held their first practice Sunday night.

It's the first time the Broncos have lost five straight games since 2010, when Josh McDaniels was fired in Week 14. It can't get worse than this: in a span of four calendar weeks, the Broncos have lost coming off a bye week to a winless team (the Giants), in a shutout (to the Chargers), to a division rival (the Chiefs) and to a legendary coach-quarterback combination (the Patriots).

At no point during the losing streak have the Broncos been competitive. In four of five games, they never held a lead. In the other one, they led for 6.7 percent of a 28-point loss at Philadelphia. Six. Point. Seven. Percent.

Let the analysis of the 2018 NFL draft begin.

Perhaps the most telling moment arrived at halftime. The Broncos entered the tunnel to boos from the home crowd. No biggie. Broncos Country is a demanding bunch. They've booed before. But these

weren't angry boos, the kind that sting, the kind that suggest disappointment. They were halfhearted boos, as if the locals expected a blowout. Apathy is always worse.

The Patriots won back-to-back games at Mile High for the first time since 1965-66. And you know it's bad when Bill Belichick and Tom Brady are winning here. Handsome Tom improved to 4-7 in Colorado. Belichick avoided his usual, antsy altitude act and politely allowed the Broncos to hand him a win.

The Broncos obliged, as they always do these days.

"I think everyone's frustrated right now," quarterback Brock Osweiler said.

"It's not for a lack of effort. I can tell you that," Osweiler added.

The Broncos didn't lose to Brady. They were already down 14-3 by the time Brady threw his fourth pass. If Olivo, the special teams coach, still has a job here by happy hour Monday, Dove Valley truly has become the Land of Fourth Chances. I would regurgitate the special teams disaster that made its weekly cameo, but this is a family publication and I love my job.

The Broncos used to break records. Now they're a broken record.

"We have to do a better job of covering tight ends and (running) backs," Joseph said.

"Effort is not the problem," he said. "It's execution."

"When you lose like this, it's on all of us," he said. "It's the staff that we chose and we felt great about."

The Broncos can wait to fire Vance Joseph. There's a phrase for that. It's called delaying the inevitable.

# Rapid Reaction: How the Patriots pounded the reeling Broncos

By David Ramsey  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
November 13, 2017

For a long, happy era, the Broncos were flying right beside the Patriots. The Patriots were elite, and the Broncos were elite. When the teams met, entertaining football theater was almost guaranteed.

Unless you've been living in a cave for the past day or so, I don't need to tell you era has ended.

The Patriots rampaged past the Broncos on a silent Sunday night on the edge of downtown Denver.

An era is over. The Patriots are, as always, roaring along as a favorite to return to the Super Bowl. The Broncos are facing a major rehab project.

Three reasons why the Patriots routed the Broncos:

## **One – Special teams**

The Patriots blocked a punt and returned a kickoff for a touchdown. The Broncos fumbled a punt. This was all in the first half. If the Broncos had delivered a normal special teams performance, this game might have retained a touch of drama in the second half.

When Dion Lewis broke into open spaces, on his way to a 103-yard touchdown, all of the Broncos chances for an upset, and a return to NFL respectability, were crushed.

## **Two – Tom Brady**

Brady is in the discussion, along with Joe Montana, for the honor of the greatest quarterback of all time, but Bronco fans have seldom seen Brady at his best when he's playing in Colorado. We saw his methodical best on Sunday night.

He was patient. He was accurate. It wasn't an effort filled with big thrills, but it was methodically effective.

And remember, the man turned 40 in August. Sorry, but there's no end in sight for No. 12.

## **Three – The Broncos defense**

Speaking of all-time best: Just two years ago, the Broncos were in the discussion for the finest defense in NFL history.

And even during this painful season, the defense has usually been sound, if not as spectacular as 2015.

Over the past two weeks, that mighty defense has been shredded by the Eagles and Patriots.

# David Ramsey: It's time for Broncos to start Paxton Lynch, the human question mark

By David Ramsey  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
November 13, 2017

It's time to find out if Paxton Lynch is more than a 6-foot-7 question mark. It's time to try yet another starter as Broncos quarterback.

Yes, elevating Lynch from the bench to the field against the Bengals next Sunday will bring yet more chaos to a Broncos season that has been filled with chaos, and defeat.

But there's no strong reason to stick with Brock Osweiler or go back to Trevor Siemian. This is a lost season for an organization and a fan base that expect to contend for a Super Bowl title each season.

Osweiler belongs on an NFL roster, despite what the Cleveland Browns might think. But Osweiler, like Siemian, belongs on a roster as a backup, not a starter.

We might soon discover that the Broncos have three backup types on their roster. We might see that Lynch is yet another in a long line of the Broncos failed first-round picks, a name that will belong beside Ted Gregory, Tommy Maddox and Jarvis Moss.

But Lynch should be given a real chance. The Broncos have little – almost nothing, really – to lose.

I expected the Broncos to take the fight to the Patriots. I expected to see a snarling, attacking version of the Broncos. I expected a strong show for a national TV audience.

Instead, we watched another surrender.

Coach Vance Joseph says, week after week, his Broncos are working diligently in practice and games.

"Effort is not the problem," Joseph said, repeating the lines he uses after each defeat. "It's execution."

Think about that. The Broncos have lost five straight games while – according to Joseph – giving their absolute best effort. If you're a Broncos fan, that's a stinging indictment of the team's talent level.

"We still have daylight," Von Miller insisted.

Not really, Von.

The darkness is why it makes sense to take a risk that's not really much of a risk. John Elway thought enough of Lynch to make him a first-round pick. Lynch has been given enough time to understand the Broncos offense. He's battled against the Broncos defense in practice.

He should be ready for his chance. If he's not ready, there's no reason to believe he ever will be.

Joseph declined to offer an endorsement for Osweiler, even though No. 17 was an improvement over Siemian.

“We’ll see,” Joseph said when asked who would start against the Bengals. He added that he will watch tape with his staff and make a decision.

Joseph will see several strong throws from Osweiler. He will see Osweiler utilizing the Broncos most dangerous offensive threats – Emmanuel Sanders and Demaryius Thomas – with imagination and nerve. Siemian never developed chemistry with Sanders or Thomas.

If Lynch fails, Osweiler is the best selection to start the final games of the 2017 season. He’s not an elite NFL quarterback, but he is superior to Siemian.

“I want to be the starting quarterback for the Denver Broncos for as long as I can,” Osweiler said.

But he seemed to sense his time is up. Osweiler was not the prime reason for the Broncos getting pounded by the Eagles and Patriots, but he failed to do enough to secure the job.

“I’m not going to put any pressure on myself,” Osweiler said. “Those decisions are for others.”

The right decision?

Promote Lynch. At least that will erase the question mark.

# 'Embarrassed' Broncos fume after mistakes pile up in Patriots' rout

By Lindsay Jones  
USA Today  
November 13, 2017

Denver Broncos players didn't hide their frustration Sunday night after a 41-16 loss to the Patriots, their fifth-consecutive loss.

"It's embarrassing. I'm tired of being embarrassed," defensive end Derek Wolfe told reporters.

The Broncos have surrendered 92 points in the past two games and now, at 3-6, find themselves not just fighting for a playoff spot, but also to save their season. Denver has not lost five straight games since 2010. Only one current Broncos, receiver Demaryius Thomas, was on that team.

"We have a good football team in us, but what we put out there is a bad football team, and what we put out there last week was a bad football team," linebacker Von Miller said.

Defensive players like Miller and Wolfe were the most vocal about their disappointment – in part because they so recently were among the best defenses in the NFL and no longer are, thanks to the repeated breakdowns over the past two weeks.

The Broncos have repeated the same mistakes in their continued struggles to cover opposing tight ends, the offense is still committing turnovers (though just one against the Patriots on a fourth-quarter interception by Brock Osweiler), and numerous special teams failures. The Broncos muffed a punt, allowed a kickoff return touchdown and had punt blocked against New England.

"We used to be a championship team and now we stink," Wolfe said. "No one respects us."

Miller defended first-year head coach Vance Joseph and his staff, saying the onus to improve is on players.

"It's a tough deal that we've been dealt and it's a tough situation, but it's not just coaching," Miller said. "I know how the media and everything is, but it's not that. We just have to find a way to win games."

Joseph has already made one major move this season in benching quarterback Trevor Siemian and replacing him with Osweiler. Joseph on Sunday night would not commit to Osweiler as the team's quarterback for next week's game against the Bengals.

Other positions that could change include punt returner after rookie Isaiah McKenzie's first-quarter fumble. He has fumbled five times this year, and lost two fumbles in the Broncos' last three games.

"Looking forward, if he can't do the job, we have to change it," Joseph said.

# Patriots keep rolling, coast past reeling Broncos

By Lindsay Jones

USA Today

November 13, 2017

This isn't to say the New England Patriots didn't need Tom Brady Sunday night in their 41-16 win against the Denver Broncos, but by the time the quarterback took the field for the Patriots' second drive, New England had already jumped to a 14-3 lead, thanks to a pair of special teams plays.

That Brady went on to throw three touchdowns was just a bonus for a New England team that has now won five consecutive games and looks very much like a Super Bowl contender once again.

Sunday's game should serve as a reminder that even though New England's defense still appears vulnerable at times – they allowed Brock Osweiler and the Broncos to rack up 335 yards – the Patriots are good enough on offense, and great enough on special teams, to control games.

The Patriots scored 24 points off Denver's special teams gaffes Sunday night, enough to beat the Broncos on their own.

New England recovered a muffed punt deep in Denver territory, setting up a touchdown, and scored on a 103-yard kickoff return by Dion Lewis in the first quarter. The Patriots also blocked a Broncos punt to set up a field goal in the second quarter, and Denver gifted New England another touchdown opportunity after lining up with 12 men on a fourth-quarter punt.

Brady answered with a touchdown pass to running back James White seven plays later.

It was no fluke that special teams played such a significant role for the Patriots Sunday night – it has long been a strength of Belichick's teams, and recently has been a major weakness for the Broncos.

Patriots coach Bill Belichick knew that Broncos punt returner Isaiah McKenzie had muffed five previous punts, and his coverage unit was coached to swarm. And while Lewis and the kickoff return squad figured they might have limited opportunities for a return, when the ball failed to clear the end zone, Lewis was ready for an aggressive return straight up the gut of the Broncos coverage team.

“That was pretty sweet, and then the blocked punt was great and set us up for a great field position,” Brady said. “Those were two huge plays. It makes them defend those things and hopefully that can set up other things down the road.”

set up other things down the road.”

Playing with an early lead allowed Brady the freedom to exploit the weakness of the Broncos' defense, notably their inability to cover tight ends over the middle of the field and to match up with running backs in pass routes. Brady routinely found the mismatch, from Lewis in the flat against a Broncos linebacker, running back Rex Burkhead on a crossing route against a safety, or even to tight end Dwayne Allen against the Broncos best player, linebacker Von Miller, who dropped into coverage.

On Allen's play, Miller was even flagged for holding, but the tight end caught the ball in the end zone anyway – his first reception of the season.

That sort of game plan – and certainly Brady's mastery of it – allowed the Patriots to largely negate what Denver's defense does best: covering wide receivers one-on-one, and allowing Miller to rush the passer.

The Broncos sacked Brady just once (on a blitz by safety Justin Simmons), and Brady threw for 266 yards and three touchdowns – all to tight ends or running backs.

"They play a lot of man coverage, so if a linebacker is matched up against us, we just want to win that match up," Patriots running back James White, who scored on a six-yard pass, said.

Rather than flying home to Massachusetts on Sunday night, the Patriots boarded buses for a drive about one-hour south to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, where they'll practice this week leading up to next Sunday's game against the Raiders in Mexico City.

Players said it will be concentrated time to review not just Sunday's game in Denver, which might have been their most complete win of the season, but examine to also examine the team they've become in recent weeks.

"I don't think it's been perfect, and I think we have pretty high expectations for what we're trying to do offensively," Brady said. "It looks pretty good, and it's probably been more uneven for the first eight games of the year, and tonight was a really good night for us. Hopefully we can build on this tonight and gain some confidence in all three phases."

# Patriots vs. Broncos final score, takeaways: Brady rolls, Denver's special teams folds

By Ryan Wilson  
CBS Sports  
November 13, 2017

This isn't the Patriots-Broncos get-togethers we became accustomed to during the four years Peyton Manning was in Denver, a stretch that included six head-to-head meetings and Lombardi Trophies for each organization. Manning retired after the 2015 season but Tom Brady remains (and at 40, there's no indication that he won't, in fact, play forever), and the Patriots are still one of the NFL's best teams.

The same can't be said for the Broncos who, despite a valiant effort from Brock Osweiler on Sunday night, fell to 3-6 because of an indifferent defense and a horrendous special teams. The 41-16 loss is the fifth straight for Denver, and it shares the AFC West cellar with the Los Angeles Chargers.

For some perspective on just how bad things are going, consider this: The Broncos finished 9-7 a season ago and missed the playoffs, but their defense allowed 18.6 points per game. They allowed 297 points all season and were the NFL's best defense on a per-play basis, according to Football Outsiders.

Through nine games this season, the Broncos have allowed 239 points -- 26.6 points per game. The defense has slipped to sixth, though you wouldn't know it watching them the past two weeks when they were on the business end a 51-23 loss to the Eagles and Sunday's beatdown by Brady and company.

The Patriots, meanwhile, have the familiar look of the AFC's best team. The Steelers share the same 7-2 record and hold the edge in the playoff race for the No. 1 seed in the conference, but no one thinks Pittsburgh is better than New England.

Against the Broncos, Brady was clinical, even by his ridiculously high standards. He finished with 25 of 34 for 266 yards with three touchdowns and no turnovers. He spent much of the evening targeting his tight ends and running backs (more on that below) while Denver's defense was helpless to do anything about it.

The Broncos' promising start was short-lived

Good news: On the first series of the game, the Broncos forced Tom Brady and the Patriots offense to go three-and-out. Bad news: Broncos return man Isaiah McKenzie muffed the ensuing punt and the Patriots recovered (of course they did).

Then, two plays later, Rex Burkhead sauntered into the end zone to give New England a 7-0 lead with 12:36 to in the first quarter. The game was effectively over at this point.

If you're looking for a silver lining -- and you'll really have to squint to see it -- this is the best we can do: The Broncos have been terrible all season when it comes to giving up points off turnovers. So this shouldn't be unexpected.

What was surprising, however, is that the muffed punt was the warm-up act for what was to come.

Oswelier, who replaced Trevor Siemian as the starter last week, had a good first series against New England on Sunday night and led Denver to a field goal. On the kickoff, however, this happened -- and pay special attention to the Broncos' Devontae Booker choosing to shove Dion Lewis towards the end zone instead of, you know, out of bounds:

There's more! Early in the second quarter, as Oswelier continued to outperform expectations, the Broncos' special teams continued to play down to its 28th ranking in DVOA:

Yep, Broncos pulled off the special-teams trifecta in the game's first 17 minutes: The muffed punt, the kick return for a touchdown and the blocked punt. Five plays later, the Patriots kicked a field goal to take a 20-6 lead.

The return of @MartysaurusRex

On the Patriots' third series, Brady found good buddy Martellus Bennett for 27 yards. It was Bennett's first reception thrown by Brady since Feb. 5, 2017 when New England beat Atlanta in Super Bowl LI.

If you're wondering where Bennett has been the last nine months, the answer, up till last week, was Green Bay. Then things got weird. The Packers parted ways with Bennett with a failure to disclose an injury designation, and according to ESPN's Adam Schefter, the tight end has been playing with a torn rotator cuff and torn labrum.

Bennett's return to New England is the exclamation point on a strange two weeks in which the tight end said during Green Bay's Week 8 bye that he would probably retire at the end of the season. Bennett practiced just once after the bye due to a shoulder injury the Packers apparently didn't know about. He didn't play in Week 9 against the Lions and before he was waived, wasn't expected to suit up against the Bears on Sunday.

But Bennett passed his physical with the Patriots and, obviously, played on Sunday night.

By the end of the night, New England's tight ends and running backs accounted for 16 of the team's 27 receptions. And this isn't a case of Bill Belichick being smarter than everyone else but of simple scouting and execution:

Here's how bad it got: The Patriots wisely stayed away from shutdown cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr. and targeted linebackers and safeties forced to cover the aforementioned tight ends and running backs. But late in the second quarter, Dwayne Allen not only caught his first pass of the season, he scored a touchdown.

In coverage on the play? One of the NFL's best pass rushers, Von Miller.

Allen is the 68th different receiver to catch a touchdown pass from Brady.

Oswelier wasn't half bad

Oswelier had one of his best games in recent memory, and that has to be encouraging for a Broncos offense that has stumbled through much of the first two months of the season. Emmanuel Sanders was the biggest beneficiary against the Patriots -- he finished with six receptions for 137 yards -- but things

were going so well for the embattled quarterback that even the equivalent of blocked arm punts were finding his receivers for first downs:

Of course, it wasn't all unicorns and rainbows. First of all, Denver lost. Plus, Osweiler's stat line (18 of 33, 221 yards, one touchdown, one interception) won't suddenly make people forget about John Elway -- or, hell, Jake Plummer and/or Jay Cutler.

And we're pretty sure this poor sap left Sports Authority Field with a less-than-glowing review of Osweiler's performance because his lasting memory will be getting doinked in the gourd midway through the second quarter:

More depressing numbers for the Broncos

In the Broncos' last five games, they have been outscored 55-6 in the first quarter.

In those games, the Broncos have held the lead for four minutes total -- and that came last week when they led the Eagles 3-0. When it was over? Philly whipped Denver, 51-23. It was such a beatdown, in fact, that the Eagles tweeted that they ran out of celebratory fireworks.

The Patriots led 27-9 at the break and cruised to a 25-point win.

Salute to Service

Every player around the league stood for the national anthem on Sunday, a day after Veterans' Day. And in Denver, Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe honored his brother-in-law, a member of the Navy, by having him run out on the field with him. Awesome moment.

Up next

The Patriots (7-2, atop the AFC East and the No. 2 seed in the AFC) are headed to Mexico City to face the Raiders (4-5) next Sunday in the famed Azteca Stadium. But first, it's to Colorado Springs for the week to train at the Air Force Academy. Why?

The Broncos (3-6), meanwhile, are tied for last place in the division with the Chargers and will host the Bengals (3-6) next Sunday.

# **LOOK: Brock Osweiler accidentally destroys a dude's face with a throw out of bounds**

By Pete Blackburn  
CBS Sports  
November 13, 2017

Quite a large sum of people have been victimized by Brock Osweiler throws over the years -- mainly Broncos and Texans fans -- but nobody more brutally than a poor bystander on the sidelines in Denver on Sunday night.

During the second quarter of the Patriots-Broncos game, Osweiler rolled out of the pocket and let a throw sail out of bounds to escape the oncoming New England rush. That throw sailed directly into the face of a gentleman who was ill-prepared to be Osweiler's checkdown guy.

As hilariously unfortunate as that was for our victim in the blue coat, it's tough to feel bad for him considering he failed to show even an ounce of awareness on that sequence. If you're standing on an NFL sideline, you have to keep your head on a swivel and always be prepared to dodge a flying projectile and/or players steamrolling their way off the field. This guy had absolutely no reaction until he took the pigskin straight in the kisser. Then he dropped like a sack of bricks, as one does.

However, he didn't get much help from the guy in the headset to his right. That gentleman attempted to use his play sheet to deter the incoming football, and -- shocker! -- it didn't help much. In fact, it may have screened the victim and done more bad than good. Then, on top of that, he didn't show a shred of sympathy in the aftermath of his neighbor's facial destruction. Just a very poor display of motor and character.

Anyway, I hope this guy is OK. Hopefully the NFL put him through something better than one of their four-second concussion tests to ensure his brain got all the help it needed.

# Report: Owners discussing unlikely nuclear option for taking Cowboys from Jerry Jones

By Will Brinson  
CBS Sports  
November 13, 2017

The drama surrounding Jerry Jones and Roger Goodell is getting more and more heated by the day, with new reports about Jones' battle with the contractual situation surrounding the commissioner continuing to simmer. CBS Sports NFL Insider Jason La Canfora reported on Sunday that owners are starting to turn on the Cowboys owner because of how he's attempted to wield his power in ownership circles.

And there might even be a "nuclear" option on the table too, as Mike Florio of Pro Football Talk reported on Sunday night that some owners have begun digging into the CBA to consider the possibility of making Jones forfeit his ownership of the Cowboys.

To be very clear, this is a seriously long shot and an unlikely outcome. Just like Goodell, Jones has helped his fellow owners make piles and piles of money.

But there is a bylaw the owners could use in this case. According to Florio's report, "multiple owners have already been discussing the possibility" of using Article VIII in the NFL's constitution and bylaws.

From Florio:

Specifically, Section 8.13 authorizes the commissioner to determine that an owner "has been or is guilty of conduct detrimental to the welfare of the League or professional football." If the commissioner believes the available sanction (a \$500,000 fine) is "not adequate or sufficient," the commissioner may refer the issue to the NFL's Executive Committee, which has the power to compel "[c]ancellation or forfeiture of the franchise in the League of any member club involved or implicated," with a directive to sell the team.

It's basically kicking Jones out of the club. But it's not as simple as telling Jones he has to sell. There would be lawsuits and lawsuits and more lawsuits, with the two sides battling for years (if not decades). It's probably not going to happen. But it is reportedly at least is being discussed in ownership circles. Apparently, the decision by Jones to back Papa John's owner John Schnatter was "the primary affront" to the other owners -- Florio reports there are owners who believe "Jones instigated Papa John's CEO John Schnatter to disparage the NFL, blaming league leadership for ratings declines and, in turn, a reduction in Papa John's revenues."

On that issue, Papa John did blast the NFL for the national anthem protests, claiming it was costing him money and pizza profit. When asked about Papa John's comments, Jones said that Schnatter is a "great American." Jones owns more than 100 Papa John's franchises.

Jones has also reportedly threatened to sue the NFL if the league ultimately decides to push through with an extension for Goodell. It is widely believed that Jones is most upset at Goodell over the six-game suspension handed to star running back Ezekiel Elliott. Sunday's results -- the Cowboys were hammered by the Falcons with Zeke and left tackle Tyron Smith on the sideline -- will not do much to help Jones' mood. If the Cowboys keep losing, expect his ire to be drawn.

# NFL Week 10: The Hoodie, the Fedora and Sorting Through the Mess of 7-2 Teams

By Peter King

MMQB

November 13, 2017

At one point Sunday night during New England's 41-16 dismantling of Denver, NBC flashed a graphic showing that Bill Belichick was about to tie Tom Landry for third place on the all-time coaching wins list. The cameras focused on Belichick on the sideline. As usual, he looked like a member of the grounds crew. A fairly unkempt one, with a gray Patriots hoodie, the hood askew over Belichick's head and his headset, making the image even weirder.

I thought of Tom Landry on the sideline. Hart, Schaffner & Marx suit, white shirt with every button buttoned, conservative necktie, stylish fedora and spit-shined wing tips. He looked like a "Mad Men" senior exec.

Appearances aside, you know what Landry and Belichick had in common, don't you? Both were extremely serious Giants defensive coordinators for six seasons, a generation apart: Landry from 1954 to '59, Belichick from 1985 to '90.

Fitting they are linked now on the all-time wins list, though not for long. Belichick has miles to go before he sleeps, and he may just catch George Halas (number two, 54 wins away), though likely not Don Shula (number one, 77 wins away). Belichick versus Landry, whose career record is different because, in part, he coached for 18 of his 29 seasons with a 14-game schedule, while Belichick has always coached 16 regular-season games:

|           | Seasons | Games | W-L-T     | Pct. |
|-----------|---------|-------|-----------|------|
| Belichick | 23      | 397   | 270-127-0 | .680 |
| Landry    | 29      | 454   | 270-178-6 | .603 |

The other thing I noticed Sunday night: These two coaches did it their way. Different ways. The Patriots demolished Denver with the same triggerman as always, Tom Brady, but so many fledgling pieces—first-year back Rex Burkhead scored a touchdown and blocked a punt, off-and-on factor Dion Lewis scored two touchdowns, vet tight end Martellus Bennett (who just arrived on campus Friday) caught three passes, and the Patriots made four game-changing plays on special teams. Dallas had a more solid base of players led by Bob Lilly, Mel Renfro, Roger Staubach (after Landry finally settled on his QB, following a few years of a Staubach-Craig Morton competition) and, later, Randy White. When New England got transient, the Patriots still won. When Dallas got transient, Landry began to struggle. Different styles, winning in different ways. Belichick almost seems to relish the roster churn, and with five Super Bowl victories, he's had different stalwarts on each team. Only Brady stays the same.

Bennett, with a bum shoulder, got to New England late Thursday night, signed, and reported for duty Friday morning. You wouldn't think of Belichick as a charmer, and he's not. But players play for him, or they're not going to play for him. "Bill was like, 'Can you practice?'" Bennett said. "I said I just want to go to sleep right now." He said, 'Oh, it's Friday. Just go out there and get some snaps.' I think he knows how to talk to me. So I'm like, 'All right, I'll go out there.'"

One other thing Landry and Belichick share: They're taciturn, but it never looks like the game is eating them alive. Thus Landry can stay in one spot for 29 years. Who knows how long Belichick stays in New England, but he won't leave because the game keeps him up at night. "He's the same on a Sunday in May as he is on a game day in the fall," said former quarterback and low-level Patriots assistant Chris Simms. Stress? Not them.

I like the fact that, for a week, Landry and Belichick, who share a lot in NFL history, will share number three on the all-time NFL coaching list. It's cool.

We'll get into some quick stories this week, and we'll answer some of the vexing questions about the future of Roger Goodell. First, let's look at what greets the winners and the losers this time of year. It gets a tad euphoric, and a tad desperate.

The winners—After previously 0-9 San Francisco won its first game of the year, 31-21 over the Giants, here's what we saw in the Niners locker room:

The losers—New York Post back page, demanding the firing of Ben McAdoo: IT CAN'T WAIT. Daily News:

That's what I like. Perspective.

### **THERE'S QUITE A NICE PACK CHASING THE EAGLES**

Eagles, 8-1. Let's give them the top seed and top billing this morning. It's only fair, and with a three-game lead in the NFC East now, it's entirely likely they'll win one of the top two seeds and get a bye out of the wild-card round.

After that? Clueless. My attempt at rating teams two through six in the league, the 7-2 teams one beat behind the Eagles.

2. New England (7-2). As usual, the Patriots didn't get too out of whack when they lost two games in the first month of the season. They're not blowing teams away now (at least not until Sunday night in Denver), but after the early defensive debacle they've held five straight foes under 18 points. And it's possible that every offensive starter in last year's Super Bowl could be playing for New England in another playoff run.

3. Los Angeles Rams (7-2). This should not be the determining factor in ranking the Rams behind the Patriots, but in this case, it's the tiebreaker with the Patriots for number two: The vast majority of truly significant actors in the Rams' rise have never played in a playoff games, never mind won a Super Bowl. But I'll take any team that's won by 33, 34 and 26 the last three weeks.

4. New Orleans (7-2). The Saints won a game 47-10 on Sunday (at Buffalo), and Drew Brees did not contribute a touchdown pass. Historic occasion. Rookie defensive backs Marshon Lattimore and Marcus Williams are so good so early that each could make the Pro Bowl this year—if voters voted on merit. This is the team Sean Payton dreamed of coaching, a balanced team that plays defense, and he could hang around a couple of years to see it through.

5. Pittsburgh (7-2). After a wholly unimpressive win in Indianapolis, even the staunchest Steeler fans will say they're worried. Pittsburgh has averaged 19.6 points in its last five games, which is not good enough. Watching the Colts bottle up Le'Veon Bell had to be disconcerting too, because it's not a great run D in Indy. But the Steelers will be able to win playoff games because of Ben Roethlisberger's weaponry and a defense that keeps getting better under coordinator Keith Butler.

6. Minnesota (7-2). Case Keenum, with the hot breath of franchise favorite Teddy Bridgewater on the back of his neck, threw for four touchdowns for the first time in his life. Who'd have figured, in a game at a playoff contender, that Keenum would lead the Vikings to 35 points in the first 35 minutes? Vikes 38, Washington 30. Now Mike Zimmer has to carefully manage the return to play of Bridgewater, who is one of the biggest local heroes in recent Minnesota sports history. That's going to be tricky, because you don't know, whether a rusty quarterback will be better than an average one playing hot.

### **Jerry Jones vs. Roger Goodell: The Questions, the Answers and an Explanation of What's Ahead**

I had a longtime football executive tell me something last week about this strange season that hit home with me. He said there's so much newsy stuff happening around the league right now—the player protests during the anthem, the fight for the commissioner's office, squabbling over what Roger Goodell's salary should be, why TV ratings are tanking—that when Sunday afternoons come and the games come on, you say, Oh yeah ... football!

My little role in this happened Sunday morning, when we published my story at The MMQB about Dallas owner Jerry Jones' desire to overthrow the Goodell contract extension and perhaps Goodell himself. In the wake of that story, here are some pressing questions and answers about where the NFL stands on the state of Goodell, and my answers will be compiled from recent interviews and best guesses concerning an ever-evolving story:

#### **WHY IS JERRY JONES TRYING TO SABOTAGE THE GOODELL CONTRACT EXTENSION?**

I believe it's because he thinks Goodell hasn't performed like a great commissioner should. I believe it's also because he thinks the fix is in on the proposed contract to the commissioner ... that even though the contract offer to Goodell is 88 percent incentives, Goodell will still end up with compensation of at least \$25 million a year even if the league has an awful year. And I believe Jones' feeling is, if the fix isn't in, let the owners see exactly how the annual compensation package will be structured, down to the precise formulas that will determine exactly what Goodell makes.

#### **DOES JONES WANT TO BE COMMISSIONER? IS THAT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT?**

I've heard this question from several people this week, and my answer: It would stun me. Jones does not want to be commissioner. He already has his dream job, and he's had it for 28 years. He wants to make the Cowboys great, and he wants to keep the Cowboys as the most valuable franchise in the United States. I just would be stunned if Jones would want to spend 15 minutes trying to make the Bengals a more valuable franchise.

#### **SO IF NOT JONES AS COMMISSIONER, WHO?**

I don't know. I believe he has one in mind, but I do not know who it is. I've heard Bill Polian's name thrown around, and I know Polian is a Jones favorite because he's tough, but I have no idea if he's a legit name in Jones' mind.

### **WHAT'S THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME OF THE GOODELL CONTRACT TALKS?**

After the smoke clears, and after Jones tries his best to find partners to scuttle the deal, I believe the commissioner will re-sign through 2024. It's interesting. Someone who is well plugged-in and who spoke to Jones in the past week told me Sunday that Jones believes he has more support from ownership than he had when he successfully prevented owners from giving money back to networks when they were in financial straits 24 years ago. He might have more support, but I don't know who these owners are (outside of Dan Snyder and possibly Jim Irsay and Stan Kroenke). I don't put anything past Jones, but I can't see how he musters enough ownership support to kill this Goodell deal ... unless, and I use this asterisk advisedly ... there are further developments such as the ESPN report Sunday that said Goodell's final negotiation request was an annual compensation package of \$49.5 million plus use of a private plane for life. League spokesman Joe Lockhart quickly quashed that report, but Adam Schefter and Chris Mortensen are eminently reliable reporters, and there's no question they're trusted by league owners and officials. So if a couple of reports like that get legs in the coming days, I could see some owners say, I'm not feeling very good about Goodell right now. which could give the Jones side some momentum.

### **IS THE COMPENSATION COMMITTEE UNANIMOUS IN ITS SUPPORT OF THE GOODELL CONTRACT?**

Good question. Jones believes if it isn't, chairman Arthur Blank has misled the ownership, and the deal should be re-opened. The key member of the committee is Houston owner Bob McNair, who was outspoken in his criticism of the league office recently. Most people around the league think McNair's criticism stems from Goodell's refusal to back McNair's explanation of "inmates running the prison," when—McNair claims—he was referring to league office employees, not players in the league. Goodell reportedly would not speak out in support of McNair. But this weekend, I heard McNair supports Goodell and will vote to approve a new contract for him.

### **WITH GOODELL'S CONTRACT VALID THROUGH THE END OF THE 2018 LEAGUE YEAR, WHAT'S THE HURRY TO RE-UP?**

Owners think it would send a message to the advertising world and all communities that the owners are solidly behind Goodell. But with the continued turbulence the league is facing, you can't help but wonder—and Jones clearly does—what the hurry is. What if the league gets this deal done next week, and then finds it has Goodell in office for the next six-plus years, and more crises roil the league? It's not dumb to hold off doing this deal till mid-2018. It's pragmatic.

### **COULD GOODELL SIGN SOME FORM OF A DEAL TODAY?**

I am told no—contrary to several reports, there is not a contract on his desk that he can sign right now.

As I wrote Sunday: Normally I'd say this is over. It's a done deal; Jones can't win. I still think it's unlikely Jones has success, but this is not a normal owner.

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.

Do not underestimate Jones. He has won when it has appeared darkest before. Jones could find some kindred ownership souls in the coming days and weeks. But there is one difference between this fight and 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.

### **Case Keenum Show: Vikings Offense Explodes With Teddy Bridgewater Waiting in Wings**

The story was ready, and it was going to be perfect. Minnesota quarterback Teddy Bridgewater dressed for his first football game in 22 months Sunday, and even though the Vikings would start the purported placeholder of the quarterback job, Case Keenum, at Washington, wouldn't it be a dramatic story if Bridgewater relieved Keenum at some point and got the save for the NFC North leaders.

It would have been spectacular, but it would not be realized. Keenum saw to that. Driving the Vikings to five touchdowns in the game's first 33 minutes, and throwing for four touchdowns for his first time as a pro, Keenum was the star in Minnesota's bombs-away 38-30 win at Washington.

"Teddy saw me before the game, and he was smiling," the 29-year-old Keenum told me from the Vikings bus after the game. "He was happy to be back, and I was thrilled to have him back. He said to me, 'Smile! Have fun.' He's just the best teammate. It's like I was telling someone before the game today: Teddy brings up the cool factor of our quarterback group exponentially."

The Vikings have been careful to not make any long-term announcements at the quarterback position, though Bridgewater is very likely their long-term QB of the future. It would be surprising but not stunning if the Vikings made a change under center this week with the defensively aggressive Rams coming to town, but it's certainly not impossible to imagine.

Keenum was not just a facilitator Sunday—not just a quarterback along for the ride with an excellent 1-2 receiver punch in Stefon Diggs and emerging star Adam Thielen. Keenum lasered a 51-yard throw down the right sideline for Diggs, a perfectly placed deep ball. He showed excellent touch on a lofted pop throw to Thielen down the left sideline. Under pressure and about to get creamed by Washington rushers Will Compton and Terrell McClain, Keenum fired a perfect pass up the left seam to Thielen. And later Keenum rolled out and waited, waited, waited for Thielen to get free in the end zone and threw a perfect strike, with Josh Norman draped on Thielen, for a touchdown.

Keenum finished 21 of 29 for 304 yards and four touchdowns, with two picks. He was not perfect. But this very likely was the best game of his 34-game NFL life, a career that has seen him be the backup and start for the Texans, Rams and Vikings in six seasons. It's been a long, winding and oft-frustrating road for the Texan. He's from Abilene and went to the University of Houston, and his voice still is Texas all the way.

"What a blast," Keenum said. "So rewarding. I'll never forget, early in my career, we were struggling in Houston [with the Texans], and after one game, [MLB pitcher] John Lackey, he's from the same hometown as me, and we know each other some ... really good dude. He's been through everything in

baseball—played in some of the biggest games at the highest level, and I respect him a lot. He sent me a text. I can give you the edited version. He said, ‘Remember this day, because days like this are what makes winning so good.’

“Man, he’s right. Days like today are why you put your hat in the ring. Let’s be honest: If they played this game on paper, I wouldn’t be in this league. But it’s a game for competitors, and I’m a competitor.”

So, I asked Keenum, what was it like for you all week knowing that everyone in Minnesota, and many other places, want to see the Bridgewater return happen theatrically ... and very soon.

“I have been preparing for this situation the whole year,” Keenum said. “I didn’t do an interview last year in L.A. without being asked about [rookie first-round pick] Jared Goff. So I get it. I am a huge Teddy fan. First, he’s just a beautiful thrower. I’ve got tremendous respect for him. He’s an instrumental part of our quarterback room, and all he’s been is helpful. A great teammate. I have had a serious knee injury. I know what he’s going through. But mostly, I’m able to compartmentalize it. I just figure, hey, it’s like I’ve got a buddy who owns a Ferrari, and he’s out of town, and he’s letting me drive it. So as long as they leave me the keys, I’m gonna keep driving this car.”

No one has said anything to Keenum about the future, except, “Get ready to go this week.” He doesn’t ask. “No one can predict the future,” he said, “and I’m not going to try.”

Rams at Vikings this week. Goff at Keenum ... or Bridgewater. If Keenum plays, it will be an emotional day for him. “Someone’s gonna have to slap me before the game—hard,” Keenum said, and you could almost hear his wide smile through the phone from Maryland. “This game means something to me.”

They all do.

## **FOOTBALL IN AMERICA: EPISODE 7—PHILADELPHIA.**

Our series, in partnership with State Farm, examining all levels of football—youth, high school, college and pro—has taken us to:

Episode I: The Bay Area

Episode II: Carolina

Episode III: Minnesota

Episode IV: Dallas

Episode V: Arizona

Episode VI: Chicago

It continues this week in greater Philadelphia. Jenny Vrentas, Kalyn Kahler and videographer Jim Butts show us a high school turnaround, what Ivy League football is really like (at Penn), and the rise of the Eagles.

Vrentas writes this week about a Lincoln Financial Field tailgater, Ed Callahan, a retired Navy lieutenant, who has become the official host for fans from far, far away. A true glimpse into the City of Brotherly Love:

“Ed Callahan has had Eagles season tickets for 22 years. He’s been tailgating out of an RV across from the Linc for 12 of those years. And for the past two he’s been hosting special guests from the state of North Dakota. Callahan’s RV, The Eagle Mobile, has become the unofficial gathering place for North Dakotans since Carson Wentz, the pride of Bismarck, was drafted by Philadelphia in 2016 and named the team’s Week 1 starter as a rookie. Callahan’s parking spot is in the Wells Fargo Center lot across from Lincoln Financial Field. Last season the Wentz family and the mayor of Bismarck, Mike Seminary, were tailgating one lot over and stopped by on their way into the stadium ... He and his wife, Deb, traveled to Philadelphia for the 49ers game last month, which coincided with Deb’s birthday. Callahan and his tailgate crew had an Eagles-themed birthday cake waiting for her.”

## **The Award Section: Career Days for Saints’ Mark Ingram, Falcons’ Adrian Clayborn Lead to Wins**

### **OFFENSIVE PLAYERS OF THE WEEK**

Mark Ingram, running back, New Orleans. Not just for his production (21 carries, 131 yards, three touchdowns), but for how hard he runs consistently, and for going into Buffalo and absolutely dominating the Bills on the ground the way the Saints used to dominate teams through the air. New Orleans: 48 carries, 298 yards (!), six touchdown runs (!!).

Case Keenum, quarterback, Minnesota. As noted above, Keenum’s first NFL day with four touchdown passes was the highlight of his NFL life. Minnesota’s 38-30 win over Washington kept the Vikings two games clear of the Lions and Packers in the NFC North.

### **DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK**

Adrian Clayborn, defensive end, Atlanta. With four major injuries requiring surgery in the previous five seasons, Clayborn seemed destined to be that guy who never would fulfill his NFL promise. The Bucs cut him loose after the 2014 season, and he landed in Atlanta. “God had a reason,” Clayborn said from Atlanta on Sunday night, after his six-sack dismantling of the Dallas Cowboys. “And I don’t really ask why. I just know today’s a good day, and I’m happy.” Clayborn took advantage of Dallas left tackle Tyron Smith being sidelined with an injury to abuse backup tackle Chaz Green. Ugly for the Cowboys, beautiful for the Falcons.

### **SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYERS OF THE WEEK**

Jesse James, tight end, Pittsburgh. He made the hustle play of the year to save two points in Indianapolis. With the Steelers down 17-9 and lined up for a PAT in the third quarter, the attempt was blocked by Margus Hunt and recovered by Matthias Farley, who took off down the left sideline on his way to what appeared to be a two-point conversion for the Colts. (The defensive team can return a failed conversion after touchdown and be awarded two points.) James began sprinting at the Colts’ 19, and he ran down the faster Farley 78 yards later, the Colts just three yards away from making this a 19-9 game. How huge was that play when the Steelers scored in the fourth quarter, then made the two-point conversion to tie the game at 17? Pretty big.

Tyler Shatley, long-snapper, Jacksonville. Never long-snapped in a game in high school. Never long-snapped in a game in college. Never long-snapped in an NFL game. But with Matt Overton out with a shoulder injury, Shatley entered and snapped for Josh Lambo’s game-tying field goal with three seconds

left in the fourth quarter. Then he snapped for Lambo's game-winning field goal in overtime. Now that's a fairly clutch performance.

### **COACH OF THE WEEK**

Sean Payton, head coach, New Orleans. After the Saints went 7-9, 7-9, 7-9 in the past three seasons, Payton made a conscious decision to change his explosive offense. No longer would the team be dependent on Drew Brees to keep the Saints in every game; now Payton and GM Mickey Loomis would put more pressure on the running game and the offensive line, with a maturing defense, to carry the load. Well, with a defense keeping the Saints in every game, and Brees not the only offensive crutch anymore, the Saints have won seven in a row. A bold preseason move by Payton continued to pay dividends Sunday in Buffalo.

### **GOATS OF THE WEEK**

Chaz Green, left tackle, Dallas. Allowed five of the six Adrian Clayborn sacks against the Falcons, playing in relief of Tyron Smith. A left tackle cannot play an uglier game. You just have to hope, for this young guy's sake, that it doesn't stick with him and mar his career.

Jack Doyle, tight end, Indianapolis. With the Colts up 17-9 with 13 minutes left against Pittsburgh, Jacoby Brissett threw an eminently catchable pass to Doyle right near the line of scrimmage. It went through Doyle's hands and into the arms of Pittsburgh linebacker Ryan Shazier, who was tackled at the Indy 10-yard line. From there, the Steelers scored on a touchdown pass, and a Martavis Bryant two-point conversion gave them the tie, and they won in overtime. Sort of a vital mistake by Doyle.

John Fox, coach, Chicago. Bears back Benny Cunningham was ruled down at the half-yard line in the first half against Green Bay after a 23-yard gain. Fox challenged the ruling on the field, claiming it should be a touchdown. Instead of having first-and-goal at the half-yard line, the Bears actually had a turnover. That's because while Cunningham dove for the end zone, the ball was coming loose as he stretched for the pylon ... and the ball was ruled a touchback for Green Bay. The Bears trailed by seven at the time, and never tied or led thereafter. Tough decision for Fox to make, but it turns out actually throwing the challenge flag on the play likely cost the Bears a halftime lead—and quite possibly a win in this incredibly close series. Green Bay leads all-time, 95 wins to 93, with six ties. Bizarre to think of it ... but without this challenge by Fox, it might have been 94-94 this morning.

### **QUOTES OF THE WEEK**

I

"Man, I was trying to keep it together. But it's just, opportunities like these don't come around twice. When you get that second opportunity, you cherish it. And you hold it. You never want to let it go. Today it got the best of me."

—Vikings quarterback Teddy Bridgewater, per ESPN Dianna Russini, after cameras caught Bridgewater tearing up on the bench before the first game he dressed for in 22 months Sunday in Washington.

II

“Those trying to peddle that nonsense are profoundly misinformed or deliberately trying to mislead.”

—NFL spokesman Joe Lockhart, after ESPN’s Adam Schefter and Chris Mortensen reported Sunday that in his most recent proposal to the NFL’s Compensation Committee, Roger Goodell asked for a contract with about \$49.5-million in compensation and a lifetime use of a private jet.

### III

“I personally wish that he would take that charge and lead. Be a leader and try and unify us as a country. Step out of your comfort zone, swallow your pride, and, with humility, try to lead us back to together.”

—Former Army Ranger and Colin Kaepernick adviser Nate Boyer, on what he thinks Kaepernick should do now, to Tim Rohan of The MMQB.

### IV

“With Alex, there are going to be a lot of people out there who think he is a quack. But the proof is in the pudding. Brady looks like he’s 27 years old, and the man is 40.”

—New England wide receiver Julian Edelman, on Tom Brady’s mystery man of a trainer, Alex Guerrero, on “The MMQB Podcast with Peter King” this week. Edelman was discussing his new book, “Relentless: A Memoir,” with Tom Curran.

### V

“His pocket presence, that’s the most impressive thing. ... This is the maturation of Tyrod Taylor that really makes him exciting. ... Watch how he has matured as a quarterback. He’ll slide, he’ll buy himself some time. His eyes are always up.”

—Chip Kelly, in a pro-Tyrod Taylor piece for ESPN’s pre-game show Sunday. Very well explained, very good TV by Kelly.

### STAT OF THE WEEK

New England since the beginning of 2016 in regular-season games:

|      | W-L  | Point Differential |
|------|------|--------------------|
| Home | 9-4  | +99                |
| Road | 12-0 | +154               |

This is why the Patriots likely have little concern over the next five games: vs. Oakland in Mexico City, Miami at home, at Buffalo, at Miami, at Pittsburgh.

### FACTOIDS THAT MAY INTEREST ONLY ME

Regarding the Pittsburgh-Indianapolis game Sunday: After 10 minutes in his Week 10 game, Ben Roethlisberger, for the season, had 10 touchdowns and 10 interceptions, and had taken 10 sacks.

## **MR. STARWOOD PREFERRED MEMBER TRAVEL NOTE**

In the past couple of years, my job at NBC has morphed into doing longer, reported stories for “Football Night in America.” I had an idea for one this year: follow globetrotting Larry Fitzgerald to his 97th country visited. He’d been to 96 through the end of 2016, and I figured he’d be going somewhere in 2017. When I asked, he said he was trying to get a tee time at the Old Course in Scotland, and if he could get one, he’d be headed there. He did get a tee time and set the trip for July with two good friends, including the man who introduced him to golf four years ago, former Cardinals wideout Andre Roberts (now a Falcon). NBC dispatched me to Scotland, with a British TV crew familiar with the Old Course, to trail Fitzgerald’s group on their 18 holes. Boy, it was fun. Here’s how it looked on TV Thursday night.

I walked the Old Course with Fitzgerald and just talked most of the way. “I bet the maintenance bill here is a fraction of what it would cost back home,” he said, walking on the front nine. “I’ve seen some pictures where the goats come out and eat this grass [on the fairway]. Old school.”

On travel: “When I was younger, my parents, we used to travel a lot, not internationally, but to the Bahamas for the cruise or national park, Disneyland, Disney World, Staten Island, Statue of Liberty ... My parents always thought, travel would give you exposure and opportunity to learn about history. That’s how my love for history developed, and kind of my passion for travel developed and we didn’t have the means to do a lot of international things, but the trips we did take were so much fun. I loved being with the family and being able to see new things, and try new foods, and all those things were really exciting to me. When I got to the NFL, my first trip I took, I went to Australia, and that was before I had any children so I went for 40 days. The next year, I went to China, Japan, Korea, went all through China down to Cambodia ... to Thailand. I biked, so it was a few days on a bike, but I got a chance to see all the country and that was one of the most fascinating places I’ve ever been.”

Fitzgerald says he thinks he has 20 or so more countries in him. He wants to see Scandinavia and Greece soon. He has eaten snake and monkey. One of his highlights: seeing the lake in Vietnam where John McCain—his friend and Arizona senator—went down, leading McCain to become a POW. Fitzgerald jumped into the frigid water off Antarctica. He has been to 48 of our 50 states, and he plans to get to Alaska and Maine one day.

“I like the off-the-beaten path, local vibe when I travel,” he said.

He shot a 78 on the Old Course ... after being 1-under, incredibly, after 11 holes. Then he and his crew drove to a nearby course, with the wind blowing hard off the North Sea, and played another 18 holes before heading back to London that night, and then back to Phoenix a few days later, and then to training camp.

Greg Olsen, tight end, Carolina. “It’s the ball, glove and my shoes from my first touchdown in the NFL. I have them in my house in Charlotte. It came in Week 5, I think, [correct] on a Monday night against Green Bay. My first game in Lambeau Field, Brian Urlacher on my side, Brett Favre on the other side, tight game. I ran a wheel route into the end zone, and in today’s rules, it would not have counted as a touchdown. I was in the air and got pushed out, and in those days, it counted as a touchdown even though I landed out of bounds on the force-out. That’s a game I’ll always remember. I think it was Brian Griese who threw the ball. That stuff will always be prized possessions of mine.”

## **POD PEOPLE**

From “The MMQB Podcast With Peter King,” available where you download podcasts.

This week’s conversations: Los Angeles Rams coach Sean McVay and New England receiver Julian Edelman, on the release of his book: “Relentless: A Memoir,” with Tom Curran.

- Edelman on making that incredible catch a millimeter above the ground in the Super Bowl, with two Falcons battering him: “A lot of it has to do with feeling like a cornered animal. If you don’t at least catch this ball [above] the ground, your season is over. That sense of relentlessness ... Was it luck? Was it skill? I can’t tell you that.”

- Edelman on the tough love he got growing up from his father in California: “When you're young and you're a kid, you may not think it is pretty good for you. You may snivel, you may pout. My dad was the type of guy who would challenge me. He would challenge me to the point where he got under my skin and he was trying to do that on purpose because he would always say, ‘You have to be mentally tough if you want to make it.’ Me being a stubborn kid and getting that stubbornness from my mother, I wanted to prove him wrong when he challenged me and it pissed me off. In baseball for example, he'd be throwing inside at me, and I'd be dipping my shoulder and he would throw it closer to me and I would start spitting towards the mound. I'd say, ‘Throw it harder!’ And I was swinging harder and it got to the point where one day I charged the mound on him and he had to put me in my place. But that's how it was with the Edelman household and I wouldn't be where I am at today without that.”

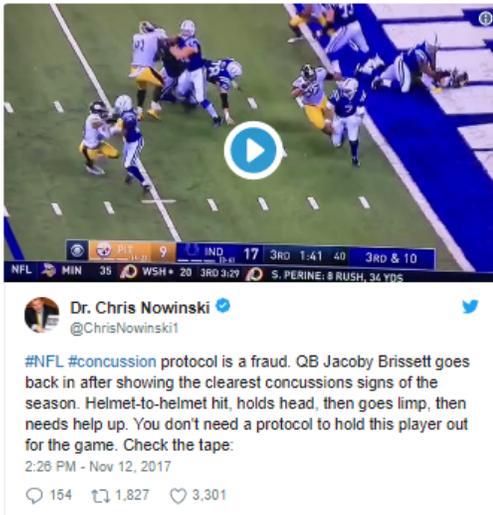
## TWEETS OF THE WEEK

I



II





### Ten Things I Think I Think: On Maurice Harris' Catch of the Year; Vontaze Burfict's Ejection

1. I think these are my quick thoughts on Week 10:

a. Catch of the year? Maurice Harris' incredible one-elbow grab diving to the ground, holding on as he crashed to the ground, just past the right pylon, from Kirk Cousins ... I have not seen a catch as good this year. Congrats to the former undrafted free agent from Cal.

b. Matthew Stafford's touch, particularly on his deep throws, is so beautiful to see right now.

c. Interesting thing about the John Lynch-Kyle Shanahan marriage: Through the 0-9 start, I never heard one thing, not even a whisper, that one was remotely unhappy with the other. This is a solid group of coaches and front-office people (personnel veep Adam Peters is really good). The win over the Giants will be the first of many.

d. Eagles had the best bye week of any team this year. Every NFC East team lost, and now the Eagles, by virtue of sitting on their couches all day Sunday, gained a game over occasionally dangerous Dallas and Washington.

e. There are not many more physically punishing rivalry games in the NFL than Seattle-Arizona.

f. What a well-deserved honor, London Fletcher getting his jersey retired by John Carroll University. Such a good player and man.

g. Case Keenum is making it very hard for the Vikings to play Teddy Bridgewater. I know Keenum's limitations, but watch him play in Washington, particularly early. The guy's good. One of the throws of the day was his soft pop fly to Adam Thielen, good for 38 yards down the left sideline, in the only spot that would have been complete. Lovely. Keenum needs to work on his fade throws, though.

- h. Adam Thielen on Washington linebacker Zach Brown. Gain of 37. Unfair fight right there.
- i. Stefon Diggs scored his second touchdown Sunday, then leaped up and hugged the goal-post stanchion. Can't use the goal post as a prop. Good Lord: Why?
- j. You're a good man, Drew Bledsoe. The former Patriots QB was back in Boston over the weekend to play a Veterans Day football game against a group of Wounded Warriors.
- k. The speed of that Steeler front is so hard to contend.
- l. Attaway Jay Glazer and Nate Boyer. This project of theirs to help returning vets is great, and not just on Veterans Day weekend.
- m. Hey, Marqise Lee: What a dumb taunting foul you caused late in Jacksonville. That might have cost your team a win.
- n. Hey Tre Boston: What a dumb decision, to not run back an interception in the fourth quarter for the Chargers.
- o. Mike Pereira's right: Atlanta safety Brian Pool got away with a hit on defenseless Dez Bryant early against Dallas—a foul that the officials just have to be able to see.
- p. Wow, Xavier Woods. The rookie Dallas defensive back with the superb diving interception, leading to the first points of the game in Atlanta.
2. I think Vontaze Burfict has lost the benefit of the doubt with me, after yet another incident in yet another game. In the span of three plays, he got called for unnecessary roughness on a hit on Demarco Murray, then bumped an official to earn a disqualification from the game, and then, on the way off the field, he got into an argument with some emboldened female fans in the front row in Nashville. On top of being a hothead, Burfict's got rabbit ears. Great.
3. I think this is why you simply should never, ever, ever bet on football: The Saints lost their first two games, both by double digits. They have won their last seven by 18.4 points. This team is precisely like the Rams—no fluke.
4. I think I ask this about the Los Angeles Chargers: Can any team lose games in a more agonizing fashion? Five of the six losses have been one-possession jobs, including losses by 3, 2, 2, and 3. The Chargers do some dumb things, but not enough dumb things to be as star-crossed as they are.
5. I think I bet Broncos VP John Elway goes quarterback-shopping again. It's not just that the woeful Brock Osweiler is the quarterback for one of America's great sports franchises. It's the utter hopelessness of their quest over the past three weeks. The Broncos have a five-game losing streak, but, really, it's the last 15 days that are particularly embarrassing. They've lost three games by 63 points. They've given up 40.3 points per game, which is the real stunner. On offense, Elway has to be mulling what to do to solidify his quarterback position for 2018. He won't go into another season wishing and hoping at quarterback. Whoever's the GM of the Giants will get a call about Eli Manning—and should listen.

6. I think it's cool to note that, between games in mile-high Denver on Sunday night and 1.4-mile-high Mexico City versus the Raiders next Sunday, the New England Patriots will work out this week in a city about halfway between the two in altitude: Colorado Springs, elevation: 6,035 feet. (Hat tip to Mike Reiss of ESPN for this note.)

7. I think I have three thoughts about the Jim Irsay-Andrew Luck situation:

a. Irsay's assertion that Luck is somehow overly protective of his shoulder and not wanting to play unless he feels totally perfect, I think, is foolish. Luck played 21 games after initially injuring his throwing shoulder in September 2015.

b. I bet Colts GM Chris Ballard has moved aggressively to tamp any hard feelings that Luck might have toward his owner. In fact, I would be shocked if Ballard hasn't done something to ameliorate the situation.

c. I do not think there's much of a chance Luck gets dealt in the offseason, no matter how well Jacoby Brissett plays. And I love Brissett.

8. I think the Seahawks shouldn't be alone in getting the once-over from the league office about Russell Wilson's 3.5-second mid-game sideline exam for head trauma Thursday night. As much or more, I blame the neutral Unaffiliated Neurological Consultant on the Seattle sideline. To refresh: On every sideline during NFL games is a local head-trauma specialist. He or she has the authority to mandate an exam of the player, or take the player to the locker room for a more thorough exam. When a player is sent to the sideline to be checked out, that neurological consultant and a team doctor must examine the player before he returns. Wilson was sent to the sidelines by referee Walt Anderson on the field, and darted around for a few seconds, never getting examined for longer than a couple of moments, and then running back on the field after missing one snap. At the end of that series, Wilson was examined. But that's not the proper protocol—he should have been examined more thoroughly when he first game out. That's one of the reasons why the NFL put those medical professionals on the sidelines in the first place—to take over a situation like that and not have a coach or the quarterback himself deciding what to do.

9. I think I'm really looking forward to Greg Olsen as the third man in the FOX booth next Sunday, Rams at Vikings. I think Olsen's one of those players who has a future in this business, and I think it'll be really interesting to hear him dish on Sean McVay's offense. Good idea by FOX.

10. I think these are my non-football thoughts of the week:

a. Story of the Week: Politico.com writer Michael Kruse went to Johnstown, Pa., a rock-solid Trump town a year ago during the election, a place Trump went and made a slew of promises, and this month found still a rock-solid Trump town. It's an excellent, thorough story. And a disturbing one.

b. I am advising this very strongly: Read that story all the way through. Read it to the last three sentences. Important.

c. Radio Story of the Week: by Christopher Joyce of NPR, about how massive development contributed mightily to the flooding in Houston. It's just a 5-minute, 20-second listen, and quite educational.

d. Column of the Week: Olympic swimmer Diana Nyad's piece in the New York Times, about being sexually abused by a trusted coach at age 14, and again thereafter, and how at age 68 it still haunts her, and why women need to come forward to tell the stories of what happened to them.

e. Nyad: "My particular case mirrors countless others. I was 14. A naïve 14, in 1964. I don't think I could have given you a definition of intercourse."

f. Sports Story of the Week: Lee Jenkins of Sports Illustrated on the physically and mentally improved Blake Griffin of the Los Angeles Clippers. As you know, I'm not much of a hoops devotee, but wow, the detail and the great writing in this piece is something we in the business should all strive. I have so much admiration for Jenkins the writer and Jenkins the reporter.

g. Holy cow: I got to see 10 of 12 shifts of Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers the other night in the Oilers-Devils game. What a talent. So big and so fast and so smooth. What a bummer the Oilers don't make it back to greater New York over the next few months. That would be appointment attending for me.

h. Coffeenerdness: So many good coffee shops in New York. I found another one the other day—Bluestone Lane at Astor Place. Wasn't jonesing for anything in particular when I walked in and asked for the flat white. Superb. A little loud in there, but a good environment to sip and talk and people-watch.

i. Beernerdness: This is the second time I've had Revolver Brewing (Granbury, Texas) Blood and Honey American Pale Wheat Ale, and I'll be back for more. I found myself at DFW Airport on Saturday night, and luckily one of the bars had this marvelous concoction, with a slight tinge of honey and spice. A great and still fairly light autumn brew.

j. Concerts are for listening, Josh Beckett, not stage-diving.

### **WHO I LIKE TONIGHT**

Carolina 20, Miami 12. Fairly amazing that Carolina has started 6-3, and almost more amazing that the Panthers have won two of their last three. This three-game stretch has seen Cam Newton throw one touchdown pass in 12 quarters, the Panthers score 40 points, and the speedy duo of Christian McCaffrey and Curtis Samuel, drafted 1-2 last spring to re-make the Panthers, combine for 171 total yards and zero touchdowns. Thank God for a pass rush, and for a run defense, and for how well defensive coordinator Steve Wilks has spotted 37-year-old Julius Peppers (who entered the weekend eighth in the NFL with 7.5 sacks) in the pass-rush. If the Carolina offense can be even a B-minus group, this is a dangerous team.

### **THE ADIEU HAIKU**

Jerry v Roger.

Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. But  
no one's talking 'ball.

# Broncos' Free-fall Continues as Patriots Hand Denver Its Fifth Straight Loss

By Robert Klemko  
MMQB  
November 13, 2017

Three thoughts from the Patriots' 41–16 win over the Broncos on Sunday Night Football...

1. Aside from the electric first half performance from Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders (six catches, 137 yards), New England appears to have shored up its defense in the last month, holding each of its last five opponents to fewer than 17 points. Cornerback Stephon Gilmore delivered an encouraging performance against wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, and the New England front seven shut down the running game in the red zone. One wonders how this defense will respond when confronted with one of the league's better tight ends, as opposed to Jeff Heurman and A.J. Derby.

2. It's difficult to understand Broncos coach Vance Joseph's decision to stick with rookie kick returner Isaiah McKenzie, who has fumbled five times this season after Sunday night. McKenzie's fumble of a Patriots' punt on the opening drive set up a Tom Brady touchdown pass to Rex Burkhead and a lead New England would not relinquish. The early score gave Brady the ability to lean on the run against a defense that can struggle against a power running game. Meanwhile, Broncos edge defenders Shane Ray and Von Miller were largely non-factors with Brady completing 25 of 34 passes for 266 yards to running backs and tight ends, including all three of his touchdowns.

3. This looked like a poorly-coached football team lacking in situational awareness more than in any other game in a disappointing season for Denver. The Patriots exploited a number of matchup head-scratchers, with Broncos linebackers struggling to keep up with slot receivers and tight ends. No mental lapse was more glaring than a second-half sequence in which the defense earned a stop on third down, only to be penalized when New England lined up for a quick punt and caught the Broncos with 12 men on the field.

# Jerry Jones' rage against Roger Goodell seems personal, but it isn't

By Charles Robinson  
Yahoo! Sports  
November 13, 2017

Last August, Jerry Jones was having a private conversation about the state of the NFL and his pole position within the league's ownership ranks. Reclining back in his chair, the Dallas Cowboys owner waxed broadly and passionately, repeatedly tracing his ethos back to one decades-old moment. It's a snippet of his memory that speaks directly to the ruckus Jones is raising today, and might answer the question that is suddenly resonating throughout the NFL.

What is Jerry doing?

A few months ago, Jones gave a peek into the foundations of his ownership ideology. That glimpse showed why it's looking more and more like the Cowboys owner is moving to position himself as the principal shot-caller in the NFL. Arguably since Day 1, he has been positioning himself to be the chairman of this billionaire fraternity, the leader who finds a way to dictate his preferred agenda.

"When I walked into my first owners meeting, I looked to my left and saw [Kansas City Chiefs owner] Lamar Hunt," Jones said in August. "I looked to my right and saw [Cincinnati Bengals owner] Paul Brown. These were guys who bucked back. The NFL wouldn't give Lamar a franchise, so he went out and started a whole other league [in the AFL] and forced his way in. Paul Brown basically got his [Cleveland Browns] franchise taken away from him – a franchise that was named for him – so he goes down south a few hundred miles and helps found the Cincinnati Bengals. These were people that looked at their situation and when it was called for, they made changes."

This is what Jerry Jones believes it means to be an NFL owner. If things aren't going the way they should – or you're dealt a hand you won't accept – you change something. And after speaking to multiple NFL sources familiar with Jones and his litany of recent frustrations, it's clear that his attitude toward Goodell has shifted significantly over the past few years.

The universal opinion appears to be this: It's not that Jones doesn't like commissioner Roger Goodell – it's that Jones doesn't like Goodell's relationship to the ownership group.

The sources also agreed on a key dynamic that has changed in that relationship during the past decade: how Jerry Jones sees himself and his influence within the broader group. As Jones has grown older, sources say the change of ownership groups around him have ushered Jones to the head of the table. Gone are some of the team owners who Jones saw as luminaries and mentors; guys like Hunt, Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis and Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney. Now, when Jones walks into a meeting and looks around, he sees himself as the center of the room. And even in a room of billionaires, that is largely true thanks in part to Jones' aggressive business tendencies, marketing acumen and charisma.

"It's the difference between being counseled and being the counselor," one NFL source said of Jones' mindset. "There were owners who counseled him who aren't sitting next to him in meetings anymore."

Now he's the counselor in the room. That doesn't mean he doesn't respect or seek the advice of [New England Patriots owner] Bob Kraft or [New York Giants co-owner] John Mara. But those are his peers. Jerry is the kind of guy who tries to lead his peers. ...

"It's not natural to try and lead your mentors. But most of Jerry's mentors are gone. I think naturally he sees himself as taking their place."

Multiple sources also pointed at Rooney as the owner Jones might be missing most. Rooney died in April, leaving Jones without a man whom he respected for even-handed decisions, thoughtful debate and masterful mediation between owners.

"Jerry listened to Mr. Rooney," one source familiar with Jones said. "I think he would have listened to Mr. Rooney on a lot of the things that are happening right now."

But Rooney isn't here. And that has left Jones trying to lead a room that – at least at this stage – doesn't appear to be willing to follow. The sources said he separated himself from the larger group by aligning himself publicly with President Donald Trump on the national anthem protests. Then he did it again with the continued pushback on the final approval process of Goodell's contract. But nothing has created more waves than his hiring of lawyer David Boies and the lawsuit threat that came along with it.

In the context of his life as an owner, this is Jones leaning back on the attitudes of power brokers who came before him. The ones who believed in decisive change. Now Jones is sitting at the head of the table staring at Goodell, calling for a correction.

And that correction is this: Goodell is trying to fashion himself as a commissioner who works in favor of the league. Jones believes that Goodell's job description and massive salary dictate he should work in favor of the owners. Largely because in Jones' mind, it's the owners who should direct what's best for the league – not the commissioner.

"Jerry looks at the prosperity of the NFL and sees it as the golden goose that Roger didn't raise or create," one league source said of Jones. "To Jerry, Roger is basically a babysitter. He watches the golden goose, but he doesn't own it. ... Jerry has known Roger almost going back to [Roger] being an intern [in the NFL]. Jerry had a hand in getting him that commissioner job. Now Roger is making a mint in a job that Jerry helped him get – and in Jerry's mind, Roger hasn't even kept the league as healthy as it should be. If Roger is making this kind of money, the point Jerry wants to deliver is that the commissioner serves at the pleasure of the owners. And also that Roger needs to do a better job of heading off or managing problems."

While Goodell's pay is a key point of Jones' gripes, multiple sources painted a picture in which finances are tied to a myriad of issues that have been festering for at least the past two years. Three sources who have been alongside Jones at multiple owners meetings over the past three years said he has raised criticism of Goodell or the league's crisis management on a number of issues.

Among the three biggest areas Jones has expressed concerns about under Goodell's leadership:

- Over the past year, Jones doesn't believe Goodell or the league's public-relations department has done a good job framing the TV ratings storyline. Chiefly, Jones believes the entertainment consumption landscape is changing drastically, yet the NFL is weathering that storm far better than most

entertainment cash cows; and that the league continues to aggressively reach for new platforms to make the game available to a younger demographic. While ratings are unquestionably down and Jones is concerned, the sources said he believes the context of the dip hasn't always been relayed well by Goodell.

- Jones believes Goodell put the NFL into an unwinnable battle when he overhauled league policy after domestic violence cases involving Ray Rice, Adrian Peterson and Greg Hardy. While part of this seems to trace from his frustration with the suspension of running back Ezekiel Elliott, the sources said Jones believes that league investigations are a dangerous quagmire. Especially when the NFL's own disciplinary reach and judgement extends beyond that of law enforcement.
- The most obvious of all, Goodell's inability to get anthem protests under control during the 2016 season, and the mushrooming backlash that occurred the past three months. The sources said Jones supported a more decisive approach to resolve the anthem issues during the offseason – before Trump could add fuel to an already smoldering issue.

Somewhere beneath all of those is the reality of public relations and image. According to the sources, Jones believes Goodell has done a poor job of identifying big problems before they happen, or definitively limiting damage in the wake of problems after they occur. And all the while, the NFL has paid him massive piles of cash during the course of what Jones believe was clear mismanagement.

In Jones' mind, the inability to correct mistakes is often the difference between success or failure. And he said as much in August.

"It is how you react," Jones said when describing his business philosophies. "There's nobody that I've ever met that bats over .500 or 50-50 on making the right decisions. There's nobody that can see around corners. Nobody can. But the guys that succeed are the ones that cut their bad decisions off quicker than others and let their good ones run longer than others."

That might say a lot about where Jerry Jones is at right now. He sees an NFL that has paid Goodell hundreds of millions of dollars during unprecedented success. But the landscape is changing both on the field, in the fan base and in the ownership ranks. Having stepped to the head of the table and fashioning himself as the chief counselor in the room, he appears intent on pressing his agenda.

In Jones' mind, changes with Goodell are necessary. And even if that means challenging the commissioner and some of his fellow owners, he learned this fighting stance from the likes of Lamar Hunt and Paul Brown.

What is Jerry doing? He's bucking back.

# Patriots roll as Broncos are undone by special teams

By Nick Shook

NFL.com

November 13, 2017

The New England Patriots took advantage of multiple special teams mistakes and coasted to victory over the foundering Denver Broncos, 41-16. Here's what we learned:

1. For the second week in a row, the Broncos (3-6) allowed 40-plus points in a loss. This time, though, much of the blame doesn't fall on the shoulders of their defense, but their special teams, which was downright abysmal and single-handedly determined the outcome of the game.

First, Denver's Isaiah McKenzie muffed a punt after the game's opening possession. Then, New England's Dion Lewis returned a kick for a touchdown. And then, the Patriots blocked a Broncos punt. And as if things couldn't possibly get worse, the Broncos were caught making a late substitution, turning a fourth-and-5 into a fresh set of downs for the Patriots (7-2). The two early mistakes were enough to sink a team -- they accounted for two touchdowns, putting the Broncos in an early hole -- but the additional miscues just piled onto what has quickly become an ugly season for a fading Broncos team. Worst of all, the issues (which accounted for 24 of New England's points) reflect rather poorly upon a coaching staff, which isn't the best for a first-year coach in Vance Joseph. If one asked a question of who's taking the fall for this, all signs point to special teams coach Brock Olivo.

2. Emmanuel Sanders and Malcolm Butler went back and forth, and though New England won the war, Sanders won the battle. The slot receiver caught six passes for 137 yards, and made Butler work extremely hard to cover him. While Sanders was kept out of the end zone, he is clearly Denver's best option and makes the Broncos' offense respectable. His presence on the field allowed Osweiler to work into some semblance of a rhythm and helped Denver's offense develop a balance (C.J. Anderson, Jamaal Charles and Devontae Booker combined to rush for 112 yards on 25 carries) that it has lacked in the last month-plus. Unfortunately for the Broncos, this remains a team that lacks options outside of the aforementioned and Demaryius Thomas, who caught five passes for 44 yards and a touchdown. Even on Thomas' touchdown, Butler was flagged for holding Sanders after the receiver gained an advantage while he was running toward the opposite side of the field. The route cleared space for Thomas in the middle, resulting in the touchdown.

3. Interesting note on Lewis, who is the embodiment of why New England is consistently near the top of the league. TO THE RESEARCH NOTES!!

Rex Burkhead made quick work off a hobbled Todd Davis, running crisp routes that freed him up for targets on a few occasions, including one for a touchdown. James White caught a touchdown pass. No matter where you focus on New England's roster, the Patriots pull out another player who ends up making an impact.

4. Even with the lopsided defeat and the 0-2 mark, Brock Osweiler wasn't too shabby. His stat line, which includes a completion percentage just a shade over 50, isn't the best, but considering the depths to which his play plunged last season, this was a major step up. Having Sanders helped a lot. We're not saying Osweiler is the future, but he did enough -- with his 221 yards, one touchdown and one

interception -- to keep the job next week. On Sunday night, the problem surprisingly wasn't the quarterback situation. That's better than it has been for the last month.

5. The special teams didn't do the Broncos' defense any favors, but as Joseph pointed out after the game, New England scored on seven straight possessions. Denver's pass rush was nonexistent and the Patriots rarely were forced to convert on third down. The resulting issue was Denver sticking with its base defense on the earlier downs and getting bad matchups against players such as Burkhead and Lewis, and then refusing to move outside of such logic even after New England exploited it. Of the 67 total defensive snaps, Denver trotted out its base 3-4 on 48 of them, and used a Dime sub package on just 17 snaps. Stubborn coaching is hurting the group as much as its on-field mistakes.

6. We'll save the best for last: Tom Brady is as good as ever and has a stable of options that seem to get deeper with each month. Just this week, the Patriots welcomed back Martellus Bennett after his bizarre divorce from the Green Bay Packers. In the first quarter, Bennett caught a pass and galloped down the sideline for a gain of 27. It's funny how New England just finds ways to fit most pieces into its offense, and makes it look seamless. Of course, a lot of that reflects upon Brady, who was even congratulating teammates for good plays and advising others after his night ended with the game in hand in the fourth quarter.

# A lesson the NFL hasn't learned: There really can be too much of a good thing

By Norman Chad  
Washington Post  
November 13, 2017

I am seldom in the business of saying, “I told you so,” because most of the time I tell you anything, I tell you something stupid. However, sitting on the sofa all day with a beer in one hand and the clicker in the other, occasionally Couch Slouch has a revelation — which, I suppose, can be explained by the fact that Yuengling is one incredibly tasty and intellectually stimulating mixture of hops, barley and yeast.

I told the NFL not to start Thursday night football.

Did those billionaire crumb-bums listen? No.

And, thus, in an avaricious attempt to co-opt another of our diminishing calendar days, the NFL has spiraled downward.

NFL TV ratings are down 5.5 percent from 2016 and nearly 13 percent from 2015.

To be fair, there are plenty of possible factors for this decline in interest, among them:

- The Trump effect.
- The kneeling-during-the-national-anthem effect.
- The turned-off-by-brain-trauma effect.
- The too-many-bad-matchups-with-too-many-bad-quarterbacks effect.
- The tired-of-seeing-Bill-Belichick-win effect.

Actually, among all the alternative theories on waning NFL viewership, I mostly subscribe to the millennials-have-the-attention-span-of-a-tsetse-fly effect.

Exhibit A: The NFL RedZone channel.

RedZone allows you to see every touchdown without having to see any one contest; who wants to watch a stand-alone game when you can watch scoring play after scoring play? It's like reading a book review rather than reading the book — you get the gist of it all without having to wade through 368 pages.

[Everything you need to know about Week 10 in the NFL]

Millennials have limited patience; they stand in front of microwaves and implore, “Come on!”

(The other night, I sat down to watch “Citizen Kane” with stepson Isaiah, stepdaughter Mia and rescue pit Daisy. Isaiah and Mia were gone before Charles Foster Kane even became a newspaperman; Daisy stuck it out to the final “Rosebud.”)

Now, don’t get me wrong — the NFL is still very popular; it hasn’t morphed into MLS overnight. But Roger Goodell and Co. decided enough wasn’t enough, and too much was better. I believe the dictionary definition of “too much” is Bills-Jets on Thursday night.

As it turns out, this is one area in which Mark Cuban and I agree wholeheartedly.

(Generally, the Dallas Mavericks owner and I are at loggerheads. We’re cut from different cloth: Cuban is a happy, uber-successful adult-in-progress; I sleep in to avoid bad news.)

In 2014, Cuban famously remarked the NFL was 10 years away from implosion. “Pigs get fat, hogs get slaughtered. And they’re getting hoggy,” he said. “. . . When you’ve got a good thing and you get greedy, it always, always, always, always, always turns on you.”

It’s turned on the NFL.

Alas, the NFL took its pitch-perfect Sunday-afternoon-to-Monday-night rhythm and transformed it into a Sunday morning from London/Sunday afternoon/Sunday night/Monday night/Thursday night/Saturday night in December thing.

Here’s the problem: If you eat filet mignon once a year, it feels and tastes special. If you eat it once a month, that specialness is dulled a bit — yet it still tastes pretty good. But if you eat it, say, five nights a week, (1) it is no longer special and (2) you sort of tire of it by the third night and (3) your arteries are more clogged than Friday rush hour on the Cross Bronx Expressway.

Yes, there can be too much of a good thing.

(That still beats too much of a bad thing, i.e. “Jimmy Kimmel Live.”)

Anyway, there is saturation, there is oversaturation and then there is the NFL’s more-of-Drew-Stanton-supersized-oversaturation.

On an unrelated note, in 1903, I warned the Wright brothers that the future of aviation was baggage fees and drones. Uh, I hate to say it, but I told you so.

### **Ask The Slouch**

Q. Is Bob Knight right about the late John Wooden’s blind eye to illicit recruiting and benefits? (Pete Fischer; Lexington, Ky.)

A. Knight is right about Wooden. On the other hand, Knight is often wrong about Knight.

Q. Why was the UCLA men’s basketball team even in China? Was it part of a semester-abroad program? (Terrence Williamson; Pittsburgh)

A. Furthermore, why shoplift Louis Vuitton sunglasses 6,500 miles from home when a booster might buy you a pair in Beverly Hills?

Q. Iowa State's quarterback is Kyle Kempt — commence groaning in 5, 4, 3 . . . — should his backup be known as the Un-Kempt? (Don Frese; Hobe Sound, Fla.)

A. I am printing this question against my better judgment.

Q. Given the outcome of all The Slouch's "Team of Destiny" designees over the years, can we assume all your earlier nuptials were also "Marriages of Destiny"? (Gordon Moller; Grapevine, Tex.)

A. Pay the man, Shirley.

Q. Is playing Stud with Tom Brady redundant? (Erich Nintze; Washington, D.C.)

A. Pay this wise soul, too.

# Derek Wolfe on Broncos: I think we stink

By Josh Alper

Pro Football Talk

November 13, 2017

The Broncos were 3-1 when they took their bye in Week Five and that break appears to have come at exactly the wrong time.

Sunday night's 41-16 thrashing by the Patriots was the fifth straight loss for the Broncos since the bye week and they have been outscored 92-39 over the last two weeks as things have spiraled to the lowest level yet. The special teams were the leading disaster against New England, but coach Vance Joseph said "all three phases" contributed to a loss that left defensive end Derek Wolfe with a particularly sour assessment of his club.

"I think we stink ... It's just sad. It's real sad," Wolfe said, via the Denver Post. "It's sad that we went from a championship-caliber team to a team that stinks and nobody respects us."

Wolfe described himself as demoralized after the loss and he's surely not alone in that feeling as the Broncos' season has taken such a severe turn for the worse over the last month-plus. Given how widespread the issues have been, it's hard to imagine they're going to sort them all out in time to reverse the drop that Wolfe outlined on Sunday night.

# Sunday Night wrap-up: Broncos errors mean easy Patriots win

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
November 13, 2017

We've established at this point that the Patriots are good at a few things.

They have a manic attention to detail when it comes to special teams. They like spreading it around to backs and tight ends in their passing game. And they don't need a lot of help.

The Patriots clocked the Broncos 41-16, effectively putting the game to bed in the first half because of an avalanche of Broncos errors on special teams.

But it was how quickly they took advantage of those mistakes that was so alarming.

The longest of their first four touchdown drives (the fact there were more is telling) was a three-minute, 18-second march. That one actually took them seven plays to cover 75 yards. Making people pay in a hurry has been a staple of theirs, but so is taking what is given to them.

With the Broncos defense dedicated to blanketing tight end Rob Gronkowski early, quarterback Tom Brady kept throwing it to the alternatives, with nine different players catching passes, the little stuff that doesn't make for pretty highlights but remains effective. He finished 25-of-34 for 266 yards and three touchdowns, and was able to let Brian Hoyer finish up.

Their stat sheet numbers might not look overwhelming (they had 350 yards of total offense when Brady called it a night), but they dominated the Broncos throughout this game.

As they do often, to many teams who don't play cleanly against them. They can be beaten, but not by bad teams which are also sloppy.

Here are five more things we learned during Sunday Night Football:

1. The Broncos have now lost five in a row, and it's not hard to tell why.

They're incredibly slow-starting since their bye week, back when they still looked like a decent team.

Since then, they've been outscored 55-6 in the first quarter, and 106-24 in the first half.

With an unsettled situation at quarterback (it's hard to blame either Trevor Siemian or Brock Osweiler), the Broncos are unable to come back from those kinds of holes each week, no matter how good their defense is.

And even though they've given up 92 points in the last two weeks, it's hard to throw rocks at the defense considering the short fields and deficits they had to deal with. That wasn't the problem Sunday.

2. There was a bright spot for the Broncos. Other than the fact they get to live in Denver, which is lovely.

Wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders had six catches for 137 yards, the bulk of Osweiler's 221 passing yards.

So they've got that going for them. Which is nice.

3. New Patriots tight end Martellus Bennett looked healthy enough.

He only played two snaps in the first half his debut with his old team, but caught a pair of passes for 32 yards.

That's not going to make the Packers very happy, after he effectively talked his way out of town while saying he was too injured to play.

4. Speaking of Patriots tight ends, it was nice of Dwayne Allen to arrive this year.

Allen hadn't caught a pass this year, and after missing one in the first half was 0-for-7 on targets this year.

But his first one mattered, as he caught an 11-yard touchdown pass.

Dealing for him seemed to make sense for the Patriots, considering he was replacing Bennett and they use so many multiple-tight end plays. But until Sunday, they hadn't gotten much in return for the 2018 fourth-rounder they sent the Colts (they also got a sixth-rounder from Indianapolis in the trade).

5. It takes some work to be a less popular Brock in Denver than Osweiler.

But special teams coach Brock Olivo may have done that.

Watching his units give up a blocked punt, allowing a 103-yard kickoff return for a touchdown, and muffing a punt to lead to the first score was a nightmare for Olivo.

All of that stuff happened in the first half, when the Broncos had actually outgained the Patriots 189-184, which illustrates how crushing those mistakes are. Giving the Patriots a free first down in the fourth quarter instead of making them punt was just piling on, and deserved a penalty beyond five yards.

Olivo, the former Lions running back, is in his first year on the job after working under Dave Toub in Kansas City the last three years. He might need a reference soon. Or at least some advice.

# **Patriots up big at halftime, lead Broncos 27-9**

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
November 13, 2017

The Patriots didn't need much help.

But the Broncos are willing to provide.

On a night of special teams miscues by the Broncos, the Patriots are up 27-9 at halftime.

The Broncos have muffed a punt, allowed a 103-yard kickoff return, and had a punt blocked, which almost seems unfair against the Patriots.

Tom Brady's thrown for two touchdowns, the first to running back Rex Burkhead (who blocked the punt later in the half) and another to tight end Dwayne Allen for his first catch of the year.

The Broncos have major problems at the moment, and aren't built to come back from this kind of deficit with Brock Osweiler at the helm (or really, any of their quarterbacks).

# Another special teams miscue stakes Patriots to early lead

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
November 13, 2017

Last week it was their defense.

This week, the Broncos special teams are the unit that's not helping.

After giving the Patriots easy field position with a muffed punt, the Broncos made them run farther the second time.

Patriots running back Dion Lewis took a kickoff 103 yards for a touchdown and a 14-3 lead, getting a shove in the back which propelled him upfield rather than out of bounds along the way.

Given the current state of their offense, that's the kind of margin they can't afford at the moment, as they try to snap a four-game losing streak.

The Broncos answered with another field goal to cut it to 14-6, but can't keep this kind of pace up for long.

# **Patriots score first after getting second chance**

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
November 13, 2017

Things started so promising for the Broncos.

After getting strafed for 51 points last week, holding the Patriots to a three-and-out was a welcome start.

But when wide receiver Isaiah McKenzie muffed the ensuing punt, it became too easy.

Tom Brady hit Rex Burkhead with a 14-yard touchdown pass, and the Patriots have a quick 7-0 lead before Brock Osweiler and the Broncos offense had a chance to take the field.

The Broncos defense is good, but that only works when they get a little bit of help from their offense and special teams.