

# Kiszla: The Broncos have lost the Bowlen family values that made them championship material

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
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Last place stinks, but know what hurts worse than 5-11? The Broncos are no longer the team Pat Bowlen built. Mr. B's blueprint for success? It's gone. Three decades of football glory slip away slowly, then all at once.

John Elway has lost his aura of invincibility in Broncos Country. The team's vision has grown fuzzy, with a commitment to excellence eroded by leadership trying to cover their assets. Who's the quarterback? The Broncos have no idea. But we do know Vance Joseph, a coach lucky to still have a job, wants to change the culture of a franchise that has won three Super Bowl trophies.

"I don't have all the answers," Elway admitted Tuesday.

Taking inventory of the mess he made, this was a different Elway than the defiant gunslinger with No Plan B. Maybe the franchise's longest losing streak in 50 years not only angered Elway but humbled him.

All the lopsided defeats endured in 2017 beat two new realities into Broncos Country.

No. 1: For maybe the first time since a confused young quarterback mistakenly lined up behind guard to take the snap nearly 35 years ago, it's now fair game to seriously criticize Elway rather than worship him as a football god.

No. 2: The shine is finally off the Lombardi Trophy won at Super Bowl 50. Rather than trying to recreate past glories, the team has accepted that the dirty job of rebuilding must be done. This could take some time. Even Elway refused to burden this team with expectations of making the playoffs next season.

While conducting the postmortem of a terrible season, Elway and Joseph sat side by side. They talked stiffly and painfully politely about their strained relationship, like a couple who stay together for the benefit of the kids. It was left to team president Joe Ellis to speak the truest words about the team's current state of discontent.

"I feel like there are times where I just get a sense that as an organization we're looking at a slogan on the wall, three trophies in the locker room or Super Bowl banners at the stadium. ... We kind of assume that is the way it's going to be," Ellis said. "If I let that creep into the organization, then I am the one that has to stop that mind-set."

In the NFL, the trickiest part of the business might be maintaining the illusion of family in a locker room where roughly 30 percent of the players are sent packing after every season. On New Year's Day, Joseph fired six assistant coaches, including running backs coach Eric Studesville, a loyal employee who guided the Broncos from the darkest days of the Josh McDaniels error to the championship glory of Super Bowl 50.

“It was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best they can be,” Joseph explained.

So let me get this straight, while taking note of what’s gone down at Dove Valley headquarters during the past 12 months. From Wade Phillips to Stuedesville, if you’re an assistant who has helped Denver win a ring, the Broncos can make do without your services. But if you’re an apprentice head coach with five NFL victories to your name, Elway is willing to gamble Mr. B’s legacy on you?

At the risk of Elway labeling me a know-it-all, the Broncos would have a brighter future today if he had simply fired Joseph and promoted Stuedesville to head coach. In an organization where Elway wields so much power that his head coach will always be a humble sidekick rather than a football wizard, Stuedesville is a real leader of men who earned the trust and respect of players through eight seasons with the team.

Players like Joseph, without question. Respect, however, is hard-earned in the NFL. If the head-scratching game plans that got Mike McCoy unceremoniously fired as offensive coordinator were any indication, the strongest-willed personalities in the locker room and coaching offices didn’t always respect Joseph enough to buy the ideas a rookie coach sold in team meetings.

“We have one goal each year, and that’s to win the championship,” Joseph said.

Poppycock.

As painful as the truth is to acknowledge, it’s time for Broncos Country to hit the pause button on the mantra of Super Bowl or bust. Championship football is not a realistic immediate goal for a Denver roster with too many holes for one draft or all the money under the salary cap to fill.

Buckle up. The ride’s going to get bumpy. In 2018, it won’t be about fun; there’s dirty work to be done. The Broncos’ checklist:

Find a quarterback. There’s no magic bullet. The next Peyton Manning ain’t walking through that door. But, as Elway said: “For us to have a chance to get better, we have to get better at that position.”

Find out if Joseph can coach a lick. If he can’t, move on. The hottest seat in town is wherever Joseph is sitting.

Find a way to conduct a family business in a way that does Mr. B proud. No more excuses. If the Broncos don’t get back to those basics, Bowlen will leave his children a nice \$2.5 billion inheritance, but not a football franchise worth keeping.

# Jhabvala vs. Kiz: Should the Broncos stick with quarterback Paxton Lynch?

By Mark Kiszla and Nicki Jhabvala

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## Should the Broncos retain quarterback Paxton Lynch or move on?

**Kiz:** It took nearly two seasons, but the Broncos finally played a game where the team placed the development of Paxton Lynch on equal footing with winning a game. Striking that balance is tough to do in the NFL, which might be why so many young QBs get thrown on the scrap heap so quickly. After Lynch threw for two touchdowns and committed three turnovers in the season finale against the Chiefs, what should Denver do next with their 2016 first-round draft choice?

**Jhabvala:** In two seasons, Lynch has played for two head coaches, three offensive coordinators and had to adapt to three systems. He also started only four games and has had little time to get critical game reps. But Sunday's game against the Chiefs was telling. It was telling not only for the way he played, but also in the way Chiefs rookie Patrick Mahomes played in his first start ever. After two years of seeing Lynch in practice, in meetings and in games, the Broncos know what they have in him. I'm not paid to be a talent evaluator, but from what I have seen, I'd be hesitant to hand him the keys going forward.

**Kiz:** There have been legit doubts about Lynch's footwork, his playbook acumen and his throwing accuracy. What concerns me more, however, is his ability to overcome adversity, because playing QB in the NFL can be a brutal job. "Some guys have it, where they can move on to the next play without concern for the last play. Some guys can't move by it," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "They usually survive and the guys who can't, they don't survive. It's too hard mentally."

**Jhabvala:** And John Elway and Gary Kubiak — two guys who sit atop the Broncos' talent evaluation department — have stressed that over the years. How do you bounce back? Do you quickly move on from mistakes? Lynch has struggled with that for two years. It was obvious during his offseason competition with Trevor Siemian, and was noticeable again last Sunday, that Lynch doesn't respond well to adversity. After his interception late in the second quarter, he was sacked twice, fumbled once and threw another interception before finishing strong.

**Kiz:** I get the meritocracy of letting Siemian compete with Lynch for the starting job in 2017. But letting two young, unproven quarterbacks battle it out in training camp undercut the commitment to Siemian and the development of Lynch. If Elway acquires a veteran QB to be the clear leader of Denver's offense in 2018, it makes financial and football sense to retain Lynch on the roster. Should the Broncos draft a QB in the first round, however, it's time for Lynch to move down the road.

**Jhabvala:** I agree. Everything is on the table this offseason. If the Broncos decide to find a quarterback in the draft, I think it would behoove that player and the team more to have veterans behind him. Brock Osweiler may not be viewed as a starter, but he is experienced and could be a good backup and leader for a team with many young players. If the Broncos decide to find a veteran quarterback in free agency, then perhaps you keep Lynch and hope he continues to develop.

# Broncos QB Trevor Siemian to undergo surgery on left shoulder

By Nicki Jhabvala  
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Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian will undergo surgery in Los Angeles on Wednesday to repair his injured left shoulder and is expected to need two to three months for recovery. The timetable would put him on track to be ready for the start of organized team activities (OTAs) in the spring.

Siemian had the same shoulder repaired last January after he played through much of the 2016 season with an AC joint sprain, but he said Monday that the latest setback is a “different deal.”

“I have to get this shoulder taken care of,” he said. “I’ll do that, and then, just like everybody else, come back to work and get better.”

But with the Broncos’ uncertainty at the quarterback position, it’s unclear if he’ll be in the mix for the starting role again.

Siemian has one year remaining on his rookie contract and is due a base salary of \$705,000 for 2018. Depending on which direction the Broncos go in finding a starting quarterback, Siemian could finish out his deal in Denver or be on the move via trade or release.

“We’re going to go through that whole thing,” general manager John Elway said Tuesday. “We’ll look at what’s available in free agency as well as where we sit in the draft. That whole evaluation will come as we go through this. We’re going to have to look at free agents since they come first. We’ll look at that situation, then we’ll also understand where we are in the draft and what’s available in the draft. Eventually, as we get time and time goes forward, we’ll put a plan together and go from there.”

Siemian earned the starting job for a second consecutive offseason after recovering from his first shoulder surgery and started the first eight games of the season before getting benched. He returned for three starts late in the year but was injured early in the Broncos’ win at Indianapolis and was subsequently placed on injured reserve.

For the season, Siemian completed 59 percent of his passes for 2,285 yards, 12 touchdowns and 14 interceptions for a 73.3 rating. He was sacked 33 times.

9News first reported his impending surgery.

# John Elway, Vance Joseph say they're out to "change culture" of Broncos after losing season

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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John Elway settled into his chair at the front of the Broncos' auditorium, wished a crowd of reporters a happy New Year and told the truth.

"There's nobody happier than me that 2017 is over. Maybe Vance," he said, looking over to his head coach sitting next to him.

Less than two days after the Broncos bid farewell to a 5-11 season they'd like to forget, and less than 24 hours after they fired six assistants, the team's general manager, along with coach Vance Joseph, began to turn the page to 2018 while hoping to assuage disgruntled fans still flabbergasted by two years of disappointment.

The Broncos have fallen from the very top of the NFL, and they fell fast. And now, two years removed from Super Bowl 50, they're starting from the bottom without a set plan at quarterback, without an offensive identity, without a complete coaching staff, and without a clear path back to the postseason.

"I think when you're 5-11 there are obviously some issues and that we've got to get handled," Elway said. "That's our goal. That's our mindset. Whether we can get there or not — I don't want to raise the expectations, but ... our goals have not changed as Denver Broncos as far as what we want to do, and that's to compete world championships.

"Can we get back there? Sure we can. That's our goal."

Elway believes he took the first step to achieving that when, after some long days of contemplation, he decided to retain Joseph for another season as head coach.

"With Vance being here a year and getting a chance to go through things as a first-year head coach, I'm sure that, as I told him many times, that he was drinking through a fire hose," Elway said. "When you go through learning what it takes to be a head coach in this league, there's so much to it. ... We thought about different options, but ultimately my goal was to stay with Vance and give him that shot and give him the best opportunity to be successful. And I don't feel like we gave him that chance."

In an effort to create a better arrangement for Joseph in Year 2, the coaching staff was gutted, including longtime running backs coach and assistant head coach, Eric Studesville. Bill Musgrave was promoted to full-time offensive coordinator in large part because his management of the offense following Mike McCoy's firing fit Joseph's original vision.

"When you go 5-11 it wasn't good this year as far as our football team," Joseph said. "You have to make some changes. In my opinion, it was time to move on to change the culture in certain rooms. ... It was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best they can be (and

getting our best players to play at their best all the time. It was more about the overall culture of the offense, and getting back to being a dominant unit.”

But to get there, further and bigger changes await.

The Broncos have three quarterbacks under contract for 2018 — Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly — and no clear starter or backup among them. They will have options, with the No. 5 pick in the upcoming draft and with money to spend in free agency. They could have even more options should they move on from some veterans who are currently set to earn hefty salaries in the coming year.

The Broncos have a puzzle and plenty of pieces to rearrange. But even they don’t know the final picture yet. Their work to find it includes not just revamping the roster and the staff, but also altering the inner workings of both.

“Early on in the season I didn’t do a good job of pushing our coaches to make the proper changes that I thought could have helped us,” Joseph admitted. “I allowed guys to obviously coach — that was my goal — but I wasn’t very good at coaching the coaches. So I’ll get better at that. That was one of my shortcomings.”

Around this time a year ago, Joseph stood in the same spot as a freshly hired rookie head coach with grand visions of creating an offense with swagger. He said then that the Broncos didn’t require a rebuild but “a reboot.” Just tweaks, he said. The Broncos had a foundation with a defense to envy. They had veterans to lead the way. They had a pair of young quarterbacks in Siemian and Lynch who had potential.

“That position didn’t perform as well as we wanted it to,” Elway said. “I thought it would perform better than it did. And it’s not just on them. I think there are a lot of circumstances that went into that, that put them in tough situations. But we didn’t perform as well as we’d like to, so that’s obviously a position where we feel like we have to get better.”

In making his mark on the team, Joseph made many marks within the Broncos’ facility, with signs that read “TRUTH” and “CHAMPIONSHIP HABITS” adorning walls and T-shirts. The team’s three Lombardi Trophies were encased and placed on display in the team’s locker room in 2016, shortly after the Super Bowl 50 win. And championship banners and jewelry still reside in the team’s lobby.

*Maybe*, team president/CEO Joe Ellis wondered, the bigger picture became blurred and the focus lost.

Ellis said he had recent discussions with Joseph and Elway and will do so with the rest of the organization about a tenor of complacency throughout the organization, and that the long-held goal of “being No. 1 in everything” might have morphed into an assumption.

“Expectations are fine. We should always have them. But we shouldn’t make assumptions,” he said, reiterating a letter he penned to fans. “I feel like there are times where I just get sense that as an organization maybe we’re making a slogan on the wall or three Super Bowl trophies in the locker room or a Super Bowl banner at a stadium facing our audience and we kind of assume that’s the way it’s going to be. If I let that creep into the organization, then I’m the one that has to stop that mindset. ... I feel responsible that I allowed that. And I’m not saying it’s widespread. But if it is in there, and my sense is that at times it became that way, that needs to stop, and I’m in charge of doing that.”

Minutes later, Ellis offered the honest truth.

“Nobody is more upset about this year than John Elway. I can assure you that,” he said. “I might be a close second.”

# Broncos will remove Sports Authority signage from stadium as they continue search for naming rights partner

By Nicki Jhabvala  
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The Sports Authority logos that hang from the Broncos' stadium are coming down.

Team president and CEO Joe Ellis said Tuesday that the team will take down the signage representing the defunct company, starting within the next 10 days.

"I actually spoke with Jay Roberts this morning. He's our stadium general manager," Ellis said. "We are in the process of having engineers looking at (our stadium). We are going to take the signs down. All of the exterior signage will come down, starting in about a week or 10 days. The name needs to remain in place for a while because we have some place-holder events both inside the building and then in the bowl itself — some concerts and stuff. There is just some connection to that name whether it's through ticketing, event management or things like that."

The Broncos had originally hoped to secure a new naming rights partner for the stadium for the start of the 2017 season. As the Broncos enter another offseason, Ellis is unwilling to make promises about finding a new partnering brand for the start of the 2018 season, but he anticipates a different look for the Broncos' stadium by then.

"I suspect by the start of the season we'll either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name," Ellis said. "That is an important part to our capital funding moving forward. I've talked ... at length about some of the needs there, and they are extensive. We have, I think, 13 seasons left on our lease, and I'd like to wrap up the naming rights deal and then extend that because the Broncos aren't going anywhere."

Though many fans have longed for the team to simply use Mile High as the name, the team is adamant in finding a new naming rights partner— their third since the stadium opened in 2001 — to help fund stadium maintenance and upgrades.

In 2016, the Broncos ended their sponsorship agreement with Sports Authority, which was valued at \$55.3 million. They also assumed the rest of Metropolitan Football Stadium District's naming rights contract with the bankrupt company, which still owed about \$20 million over five years. That money has been coming out of the team's pockets, eating at its bottom line and taking away from other potential changes to improve fan experience.

In an extensive interview with The Denver Post before the start of the Broncos' 2017 season, Ellis said the projected cost to maintain and continuously upgrade the stadium is \$650 million over 20 years.

“There are different components. It’s a complicated deal to put this together,” Ellis said. “I told many of you here last year, I’m not going to put an end date on that because it is important to get the right deal. We continue to have productive discussions with companies. I’m hoping we can get it resolved.”

# Broncos freeze ticket prices for another year

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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After a 5-11 finish and their worst year of John Elway's executive tenure, the Broncos announced Tuesday that they will not raise ticket prices for 2018, marking the second consecutive year in which they've held pat.

The average general-admission ticket for the Broncos will stay at around \$101, close to the NFL average. The average price for all tickets, including luxury seating, is approximately \$190.

"We've raised them in good times. When you see the kind of loyalty, commitment and emotions that are fans pour into this team, it's sort of the least we can do," Broncos president/CEO Joe Ellis said. "I saw a few comments that maybe we should have lowered them. Those aren't necessarily totally out of line, but we're not able to do that because we're going to field a competitive team each and every year we hope. It wasn't too difficult of a decision."

In a letter to fans earlier in the day, Ellis said "there are no excuses for what went wrong," in Vance Joseph's first year as head coach and that "all of us take full responsibility for our first losing record in seven years."

"With our organization now turning its attention toward the offseason, we'll continue to have the highest expectations on and off the field," Ellis wrote. "That's the standard created by Pat Bowlen, and our commitment is to protect the winning tradition that he's established during his ownership of the Broncos."

"Personally, it's important to note that we cannot fall back on our past success. While expectations will not be lowered, there can never be assumptions or an entitled mentality from our organization."

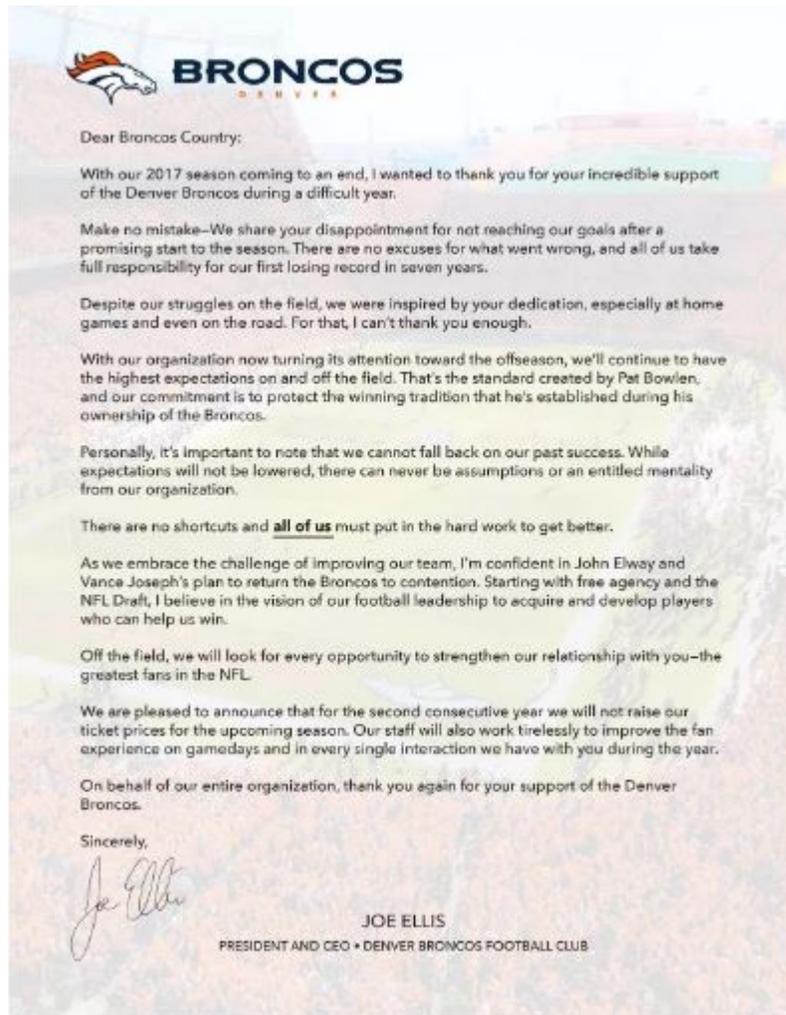
The Broncos haven't budged on ticket prices since their Super Bowl-winning season in 2015. They failed to make the playoffs in 2016 before Gary Kubiak stepped down from coaching, then fell further while trying to make it back in 2017.

Joseph will stay on for a second season as head coach and he will do so with many new faces on his staff and his roster. The team parted with six assistants on Monday, including longtime running backs coach and assistant head coach, Eric Studesville.

"There are no shortcuts and all of us must put in the hard work to get better," Ellis added in his letter. "As we embrace the challenge of improving our team, I'm confident in John Elway and Vance Joseph's plan to return the Broncos to contention. Starting with free agency and the NFL draft, I believe in the vision of our football leadership to acquire and develop players who can help us win."

Last year the Broncos faced heavy criticism for "weeding out" season-ticket holders who did not attend a single game in 2016. At the time the team said the legal revocation of certain season-ticket holders put "more tickets in the hands of Denver Broncos fans." But it outraged many who claimed they weren't warned of the policy and who remained skeptical the team could prove what tickets were sold.

“We will always want to put tickets in the hands of people that want to go to the games,” Ellis said Tuesday. “That process last year, we had unveiled a lot of people that quite frankly were selling their seats for straight profit. That’s not what we want. We have a big waiting list. I’ve also encouraged our people to get these tickets in the hands of people that have been waiting and that will come to games. That is our intention.”



# For third straight offseason, John Elway's top task for Broncos: find elusive stability at quarterback

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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The Hall of Fame quarterback returned his team to the mountaintop by finding a future Hall of Fame quarterback to guide it.

John Elway, in his second season as the Broncos' general manager in 2012, convinced Peyton Manning to finish his already stellar career in Denver, and that recruitment turned into two Super Bowl trips and one championship.

But since Manning retired following the championship at the end of the 2015 season, the Broncos are 14-18, a stretch defined by some of the most inadequate quarterback play in the NFL. Now, the spotlight is once again on Elway to find another player who can return the Broncos to a championship level.

"There is no doubt we have to get better at that position," Elway said Tuesday. "For us to get better, we have to get better at that position."

The Broncos had the NFL's most dysfunctional quarterback situation this past season. Denver made five different changes at the starting spot among Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch, the team's first-round pick in 2016. It was the first time since 2003 the Broncos started more than two quarterbacks in the same season. The chaotic shuffling produced predictable results. The Broncos had more interceptions (22) than touchdown passes (19) and had the second-worst quarterback rating (73) in the league.

Just two days after Denver ended its season with a 5-11 record, Elway wasn't ready to provide a point-by-point plan of attack for how the Broncos will search for their starting quarterback in 2018. Siemian, Lynch and 2017 seventh-round pick Chad Kelly are all under contract for next season, but it's certain the Broncos will seek outside help at the position.

Elway pointed to free agency, where Kirk Cousins could be the top prize, and April's NFL draft, where the Broncos could have their choice of top prospects at the No. 5 spot, as avenues Denver will explore to find another quarterback.

"Eventually, as we get time and time goes forward, we'll put a plan together and go from there," Elway said.

Elway stopped short Tuesday of giving a vote of confidence to any quarterback on Denver's 2017 roster. Trevor Siemian, who led the Broncos to a 3-1 start, lost his job three weeks later amid an avalanche of turnovers. His second stint as the starter — after Osweiler and Lynch had turns in the role — was ended by shoulder injury he suffered Dec. 14, and he is having more tests on that shoulder this week.

Osweiler, a second-round pick of Elway in 2012, is an unrestricted free agent. He signed a one-year deal with the Broncos just before the beginning of the season following a forgettable 2016 season as

Houston's starter. He was brought back, following a brief stint with the Browns, as a familiar entity after a preseason injury to Lynch, and he went 0-4 as a starter.

Then there's Lynch, who was expected to receive an extended audition as the starter, beginning with his third career start at Oakland on Nov. 26. But he injured his right ankle in the second half of that game and wasn't able to return until Sunday's finale against the Chiefs, where he produced a mixed-bag performance with two touchdown passes and three turnovers.

Elway admitted Tuesday he wished he had more data on Lynch.

"The unfortunate thing with Paxton is that we didn't get a chance to see him as much as we wanted to this year," Elway said. "That's the unfortunate thing. ... We have to figure out where he is in the process as far as him developing as the quarterback. There's no question we have to figure that out. The hardest thing is we didn't get to see him play this year and he didn't get that experience that we were hoping to get him."

# Broncos outline former coach Gary Kubiak's expanded role in team's front office

By Nick Kosmider  
Denver Post  
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Broncos' general manager John Elway confirmed Tuesday that Gary Kubiak, who has worked for the Broncos in positions ranging from backup quarterback to head coach, will have a larger role in the team's front office heading into the offseason.

Just don't ask Elway to provide an exact title.

"You know, I keep getting asked that and I'm not sure what the title's going to be," Elway said. "I don't even know what his title is now. I know what he's going to be doing, so I haven't worried about the title."

For the record, the title for Kubiak in 2017 was senior personnel advisor. He took that job in July, six months after he stepped down following two seasons as Denver's head coach — a stint that included a Super Bowl victory. Kubiak's role will be expanded, Elway said, to include personnel contributions ahead of free agency and the NFL draft.

"He's a guy who has a lot of knowledge of football — a very good evaluator, too," Elway said. "So he'll help us in that area."

Kubiak figures to yield influence in Denver's search for a starting quarterback. He joined Elway and director of player personnel Matt Russell at the Cotton Bowl last week, where potential first-round pick Sam Darnold was playing quarterback for USC.

"I think it's going to be fun for John and (Kubiak) and for us," Broncos president Joe Ellis said of Kubiak's expanded role. "He'll add some expertise to the proceedings. I'm excited about it."

**Assistant interview.** Former University of Texas at El Paso head coach Sean Kugler was at Broncos' headquarters Tuesday to interview for the open offensive line coaching job, according to an NFL source. Before coaching UTEP, his alma mater, from 2013 to 2017, Kugler was an offensive line coach for the Bills and Steelers from 2007 to 2012. He was also a tight ends coach and an offensive line coach for the Lions from 2001 to 2005.

The Broncos fired Jeff Davidson as their offensive line coach Monday after one season.

**Footnote.** The Broncos are one of six teams up for mandatory inclusion on the next season of HBO's "Hard Knocks," NFL.com reported Tuesday. The show gives viewers an inside look at the training camp of an NFL team. The 49ers, Browns, Chargers, Ravens and Redskins are also eligible.

**Hall of Fame.** Broncos Ring of Famer John Lynch and former safety Brian Dawkins moved a step closer to Canton.

The two were named finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2018 and will go up for vote for enshrinement by the Hall's selection committee on Feb. 3, the day before Super Bowl LII.

Lynch, currently the San Francisco 49ers general manager, has been named a finalist five times, while Dawkins has made the finalist round twice.

Ty Law, a Broncos cornerback in 2009, was also named one of the 15 modern-era finalists.

# Siemian to have second surgery in two years on non-throwing shoulder

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Trevor Siemian, the Broncos' starting quarterback in 2016 and for 10 games this season, will have his left, non-throwing shoulder surgically repaired Wednesday.

It's the second time in two years Siemian's left shoulder will be operated by Dr. Neal ElAttrache at the Kerlan-Jobe Clinic in Los Angeles.

"It's unrelated to what I had last year," Siemian said in a phone interview with 9News. "Just my annual left shoulder repair."

Like last year, Siemian will be out two months, but again should be ready by the start of organized team activities (OTAs).

The surgery in early January last year repaired torn ligaments and a grade 5 separation in his left shoulder, an injury he played with most of the 2016 season. He played well, too, throwing 18 touchdowns against 10 interceptions while posting an 8-6 record overall.

Siemian sprained his left shoulder again in Game 5 this season against the New York Giants. He only missed a few plays that time but he later suffered a subluxation in his left shoulder after getting sacked to the Indianapolis turf in game 14 on December 14. The injury forced Siemian to miss the final two games of the season.

Initially, there was hope Siemian wouldn't require another surgery, but a second opinion from his shoulder surgeon determined otherwise.

Siemian, 26, has one more year left on his four-year rookie contract that will pay him a team-favorable \$705,000 in 2018. The question is whether he will still be with the Broncos come March 14, when the 2018 league season opens for trades and free agent signs.

# Elway: Joseph won back job with re-interview two weeks ago

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 3, 2018

Vance Joseph and John Elway sat side-by-side for their state-of-the-Broncos press conference in the UCHealth Training Center auditorium.

There were times when I started squirming for them.

There was Elway talking about how he did essentially consider moving on from his head coach after the Denver Broncos finished 5-11 in 2017.

Awk-ward. Then again, this is professional football. Elway said it straight and Joseph never flinched.

"It's my responsibility to think about other options," Elway said. "To kind of see what would be best for our football team. Kind of thought of different options but ultimately our goal was to stay with Vance and give that a shot and I will say to give him the best opportunity to be successful. I don't feel like we gave him that chance. ... And that's on me."

Later, in an interview with 9NEWS, Elway went deeper into the process of how he came about retaining Joseph.

"The hardest part was 5-11," Elway said. "Going through that process really the last couple weeks of the season trying to figure out, 'Is Vance the right guy? And if he's not the right guy, who is that?'"

Two weeks ago, Elway and Joseph had a heart-to-heart, closed-door talk. It was after discussion that Elway said he started to become convince to stick with Joseph.

"I kind of went back to an interview process with him," Elway said. "I said, 'OK, now we know what we know. Tell me how you're going to fix it.'"

"He had a lot of good answers there. It was at that point in time I was leaning Vance. But obviously with my job and the expectations they have of me here is I had to explore different options to see what else was available and ultimately it came down to I think Vance is still the right man for the job.

On the personnel side, we've got to do a better job of helping him in certain situations to give him a chance to be successful." (To see our sit-down interview with Elway, watch "The Broncos Huddle" at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday on 9News and 10:30 p.m. Wednesday on Channel 20).

Joseph said he wants to coach his coaches better. And he will have new coaches after firing six on Monday, including running backs coach Eric Studesville, receivers coach Tyke Tolbert and offensive line coach Jeff Davidson.

“As far as our football team you have to make some changes and in my opinion, it was time to move on to change the culture in certain rooms,” Joseph said. “Obviously, Eric and Tyke and Jeff Davidson are all good people and football coaches. They’ve been here through a lot of winning years.

“In my opinion, it was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best that they can be and getting our best players to play at their best all the time.”

More squirming. The Broncos will not make any more coaching staff changes, at least for now. Joe Woods will return as defensive coordinator and Bill Musgrave as offensive coordinator. The team is searching for a new special teams coordinator to replace Brock Olivo, who was also fired Monday.

There will be a seventh coaching change. A league source told 9News that Joseph is targeting Ben McAdoo or Ken Zampese as his quarterbacks coach, a position currently held on an interim basis by Klint Kubiak.

McAdoo, the New York Giants’ recently fired head coach, was on the San Francisco 49ers’ staff with Joseph in 2005. Zampese and Joseph were on the Cincinnati Bengals’ coaching staff in 2014-15.

Both McAdoo and Zampese are first hoping to fill an offensive coordinator position. Klint Kubiak will be retained on the coaching staff. The Broncos are also interviewed former UTEP head coach Sean Kugler for their vacant offensive line coach Tuesday and will interview their own offensive line assistant Chris Strausser for the top job.

About 20 minutes after Elway and Joseph held their joint press conference, Broncos’ president and chief executive officer Joe Ellis addressed the media and took responsibility for perhaps allowing a satisfied mindset to infiltrate UHealth Training Center after the franchise enjoyed so much success from 2011-15, when it won five consecutive AFC West Division titles, played in two Super Bowls and won one world championship.

“Expectations are fine, we should always have them but we shouldn’t make assumptions,” Ellis said. “And I feel like there’s times where you get a sense that as an organization maybe we’re looking at a slogan on the wall, or three Super Bowl trophies in the locker room, or Super Bowl banners at the stadium facing our audience. We kind of assume that is the way it’s going to be.

“If I let that creep into the organization, then I am the one that has to stop that mindset. I talked to John about it. I talked to Vance about it. They understand. We had good discussions. I’m going to talk to a lot of people in the organization about it in the next month. I feel responsible that I allow that. I’m not saying it’s widespread, but if it is in there— and my sense is that at times it became that way—that needs to stop. I’m in charge of that.”

One sign of progress: The Sports Authority signs are coming down. No more looking at a bankrupt company. You gotta start somewhere.

# Broncos freeze ticket prices for second consecutive year

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 3, 2018

The Broncos may be a proud franchise, but they are not audacious.

Not this year, they're not. In fact, for the second consecutive year, the Broncos will not raise ticket prices. It's no coincidence the ticket freezes have occurred after the Broncos missed the playoffs each of the past two years.

The Broncos lost 7 of their last 12 games in 2016 to finish 9-7 and slumped to 5-11 in Vance Joseph's first year as head coach in 2017.

The average price of a Broncos' general-admission ticket (not including premium and luxury suite seating) stays at a little more than \$101, which is about the NFL average. (The Broncos did raise ticket prices each year following their five-year playoff run from 2011-16). The Broncos' average ticket price for all seats is \$190.

The secondary market suggests the Broncos could charge more. According to Vivid Seats, the Broncos commanded an average priced ticket of \$302 in 2017, second only to the \$380 average price for New England Patriots' secondary-market tickets. The NFL's average priced ticket on the secondary market is \$172.

The Broncos' ticket prices, though, have stayed the same since 2015 season. Fans may have felt they got more for their money that year as the team went 12-4 in the regular season, won two home AFC playoff games, then went on to capture Super Bowl 50.

The Broncos' on-field product has fallen drastically the past two years but at least fans aren't paying more to watch it.

On Tuesday morning, President and CEO Joe Ellis wrote a letter thanking fans for their support after a difficult season.

# 'Sports Authority Field' sign to come down off Broncos stadium

By Jeremy Chavez

9 News

January 3, 2018

Ding. Dong. The Sports Authority Field sign will soon be gone.

On Tuesday, during the Broncos season ending press conference Broncos President and CEO Joe Ellis announced that the Sports Authority name and sign will soon be removed from the Broncos team stadium.

Ellis said he spoke with stadium general manager Jay Roberts he told the and stated, "We are in the process of having engineers looking [at the stadium]. We are going to take the [Sports Authority] signs down. All exterior signage will come down, starting in about a week or 10 days."

**@MikeKlis**

**So "eventually to be renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High" will now be renamed "no longer hanging the sign of Sports Authority Field at Mile High." #9sports**

**12:21 PM - Jan 2, 2018**

**9 Replies 12 Retweets 41 likes**

It's been a long time coming after Sports Authority Inc. declared Chapter 11 Bankruptcy on March 2016 and declared all stores would close at the end of August 2016.

However, they have yet to announce the new name or one that will replace the giant red and blue logo.

"I suspect by the start of the season we'll either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name," Ellis said.

In the mean time, the stadium moves from one awkward name based on liquidated company to no name at all. Maybe when they finally announce a name, Broncos fans will finally know what to call the home of the Denver Broncos, or just stick with Mile High Stadium.

# Here are the Broncos' 2018 opponents

By Alexander Kirk

9 News

January 3, 2018

After watching the Broncos limp to a last-place finish in the AFC West, fans have turned their attention to the clean slate of 2018.

The opponents the Broncos will face next year were finalized on Sunday.

The teams coming to soon-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High include the Cleveland Browns, Pittsburgh Steelers, Los Angeles Rams and Seattle Seahawks.

As always, the Broncos will play home and away games against AFC West foes Kansas City Chiefs, Los Angeles Chargers and Oakland Raiders.

The Broncos will head on the road in 2018 to play the Baltimore Ravens, Cincinnati Bengals, Arizona Cardinals and San Francisco 49ers.

Dates and times have not been announced for the 2018 schedule and preseason opponents have not been announced. NFL schedules are typically finalized in April.

# Many Broncos now have to wait to see if they're part of the team's plan

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 3, 2018

The Denver Broncos' top football decision-maker John Elway said Monday, one day after the Broncos had closed out a 5-11 season with a 27-24 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs, that the 2018 season had "officially" begun.

They opened that offseason work with a morning announcement the Broncos would retain coach Vance Joseph, then quickly followed it with an afternoon shake-up as several assistant coaches were shown the door, including two of the team's longest tenured -- assistant head coach/running backs Eric Studesville and wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert.

The Broncos players, who spent Monday morning taking exit physicals as part of their to-do list, were also set to deal with their own brand of uncertainty. Free agency doesn't open for another two months, but many who participated in the Broncos' troubled season were left to wonder what the future might hold.

"I've said it before, this whole business is uncertainty," said running back C.J. Anderson. "Everybody has to deal with that in some way. I hope I'm back, but those decisions aren't up to me."

Anderson just concluded a 1,007-yard season, but his contract is structured in such a way that, despite two years remaining on the deal, the Broncos could release him without any "dead money" penalty against the salary cap.

The Broncos have used a pick in each of the past two drafts on a running back -- Devontae Booker in 2016 and De'Angelo Henderson in 2017. The Broncos had been ready to give Booker a look as the main back when training camp opened, but a wrist fracture was discovered and Booker didn't play until Week 4 and didn't have more than eight carries in a game until Week 11.

Then there's the expected makeover behind center. Quarterback Brock Osweiler is set to be an unrestricted free agent while quarterback Trevor Siemian has a year remaining on his deal, but both know there are changes coming at the position.

On his chances to be back, Osweiler said: "Absolutely. I love the Denver Broncos. I love this organization. I love the coaches. I love the support staff. I love the city. I love the state ... I would love to be a Bronco for as long as I possibly can."

Siemian, who won back-to-back training camp battles to earn the starting job before he was benched this season and then suffered a season-ending shoulder injury after he had returned to the lineup, has a year left on his deal. Siemian, like Osweiler, knows the Broncos are already scouting the draft's best quarterback prospects and that Paxton Lynch was a first-round pick in 2016.

"I haven't thought that far ahead to be honest with you," Siemian said. "As far as I know, I'm under contract another year. Excited to be back here. I have a lot of great teammates and coaches here."

"I just want to get better," Lynch said. "Whatever I can do in the offseason to get better ... The goal is always to come back better than when you left."

Cornerback Aqib Talib, who will turn 32 next month, is another veteran player whose contract the Broncos may feel compelled to look at. Talib was just selected to his fourth Pro Bowl in four seasons with the Broncos and has two years remaining on his deal he signed in 2014.

But most of the guaranteed money in the deal is off the books and, if the Broncos chose, they could release him and have a dead money charge of \$1 million. He is scheduled to count \$12 million against the cap next season. Talib has said he doesn't know what the Broncos will do, but "if they want me back, I want to be back."

Linebacker Todd Davis, who has been a starter for the past two seasons, is one of the Broncos' front-line free agents. He finished second on the team in tackles, with 82.

"I love this team and I love the organization," Davis said. "We'll see what happens. I'm very excited for the future with this organization, but we'll see ... Being a Cali boy I never would have thought I'd love Denver this much, but I really love it here. I think it's a great, great city and great people ... so I would love to get a contract here and stay here."

But as they all loaded boxes and shoved clothes and other gear into plastic bags, they all knew the change that had been promised one floor above them would arrive soon enough.

"It's coming," said linebacker Brandon Marshall. "There are changes every year, that's the league, but when you finish like we finished, everybody knows they're not just going to let that go."

# Broncos president's letter to fans: 'There are no excuses'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 3, 2018

In a letter posted on the team's website Tuesday morning, Denver Broncos president/CEO Joe Ellis thanked the team's fans for their support this past season and said, in part, "there are no excuses for what went wrong."

In the letter, Ellis offered, "Make no mistake. We share your disappointment for not reaching our goals after a promising start to the season. There are no excuses for what went wrong, and all of us take full responsibility for our first losing record in seven years."

After a 3-1 start that included a dominant 41-17 victory over the Dallas Cowboys in Week 2, the Broncos crumbled following a Week 5 bye. They lost eight consecutive games -- the first eight-game losing streak since 1967 -- and finished 5-11, including Sunday's 27-24 home loss to the Kansas City Chiefs.

In his letter, Ellis noted the team will "continue to have the highest expectations on and off the field. That's the standard created by Pat Bowlen, and our commitment is to protect the winning tradition that he's established during his ownership of the Broncos."

The Broncos have now missed the playoffs in back to back seasons for the first time since 2009-2010. That was Josh McDaniels' two seasons as head coach, and McDaniels was fired with four games remaining in the 2010 season.

John Elway was hired as the Broncos' top football decision-maker after the 2010 season. The Broncos retained coach Vance Joseph, who just completed his first season on the job, but Joseph and Elway fired six assistant coaches Monday, including the team's two longest-tenured assistants in assistant head coach/running backs Eric Studesville and wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert.

"Personally, it's important to note we cannot fall back on our past success. While expectations will not be lowered, there can never be assumptions or an entitled mentality from our organization," Ellis wrote.

The Broncos also announced Tuesday they would not raise ticket prices for the second consecutive season.

# John Elway: Broncos have 'got to get better' at QB position

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 3, 2018

John Elway minced no words about the biggest offseason question the Denver Broncos must answer.

What the team does at quarterback will be on the top of every to-do list as it attempts to dig out of its 5-11 mess.

In a 26-minute season wrap-up alongside coach Vance Joseph, Elway summed it all up with "the No. 1 goal is we know we have to get better at that position."

"We expect to have an answer there, however that goes," said Elway, the Broncos' president of football operations and general manager. "I think that thought process makes me think we're going to have a better year. Because the fact is we've got to figure out how to get that position playing better. ... There is no doubt we've got to get better at that position. For us to have a chance to get better, we've got to get better at that position."

The Broncos just closed out their worst season since 2010, when they went 4-12. And the team's struggling offense -- QBs Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch all started at various points in the season -- has taken the brunt of the blame in the first two days of the offseason.

On Monday, Joseph fired six assistant coaches, including Eric Studesville (assistant head coach/running backs), Tyke Tolbert (wide receivers) and Jeff Davidson (offensive line). That was after offensive coordinator Mike McCoy had already been fired in November.

Elway on Tuesday simply confirmed what all of the quarterbacks on the roster already knew -- there are no givens at the position.

The Broncos finished tied for 26th in scoring (18.1 points per game), were 20th in passing (208.3 yards per game), tied for third in most sacks allowed (52), tied for 25th in receiving touchdowns (19), were 31st in passer rating (73.0), threw the second-most interceptions (22) and suffered their first shutout loss in 25 years.

Only the winless Cleveland Browns had more turnovers than the Broncos did this season.

Siemian, Lynch and Chad Kelly, a rookie who spent the season on injured reserve, are all under contract for next season. It's highly unlikely they all will be with the team when the offseason program begins.

Elway, who has already scouted the likes of Wyoming quarterback Josh Allen and USC quarterback Sam Darnold in person, said the Broncos will look at both free agency and the draft to find a long-term starter at the position.

"We're going to go through that whole thing," Elway said. "We'll look at what's available in free agency as well as the draft, where we sit in the draft. ... That whole evaluation will come. Free agency comes first. We'll look at that situation and understand where we are in the draft and what's available in the draft."

While the Broncos have the No. 5 overall pick in the April draft, president and CEO Joe Ellis said Tuesday that the team is in a position to spend what it wants in free agency, where the list could include high-profile quarterbacks such as Drew Brees or Kirk Cousins.

The Broncos traded up to select Lynch with the 26th overall pick in the 2016 draft, but Elway wouldn't commit to Lynch for next season other than saying he needs to get better and will be part of the discussion.

Because of a preseason shoulder injury and an ankle injury suffered Nov. 26 against the Oakland Raiders, Lynch missed roughly two-thirds of the season's practices and started just two games. He has also already lost back-to-back training camp battles to Siemian.

"The unfortunate thing with Paxton is we didn't get a chance to see him as much as we wanted this year," Elway said. "... That falls in the process too, and we've got to figure out where he is in the process as far him developing as the quarterback. There's no question we've got to figure that out too. ... That's one that's going to be high on the topics of discussion where we think he is and if he can that guy moving forward."

# Broncos CEO Joe Ellis has a message: Work hard, assume less

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 3, 2018

It seems that Super Bowl hangover lasted longer -- like, perhaps, almost two seasons longer -- than the Denver Broncos assumed it would.

At least that was the assessment of team president/CEO Joe Ellis on Tuesday as the Broncos began to pick through the rubble of their 5-11 finish. The Broncos may have won Super Bowl 50 to close out the 2015 season, but the back-to-back playoff misses that have followed that title had Ellis citing the team's third Super Bowl win as still having an impact.

"I would say that one thing that I feel, a characteristic had seeped into our building a little bit, both of our buildings maybe," Ellis said Tuesday. "... Expectations are fine, we should always have them, but we shouldn't make assumptions. And I feel like there's times, I just get a sense as an organization, maybe we're looking at a slogan on the wall or three Super Bowl trophies in our locker room or Super Bowl banners at a stadium ... and we kind of assume that's the way it's going to be."

Ellis, who is the team's top executive and has oversight on all decisions, then added: "And if I let that creep into the organization, then I'm the one that has to stop that mindset."

There are certainly plenty of football matters to attend to now that the Broncos have missed the playoffs in two consecutive seasons for the first time since 2009-2010, things like the uncertainty at quarterback, the season-long struggles on offense and subpar special-teams play. But Tuesday, Ellis, president of football operations/general manager John Elway and coach Vance Joseph, who was not with the team during the Super Bowl run, all pointed to the prospect of far more tough love.

Ellis said he had met with both Elway and Joseph on the topic and offered he would meet with others in the organization as well in the weeks to come.

For his part Joseph, who was in his first season as a head coach, pointed to how he managed his coaching staff during the season and then how that staff managed the players. The Broncos were 3-1 at one point and then went 2-10 after their Week 5 bye, including an eight-game losing streak, the team's longest since 1967.

"Early on I didn't do a good job of pushing our coaches," Joseph said. "... I allowed guys to, obviously, coach, that was my goal. But I wasn't very good at coaching the coaches. I'll get better at that -- that was one of my shortcomings."

Joseph fired six assistant coaches on Monday, including three on offense in assistant head coach/running backs Eric Stutesville, wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert and offensive line coach Jeff Davidson. Stutesville had been with the Broncos since 2010, while Tolbert had been hired in 2011.

But Joseph cited the need to push players harder in making the changes.

"In my opinion, it was time to move on to change the culture in certain rooms," Joseph said. "Obviously Eric and Tyke and Jeff Davidson are all good people and football coaches. They've been here through a lot of winning years. In my opinion, it was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best that they can be and getting our best players to play at their best all the time. It was more about the overall confidence of the offense and getting back to being a dominant unit versus [being] personal about the coaches."

For his part Ellis posted an open letter to the team's fans on the Broncos website Tuesday morning that offered "no excuses" would be made for this past season. Ellis also added in the letter that "personally, it's important to note we cannot fall back on our past success. While expectations will not be lowered, there can never be assumptions or an entitled mentality from our organization."

Ellis said Tuesday the Broncos are in position financially to make any moves in free agency Elway deems necessary to return to the playoff conversation. This season was just the sixth losing season the team has had since Pat Bowlen became the primary owner in 1984.

"Yes, that is the shortest answer I can give -- we are in good shape," Ellis said. "I really think that the most important part of my job is to give John [Elway] and all of the football staff -- coaches, operations, everybody -- the resources that they need for us to be successful. Sometimes it doesn't always work out, but I really feel in the long run if we do that each and every year, we should be set up for success."

# Trevor Siemian to have surgery on left shoulder for 2nd straight year

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 3, 2018

For the second consecutive season, Denver Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian will have surgery on his left shoulder.

Siemian underwent an evaluation Tuesday in Los Angeles and will have surgery Wednesday to repair the damage from a dislocation suffered Dec. 14 against the Indianapolis Colts. Siemian was sacked by linebacker Barkevious Mingo and landed hard on his non-throwing shoulder.

Siemian left that game and did not play again after being placed on injured reserve.

With a recovery period of eight to 12 weeks, Siemian will likely miss the conditioning portion of the Broncos' offseason program. However, he's expected to be ready to participate in OTAs and minicamps.

Siemian also had surgery on his left shoulder following the 2016 season after playing for most of the season with an AC joint sprain.

Siemian said his shoulder was "a little sore" as players went through their exit physicals Monday.

"Sleeping is kind of tough, but it's all right," he said. "... I have to get this shoulder taken care of. I'll do that and then, just like everybody else, come back to work and get better."

Siemian said this latest surgery is unrelated to his surgery last year.

The seventh-round pick in the 2015 draft has one year remaining on his original rookie contract.

"I haven't thought that far ahead to be honest with you," Siemian said when asked if he expected to be part of the Broncos' plans in 2018. "As far as I know, I'm under contract another year. Excited to be back here. I have a lot of great teammates and coaches here. It's a good group to be a part of."

Siemian has won back-to-back training camp battles for the starting job and started 10 games this season. However, the Broncos' offense struggled mightily at times, especially with turnovers, as Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch all started games for the team.

Siemian finished with 2,285 yards passing with 12 touchdowns and 14 interceptions. He was sacked 33 times and finished with a 73.3 passer rating.

Broncos president of football operations and general manager John Elway has promised an overhaul at the position. So, while Siemian, Lynch and Chad Kelly, a rookie who spent this season on injured reserve, are all under contract, the Broncos are expected to take a long look at quarterbacks in both free agency and the draft.

# Broncos may be closer to a rebuild than a reboot this time around

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 3, 2018

Just under a year ago, Denver Broncos coach Vance Joseph was in the same meeting room inside the team's complex as he was Tuesday talking about what was to come.

Circumstances were far different then.

On Jan. 12, 2017, Joseph was formally introduced as the Broncos' newest head coach, and among the things he said about the state of affairs of the team he had been hired to lead was this:

"This job won't be a rebuild. Again, most jobs that are taken by a first-time head coach or most jobs that are open, it's a rebuild. This job is not broken. It's a reboot."

Well, it's safe to say sometimes life comes at you fast in the football business.

On Tuesday, Joseph was in that same room, once again alongside Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway, trying to sift through a 5-11 finish, the decision to fire six assistant coaches and figuring out how, exactly, to make repairs.

The tone of things was far different, and the Broncos look far closer to a rebuild of sorts than they do a reboot. They had an eight-game losing streak this season, lost four games by at least 20 points, suffered their first shutout loss in a quarter century and don't have a long-term answer at quarterback.

Even Elway, who so famously said "there's no Plan B" when he signed Peyton Manning in 2012, took a far more measured approach Tuesday when he talked about the team's future and how much work it would take to dig out from the Broncos' worst finish since 2010. That was the season before Pat Bowlen hired Elway to his current post.

Asked about whether the Broncos, who had won five consecutive AFC West titles from 2011 to '15 and finished 9-7 in a "down" 2016 season, could return to the playoff conversation quickly, Elway offered a far more tempered view than usual.

"We hope so; you never know," Elway said. "I think that when you're 5-11, there are obviously some issues that we have to get handled. I think that is our goal. That's our mindset. Whether we can get there or not, I don't want to raise the expectation level by saying, 'Yes, automatically we're going to get back there.' But our goals have not changed for the Denver Broncos and what we want to do -- and that's to compete for world championships. Now we have to build towards that process. That starts now."

There were some in the organization who believed Joseph was on the doorstep of being fired as the season drew to a close, and even though he was retained, the Broncos head into the offseason with far

more in-house turmoil than they've had in years. The Broncos lost the season finale, 27-24, to the Kansas City Chiefs, capping a 2-10 mark after their Week 5 bye.

The Broncos went into that bye week 3-1, openly talking about their playoff potential. But they lost to the previously winless New York Giants in Week 6 -- one of only three wins for the Giants this season -- and never regained their footing.

They won back-to-back games in December, against the New York Jets (5-11) and Indianapolis Colts (4-12), but then lost games to the Washington Redskins and the Chiefs to close out the year.

The uncertainty at quarterback and significant staff turnover are the biggest hurdles for the Broncos. Their ability to go from a 4-12 finish in 2010 to an 8-8 finish in 2011 to four consecutive seasons of at least 12 wins and two Super Bowl trips was largely centered on Manning's arrival and Von Miller's rise to joining the league's best defensive players.

The Broncos finished No. 3 in total defense this season -- the fifth year in the past six they were among the league's top four in total defense -- but the unit had its struggles as well, as only the Giants surrendered more touchdown passes than the Broncos' 29. But Elway said Tuesday he still believed the defense provided a foundation.

"As a whole, the performance was very good when you look at the numbers," Elway said. "We still have a good base on the defensive side. Obviously, we have to get better offensively. We've been working towards that. We have to continue to work towards that. Can we get back there? Sure we can. That's our goal. That's what our fan base expects. That's what we expect of ourselves. That's what we expect of the coaching staff. We're working to that. Hopefully we can get there."

Joseph, too, knows the Broncos have work to do.

"When you're 5-11, it wasn't good enough from my chair, and that will change," he said.

# Elway, Joseph promise to fix Broncos' problems in 2018

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

January 3, 2018

Even though John Elway chose continuity over change, major shifts are afoot for the Denver Broncos in the wake of the team's most disappointing season in decades.

A day after deciding to retain head coach Vance Joseph, Elway said he's expanding Gary Kubiak's front office role to help him in free agency and the draft.

"I'm not sure what his title is going to be," Elway said Tuesday. "I don't even know what his title is now."

Kubiak returned to the Broncos last summer in a scouting capacity seven months after stepping down as their head coach over health concerns. As a senior personnel adviser, Kubiak scouted college and pro players and provided input on Denver's offense to Joseph, a protege and first-year head coach with defensive roots.

Elway said he considered firing his head coach following Denver's 5-11 finish, which was the worst in his seven seasons as the Broncos' chief football executive.

"It's my responsibility to think about other options to see what would be best for the football team," said Elway, who decided against embarking on a search for his fourth head coach in five years.

Elway said he shoulders some of the blame for Denver's dismal season and aims to fix the roster deficiencies this offseason to give Joseph a better hand.

"Looking back I feel good about the fact that we can stay where we are," Elway said. "With Vance making some changes on his staff ... we'll have a chance to get better."

Joseph jettisoned six assistants on New Year's Day, including longtime running backs coach Eric Stutesville, receivers coach Tyke Tolbert, O-line coach Jeff Davidson and special teams coordinator Brock Olivo.

Joseph said he wanted to "change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best that they can be and getting our best players to play at their best all the time."

Stutesville, whose firing rankled running back C.J. Anderson and other Broncos, is interviewing for the Giants' head coaching job Thursday.

Joseph said he's also taking the interim tag off offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave, who was promoted from quarterbacks coach when Mike McCoy was fired midseason with the Broncos in the midst of an eight-game skid that was their longest in a half-century.

"I think how we played offensively after we hired Billy was my vision of offense: to run the football, control the games, play great defense and to minimize the errors by the quarterback," Joseph said.

The Broncos were 5-0 when running the ball more than throwing it and 0-11 when they didn't.

Although they ranked third in the league in defense, they allowed 29 touchdown throws. Only the Giants, with 32, allowed more.

The offense sputtered behind the turnstile trio of QBs Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch, who combined for 19 TD throws, 22 interceptions and none of them topped Tim Tebow's career passer rating of 75.3.

Asked if one of the three QBs under contract for next season — Siemian, Lynch and Chad Kelly — could be the starter next season, Elway said, "I don't know," avoiding an endorsement for any of them, all of whom are his draft picks.

"There is no doubt we have to get better at that position," Elway said. "For us to have a chance to get better, we have to get better at that position."

Even with a new QB, Elway acknowledged there might not be any quick fixes to return to the playoffs.

"That is our goal. That's our mindset. Whether we can get there or not, I don't want to raise the expectation level by saying, 'Yes, automatically we're going to get back there,'" Elway said.

"But, our goals have not changed for the Denver Broncos and what we want to do — and that's to compete for world championships. Now, we have to build toward that process. That starts now. Hopefully, we can get back to where we're very competitive."

Joseph said he'll change some things in his own approach in 2018.

"Early on in the season, I didn't do a good job of pushing our coaches to make the proper changes that I thought could have helped us," Joseph said. "I allowed guys to coach — that was my goal — but I wasn't very good at coaching the coaches. I'll get better at that. That was one of my shortcomings."

Elway said he, too, is open to blunt self-assessments.

"I don't have all the answers," Elway said when asked what he had learned in 2017. "I want to search and find all the answers because I want this team to be as good as it can possibly be. I'm fortunate in the fact that I played for a long time. I've been in this job now for seven years. So, therefore, I'm always trying to get better. As soon as I think I have it down, I'll retire."

# Some Minneapolis streets begin closing ahead of Super Bowl

By Staff

Associated Press

January 3, 2018

With just over a month to go before the Super Bowl, some streets near U.S. Bank Stadium already are closing in downtown Minneapolis.

Parts of Chicago Avenue, Fifth Street South and Norm McGrew Place closed to traffic Tuesday. Those streets will remain closed until Feb. 11, a week after the Super Bowl.

Minnesota Public Radio reports more closures will follow in two weeks, when Nicollet Mall closes for Super Bowl-related activities. Eighth Street on either side of the mall also will close later that week.

Streets around Minneapolis Convention Center also will close the week before the Super Bowl to accommodate the Super Bowl Experience, the NFL theme park that accompanies the championship every year.

More street closures in downtown Minneapolis kick in Feb. 2, the Friday before the game.

# Woody Paige: Vance Joseph fortunate he'll return to Broncos for a second season

By Woody Paige

KMGH

January 3, 2018

Of the six NFL head coaches hired before the 2017 season, only one took over a winning team.

And only one produced a team that was worse than the year before.

Vance Joseph was the only one.

Yet, Joseph has survived, barely.

After much vacillation (and head-scratching and soul-searching), John Elway, the master of all he sees of the Broncos at Dove Valley, finally decided to bring back Joseph for a second season.

Instead, six assistants were fired, joining Mike McCoy, who already was dumped on Nov. 20. A third of the staff is gone.

Joseph admitted in the season-summary media conference on Tuesday that he made mistakes as a rookie head coach, and Elway acknowledged that he could have given Joseph more help in the disastrous year that ended with the team's 11th loss.

The Broncos finished with their worst record since the Josh McDaniels Debacle, and even Coach McKid didn't lose 11 games in 2010. He was fired before season's end and replaced by interim coach Eric Stutesville, the running backs coach.

Joseph – with Elway's permission, or upon his orders – fired Stutesville, the longest-tenured coach on the Broncos' staff, and in his first season as assistant head coach. Wide receivers Tyke Tolbert, who had been in Denver since 2011, also was kicked out.

Brock Olivo, who never should have been hired in the first place, FINALLY was fired – but only after Joseph kept calling him an outstanding special teams coach throughout the season, although the Broncos proved they had the worst special teams in the entire league. And the statistics, and continued presence of Isaiah McKenzie on the field and the roster, verified that dubious achievement.

Former Broncos' lineman Jeff Davidson, who once protected Elway's backside, was not protected by Elway and Joseph. Davidson was thrown to the curb like the offensive line coaches that preceded it.

Alex Gibbs is not coming back. The greatest offensive line coach in the history of the franchise had enough of the Broncos years ago. Johnnie Lynn, we hardly knew ye or knew what you did. And outside linebackers coach Fred Pagac, who was on the Super Bowl championship staff, was unceremoniously bounced after three seasons here and 17 years in the NFL as an assistant, and 22 years before that with Ohio State.

Bill Musgrave, promoted from quarterbacks coach when McCoy was fired, retains his coordinator's job, despite failing to produce anything with three quarterbacks. And Joe Woods stays as the defensive coordinator although he was a considerable dropoff from Wade Phillips, who will be back in the playoffs with the Rams.

The rest of the assistants sighed, although they could have been gone, too.

Did Geep "Beep Beep" Chryst really do anything with the tight ends, who were no factor in the offense in '17?

Nevertheless, the Joseph decision is the most mysterious. He assumed control of a team that won the Super Bowl two seasons ago and missed by a game being in the playoffs the sixth straight season in 2016. Even he said in his inaugural meeting with the press, in which he seemed uncomfortable and uncertain, that he got the most attractive job of the six new head coaches. He said the Broncos were "retooling," not "rebuilding."

The Broncos were a negative four (9-7 to 5-11) from 2016 to 2017.

Compare to the other five:

Sean McVay, Rams, plus seven, 4-12 to 11-5. And he hired the Broncos' defensive coordinator from '16.

Doug Marrone, Jaguars, plus seven, 3-13 to 10-6. And he hired the Broncos' special teams coordinator from '16.

Anthony Lynn, Chargers, plus four, 5-11 to 9-7. And he was turned down by the Broncos, a team he had played for.

Sean McDermott, Bills, plus two, 7-9 to 9-7. And he hired the Broncos' offensive coordinator from '16.

Kyle Shanahan, 49ers, plus three, 2-14 to 5-11. He also was turned down by the Broncos, a team his dad coached to two Super Bowl victories.

McVay, who will be the NFL coach of the year, and Marrone won their divisions. The Bills slipped into the playoffs, and the Chargers, following an awful start, weren't eliminated from the postseason until the last week of the season.

Shanahan won his last four games.

Joseph's team lost eight consecutive games and defeated only two teams that ended up with winning records. The Broncos were last in the division and lost four of six games to AFC West opponents.

Shanahan should have been the choice.

Joseph is very fortunate he will return for a second, and probably, last season.

# Broncos' John Elway identifies quarterback as top priority, expands Kubiak's role

By Troy Renck

KMGH

January 3, 2018

In his first public comments since his worst season as a general manager, John Elway showed humility, honesty and candor as he attempts to execute a rebound.

Elway admitted he considered multiple options before retaining embattled coach Vance Joseph, ultimately believing Joseph, with a revamped coaching staff, will improve.

"There's nobody happier than me that 2017 is over. Maybe Vance," Elway said. "As I told Vance many times, he was drinking through a fire hose when you go through learning what it takes to be a head coach in this league. We thought about different options, but ultimately our goal was to stay with Vance."

Joseph acknowledged he made mistakes in his first season. He must coach his coaches better, a point I have discussed on numerous occasions. Joseph waited too long to assert control over the game plan, and it backfired with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy. Joseph said he should have addressed the offensive philosophy earlier, stressing the team run the ball. Joseph retained offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave and defensive coordinator Joe Woods, and will add six assistant coaches. Ben McAdoo, whom Joseph praised while coaching with him in San Francisco, is among the candidates for the quarterbacks coach position.

"Early on, I didn't do a good job of pushing the coaches. It was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players," Joseph said of the dismissed staff. "I know I need to do better."

Quarterbacks dominated Monday's press conference. The Broncos, if you have not realized, need a starter. A good one. In a pass-happy league, the Broncos ranked 25th in touchdowns through the air, while posting the second-most interceptions (22). Denver made six quarterback changes, leading every player, minus the quarterbacks, to admit any U-turn begins with consistency at that position. Elway did not disagree, acknowledging it undermined Joseph in his first season.

"That position did not perform as well as we wanted it to and it's not just on them. I think there's a lot of circumstances that went into that. Obviously a position that we feel like we have to get better at," Elway said. "There's no doubt we have to get better. For us to have any chance, we have to get better at that position."

While the Broncos look for a quarterback on the field, they promoted one off it. In a move long overdue for one of the smallest front offices in the NFL, the Broncos expanded the role of former coach Gary Kubiak. Kubiak, who stepped down as the team's coach in 2016 because of health reasons, will help with the draft and free agency.

"He's a guy that has a lot of football knowledge. He's a good evaluator, too," Elway said of Kubiak, who has known Elway since 1983 and guided the Broncos to a Super Bowl title in 2015. "He'll help us in that

area. I am not sure what his title is going to be. I don't even know what his title is now. I know what he's going to be doing, so I am not worried about the title."

This has been a difficult season for Elway. He helped frame this year's talk of this being a reboot, and dismissing the idea of windows closing. He was more measured in his response Monday about the team's immediate prospects -- a stance that makes sense with quarterback uncertainty and a roster in transition.

"When you are 5-11, there are obviously some issues that we have to get handled. I think that is our goal. Our mindset is to get back to the playoffs," Elway said. "But whether we can or not, I don't want to raise expectation level by saying, 'Yes, we are automatically going to get back there.'"

Elway received criticism for failed draft picks, with only first rounder Garrett Bolles contributing from this year's class. The Broncos have only selected one Pro Bowler since 2012 (Von Miller; Malik Jackson made the game this year, but plays for Jacksonville). Elway talked humbly of the challenge ahead, but clearly has not lost his edge for bite.

"I always try to get better. I don't have all the answers," Elway said. "I am fortunate that I played for a long time. I have been in this job for seven years, therefore I am always trying to get better. As soon as I think I have it down, I'll retire. Then, I'll be doing what you do (in talk radio) because then you know it all."

Elway is casting a wide net in his search for a quarterback. He allowed that if the Broncos start a rookie next season, it might take more time to execute a U-turn. He has no financial issues in free agency, so the Broncos are likely to pursue potential high-profile free agents Kirk Cousins and Drew Brees, any number of Minnesota's quarterback stable, while also exploring the trade market (Will Kansas City's Alex Smith become available?). The offense needs help in multiple areas. I asked Elway if he would consider trading a defensive player to upgrade the other side of the ball. A year ago, he said no. This year he is keeping an open mind, though it's not his preference (cornerback Aqib Talib, in my opinion, could be dealt).

"Once we let the dust settle, we will start putting a plan together. I really don't like taking away from a strength; I don't like doing it," Elway said. "I think that because if it's a known strength, and you're not positive, that you're going into another strength, I like what I know even though it might help us (to make a move)."

## **Footnotes**

The Broncos will begin removing the exterior signage at Sports Authority Field over the next week to 10 days. It has been an embarrassing eyesore to feature a bankrupt company on the building. A placeholder will be used or a new corporate sponsor will be featured by the opening of the season, Broncos CEO Joe Ellis said. ... The Broncos are not raising ticket prices. "When you see the kind of loyalty, commitment and emotions that are fans pour into this team, it's sort of the least we can do. I saw a few comments that we should lower them. Those aren't necessarily out of line," Ellis said. ... Ellis believes complacency settled in this season, something for which he holds himself responsible. "I feel like there are times where I just get a sense that as an organization maybe we're looking at a slogan on the wall, three trophies in the locker room or Super Bowl banners at the stadium facing our audience. We kind of assume that is the way it's going to be. If I let that creep into the organization, then I am the one that

has to stop that mindset. I talked to John. I talked to Vance. They understand. We had good discussions. I'm going to talk to a lot of people in the organization about it in the next month. I feel responsible that I allow that. I'm not saying it's widespread, but if it is in there -- and my sense is that, at times, it became that way -- that needs to stop. I'm in charge of that. On the accountability side, an entire community, 75,000 people that show up every Sunday, two other trustees and the Bowlen family. I feel like I'm accountable to a lot of people. This year was disappointing and a letdown. Now we are moving forward and looking toward the future. We've got to improve things."

# 'Sports Authority' name coming off Broncos stadium

By Jason Gruenauer

KMGH

January 3, 2018

The Broncos stadium may not have a new name, but they're going to start taking the old name off soon.

"We are going to take the [Sports Authority] signs down. All of the exterior signage will come down, starting in about a week or 10 days," Broncos President and CEO Joe Ellis told reporters on Tuesday.

The name will have to stay in place inside the stadium for a while longer because of events and concerts, according to Ellis.

So what now?

"I suspect by the start of the season we'll either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name. That is an important part to our capital funding moving forward," he added.

Ellis wouldn't put a time frame on a new name but added that the franchise has had "productive discussions" with companies.

# Lynch, Dawkins, Law are Broncos players named as 2018 Pro Football Hall of Fame finalists

By Blair Miller

KMGH

January 3, 2018

Three former Denver Broncos were named Tuesday as finalists for the 2018 class of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

John Lynch, Brian Dawkins and Ty Law are among the 15 finalists. The list was narrowed down from 27 semifinalists announced Nov. 21, which also included former Broncos Steve Atwater and Karl Mecklenburg, who did not make the lists of finalists.

Lynch is the only of the three who is a member of the Broncos' Ring of Fame. Lynch played the final four years of his career in Denver and was selected to the Pro Bowl each year. The Broncos made the playoffs in 2004 and 2005.

Dawkins played the final three years of his 16-year career with the Broncos, earning Pro Bowl nods in 2009 and 2011 after 13 years with Philadelphia.

Law played in seven games with the Broncos in the final season of his career, 2009, after 14 years with New England, Kansas City and the New York Jets.

Among the other finalists are Ray Lewis, Randy Moss, Brian Urlacher, Edgerrin James and Isaac Bruce.

**@ProFootballHOF**

**Congratulations to the 15 modern-era finalists! The official #PFHOF18 class will be selected on the eve of the Super Bowl.**

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# Sports Authority signs at the Denver Broncos stadium are coming down

By Monica Mendoza  
Denver Business Journal  
January 3, 2018

The Denver Broncos season has ended, and soon, so will the signs touting a failed sporting goods chain on the football team's stadium.

Denver Broncos President and CEO Joe Ellis said today at his end-of-season press conference that the Sports Authority signs at the stadium will come down.

When the \$400 million stadium opened in 2001, it was named Invesco Field at Mile High after Invesco Funds Group Inc. inked a 20-year naming-rights deal for \$120 million.

But then, Invesco hit financial hard times, and in 2011, Sports Authority, an Englewood-based retail company, bought the remaining 10 years on the naming contract.

But Sports Authority filed for bankruptcy in March 2016, following a missed interest payment and a round of store closures and layoffs. In the months that followed, the company sold off all of its assets.

The Broncos bought the remaining five years of the naming rights contract themselves for \$19 million while searching for a new buyer.

Today, Ellis said:

"I actually spoke with Jay Roberts this morning. He's our stadium general manager. We are in the process of having engineers looking — we are going to take the [Sports Authority] signs down. All of the exterior signage will come down, starting in about a week or 10 days, I think.

"The name needs to remain in place for a while because we have some placeholder events both inside the building and then in the bowl itself — some concerts and stuff. There is just some connection to that name whether it's through ticketing, event management or things like that."

Ellis went on to say that he suspected that by the start of the next season, "we'll either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name. That is an important part to our capital funding moving forward."

The Broncos, he said, have 13 seasons left on the lease at the stadium, which is owned by the Metropolitan Football Stadium District. The money from the naming rights contract is used each year to make improvements on the stadium.

"...I'd like to wrap up the naming rights deal and then extend that because the Broncos aren't going anywhere. There are different components. It's a complicated deal to put this together," Ellis said.

Ellis said there is no deadline per se to get a new naming rights contract. He has said he wants to get it right.

"We continue to have productive discussions with companies. I'm hoping we can get it resolved. The stadium has been terrific. I'm proud of the way stadium management company and all of them down there have maintained it and kept it up."

In November 2016, the Broncos hired a California marketing and talent agency, WME-IMG, to sell naming rights of their stadium.

# Broncos' 'No. 1 goal' for offseason: 'We have to get better' at quarterback

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
January 3, 2018

Make no mistake: While fixing what ails the Broncos doesn't end with the quarterback position, it starts there.

"I think there is no doubt we've got to get better at that position," President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway said. "For us to have a chance to get better, we've got to get better at that position."

Only the Browns finished the season with a lower team-wide passing-efficiency rating than the Broncos' figure of 73.0. Cleveland was also the only team with a worse season-long touchdown-to-interception differential than the Broncos' minus-3 (19 touchdowns, 22 interceptions).

"Obviously, that position didn't perform as well as we wanted it to. I thought it would perform better than it did," Elway said. "And it's not just on them; I think there's a lot of circumstances that went into that, that put them in tough situations. But we didn't perform as well as we'd like to, so that's obviously a position that we feel like we have to get better at going into next season."

Now the Broncos must figure out the potential solution, which could involve some combination of internal options, free agency or the draft, in which the Broncos have the No. 5 overall selection.

Starting quarterbacks from this season with expiring contracts who could be unrestricted free agents include Washington's Kirk Cousins, New Orleans' Drew Brees, Miami's Jay Cutler, Minnesota's Case Keenum and Sam Bradford, San Francisco's Jimmy Garoppolo and Josh McCown of the New York Jets. However, that field should look substantially different given that some of those names will likely be re-signed or given the franchise tag in the next two months.

The draft could present the Broncos with a handful of viable early-round choices depending on how the final collection of available quarterbacks looks when all potential early-entry candidates have declared by Jan. 15. For now, the field officially includes Wyoming's Josh Allen, Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield and Oklahoma State's Mason Rudolph, the last two of which are expected to headline the passers at the Senior Bowl later this month.

"We expect to have an answer there, one way or the other, however that goes," Elway said. "I think that thought process makes me think that we'll have a better year, because the fact is we've got to figure out how to get that position playing better. That's what we don't know going into it. There's a lot of unknowns."

"Until we kind of figure out exactly what that is -- once we figure that out, then we can set up a plan of how we want to attack it."

Part of the plan is evaluating the progress of Paxton Lynch, who made his fourth career start against the Kansas City Chiefs last Sunday and used a series of short, controlled passes to find an early rhythm en route to a 21-of-31, 254-yard, two-touchdown, two-interception performance.

"That falls in the process too and we have to figure out where he is in the process as far as him developing as the quarterback," Elway said. "There's no question, we have to figure that out, too."

"The hardest thing is that we didn't get to see him play this year and he didn't get that experience that we were so hoping to get him -- especially when he got hurt in the Raiders game. That's one that's going to be high on the topics as far as discussion -- where we think he is and if he can be that guy going into the future."

But whoever starts at quarterback to open the season will be asked to guide an offense that is more focused on establishing the ground game. That's what Head Coach Vance Joseph wants. That's what it did early in the season, and that's where he wants it to return.

"Our first goal was to run the football. In the first month of the season, we ran the football, we threw it, we scored points and we moved the ball, but the turnovers were still there -- and I blame myself for not addressing that part of our offense," Joseph said. "But our philosophy hasn't changed offensively: It's running the football, controlling the game, keeping third downs manageable -- for whoever's playing quarterback, that's the formula of winning football. That hasn't changed."

The final six games of the regular season under Offensive Coordinator Bill Musgrave offered a glimpse of what Joseph wanted to see. Denver ran the ball more often; 44.5 percent of the plays in the six games with Musgrave were runs, compared with 36.6 percent in the previous six games.

"How we played offensively after we hired Billy was my vision of offense: To run the football and control the games and to play great defense and to minimize the errors by the quarterback, and I thought Billy did a great job of calling the game that way," Joseph said.

An emphasis on the run would help any quarterback. But if the Broncos go the rookie route, it would provide an extra benefit to keep the pressure off that young passer as he develops.

That option is on the table, and if it is Denver's choice, Elway's experience in 1983 could provide guidance. It was rough at times. But by Week 15, he led the Broncos back from a 19-0 deficit to a 21-19 win over the Baltimore Colts that clinched the Broncos' first playoff win in four years. A season later, the Broncos were back atop the AFC West with a 13-3 record.

"Obviously it's not ideal, but I would say this: I did it," Elway said. "It was tough. You drink through a fire hose. But then again, if you make it through that you have a chance to be tough enough to handle it in this league, too. You have to play it by ear."

"The personality, if it is a young guy -- what's his personality? Where do you think he is?"

Whether the Broncos' 2018 quarterback is a rookie or a veteran, finding out the personality is crucial -- especially if he is a rookie, whose locker-room presence at the NFL requires a projection.

"Obviously stepping into that role when you come out of college -- in college you're allowed to be a kid. You come to the NFL and the expectation levels rise, especially if you're a high pick. You're expected to be good or show signs of being a very good player early," Elway said.

"The other half is how are they going to handle the situation and how are they going to handle the [significance] of being a quarterback in the NFL. That is the biggest part and I say it all the time. Just trying to figure out how these guys can handle the tough times, because there's going to be tough times. When the world feels like it's caving in are they going to be able to battle through that and not lose their confidence?"

For many young prospects, the NFL experience represents the first taste of failure. So many have been the best player at every level at which they've played all the way up the ladder from Pop Warner to college, and then they arrive and find a horde of teammates and opponents whose natural abilities and instincts match their own. Sometimes, then, you lose. So how do you handle the defeats -- both on the scoreboard and in the one-on-one matchups?

The answer to that so often determines who succeeds and who fails at this level.

"What gets you here is your swagger and your confidence as quarterback. You have a chance to play in the NFL and that's what gets you here and you can't be afraid of it. Then all of a sudden if you get in the world and all of a sudden things aren't going well, the world starts caving in on you and you lose that swagger or you lose that confidence, it's very, very difficult to get it back," Elway said.

"You have to figure out how strong they are, what they believe in and how strong they are, what they are as a quarterback and to be able to battle through that. If they can do that, then they have a chance to have a great, long career.

"To me, I say it all the time: It's 50 percent the physical side of it and 50 percent mental side. The heart and finding out what they have inside, that's the difficult part. Not only at the quarterback position, it's about every position because it comes down to what's inside, what's in that heart, how bad they want it and how great they want to be. If they want to be great football players, they have a chance to be great."

The evaluation of the possible quarterbacks, down to the most minute detail, will be arduous. The success or failure of the 2018 Broncos -- and perhaps seasons beyond -- could depend on it.

"We have to formulate that plan, exactly what it's going to be," Elway said. "With that being said, the No. 1 goal is we know we have to get better at that position."

# Broncos to increase Gary Kubiak's role, keep Bill Musgrave as offensive coordinator

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
January 3, 2018

The Broncos have begun to take steps toward a bounce-back season in 2018. After the team announced Monday it was parting ways with six assistant coaches, President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway and Head Coach Vance Joseph said on Tuesday that they will expand Senior Personnel Advisor Gary Kubiak's role and retain Bill Musgrave as offensive coordinator.

"We're going to enlarge Gary's role, as far as on the personnel side," Elway said. "Right now, he was working in college, [and] really doing the offensive side of the football for us. ... I'm going to give him a larger role. He's going to be involved in free agency, as well as the draft. He's a guy that's got a lot of knowledge of football, very good evaluator, too. So he'll help us in that area."

Kubiak, who coached the Broncos from 2015-16 before stepping away, spent the previous season working in Texas helping Elway's staff evaluate college prospects.

The Super Bowl 50 head coach has spent 23 years with the Broncos, including nine as a quarterback, 11 as an offensive coordinator and then two as a head coach.

Elway said he had not determined a title for Kubiak's new role. Musgrave's role increased when he was promoted to offensive coordinator after the Broncos parted ways with Mike McCoy on Nov. 20. Joseph said during Tuesday's end-of-season press conference that Musgrave will remain offensive coordinator.

The changes Musgrave made in his short time leading the offense impressed the Broncos' players, as they noted Monday.

"I think that's the thing when you go through a change like that in the middle of the season, you're not going to flip everything over on its head," Trevor Siemian said. "That's too tough and you have too much time spent on the scheme. I thought Coach Musgrave did a really nice job of making that transition, putting a few tweaks on it his way and keeping a little bit of the continuity we had."

*Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly quoted John Elway, saying that Gary Kubiak was not involved in scouting the offensive side of the football. DenverBroncos.com regrets the error.*

# Joe Ellis focuses on eliminating complacency to help return Broncos to their standard

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
January 3, 2018

The Broncos have not had many years where they haven't deliver on expectations, and President and CEO Joe Ellis remembers them well.

"Every time you have a season like this, you should never forget [it]," Ellis said. "... I've never forgotten 2010, and I won't forget this. I remember 7-9 in 2007. I remember 6-10 in 1999, my second year here, after we had gone 14-2 and breezed through the playoffs and won the Super Bowl."

Seasons like these, Ellis said, are reminders. They remind him to work harder or have more intense scrutiny, and they remind him what could happen more often if the organization doesn't maintain the standard to which it has held itself over the years.

"It just creates a greater sense of urgency, and then you have to maintain it," Ellis said. "You can't just say, 'OK, we've gotten to 2018, and this happened or that happened.' There are no guarantees what happens in 2018. I can assure you we will do everything we can in the next six months [or] seven months to get things back on track."

As part of that initiative, Joe Ellis walked through the parking lots at Sports Authority Field at Mile High three weeks ago, talking with fans and listening to the concerns and criticism they had for the team.

The feedback largely centered on the team's roster or the status of the stadium's naming rights, but it certainly wasn't limited to those topics.

Ellis had been a little apprehensive about the reaction he'd receive, as the team wouldn't break its eight-game losing streak until after that game, but the fans were cordial and honest, and he walked back to the stadium with a greater understanding of what worried them.

"It was appreciative criticism," Ellis said. "They were glad to be able to express it. It was wide-ranging, as I would have expected. But a lot of the fans recognize the history of the team, especially under Mr. [Pat] Bowlen and his terrific ownership, and the success that we've had. But there are expectations. They haven't changed, and they shouldn't. Our fans should always expect greatness out of this organization.

"And if we don't deliver it, then we better figure out each and every year how to."

As part of addressing that, Ellis has noticed a sense of complacency in light of recent achievements. Ending that mindset has become a focus for him as he helps steer the Broncos back to reaching its standard.

"Expectations are fine. We should always have them, but we shouldn't make assumptions," Ellis said. "I feel like there are times where I just get a sense that as an organization maybe we're looking at a slogan on the wall, three [Lombardi] trophies in the locker room or Super Bowl banners at a stadium facing our

audience. We kind of assume that is the way it's going to be. If I let that creep into the organization, then I am the one that has to stop that mindset. I talked to [President of Football Operations/General Manager] John [Elway] about it. I talked to [Head Coach] Vance [Joseph] about it. They understand. We had good discussions. I'm going to talk to a lot of people in the organization about it in the next month. I feel responsible that I allow that. I'm not saying it's wide-spread, but if it is in there, and my sense is that at times it became that way, that needs to stop."

# John Lynch, Brian Dawkins named 2018 Pro Football Hall of Fame finalists

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
January 3, 2018

The Denver Broncos' small group of Pro Football Hall of Famers could grow again in 2018.

Ring of Famer John Lynch was announced as a modern-era finalist for the 2018 Pro Football Hall of Fame class on Tuesday. This is Lynch's fifth straight year as a finalist for the Hall of Fame.

Lynch arrived in Denver in 2004 after 11 outstanding seasons with the Buccaneers, with whom he won Super Bowl XXXVII and earned five Pro Bowl trips, three First-Team All-Pro selections and one Second-Team All-Pro pick.

The heavy-hitting safety joined Champ Bailey in the Broncos' defensive backfield, immediately making Denver's passing defense one of the league's most formidable units. Though Lynch only played in Denver for four seasons, he made the most of his time as a Bronco, earning four more Pro Bowl nods.

Lynch was inducted into the Broncos' Ring of Fame and Buccaneers' Ring of Honor in 2016.

But Lynch isn't the only former Bronco who could enter the Hall of Fame in 2018.

Brian Dawkins, who played for the Broncos from 2009-11 after 13 years with the Eagles, is also a finalist. Dawkins was a nine-time Pro Bowler, including two selections during his time with the Broncos, and he was a four-time First-Team All-Pro with two Second-Team All-Pro selections.

Ty Law, a member of the 2009 Broncos with Dawkins, was also selected as a finalist.

The Hall of Fame's Selection Committee will decide whether they will be part of this year's class on the Saturday before the Super Bowl.

# Vance Joseph acknowledges areas in which he can improve as he turns toward second season

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
January 3, 2018

Three-hundred-and-fifty-six days ago, Vance Joseph sat in the Denver's team-meeting room and explained his vision as the 16th head coach in Broncos' history. He was back in the same spot Tuesday after a 5-11 season that didn't live up to his own expectations, but his words and tone carried different gravity than they did ahead of his first season as head coach.

Joseph, whose standing with the team was affirmed Monday by President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway, spoke as a man who had been shaped by his experiences as one of the leading figures of an NFL franchise.

It's not that he wasn't prepared for the job in January 2017 when he took over for Gary Kubiak. Joseph had been closely involved for years in the decision-making processes that face head coaches. But the nature of the beast is quite a bit different in the head coach's chair, and Joseph was the first to admit Tuesday that he can learn from his inaugural season.

"I've been in this league a long time," Joseph said. "But obviously, things come up that aren't football related. As a first-time head coach, I can say this: Early on in the season, I didn't do a good job of pushing our coaches to make the proper changes that I thought could have helped us. I allowed guys to coach — that was my goal — but I wasn't very good at coaching the coaches. I'll get better at that. That was one of my shortcomings.

"It's a big job, and it's a job that you can get better at. I will get better at those things. When you're 5-11, it wasn't good enough from my chair, and that will change."

Elway suggested Tuesday he had reason to believe the change could indeed come. Joseph was "drinking through a fire hose" as he learned how to be successful head coach, Elway said, but the Broncos were best-served to retain Joseph for his second season.

Elway arrived at that decision in part because of the failings at certain positions where the Broncos expected better play. In short, Elway said, the Broncos didn't give Joseph the support he needed in Year 1 to find true success.

That will certainly change moving forward.

"That part is on me," Elway said. "We will get that part fixed this coming year. Hopefully we solve those issues and give Vance and his staff the best opportunity to be successful. Looking back, I feel good about the fact that we can stay where we are."

And Joseph, with a season under his belt, has a plan to help the Broncos return to the postseason. That began Monday with staff changes, as Joseph aims to make his offense stronger.

“It was time to change the culture so we could get back to pushing our players to be the best that they can be and getting our best players to play at the best all the time,” Joseph said. “It was more about the overall confidence of the offense and getting back to being a dominant unit vs. [being] personal about the coaches.

“I’m looking forward to bringing in guys who can change the culture and get our offense back to playing good football. It’s as simple as that.”

He’ll also take a more hands-on approach with the upcoming rookie class in an attempt to bridge the gap between the veteran players and the young players who Joseph said “don’t understand what it takes vs. veteran guys who have won games and are trying to catch the young guys up to help us win.”

Those tactics are just part of the reason why President and CEO Joe Ellis has faith that the second-year head coach can turn things around.

Ellis met with Joseph on Monday night for what Ellis called a “really good, candid conversation,” and it left Ellis with a sense of optimism.

“I just think he began to see all of the various situations and things that come up through a course of the season,” Ellis said. “Some of the them he didn’t — these are his words that he said — he didn’t handle well and some things that he did. I think he’s growing into the job. A lot of people say we don’t have time for someone to grow into the job. I respect that and understand that. I just think there are some things that he needs to do — that I’m not going to discuss here because I’m going to have a follow-up conversation — which I said to him yesterday that he is going to have to improve on.

“I know he will. He is convicted to do that. He’s passionate about that. I’m optimistic that he is going to turn into a really good coach. I really am.”

# Broncos to remove Sports Authority signage from stadium in coming weeks

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
January 3, 2018

President/CEO Joe Ellis announced Tuesday that the Sports Authority signage on the outside of the Broncos' stadium will come down in the coming weeks.

"We're going to take the signs down," Ellis said in his season-ending press conference. "All of the exterior signage will come down here starting probably in a week or 10 days, I think."

Ellis announced the decision following a conversation Tuesday morning with Jay Roberts, the general manager of the Stadium Management Company.

Sports Authority Field at Mile High will remain the stadium's name "for a while," Ellis said, because of preexisting events that are tied to the name.

"We have some placeholder events both inside the building and then in the bowl itself, some concerts and stuff," Ellis said. "There's a connection to that name whether it's through ticketing or event management. I suspect by the start of the season we will either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name."

Ellis emphasized the need to find a naming-rights partner at some point in order to continue the maintenance and upkeep of the Broncos' 76,125-seat stadium.

"That's an important part of our capital funding moving forward," Ellis said. "We have 13 seasons left on our lease, and I'd like to wrap up the naming-rights deal and then extend that, because the Broncos aren't going anywhere. There's different components. It's a complicated deal to put this together."

"I told many of you here last year, I'm not going to put an end date on that because it's important to get the right deal. We continue to have productive discussions with companies, and I'm hoping we can get it resolved."

The Broncos won the AFC Championship at Sports Authority Field at Mile High during both the 2013 and 2015 seasons. Ellis said Tuesday he hopes to celebrate many more victories at the stadium in the future.

"The stadium has been terrific," Ellis said. "I'm really proud of the way the Stadium Management Company [has] maintained it and kept it up. It's a great environment. A lot of terrific memories have already taken place there, and I expect many more. I look forward to resolving this stadium issue as fast as we can."

# A Letter to Our Fans from Broncos President & CEO Joe Ellis

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

January 3, 2018

Broncos President & CEO Joe Ellis thanks fans for their incredible support after a difficult season.



# Paul Klee: Who leads this Broncos comeback? Give me John Elway. You take the field.

By Paul Klee  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
January 3, 2018

There were options. When it comes to ridiculous things that were said and done during the most ridiculous Broncos season in a lifetime? Oh, goodness. So many options.

That's why the collective-but-separate messages delivered by team president Joe Ellis and vice president of football operations John Elway were so necessary, spirited and, yes, reassuring. Tuesday at Dove Valley wasn't just a warm bear hug telling Broncos Country it's all going to be OK; Tuesday was a humbled presentation on the what (went wrong), the why (it did) and the how (the big-wigs are going to fix it).

Oops, almost forgot. What was the ridiculousness? In a nutshell, the idea being floated around that the Broncos should move on from John Elway as general manager. It's an idea so ridiculous that I keep misspelling ridiculous, but thank goodness for spellcheck. Come on, people. Has Colorado been so overrun with newcomers that anything prior to 2016 has been forgotten?

Elway might fail. But three Super Bowl rings as a quarterback/executive and 78 wins in seven seasons as the general manager — still the third-most in the NFL, despite the slog that was '16 and '17 — more than earn the benefit of the doubt.

Did Elway's scouting department whiff on quarterbacks Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch with lofty draft picks? Yes. Are there valid concerns about Vance Joseph, an Elway hire who on Monday admitted he failed in the most important duty leveled on a head coach? No doubt about it.

"I wasn't very good at coaching the coaches," Joseph said, and now six assistants are gone.

But just when folks are peeping over the ledge to see how far this thing can fall, here comes No. 7 to remind folks why it has placed its faith in him for 23 seasons, 12 division titles and seven — count 'em, seven — Super Bowl appearances. Then here comes Ellis, a good man with a deep understanding of what the Broncos mean to millions, to remind us why the franchise still shows fewer losing seasons (six) than Super Bowls (seven) in the Pat Bowlen era.

"I've never forgotten 2010 (when the Broncos went 4-12)," Ellis said. "John came in and, in many ways, rescued us from that," he said.

They haven't saved this day. Not yet. But after a season with more silly drama than common sense, the Broncos braintrust did the most important thing it could have done: owned it with humility. And they offered concrete examples of the mess that's been made and how they will clean it up.

The best example they shared is something I've seen in all kinds of sports, at all kinds of levels, just never with this team with this leadership: the new Broncos saw three championship banners waving in

the breeze at Mile High Stadium but ignored what it took to hang them there. There's a word for that: entitlement. Owning the uniform doesn't mean you own the history.

"A characteristic kind of seeped into our building," Ellis said, and then he continued, "Expectations are fine. We should always have them. But we shouldn't make assumptions (that winning is a given)."

The Broncos got cocky. They believed the powerhouse defense that won Super Bowl 50 was so damn powerful it didn't matter if it was you, me or Paxton Lynch at quarterback, although it seems the results might've been the same.

"The No. 1 goal is we have to get better at that position," Elway said.

It wasn't that Elway and Ellis identified quarterback as the No. 1 priority of the offseason — water is wet, all that — that should reassure the masses. It's the characteristics that Elway seeks in the next quarterback that should help you sleep. In the search for a franchise quarterback, the choices suggest Elway's been trying to find himself — physically, I mean, with the big arm and mobile feet. But a big arm and mobile feet aren't the traits that separated Elway from every other quarterback. It was a competitive streak that turned the Cleveland Browns into a "30 for 30," told the great Peyton Manning to take a paycut and, after seeing how he attacked his doubters Tuesday, burns as hot as ever.

"If it is a young guy, what's his personality?" Elway said.

Translation: enough with the quarterbacks who win the scouting combine but lose their minds after a pick-6. The same pride and fire that elevated Denver's defense? Elway said the Broncos are out to find the quarterback equivalent.

"You have to figure out how strong they are," Elway said, and he added the critical trait for the long-term quarterback of the Broncos: "The heart and what they have inside."

Other housekeeping news from the most telling Broncos press conference in over a year? Sure thing: Gary Kubiak will return with a larger role in choosing players ("In free agency and in the draft," Elway said), the signage at Sports Authority Field is coming down in the next week (naming rights are still up in the air) and the team will not raise ticket prices for the 2018 season, a sharp move at a time when the interest of NFL fans is no longer a given.

"It's sort of the least we can do," said Ellis, who requested the company of a security guard as he toured the tailgate lots prior to the Jets game to gauge the temperature of fans near the end of a shabby season.

Hey, when the Broncos get blanked by the Chargers and blown out by the Patriots, no one involved is above criticism. Lord knows I've dished out plenty. And there's no guarantee that Elway, Ellis and Joseph will return the Broncos to a sensible operation and championship contention in short order.

"I don't have all the answers," Elway said, and there's that humility I was talking about. "I want to search and find all the answers, because I want this team to be as good as it possibly can be."

Really, only one guarantee springs to mind: there's no one on this football-loving planet I'd rather lead a comeback. Give me No. 7. You take the field.

# Black Monday Blog: Marvin Lewis Stays With Bengals in Surprise Move, Pete Carroll Coming Back for 2018

By Staff

MMQB

January 3, 2018

## THE LATEST

The Bengals have signed Marvin Lewis to a new, two-year contract.

Pete Carroll has said he will not retire.

Longtime Packers GM Ted Thompson will transition to a new role within the organization.

Broncos fire multiple assistant coaches, but offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave will return for 2018.

Bears GM Ryan Pace has received a contract extension.

Bruce Arians has told his staff he is retiring.

John Elway announced Vance Joseph will get a second season in Denver.

The Bears have fired John Fox.

Jim Caldwell has been fired by the Lions; Detroit requests interview with Texans defensive coordinator Mike Vrabel.

Broncos GM John Elway is on the fence about Vance Joseph, but is now leaning toward keeping Joseph for a second season.

After a season-ending loss to the Chargers, Jack Del Rio said he has been fired by Oakland. All eyes now turn to Jon Gruden.

Chuck Pagano has been fired by the Colts.

Read on for team-by-team news and analysis...

## ARIZONA CARDINALS

**STATUS:** Bruce Arians is retiring.

## THE LATEST

Plan is for Eagles QBs coach John DeFilippo to interview for the Cardinals and Bears HC jobs on Friday/Saturday in Philly, per source. —*Albert Breer*

Bruce Arians: "I probably didn't truly know until that kick went through that I was gonna retire. Everybody was speculating ... Been an unbelievable journey." —*Albert Breer*

Cardinals coach Bruce Arians told his coaches that he's retiring, per sources. It'll be made official shortly. —*Albert Breer*

## **CANDIDATES TO WATCH**

Arizona has put in a request to interview Vikings OC Pat Shurmur. —*Albert Breer*

I'd expect the Cardinals' search to be as wide open as any out there during this cycle. They'll be thorough with it, and go in without a front-runner. —*Albert Breer*

Whispers within league circles suggest GM Steve Keim wants an offensive-minded head coach—most likely one who values traditional dropback pocket passing (essentially, a younger Bruce Arians). Josh McDaniels is the biggest name out there, but there are multiple jobs that come with a long-term franchise quarterback; Arizona isn't one of them. Lions offensive coordinator Jim Bob Cooter is hot young candidate, but his passing game isn't as sophisticated as Arians'. Chiefs offensive coordinator Matt Nagy's stock has sky-rocketed in the past month since Andy Reid appointed him as the play-caller. But Nagy, given his inexperience, represents a serious gamble. Someone with previous head coaching experience and many more years of play-calling would be safer, perhaps an older branch of the Andy Reid coaching tree: Pat Shurmur. —*Andy Benoit*

## **CHICAGO BEARS**

**STATUS:** John Fox has been fired. GM Ryan Pace has received a contract extension.

## **THE LATEST**

Bears have requested permission to interview Patriots OC Josh McDaniels and Vikings OC Pat Shurmur. —*Albert Breer*

Plan is for Eagles QBs coach John DeFilippo to interview for the Cardinals and Bears HC jobs on Friday/Saturday in Philly, per source. —*Albert Breer*

Bears president Ted Phillips announces contract extension for GM Ryan Pace. New deal takes the sides through 2021. —*Albert Breer*

The writing has been on the wall here for a while. What's less certain is whether GM Ryan Pace gets to pick the next coach, and whether the coaches pursued by the Bears dictate Pace's fate. —*Albert Breer*

## **CANDIDATES TO WATCH**

Expect to hear offensive names like Minnesota's Pat Shurmur, New England's Josh McDaniels and Philly QBs coach John DeFilippo in the mix. —*Albert Breer*

If Vic Fangio follows Fox out the door (which is likely), you're left with a defense that's decent, but only decent, especially considering it may need to replenish at cornerback (starters Kyle Fuller and Prince Amukamara are both free agents). Stylistically, Texans defensive coordinator Mike Vrabel could be seen

as a good fit. Vrabel has spent much of his playing and coaching career in Romeo Crennel's intricate system. But would GM Ryan Pace, whose own job security might be iffy, take a chance on a coach with just one year of coordinating experience? He may see a safer option in Dennis Allen, who has four years of coordinating experience, plus head coaching battle scars from his three years in Oakland. Allen, who is still only 45, just turned around the perennially unfixable Saints defense. —*Andy Benoit*

Chicago seems a good fit for offensive coordinators Pat Shurmur or Josh McDaniels, with Mitch Trubisky needing a hands-on mentor. —*Peter King*

### **CINCINNATI BENGALS**

**STATUS:** Marvin Lewis, whose contract had expired, has signed a new, two-year deal with the Bengals.

#### **THE LATEST**

The Bengals still have a raft of staff issues to work out. They went through an in-season offensive coordinator change, and defensive coordinator Paul Guenther's deal is expiring. Sources say a good chunk of coaches on last year's staff are now free agents. So Lewis has immediate decisions to make and plenty of work to do. —*Albert Breer*

### **CLEVELAND BROWNS**

**STATUS:** Jimmy Haslam has reiterated that Hue Jackson will be retained for 2018.

#### **THE LATEST**

Haslam already said Jackson will be back in 2018, and GM John Dorsey affirmed it upon his hiring. What if the Bengals call? Will O-16 change anything? My belief is Jackson sticks, but I also know Dorsey has done his research. —*Albert Breer*

### **DALLAS COWBOYS**

**STATUS:** Jerry Jones has offered public support for Jason Garrett.

### **DENVER BRONCOS**

**STATUS:** John Elway announced that Vance Joseph will be the Broncos' head coach in 2018. Multiple assistant coaches have been let go, though offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave who was promoted to the role midseason, will be retained.

#### **THE LATEST**

Broncos announce they've fired O-line coach Jeff Davidson, assistant DBs coach Johnnie Lynn, special teams coach Brock Olivo, outside linebackers coach Fred Pagac, assistant head coach/RBs coach Eric Stutesville and WRs coach Tyke Tolbert. —*Albert Breer*

Expectation is Broncos will now take a hard look at/address offensive staff and quarterback position this offseason. —*Albert Breer*

After a season-ending loss to the Chiefs, Broncos players spoke out in support Vance Joseph. CB Bradley Roby: "Rome wasn't built in one day . . . You can't expect a guy to come in and flip it around in one year." DE Shaquil Barrett: "We like Coach Joseph, and if he's back we're ready to work for him and turn

it around . . . You need two to three years to leave your mark, but it's also out of my hands. I can't do anything about it." And veteran DT and first-year Bronco Domata Peko: "I would be disappointed if he was fired. I'm really pushing for him to get another chance. It's always going to be tough for a first-year head coach; you saw how Coach Zimmer struggled at first. Now [Joseph's] got his feet wet and knows how to do it. Everyone loves him, respects him, and he's a hell of a coach." —*Robert Klemko*

## **DETROIT LIONS**

**STATUS:** On Monday, the Lions announced Jim Caldwell has been fired.

## **THE LATEST**

Lions interviewed both offensive coordinator Jim Bob Cooter and defensive coordinator Teryl Austin on Tuesday. —*Albert Breer*

Texans defensive coordinator Mike Vrabel will interview for the Lions job Wednesday morning, per source. —*Albert Breer*

Lions GM Bob Quinn said that he and president Rod Wood will run the head coaching interviews; ownership won't be in the room but will be consulted. —*Albert Breer*

The Lions have asked for permission to interview Texans defensive coordinator Mike Vrabel. —*Albert Breer*

Lions assistant head coach/O-line coach Ron Prince has been let go, per sources, reflecting the organization's frustration with the run game. Possibility still alive that OC Jim Bob Cooter is paired with a defensive head coach. —*Albert Breer*

Rumblings had held for a few weeks that Caldwell would be in trouble if he missed the playoffs. I'd expect Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia to be a consideration if Caldwell gets whacked, with the possibility that Jim Bob Cooter and the offensive staff stay. —*Albert Breer*

## **CANDIDATES TO WATCH**

Detroit has a request in to interview Vikings OC Pat Shurmur. —*Albert Breer*

Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia immediately becomes the name to watch for the Lions opening. —*Albert Breer*

Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia is reportedly at the top of their list. The question is: Who would Patricia bring as his offensive coordinator? That was one concern teams had last season when Patricia was passed over for head coaching jobs. —*Andy Benoit*

## **GREEN BAY PACKERS**

**STATUS:** Longtime GM Ted Thompson will transition to a new role within the organization. Head coach Mike McCarthy received a one-year contract extension.

## THE LATEST

Source confirms the one-year extension for Packers coach Mike McCarthy. —*Albert Breer*

Eliot Wolf and Brian Gutekunst are obvious internal candidates, but some there have a belief that Russ Ball might be the guy. —*Albert Breer*

## HOUSTON TEXANS

**STATUS:** Bill O'Brien's is expected to stay. There are reports that he and GM Rick Smith are at odds. In a statement released Sunday, Smith said he is taking an extended leave of absence from the team while his wife is treated for cancer.

## THE LATEST

Bills VP Brian Gaine is the man to watch for Houston GM position. He and Bill O'Brien have a great working relationship; both are from the Parcells/Belichick school. —*Albert Breer*

I hear owner Bob McNair is going to agree with at least some of Bill O'Brien's requests, and it's likely now that O'Brien will stay, particularly with Rick Smith's future understandably cloudy. McNair doesn't want to lose both men in the same year. —*Peter King*

Coach Bill O'Brien meets with ownership to discuss the future of the franchise tomorrow. If he is to stay, I'd expect a new personnel chief to come in. —*Albert Breer*

Simply, a reckoning is coming here. I'd be floored if O'Brien even considered signing an extension without changes to the way the football operation is aligned, and 2018 is a contract year for him. That would create a decision point for ownership—go forward for a year with a coach that would be the No. 1 guy on the market if free, or cut the cord now and move forward with GM Rick Smith. —*Albert Breer*

## INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

**STATUS:** The Colts have fired Chuck Pagano.

## THE LATEST

Chuck Pagano addressed the team, per those there, in a way that felt to everyone like farewell. Told the players that he loved them for fighting today, and that he'd never forget the group. —*Albert Breer*

## CANDIDATES TO WATCH

If Andrew Luck is healthy, this is the most attractive job opening. Given what Luck's body has recently gone through, Ballard might be inclined to find a coach who will install a passing game that's both complex and quick-timed. That's an unusual combination, but there's a certain quarterback in New England who has mastered it. The Colts could go hard after Josh McDaniels. —*Andy Benoit*

The rumor that will never go away is that owner Jim Irsay longs to hire old Colts QB Jim Harbaugh as his head coach. But the domineering Harbaugh, I believe, would be an ill fit with Luck and GM Chris Ballard. —*Peter King*

Two of GM Chris Ballard's ex-Chief co-workers, special teams coordinator Dave Toub and offensive coordinator Matt Nagy, have been connected to this one, and there are whispers that Indy could make a run at Pats offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels. —*Albert Breer*

The Colts have been granted permission to interview Texans defensive coordinator Mike Vrabel, per source. —*Albert Breer*

#### **NEW YORK GIANTS**

**STATUS:** ESPN's Adam Schefter reports that Eagles defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz is the favorite for the vacant head-coaching position.

#### **THE LATEST**

Matt Patricia will have the chance to do a lot of interviews over the bye week, and deservedly so, but I have a hard time seeing John Mara hiring a head coach who wore a Goodell clown T-shirt. —*Jenny Vrentas*

I'd expect both Patriot coordinators to be considered. —*Albert Breer*

#### **CANDIDATES TO WATCH**

New GM Dave Gettleman is 66 and might not be interested in a long-term rebuilding effort. Jim Schwartz represents a candidate with prior experience, and one who will likely update—but not rewrite—the offensive and defensive playbooks. All the better that he happens to currently work for a division rival. —*Andy Benoit*

#### **NEW YORK JETS**

**STATUS:** The Jets have signed head coach Todd Bowles and GM Mike Maccagnan to contract extensions through 2020.

#### **OAKLAND RAIDERS**

**STATUS:** Jack Del Rio says he has been fired, and numerous reports have linked the Raiders to Jon Gruden.

#### **THE LATEST**

Three things on Jon Gruden: (1) He's been lining up staff for a few weeks. That's not always a sure sign a guy is coming back, but he's done what he'd need to do. (2) He's not as happy in the booth as he was coaching. And (3) His youngest graduates high school next year. —*Albert Breer*

Jack Del Rio was under contract through 2020, and a big question was whether Mark Davis would be willing to eat three years on a contract. Now, all eyes turn to Jon Gruden, with whom Davis has had a long-standing fascination. —*Albert Breer*

#### **SEATTLE SEAHAWKS**

**STATUS:** Pete Carroll has said he will not retire.

**TAMPA BAY BUCS**

**STATUS:** The Bucs are expected to retain Dirk Koetter.

**WASHINGTON**

**STATUS:** Jay Gruden is expected to be retained

# Terrell Owens, Randy Moss headline 15 finalists for Hall of Fame class of 2018

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

January 3, 2018

From 108 to 27 to 15. The list of candidates for the Pro Football Hall of Fame class of 2018 continues to shrink.

On Tuesday night, the Pro Football Hall of Fame whittled down the list of candidates for the Class of 2018 to 15 all-time greats. The process started with 108 nominees in September. In November, the list was trimmed to 27 semifinalists. On Tuesday, the Pro Football Hall of Fame named their 15 finalists. The modern-era list is headlined by a pair of inside linebackers in Ray Lewis and Brian Urlacher, and a pair of receivers in Randy Moss and Terrell Owens.

Here's the entire list:

1. Ray Lewis -- linebacker for the Ravens
2. Brian Urlacher -- linebacker for the Bears
3. Edgerrin James -- running back for the Colts, Cardinals, and Seahawks
4. Randy Moss -- wide receiver for the Vikings, Raiders, Patriots, Titans, and 49ers
5. Terrell Owens -- wide receiver for the 49ers, Eagles, Cowboys, Bills, and Bengals
6. Isaac Bruce -- wide receiver for the Rams and 49ers
7. John Lynch -- safety for the Buccaneers and Broncos
8. Brian Dawkins -- defensive back for the Eagles and Broncos
9. Ty Law -- defensive back for the Patriots, Jets, Chiefs, and Broncos
10. Everson Walls -- defensive back for the Cowboys, Giants, and Browns
11. Tony Boselli -- tackle for the Jaguars
12. Joe Jacoby -- tackle and guard for the Redskins
13. Steve Hutchinson -- guard for the Seahawks, Vikings, and Titans
14. Alan Faneca -- guard and tackle for the Steelers, Jets, and Cardinals
15. Kevin Mawae -- center and guard for the Seahawks, Jets, and Titans

The list grows to 18 when you include:

1. Bobby Beathard (contributor finalist)
2. Robert Brazile (seniors committee finalist)
3. Jerry Kramer (seniors committee finalist)

Back in August, our John Breech guessed which five modern-era finalists will end up making it into the Hall of Fame this year:

1. Terrell Owens
2. Ray Lewis
3. Alan Faneca
4. John Lynch

## 5. Don Coryell

Four of those five guys are still alive, with Coryell getting left out. Owens is the biggest name on that list considering he should already be in the Hall of Fame and he hasn't been shy about letting everyone know how he feels about getting snubbed. Lynch, the current general manager of the 49ers, is also a notable name considering how well things are going for him lately. Earlier this season, he acquired Jimmy Garoppolo in a trade with the Patriots and as a result, the 49ers appear to be on the rise with their new franchise quarterback. Now, he has a chance to be named a Hall of Famer.

The 2018 class will be announced the day before Super Bowl LIII. Anywhere between 4-8 people will gain entrance into the Hall of Fame.

So, who ya got?

# Hall of Fame finalists: Ray Lewis a lock, but who else will get in?

By Elliot Harrison

NFL.com

January 3, 2018

*The 15 modern-era finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2018 are as follows (presented in alphabetical order): Tony Boselli, Isaac Bruce, Brian Dawkins, Alan Faneca, Steve Hutchinson, Joe Jacoby, Edgerrin James, Ty Law, Ray Lewis, John Lynch, Kevin Mawae, Randy Moss, Terrell Owens, Brian Urlacher and Everson Walls.*

*The Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2018 will be announced during the NBC broadcast of "NFL Honors" from 9-11 p.m. ET on Feb. 3 (the eve of Super Bowl LII).*

*NFL.com's Elliot Harrison breaks down the hopefuls' chances of enshrinement below.*

## Strong candidates

**Brian Dawkins, safety:** Dawkins is going to hit Canton one of these days. In fact, I think that day will come in February. Dawkins was the top player at his position from the late 1990s into the 2000s. Like Lewis, he was named to the All-Decade Team of the 2000s.

**Alan Faneca, offensive guard:** This guy's enshrinement is not a matter of if, but when. And like with Dawkins, Faneca's year very well could be 2018. Offensive linemen have not been getting short shrift from voters of late (... well, except for centers, unfortunately). Seven guards have been voted in since 2007, despite the lack of sex appeal at their position. Faneca was a dominant player, a six-time first-team All-Pro who would block your face off. Dermontti Dawson told me he could tell Faneca was special from the dude's first training camp. Faneca was the key member of the offensive line that paved the way for Jerome Bettis and Willie Parker on the Steelers' Super Bowl XL team.

**John Lynch, safety:** Lynch is doing himself a favor by knocking this GM gig out of the park so far. (That Jimmy Garoppolo trade looks like a stroke of genius.) The former minor league baseball player was a heckuva safety, despite being the least-heralded member (after Warren Sapp and Derrick Brooks) of the Bucs' triumvirate that controlled offenses in the late '90s and early 2000s. That said, most folks I've spoken to would take Dawkins before Lynch -- while a few others cite Darren Woodson first among eligible safeties.

**Brian Urlacher, linebacker:** This is an interesting case. Urlacher enjoyed a fantastic 13-year career, getting named Defensive Rookie of the Year in 2000 and Defensive Player of the Year in 2005. His name can be found alongside Lewis' on the All-Decade Team of the 2000s. This year will be a tough sell for Urlacher, with Lewis sure to get in and so many tightly packed candidates. That said, Urlacher's ability to cover ground in the middle of the field as a Cover 2 MLB should sit well with the young voters who came up on "Madden." The video game, not the announcer.

## **Virtual lock**

Ray Lewis, linebacker: Is this even a question? Lewis made a billion Pro Bowls, was named first-team All-Pro seven times, won Defensive Player of the Year twice and even managed to earn a Super Bowl MVP. Also remember: Voters are asked to only consider on-field stuff, as other matters typically surface when Lewis' name comes up in public forums. The former Raven is also a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame's All-Decade Team of the 2000s.

## **Ascending**

Tony Boselli, offensive tackle: Been hearing this former No. 2 overall pick come up quite a bit in Canton chatter. The thinking here is that Terrell Davis finally hearing his name called could do much for other short-career guys like Boselli. In the late '90s, Boselli was the premier left tackle in football when healthy.

**Isaac Bruce, wide receiver:** Bruce boasts numbers comparable to those of Terrell Owens (at least in terms of receptions and yards), but with what is perceived as a far better attitude. Add in the fact that Bruce scored the winning touchdown in Super Bowl XXXIV, and the wideout might indeed have enough juice to get the Canton call. How the former Rams great was able to post 119 catches for 1,781 yards and 13 touchdowns in 1995 -- with past-their-prime QBs Chris Miller and Mark Rypien throwing him passes -- is anyone's guess. You think DeAndre Hopkins had it bad ...

**Edgerrin James, running back:** Edge owns more support in that voter room than he's ever had before, presumably because of a simple question: How many prolific running backs are coming down the pike? Adrian Peterson? Frank Gore? That's it. Maybe the newfound love for James' run in pro football is an offshoot of the Colts sucking, and people realizing how special that Manning/James/Harrison/Wayne/Freeney/Mathis team really was. Kinda like John Smoltz and the '90s Braves. To think, James touched the ball 881 times in his first two pro seasons.

**Ty Law, cornerback:** If there is one thing every Hall voter is well aware of, it's the scant number of defensive players in comparison to offensive players enshrined in Canton. That paves the way for a guy like Law, who, similar to James, has the advantage of hardly any corners coming down the road boasting 50-plus career interceptions. (Champ Bailey and Charles Woodson are going to moonwalk their way into the Hall.) In this day and age of bubble screens and none-yard outs, how is a corner supposed to get to 53 interceptions, much less three Super Bowl rings?

**Everson Walls, cornerback:** Walls' name has been broached in Canton chatter more in the last year than any I can remember in over a decade of covering the sport, much less the last five years covering the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Walls is the only corner in the history of the NFL to lead the league in interceptions three times. He picked off Joe Montana, the greatest quarterback of his era, four times. He posted four picks in 10 postseason games. He won a ring as a starting corner on the 1990 Giants under defensive coordinator Bill Belichick. And he was better than your favorite eligible-but-not-in-the-Hall-yet cornerback.

## **Heated debate: Randy Moss vs. Terrell Owens**

Appropriate or not, Moss and Owens will be linked together. They both played in the same era, both were considered distractions and both could absolutely take over a game. While the stats are there for

both -- Moss is second and Owens is third all-time in touchdown receptions, behind only Jerry Rice -- I don't see either hearing his name announced the Saturday before the Super Bowl.

There is a bloc of voters who, at least for the time being, are a hard "no" on T.O., which could precipitate pushback on Moss. Put another way: If Owens and Moss were even in scope -- Owens is second in career receiving yards, Moss is fourth -- and the former can't get inducted in three tries, why should Moss make it on his first? It's worth noting that, when it came to the defensive coordinators whose job it was to stop these dynamic wideouts (even more so than the corners covering them), surely no one was scarier than Moss. That could be worth a handful of additional votes. Not enough to be first-ballot -- fortunately or unfortunately, depending on what you expect from your Hall of Fame wide receiver.

### **Not this year**

**Kevin Mawae, center:** Mawae continues to slowly bubble to the surface of Hall discussions. He enjoyed a long, decorated career. But he also played a position that has been overlooked by Hall voters for some time -- something one of the senior voters brought up to me, specifically citing Mawae. In the last 30 years, only five centers' names have been called. Thankfully, two of those -- Mick Tingelhoff and Dermontti Dawson -- were enshrined in the last six years. That said, don't see three offensive linemen being inducted in the 2018 class -- two is a stretch. Those two: Boselli and Faneca.

**Steve Hutchinson, offensive guard:** Hutchinson was an awesome player. Look no further than Shaun Alexander's production, or lack thereof, after the All-Pro guard left Seattle to sign with the Vikings in 2006. Alexander won league MVP with 1,880 rushing yards in 2005. He wouldn't equal that total in the remaining three seasons of his career combined. That said, with Faneca still waiting -- and all the other names above -- Hutchinson will fall victim to a numbers game this year. Speaking of, numbers don't support two guards, one class.

**Joe Jacoby, offensive tackle:** This marks the last year that Jacoby will be grouped with the modern-era finalists. That's because Jacoby's last season was 1993. Candidates have 25 years from their last year in the league before they fall into the seniors abyss. With Walls also up after this year (his last season was also 1993), one of those two should receive a solid push. With two senior candidates (at most) per year, voters know how important it is for guys like Jacoby and Walls to make it while still within the modern-era parameters. My guess: Walls will be the name you hear, mostly because he has quantifiable numbers and an NFL record, to boot (see above).

### **Quick notes on the Seniors Committee/Contributor nominees**

Robert Brazile was a new name that many of those odd ducks who follow Canton's proceedings were surprised to hear. The do-everything outside linebacker on Bum Phillips' Oilers teams seemingly came out of nowhere to be nominated -- well, unless you followed his career. The first eight years of Brazile's NFL tenure were special. He made seven Pro Bowls, and despite not being known as just a pass rusher, posted 6.5 sacks in the strike-shortened 1982 campaign that featured all of nine games. Between him, Elvin Bethea and Curley Culp, those "Luv Ya Blue" teams had a helluva front seven. Kinda like what the Lombardi Packers had on the offensive side of the trenches, with Jerry Kramer anchoring the interior portion from right guard. As the author of the most famous block in NFL history, Kramer's name has been screamed from the mouths of every Packers fan over age 50 for the last two decades. No player has been mentioned as a Hall oversight more than the man who wrote "Instant Replay." There is no way Kramer will miss the cut, as voters have been inundated with enough Kramer chatter (Packer Backers

complaining) to last a lifetime. Not to mention, he was a fantastic player on pro football's greatest team of all time, the 1962 Green Bay squad.

As a contributor, Bobby Beathard might be unequalled in terms of resume. The teams for which he worked, scouted and served as personnel czar made it to an incredible seven Super Bowls. SEVEN! That includes the Chiefs (1), Dolphins (2), Redskins (3) and Chargers (1). Good luck finding a dude who can match those totals on a LinkedIn profile. Beathard's most famous work? Building those Joe Gibbs Redskins teams that won two Super Bowls in the 1980s. Ain't no way Beathard gets too many "no" votes. It's people like him for whom this "contributor" category was created in the first place -- and deservedly so.

# Randy Moss, Terrell Owens among Hall of Fame finalists

By Staff

NFL.com

January 3, 2018

The list of 15 Modern-Era Finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2018 features five players who are finalists for the first time. The group includes four first-year eligible nominees - Steve Hutchinson, Ray Lewis, Randy Moss, and Brian Urlacher. Everson Walls, in his 20th year of eligibility, is also a first-time finalist.

The 15 Modern-Era Finalists will be considered for election to the Hall of Fame when the Hall's Selection Committee meets on "Selection Saturday" in Minneapolis the day before Super Bowl LII to elect the new class. The Modern-Era Finalists were determined by a vote of the Hall's Selection Committee from a list of 108 nominees that was earlier reduced to 27 semifinalists, during the year-long selection process.

The 2018 Modern-Era Finalists with their positions, years and teams:

Ray Lewis, LB - 1996-2012 Baltimore Ravens

Brian Urlacher, LB - 2000-2012 Chicago Bears

Edgerrin James, RB - 1999-2005 Indianapolis Colts, 2006-08 Arizona Cardinals, 2009 Seattle Seahawks

Randy Moss, WR - 1998-2004, 2010 Minnesota Vikings, 2005-06 Oakland Raiders, 2007-2010 New England Patriots, 2010 Tennessee Titans, 2012 San Francisco 49ers

Terrell Owens, WR - 1996-2003 San Francisco 49ers, 2004-05 Philadelphia Eagles, 2006-08 Dallas Cowboys, 2009 Buffalo Bills, 2010 Cincinnati Bengals

Isaac Bruce, WR - 1994-2007 Los Angeles/St. Louis Rams, 2008-09 San Francisco 49ers

John Lynch, FS - 1993-2003 Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 2004-07 Denver Broncos

Brian Dawkins, S - 1996-2008 Philadelphia Eagles, 2009-2011 Denver Broncos

Everson Walls, CB - 1981-89 Dallas Cowboys, 1990-92 New York Giants, 1992-93 Cleveland Browns

Ty Law, CB - 1995-2004 New England Patriots, 2005, 2008 New York Jets, 2006-07 Kansas City Chiefs, 2009 Denver Broncos

Tony Boselli, T - 1995-2001 Jacksonville Jaguars, 2002 Houston Texans (injured reserve)

Kevin Mawae, C/G - 1994-97 Seattle Seahawks, 1998-2005 New York Jets, 2006-09 Tennessee Titans

Joe Jacoby, T - 1981-1993 Washington Redskins

Steve Hutchinson, G - 2001-05 Seattle Seahawks, 2006-2011 Minnesota Vikings, 2012 Tennessee Titans

Alan Faneca, G - 1998-2007 Pittsburgh Steelers, 2008-09 New York Jets, 2010 Arizona Cardinals

The modern-era finalists join three other finalists to comprise 18 finalists under consideration for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2018.

Two Senior Finalists were announced in August 2017 by the Seniors Committee that reviews the qualifications of those players whose careers ended more than 25 years ago.

- » Robert Brazile, Linebacker - 1975-1984 Houston Oilers
- » Jerry Kramer, Guard - 1958-1968 Green Bay Packers

One Contributor Finalist, also announced in August, was selected by the Hall of Fame's Contributor Committee that considers persons, other than players and coaches, who made outstanding contributions to professional football.

- » Bobby Beathard, General Manager/Personnel Administrator - 1966-67 Kansas City Chiefs, 1968-1971 Atlanta Falcons, 1972-77 Miami Dolphins, 1978-1988 Washington Redskins, 1990-99 San Diego Chargers

To be elected, a finalist must receive a minimum positive vote of 80 percent during the annual selection meeting.

Fan vote: [www.nfl.com/hofvote](http://www.nfl.com/hofvote)

# Denver Broncos Will Keep Ticket Prices The Same

By Staff

CBS 4

January 3, 2018

The Denver Broncos will keep ticket prices the same as last season.

Denver Broncos President and CEO Joe Ellis made the announcement in the form of a letter on Tuesday morning and referenced the “disappointment for not reaching our goals after a promising start to the season.”

Ellis said this is the second consecutive year that the ticket prices will not be subject to an increase.

He also said that the Broncos staff at Mile High Stadium will work to improve the fan experience on game days.

Ellis also commented about the coaching situation, “As we embrace the challenge of improving our team, I’m confident in John Elway and Vance Joseph’s plan to return the Broncos to contention. Starting with free agency and the NFL Draft, I believe in the vision of our football leadership to acquire and develop players who can help us win.”

# Sports Authority signs on outside of football stadium to be removed

By Chuck Hickey

FOX 31

January 3, 2018

Sports Authority branding will be taken down outside Sports Authority Field at Mile High within the next week to 10 days, Broncos president and CEO Joe Ellis said Tuesday.

Sports Authority went into bankruptcy in March 2016 and closed all of its stores. It tried to sell the rights, but no new company came forward to put its logo on the home of the Broncos.

Sports Authority had five years left on its contract worth \$19.2 million. When it failed to make a \$3.6 million payment in August 2016, the former sporting goods retailer was in breach of its contract.

Sports Authority, which has had its name on the stadium since 2011, tried to market the contract. Several companies expressed interest, but no cash bid for the contract was received.

In August 2016, the Broncos emerged as the highest bidder to assume the contract for naming rights to the stadium. The U.S. Bankruptcy Court granted the team the naming rights in November.

Since then, the Broncos have been working without success to secure a new naming rights holder all the while Sports Authority signage was still plastered on the outside of the stadium.

At a season-ending news conference Tuesday, Ellis said work will begin soon on taking down the outside Sports Authority signage.

But the stadium will still be named Sports Authority Field at Mile High because there are some events connected to the name in the coming months.

"I suspect by the start of the season, we will either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name," Ellis said.

"That's an important part of our capital funding moving forward."

The Metropolitan Football Stadium District, the public entity that owns the stadium, said it relies on the revenue from naming rights to help pay for stadium upkeep, which is expected to cost about \$300 million over the next 30 years.

The Broncos have 13 years left on the lease at the stadium, which opened in 2001.

"I'd like to wrap up the naming rights deal then extend (the lease) because the Broncos aren't going anywhere," Ellis said. "It's important to get the right deal. We continue to have productive discussions with companies and I'm hoping we can get it resolved."

# Why John Elway looked himself in the mirror before making a decision on Vance Joseph

By Zac Stevens

BSN Denver

January 3, 2018

On Tuesday morning, just before lunch, John Elway strolled into the team meeting room at the UCHealth Training Center ready to face the media for the annual end-of-season press conference to discuss the Denver Broncos' disappointing year.

As he sat in his chair, he looked up through the bright lights to the large room speckled with media members and stole the show—as if John Elway in the room didn't already do such.

“First of all, Happy New Year to everybody. There's nobody happier than me that 2017 is over,” he said with a slight grin reaching across his face, breaking the ice, while at the same time being completely serious.

That is, of course, except for one person, “Maybe Vance,” Elway added.

# Understanding the Broncos' assistant coach firings requires a look beyond position performance

By Ryan Koenigsberg

BSN Denver

January 3, 2018

The wrecking ball has made its first trip through Denver Broncos headquarters.

On Monday evening, the Broncos officially announced that they had parted way with six, count 'em, six assistant coaches, following an abysmal 5-11 season.

Running backs coach Eric Stutesville, wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert, outside linebackers coach Fred Pagac, special teams coordinator Brock Olivo, offensive line coach Jeff Davidson and defensive backs assistant Johnnie Lynn were all shown the door on black Monday.

The first three, Stutesville, Tolbert and Pagac, all raised eyebrows in Broncos Country as they have become very recognizable names to fans throughout the years.

Stutesville, of course, was the Broncos longest-tenured coach, he joined the team in 2010 under Josh McDaniels and has since coached Knowshon Moreno and, just this season, C.J. Anderson, to 1,000-yard campaigns. He notably served as the team's interim head coach when McDaniels was fired.

Tolbert joined the team just one year later in 2011. In his seven seasons with the team, he helped Demaryius Thomas go to five consecutive pro bowls to go along with five consecutive 1,000-yard seasons. He also coached receivers for the most prolific offense in NFL history.

Pagac became a part of the staff when Gary Kubiak was named head coach in 2015. Most notably, he coached Von Miller to a Super Bowl MVP and a postseason for the ages.

On the surface, it's easy to look at these moves as head-scratchers, but to understand the decisions, it's important to know that there is a lot more that goes into these decisions than simply how their respective units performed.

# Eric Stutesville set to interview with Giants Friday

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
January 3, 2018

It's going to be an interesting week for Eric Stutesville.

Stutesville was fired from his post as assistant head coach/running backs coach by the Broncos on Monday, but he'll be ending the week with an interview for a head coaching job. Stutesville was named as a Giants candidate on Monday and Ian Rapoport of NFL Media reports that he's set to interview with the team on Friday.

Stutesville was the Giants' running backs coach under Jim Fassel from 2001-03 and then spent six years in the same role with the Bills before moving to Denver in 2010. He was the interim head coach for the final four games of his first year with the Broncos.

The Giants have also requested permission for interviews with Josh McDaniels, Matt Patricia and Steve Wilks since the end of the regular season. Interim head coach Steve Spagnuolo is also expected to get a formal interview for the permanent job.

# Broncos to expand Gary Kubiak's role in personnel

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
January 3, 2018

The Broncos held an end of the season press conference with coach Vance Joseph and General Manager John Elway on Tuesday and it began with a discussion of the decision to keep Joseph on board for a second season.

Elway said it was his responsibility to consider other options at head coach before deciding to stand pat with Joseph. He also said that he didn't feel he gave Joseph everything he needed in order to be successful during the 2017 season.

"That part's on me," Elway said, via Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post. "We will get that part fixed this coming year ... and give Vance and his staff the best opportunity to be successful."

One way the Broncos will be changing their approach is by changing a good chunk of Joseph's staff as six assistants were let go on Monday. Another is by giving Joseph's predecessor Gary Kubiak a bigger role in the personnel department.

Kubiak remained with the team in a scouting capacity after retiring as the head coach last year. Elway said that Kubiak will "be involved in free agency as well as the draft" this time as Elway and company try to get Joseph the quarterback and other pieces that represent his best opportunity to succeed.

# Bill Musgrave will remain Broncos offensive coordinator

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
January 3, 2018

The Broncos have let several assistant coaches go since their season ended with Sunday's loss to the Chiefs, including their offensive line, running backs and wide receivers coaches.

That will lead to significant changes to the offensive coaching staff for 2018, but there will not be a change at the top. General Manager John Elway and head coach Vance Joseph said at a Tuesday press conference that Bill Musgrave will remain the team's offensive coordinator.

Musgrave opened last season as the team's quarterbacks coach was promoted to interim offensive coordinator when the Broncos fired Mike McCoy in November. He's also had experience running offenses for Philadelphia, Carolina, Jacksonville, Minnesota and Oakland over his two decades as a coach at the professional and college levels.

Musgrave drew good reviews from Broncos players for simplifying the offense after taking over for McCoy, although it remains to be seen how many of them he'll be working with in 2018 as the Broncos are set to make changes at quarterback and elsewhere before returning to action.

# Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian to have surgery on left shoulder

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

January 3, 2018

Denver Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian will have surgery on his non-throwing shoulder for a second consecutive offseason, according to multiple reports.

Siemian was injured in the first quarter of Denver's game against the Indianapolis Colts in December. Colts linebacker Barkevious Mingo sacked Siemian with his elbow driving into the turf and jamming his left shoulder. He was carted off the field and did not play again for Denver this season.

Siemian referred to last season's surgery as an "optional" procedure to help clean up an issue that prevented him from working out as he would like. While X-rays were negative, Siemian still needs the surgery to move forward properly into next season.

"Sleeping is kind of tough, but it's all right," Siemian said, via Jeff Legwold of ESPN.com. "... I have to get this shoulder taken care of. I'll do that and then, just like everybody else, come back to work and get better."

The recovery time following the surgery is expected to be 8-12 weeks and he's expected to be available for OTAs and mini-camps.

# Report: Broncos considering Ben McAdoo for QB coach vacancy

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
January 3, 2018

The Broncos are retooling coach Vance Joseph's staff before his second season, and they may be looking to add someone with head coaching experience.

According to Mike Klis of KUSA, the Broncos are considering former Giants head coach Ben McAdoo along with former Bengals offensive coordinator Ken Zampese for their quarterback coach job.

McAdoo and Joseph worked together in San Francisco.

While McAdoo might prefer a coordinator job — if only to remind people he was good at something before head coaching, wearing suits and haircare seemed to flummox him in New York — but the Broncos are keeping Bill Musgrave in that position. Musgrave began the year as quarterbacks coach but was promoted when they fired Mike McCoy, who just happened to be the first deck chair thrown overboard.

Once upon a time, McAdoo built a reputation for being good, but that was when he coaching some guy named Aaron Rodgers. There are no Aaron Rodgerses on the Broncos roster.

# Broncos will take down signs for company that doesn't exist

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
January 3, 2018

The stadium in which the Broncos play continues to be named for a company that no longer exists. That won't be the case for much longer.

But not because the Sports Authority is making a comeback; the Broncos finally will be removing the signs that carry the name of the nonexistent business. Eventually, the name will be removed from all references to the venue.

Broncos president/CEO Joe Ellis disclosed the plan during a Tuesday press conference.

"We're going to take the signs down," Ellis said. "All of the exterior signage will come down here starting probably in a week or 10 days, I think."

The name will remain "for a while," however, due to previously-scheduled events that carry the official name.

"There's a connection to that name whether it's through ticketing or event management," Ellis said. "I suspect by the start of the season we will either have a placeholder name or a name on the building that involves a corporation supporting that name."

The Broncos presumably kept the name because it would be easier from a P.R. standpoint to replace "Sports Authority" with another corporate moniker. Stripping a gratuitous name away from Mile High Stadium for a while and then later replacing it with a new name would invite a fresh round of what's-the-world-coming-to? criticism of the corporate influence on American sports.

But the Broncos apparently realized how goofy it was to continue to use a name for a company that doesn't exist. And it was indeed goofy.

Soon, it will be less goofy.

# Hall of Fame ballot includes five first-time finalists, including Everson Walls

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

January 3, 2018

Four players in their first year of eligibility made the list of finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2018. Steve Hutchinson, Ray Lewis, Randy Moss and Brian Urlacher will have selectors discuss their cases during "Selection Saturday," the day before Super Bowl LII.

In addition, Everson Walls, in his 20th — and final — year of eligibility, became a first-time finalist.

All five offensive linemen on the semifinal list made the cut to 15. Four defensive backs, including Walls, also are finalists.

The selection committee was given an initial list of 108 nominees, which was reduced to 27 semifinalists in a mail-in ballot. Roger Craig, Torry Holt, Hines Ward, Leslie O'Neal, Simeon Rice, Richard Seymour, Karl Mecklenburg, Steve Atwater, Ronde Barber, Leroy Butler, Don Coryell and Jimmy Johnson were the semifinalists failing to receive enough votes to advance.

The Hal of Fame already had announced the two seniors candidates — Robert Brazile and Jerry Kramer — and the contributor finalist — Bobby Beathard — who will join the 15 modern-era finalists on the ballot.

The 2018 Modern-Era Finalists with their positions, years and teams:

Tony Boselli, Tackle, 1995-2001 Jacksonville Jaguars

Isaac Bruce, Wide Receiver, 1994-2007 Los Angeles/St. Louis Rams, 2008-09 San Francisco 49ers

Brian Dawkins, Safety, 1996-2008 Philadelphia Eagles, 2009-2011 Denver Broncos

Alan Faneca, Guard, 1998-2007 Pittsburgh Steelers, 2008-09 New York Jets, 2010 Arizona Cardinals

Steve Hutchinson, Guard, 2001-05 Seattle Seahawks, 2006-2011 Minnesota Vikings, 2012 Tennessee Titans

Joe Jacoby, Tackle, 1981-1993 Washington Redskins

Edgerrin James, Running Back, 1999-2005 Indianapolis Colts, 2006-08 Arizona Cardinals, 2009 Seattle Seahawks

Ty Law, Cornerback, 1995-2004 New England Patriots, 2005, 2008 New York Jets, 2006-07 Kansas City Chiefs, 2009 Denver Broncos

Ray Lewis, Linebacker, 1996-2012 Baltimore Ravens

John Lynch, Free Safety, 1993-2003 Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 2004-07 Denver Broncos

Kevin Mawae, Center, 1994-97 Seattle Seahawks, 1998-2005 New York Jets, 2006-09 Tennessee Titans

Randy Moss, Wide Receiver, 1998-2004, 2010 Minnesota Vikings, 2005-06 Oakland Raiders, 2007-2010 New England Patriots, 2010 Tennessee Titans, 2012 San Francisco 49ers

Terrell Owens, Wide Receiver, 1996-2003 San Francisco 49ers, 2004-05 Philadelphia Eagles, 2006-08 Dallas Cowboys, 2009 Buffalo Bills, 2010 Cincinnati Bengals

Brian Urlacher, Linebacker, 2000-2012 Chicago Bears

Everson Walls, Cornerback, 1981-89 Dallas Cowboys, 1990-92 New York Giants, 1992-93 Cleveland Browns