

John Elway talks talent evaluation, Broncos' near future and "not having all the answers"

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

January 4, 2018

There was a time not so long ago when John Elway could end a season and say the Broncos' expectations had not diminished, that Plan A remained the only plan, that competing for a Super Bowl title was the only option.

That was then.

The new reality is the Broncos' general manager admitting his latest annual reconstruction will require a bit more work. And more time.

"When you're 5-11, there are obviously some issues that we have to get handled," Elway said. "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."

It starts with finding new coaches for the vacancies they have. It continues with evaluating their current roster and potential pieces of their next one, via free agency, trades and the draft.

And it will focus primarily on finding a quarterback, some way, somehow, with Elway, a Hall of Fame quarterback, and Gary Kubiak, once his backup and now his right-hand man in the front office, leading the way. Kubiak rejoined the franchise last July and will take on a larger role this year as an evaluator of not just offensive talent in the upcoming draft, but also free agency.

The Broncos can choose from one of three options in finding their starting quarterback for 2018 and, as of now, they say they're not sure which door offers the best solution.

With possibly enough cap space, they could chase a veteran on the free-agent market or even trade for one.

With three quarterbacks under contract for next season, they could turn to Paxton Lynch or Trevor Siemian or Chad Kelly, though this increasingly appears to be the least likely option, if it's truly one at all.

Or, with the No. 5 pick in the 2018 draft, they could snag a young quarterback with potential but likely needing time to develop.

"Going into it, we don't know," Elway said. "I think there is no doubt we have to get better at that position."

In coming weeks the Broncos will scout free-agent candidates and the potential of draft prospects, a task that's arduous and, many times, produces unexpected results.

They witnessed it first hand with their current crop of quarterbacks, whom Elway said didn't perform as well as he expected in 2017. And the Broncos could very well be looking at developing a young quarterback again.

"In college you're allowed to be a kid," Elway said. "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. ... 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."

Mike Shanahan, former Broncos head coach, said evaluating the skills of a future NFL quarterback requires examination of his athletic talents but also the intangibles. The things the stat sheets can't quantify.

"Work ethic is a big key," Shanahan said. "Does he really love football? How does he process things? What's his mental makeup? Is he a guy that's shooting for perfection all the time? Or is he a guy that may be talented but doesn't have the little things that are going to separate him from the rest of the pack?"

And, can they adjust to the pro game? Can they handle the really bad times, along with the good times.

"The college game has made it much more difficult to evaluate and, again, it goes back to the same thing as far as how we adjust our game in the NFL to take advantage of what those guys can do," Elway said. "Can they be taught different things to be able to do in the pro game that you really need? You have to be under center more. You can't be in shotgun every down. ... That's all part of the evaluation and trying to figure out if those guys can make that transition."

The transition has proved difficult for some quarterbacks, especially those who ran a spread offense in college. That transition can also require time and the perfect environment, and there was perhaps no greater testament to that than Jared Goff, the Rams' No. 1 overall pick in 2016 who struggled as a rookie but blossomed in his second season under rookie head coach Sean McVay.

Creating that perfect storm with a young quarterback isn't easy. The Broncos' top football decision-maker should know.

"Obviously it's not ideal, but I would say this: I did it. It was tough," Elway said. "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."

Though the Broncos have found talent on the defensive side through the draft and the pool of college free agents, their offensive selections have paled in comparison and as Elway begins his next roster remake, he does so with a less sturdy foundation.

Denver still has a top-five defense, but with so many moving parts, they could find themselves having to pony up more money to convince a free agent to join a rebuild. And should Elway opt for a rookie quarterback, the year of transition could easily spill over into 2019.

“I think every time you make a choice or make a decision on a guy, you see how it turns out. Then you look at it and ask, ‘How could I have gotten better? What did I miss? What did I get?’ ” Elway said. “... I don’t have all the answers. I want to search and find all the answers because I want this team to be as good as they 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, therefore, I’m always trying to get better. As soon as I think I have it down, I’ll retire.”

Broncos' staff to coach North team in upcoming Senior Bowl

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
January 4, 2018

The Broncos are headed to Alabama.

Vance Joseph's staff will lead the North team of the Senior Bowl, held Jan. 27 in Mobile, Alabama, while the Houston Texans' staff guides the South team.

"We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl," Broncos general manager John Elway said in a statement. "On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experience gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field.

"The Senior Bowl has a great tradition and we are excited to be a part of it."

One of those prospects is Heisman winner Baker Mayfield. The Oklahoma quarterback accepted an invitation to the Senior Bowl in December and will be one prospect the Broncos look at closely for their No. 5 pick.

"I think half of it is what you see on film and the other half is figuring out what kind of guy it is," Elway said of evaluating quarterback prospects in the draft. "... 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. 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?"

"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 Broncos have coached the Senior Bowl six times, most recently in 1989 when Dan Reeves' staff led the North team. Joseph was a part of the San Francisco 49ers' staff that coached in the Senior Bowl from 2006-08.

"Having coached the Senior Bowl in the past, it's a tremendous evaluation tool spending all week with these players in a variety of group and individual settings," Joseph said in the team's statement. "From the meeting rooms to the practice field, the Senior Bowl experience lets us see how these prospects work and prepare in a competitive environment."

The annual Senior Bowl is an invitation-only all-star game of sorts for the nation's top senior collegiate players and top NFL draft prospects. NFL coaching staffs lead the two teams through three days of practices (January 23-25) before the teams face off in a game. A total of 110 players will be included, with the final commitments expected to be announced later this week.

Pay bump. The Broncos have two players drafted in the latter rounds (3-7) in 2015 that earned performance escalators: quarterback Trevor Siemian and guard Max Garcia. Both will have base salaries of about \$1.9 million in 2018, though the actual amount is dependent on the salary cap that will be set in March.

According to the collective bargaining agreement, the proven performance escalator, or PPE, can be earned in the fourth year of a drafted player's rookie contract by either playing 35 percent of team's snaps on offense or defense in two of the player's first three seasons, or 35 percent "cumulative average" of the team's snaps in his first three years.

The extra salary is not guaranteed and does not count against the team's salary cap.

On the mend. Siemian underwent successful surgery on his left shoulder in Los Angeles on Wednesday and is expected to return to Denver on Friday. The surgery was his second in as many years on his non-throwing shoulder.

Broncos CB Aqib Talib opens up about his future, Vance Joseph and the team's QBs

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

January 4, 2018

Aqib Talib believes the Broncos are a quarterback away from returning to the top five in the league and he hopes he's around to be a part of it.

The veteran cornerback was a guest on Vic Lombardi's show on Altitude 950 radio earlier this week and said "there's a chance" he might return for a fifth season, but indicated he knows there's a possibility he won't either.

"If I wasn't (returning), it wouldn't be the most surprising thing in the world. You have three corners making big money and that's rare to have," Talib said. "I had conversations with our staff during our exit meetings and stuff, so it's kind of up in the air. But I wouldn't be surprised if I'm still here.

"Just put it like this: I had good conversations with (coach) Vance (Joseph), with (defensive coordinator) Joe Woods. I mean, things change. But there's a chance I will be back."

Talib, 31, has two years remaining on the five-year contract he signed with the Broncos in 2014 and carries a salary cap hit of \$12 million for next season but only \$1 million in "dead money." Which means the Broncos could release him before June 1 and reap a hefty savings, something they'll likely consider since Bradley Roby's salary jumps from about \$1 million to \$8.526 million next season.

"I definitely want to be back. I'd love to retire as a Bronco," Talib said. "It's probably the funnest locker room. I met real friends on this team. We got great memories — Super Bowl 50. Not even just the Super Bowl. Off the field, memories together. I love the guys on the team. I love the staff. I'd love to come back."

Losing a perennial Pro Bowler could sting, too.

For the last two seasons, the Broncos' offense has struggled — to put it politely — to find consistency and cohesion from their quarterbacks and offensive line. The defense finished among the league's top five in total yards, passing yards and rushing yards allowed, and figures to be a selling point as the Broncos search for a quarterback.

"I feel like as a defense, we were put in a lot of bad positions," Talib told Lombardi. "We probably lead the league in drives that started like plus-50. So you get 10 yards and you get a field goal. We were put in a lot of bad positions, so I feel like we get a quarterback who really controls the game — one of those guys I was talking about that really runs the show and controls the game on offense — I feel like we get a quarterback, sky's the limit for this team. We'll be right back in them power rankings, top five. We'll be right back there, man. We're super talented on 'D' and offense."

The Broncos enter the offseason with plenty of options, as they're armed with the No. 5 pick in the upcoming draft and have enough cap space to pursue a free agent quarterback, such as Kirk Cousins, if the Redskins don't re-sign him.

After playing four years for John Elway, Talib is convinced the Broncos' general manager is eyeing a big splash in free agency to fill the void at quarterback.

"Me knowing John, I don't really know if he wants to rebuild and have two more seasons of 8-8 and 7-9 and 'we're getting better,' " Talib said. "I don't know if he's ready to do that. John is ready to get back to the top because that's where he belongs. That's just John Elway. I don't really see him drafting a rookie and trying to rebuild. I see him getting a vet and getting back to the top ASAP because that's where he belongs."

Talib added that he expected Joseph to return for a second season because the team's record "wasn't his fault."

"I think it was the hand he was dealt, honestly," Talib said. "It was the hand he was dealt. John knew what he gave him to work with. Until you give him a nice veteran quarterback, then you'll see who the real V.J. is."

On those potential free agents on the market could be Alex Smith. Or at least Talib thinks so.

The Chiefs started rookie Patrick Mahomes in their season-ending victory in Denver, leading many to believe he could be their starter going forward.

"That guy can play some ball," Talib said of Mahomes. "... He's smart. I see him checking protections, I see him reading the defense. We know how strong his arm is, and the guy is a competitor. So I think Alex Smith, he definitely might be on the market next year. ... The guy (Mahomes) has an AK-47 for an arm."

Broncos hire Sean Kugler to coach offensive line

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

January 4, 2018

One coaching vacancy is filled.

The Broncos on Wednesday hired former University of Texas-El Paso head coach Sean Kugler to coach their offensive line, an NFL source confirmed.

Kugler, a New York native, has coached at the college and professional level for 24 years and served as the offensive line coach at Boise State in 2006 when former Bronco Ryan Clady starred at tackle. Boise State, coached by Chris Petersen that year, went 13-0 and defeated Oklahoma in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl.

Kugler was succeeded at Boise State by Chris Strausser, who coached Broncos center Matt Paradis in college and was hired last year as Denver's assistant offensive line coach. (Strausser was previously the associate head coach/offensive line at the University of Washington under Petersen.)

A former offensive lineman himself, Kugler signed with the Steelers as an undrafted free agent in 1989 and had a brief stint in the now-defunct World League of American Football in 1991.

Kugler began his coaching career in 1990 at the high school level in Florida, before spending eight seasons as a position coach at UTEP. In 2001 he joined the NFL, coaching the tight ends and later the offensive line for the Detroit Lions for five seasons.

One year at Boise State (assistant head coach/offensive line) was followed by three (2007-09) with the Buffalo Bills, where he worked with nine-time Pro Bowl tackle Jason Peters, and three more as the Pittsburgh Steelers' offensive line coach (2010-12), helping them to Super Bowl XLV.

Kugler stepped down as UTEP's head coach after an 0-5 start this season.

Former Broncos offensive line coach Jeff Davidson was one of six assistant coaches fired Monday after the Broncos' closed out their first losing season since 2010 and quickly sought a "culture change." The longtime offensive line coach was hired in 2017 as part of Mike McCoy's offensive staff and it seemed inevitable that the team would move on from Davidson when it fired McCoy after Week 11.

Elway: Personnel department to be evaluated after draft

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 4, 2018

John Elway is facing his most important draft in seven years and he will do so mostly with those who brought 'em.

With the exception of enhancing the role of Gary Kubiak, Elway said he wouldn't make any changes to the Broncos' personnel department until the bulk of his offseason roster reconstruction is completed.

"On the personnel side, we're in the middle of our season," Elway said in an interview with 9NEWS. "We really don't evaluate the personnel side until after the draft. With Adam Peters going to San Francisco last year, Brian Stark moved up to our college director and is doing an outstanding job. We interchanged scouts from last year. The process is always done in May.

"It's two different seasons: Coaching evaluation is done when the season's over, the scouts and personnel side, that evaluation is done when the draft's over. We're always trying to get better on that side."

Elway heads the Broncos' football operations as general manager. Matt Russell is second in command as director of player personnel. Then it's Kubiak, who served this past season as senior personnel advisor, director of pro personnel A.J. Durso and director of college scouting Brian Stark.

Tom Heckert is also a senior personnel advisor but he has been in a part-time, out-of-town role. Elway admits he's missed on some draft picks in recent years, but in fairness, his average first selection the past six years has been 27th.

He picks No. 5 overall this year, the highest since his first GM season of 2011 when he took Von Miller with the No. 2 pick and added the likes of Julius Thomas in the fourth round and Virgil Green in the seventh.

"You're always learning," Elway said in his state-of-the-Broncos press conference Tuesday. "You're learning every year. You look at different players and how you evaluate players that got better and played as well as you thought they should, or other players who didn't play as well as you thought they should. Evaluations are always tough."

Elway was just starting to get worked up, even pounding the table as he talked.

"I think every time you make a choice or make a decision on a guy, you see how it turns out," he said. "Then you look at it and ask, 'How could I have gotten better? What did I miss? What did I get?'"

"Every player that you pick in the draft, we go back and evaluate every player in the draft and what this kid was when we go them and what we thought he was before we got him, then we learn from that.

"I always try to get better. I don't have all the answers. I want to search and find all the answers because I want this team to be as good as they 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, therefore, I'm 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 because then you know it all."

Broncos coaching staff will coach in Senior Bowl

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 4, 2018

The Denver Broncos revised coaching staff will coach in the Senior Bowl, sources tell 9NEWS Broncos Insider Mike Klis.

The Denver coaches will coach the North team in the Senior Bowl game in Mobile, Alabama on Jan. 27.

Vance Joseph and his revised staff will hold North team practices on Jan. 23, 24 and 25 ahead of the game.

It's a dubious honor. Teams who finish near the bottom of the league and still have their coaching staffs in place are those selected to coach the Senior Bowl teams.

Still, the Broncos can turn this into an advantage.

The game will give the coaches and John Elway's personnel staff a great first-hand look at many upcoming draft prospects.

The Houston Texans coaches will lead the South team.

Jordan Taylor to undergo hip surgeries

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 4, 2018

Next up in the line of Broncos' offseason surgeries is Jordan Taylor.

The Denver Broncos' second-year receiver and punt returner will have soon have both hips surgically repaired by Dr. Marc Philippon at The Steadman Clinic in Vail, league sources tell 9NEWS.

It would be similar to the double-hip procedure Dr. Philippon performed on Broncos center Matt Paradis last year. Paradis had the hip surgeries spaced about a month apart. He missed the entire offseason, but didn't miss a snap during the regular season for a third consecutive year.

The long-framed, long-haired, sure-handed Taylor -- known as "Sunshine" to his teammates and cult following -- was not only a rare Broncos' bright spot in the second half of the 2017, he also showed remarkable toughness the entire season. Taylor had been playing with a labrum tear in his right hip since the preseason, according to a source.

Taylor rescued the Broncos' punt returning position from the fumbling Isaiah McKenzie in the final quarter of the season and had 6 catches for 65 yards in the season finale Sunday against Kansas City.

Taylor, who turns 26 next month, will be an exclusive rights free agent who is expected to make \$630,000 in 2018.

He follows quarterback Trevor Siemian to the Broncos' list of offseason body repairs. Siemian is undergoing left shoulder surgery this morning by Dr. Neal ElAttrache in Los Angeles.

Kugler to coach Broncos offensive line

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 4, 2018

The Broncos have hired Sean Kugler to coach the Denver Broncos' offensive line, a coaching source told 9News. Kugler's exact title is to be determined.

As Vance Joseph talked about what he wanted from his new coaching staff, it was almost as if he had Sean Kugler's image in the back of his mind.

"In my opinion," Joseph, Denver's head coach, said Tuesday in his joint state-of-the-Broncos press conference with general manager John Elway on Tuesday. "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."

Chris Strausser, the Broncos' assistant offensive line coach last year, also interviewed for the job that was held by Jeff Davidson last season and is in the mix for a role with the team.

A text to Ryan Clady asked if Kugler would be a good choice as the Broncos' offensive line coach.

"Hell, yeah," Clady texted back.

Kugler has an extensive and mixed coaching background. He started with three years at the high school level. He also has 12 years at the college level – the past 4 ½ years as UTEP's head coach – and 11 years as an NFL assistant coach.

In 2006, he was the Boise State Broncos' offensive line coach, where he tutored a future Denver Broncos' four-time Pro Bowler and two-time All Pro in Clady.

The text exchange was followed promptly by a phone call.

"I had him one year at Boise and I thought he was great as far as motivating guys," said Clady, who had just returned to his Los Angeles-area home after the Denver Broncos' honored his career over the weekend. "Some of the guys I played with didn't have the greatest talent but I think he elevated the whole unit. He communicates well."

"One thing I noticed is, he treated us like men. You don't really get that in college too often."

Kugler's coaching style apparently is closer to matching the energy of a Bill Kollar or Reggie Herring than the soft-spoken Davidson. Which sounds like Joseph's kind of coach for his revised staff.

What Kugler should understand is it's been three years since the Broncos have had a tackle like Clady. Garrett Bolles started 16 games this past season as a first-round rookie. While he demonstrated the athletic skills to one day become a fine player, his play still has a dropped left foot in the development stages.

At right tackle, the Broncos tried \$6 million-a-year free agents each of the past two years in Donald Stephenson and Menelik Watson. The team is expected to try, try, try again in 2018.

“It’ll go back into the evaluation process,” Elway said in a sit-down interview with 9NEWS on Tuesday. “Obviously, it’s not one we want to continue to talk about because we want to get it fixed. Menelik, we lost him to a calf halfway through the year so that’s a problem. He’s had a history of injuries and so can we rely on him to stay healthy for a year? Because I think he has the ability to do it.”

With Kugler hired, the Broncos are looking for assistant coaches at the quarterback, running back, receiver, outside linebacker, defensive backs, and head special teams positions. Chicago Bears running backs coach Curtis Modkins is a candidate for the same position with the Broncos.

Carolina's Thomas McGaughey, whose contract expires after this season, is in the mix to possibly return to the Broncos as special teams coordinator. McGaughey was the Broncos' assistant special teams coordinator in 2005-06. Oakland's Brad Seely, Detroit's Joe Marciano and Indianapolis' Tom McMahon -- all special teams coordinators whose head coach just got fired -- may also be in the mix.

After Broncos' special teams struggled under first-year coordinator Brock Olivo in 2017, Denver is expected to replace him with someone who has NFL coordinator experience.

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

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 4, 2018

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.

Broncos eligible to be forced to be on 'Hard Knocks' show

By Jon Heath

9 News

January 4, 2018

The Broncos' decision to keep Vance Joseph as the team's head coach makes the team eligible to be featured on HBO's "Hard Knocks" show this summer.

NFL teams are ineligible for the show if they have a new head coach, if they have a playoff appearance in the last two seasons or if they have been featured on "Hard Knocks" within the last ten years.

Denver is one of six teams that are eligible, joining the 49ers, Browns, Chargers, Ravens and Redskins. Another NFL team could also volunteer to appear on the show, but that is extremely unlikely to happen.

The Broncos have been approached in the past about being on the show (on a "volunteer" basis) but they turned down NFL Films' offer. Because the team is now eligible, Denver could not turn down the show if asked again.

"Hard Knocks" provides an inside look at an NFL team's training camp each season, which is entertaining for fans but secretive teams don't like having extra cameras around sharing the team's routines and practices.

The Buccaneers were featured last year and went 5-11 this season.

One of the Broncos' biggest offseason questions: What happens to Paxton Lynch?

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 4, 2018

As the Denver Broncos sift through all that went wrong in a 5-11 season, the question of quarterback Paxton Lynch's future is a fairly significant piece of the puzzle.

The team's top football decision-maker, John Elway, went as far as to say Lynch's future will 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."

What the Broncos do at quarterback tops the offseason to-do list and neither Elway nor coach Vance Joseph has seen enough from Lynch to say he's absolutely part of the plan.

"The unfortunate thing with Paxton is we didn't get a chance to see him as much as we wanted this year," Elway said. "... 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, 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."

The Broncos sent first- and third-round picks to the Seattle Seahawks on the first day of the draft in 2016 to move up from No. 32 to No. 26 to select Lynch. It's a well-worn tale of how the Dallas Cowboys wanted to select Lynch and the Broncos moved to make the pick before the Cowboys could trade back into the first round.

That's an investment. Since then, Lynch has lost back-to-back training camp battles to Trevor Siemian for the starting job and he has made just four regular-season starts in two years, playing in five games overall.

His best showing came this past Sunday, but even that was a lukewarm affair. He completed 21 of 31 passes for 254 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions against the Kansas City Chiefs' reserves, while he largely had the Broncos' starters around him.

He lost two-thirds of his potential practice time this season with a shoulder injury in the preseason and then he suffered an ankle injury during his Nov. 26 start against the Oakland Raiders. That is certainly a slice of bad luck, but now Elway has made it clear he's looking for quarterbacks in free agency and the draft.

Lynch said earlier this week that he was still trying to formulate his offseason plan. From a football perspective he has work to do, whether he wants to accept that or not, and there are many in the league who say he doesn't always project urgency about what specifically he will do.

"I just want to get better, whatever I can do in the offseason to get better, I'm sure I'll figure that out whenever I actually dive into it," is how Lynch put it earlier this week. "For now, I'm just going to decompress a little bit and relax a little bit. The goal is always to come back better than when you left."

Most of the Broncos' internal discussions about Lynch will take place before free agency and before the draft, which is also before Lynch gets to throw a football again for the team in a practice setting. It means some of this is out of his hands.

As far as what he needs to do, several personnel evaluators who met with Lynch before the 2016 draft and have watched him play since say he needs to speed up his game-day decision-making if he's going to evolve past a first-read-and-run quarterback. Joseph said he was pleased at Lynch's work against the Chiefs' backups this past Sunday, but hinted at that assessment as well.

"As far as his growth, he needs to just keep playing and keep growing as far as a quarterback -- his football IQ and all of those things," Joseph said.

In four starts, Lynch, whose mobility is supposed to be his strength, has largely used his legs to leave the pocket rather than move to make a throw. He's been sacked 18 times in just under 17 quarters of play -- five games overall.

He won't turn 24 until next month, but the Broncos' words and actions in recent weeks show the clock is already ticking on whether or not the Broncos give him another chance to show what he's learned.

Broncos 'jumped at the opportunity' to coach in Senior Bowl

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

January 4, 2018

On New Year's Day, just one day after the Denver Broncos had concluded their 5-11 trek through the 2017 season, John Elway told the social media world, "Our 2018 season starts today."

To that end, the Broncos got one of their offseason wishes, which is a work week at the Senior Bowl for the team's coaching staff. For the first time since 1989, the Broncos will handle coaching duties for one of the teams at the college all-star game, which features many of the best senior prospects in the 2018 draft.

The Broncos will coach the North team, which usually includes players from the Big Ten and Pac-12, among other leagues. The Houston Texans staff will coach the South team, which usually includes players from the Big 12, ACC, SEC and other leagues. However, players are moved around at times if there aren't enough from a given conference or geographical location to fill out a position group. So until Senior Bowl officials release the two rosters -- expected to happen Jan. 17 -- it won't be known which team some prominent players will play for. That includes the marquee player in this year's game, Heisman Trophy-winner Baker Mayfield.

The Oklahoma quarterback accepted an invitation to play in the game in recent weeks.

In a statement, Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway said: "We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl. On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experience gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field. The Senior Bowl has a great tradition, and we are excited to be a part of it."

Since taking his current job in 2011, Elway has consistently attended Senior Bowl practices, and the Broncos' draft classes in those years have often included players the team met with during Senior Bowl week. The collegiate teams will practice Jan. 23-25, and the game will be played Jan. 27 in Mobile, Alabama.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph may have to adjust how he has the staff handle duties during practices, given that he fired six assistant coaches. The Broncos are looking for a quarterbacks coach, a running backs coach, a wide receivers coach, an offensive line coach, a special-teams coordinator, an assistant defensive backs coach and a linebackers coach.

The Broncos do have coaches still on the staff who could handle practices for the offensive line, quarterbacks, defensive backs and linebackers. They would have to adjust to work with special teams, wide receivers and running backs if they do not fill those positions before they go to Mobile.

Coaches also often interview candidates for coaching jobs at the Senior Bowl. Joseph worked the Senior Bowl three times when he was an assistant coach for the San Francisco 49ers.

Broncos, Texans staffs will coach in Senior Bowl

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

January 4, 2018

The Denver Broncos' staff will coach at the Senior Bowl later this month, where they'll get an up-close look at Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield, who is one of the college quarterbacks sure to be on their radar as they prepare for the NFL draft.

The Senior Bowl announced Wednesday that the Broncos, led by Vance Joseph, will coach the North Team and the Houston Texans staff, led by Bill O'Brien, will coach the South Team, which will include Mayfield, who won the Heisman Trophy this season.

"We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl," general manager John Elway said. "On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experience gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field. The Senior Bowl has a great tradition and we are excited to be a part of it."

Although the Broncos will keep an eye on all positions, Elway said at his season-ending news conference this week that fixing his QB problem was a top offseason priority.

"For us to have a chance to get better, we have to get better at that position," Elway said after the Broncos missed the playoffs for the second straight season following their Super Bowl 50 triumph in Peyton Manning's last game.

The Texans already have their quarterback in Deshaun Watson, but will also benefit from the three days of practices leading up to the game Jan. 27 in Mobile, Alabama, that features many of this year's top draft prospects.

It's a big year for O'Brien, who will enter the final year of his contract after being retained following a 4-12 finish, which had a lot to do with season-ending injuries to Watson and superstar defensive end J.J. Watt.

This marks the first time the Broncos have coached in the Senior Bowl since 1989.

"It's a tremendous evaluation tool spending all week with these players," said Joseph, who worked the 2006-08 games as a 49ers assistant coach. "From the meeting rooms to the practice field, the Senior Bowl experience lets us see how these prospects work and prepare in a competitive environment."

In addition to the coaches, the Broncos' and Texans' football support staffs — athletic training, equipment, video, operations and public relations — will work the Senior Bowl week.

The NFL Network will televise practices Jan. 23-25 and sessions Jan. 24-25 will be broadcast by ESPNU. Also, the NFL Network will broadcast the game, which kicks off at 2:30 p.m. ET on Jan. 27.

Denver Broncos staff to coach North team at 2018 Senior Bowl

By Blair Miller

KMGH

January 4, 2018

The Broncos' coaching staff will get their first look at some of the college players that could help them retool later this month, as staffers will be coaching the North team at the Senior Bowl on Jan. 27.

A pool of prospective NFL players will play at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala. to try and improve their draft stock and make an NFL roster next year.

The Broncos' staff will coach the North team, while coaches from the Houston Texas will be in charge of the South team. There are also three practices ahead of the game itself. Denver's training, equipment, video, operations and PR staffs will also be working the Senior Bowl.

"We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl," said John Elway, the President of Football Operations and GM for the Broncos. "On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experiences gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field."

This is the seventh time Broncos' staffers will coach a team at the Senior Bowl, though they haven't done so since 1989. It's also the fourth time head coach Vance Joseph will coach in the game.

Having coached the Senior Bowl in the past, it's a tremendous evaluation tool spending all week with these players in a variety of group and individual settings," Joseph said. "From the meeting rooms to the practice field, the Senior Bowl experience lets us see how these prospects work and prepare in a competitive environment."

Dozens of players have already accepted invites to the Senior Bowl. As the Broncos look for a new quarterback, they will get a chance to see several of the prospects, including Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield; Oklahoma State's Mason Rudolph; and Washington State's Luke Falk.

[Click here for a full list of players who have already accepted invitations.](#)

Vance Joseph, Broncos staff to coach North Team in 2018 Senior Bowl

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
January 4, 2018

The Denver Broncos' staff will coach in the 2018 Reese's Senior Bowl on Saturday, Jan. 27, at Ladd-Peebles Stadium in Mobile, Alabama, it was announced by Senior Bowl officials on Wednesday.

The Broncos will coach the North Team and the Houston Texans will coach the South Team in the 69th Senior Bowl, which will feature many of this year's top senior collegiate football players and NFL draft prospects. There will be three practices leading up to the Senior Bowl, which kicks off that Saturday at 1:30 p.m. CST and is broadcast by NFL Network.

This represents the seventh time the Broncos have been invited to participate in the Senior Bowl, having previously coached the game in 1970, '71, '75, '81, '86 and '89.

"We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl," President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway said. "On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experience gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field.

"The Senior Bowl has a great tradition and we are excited to be a part of it."

Broncos Head Coach Vance Joseph will be working his fourth Senior Bowl. He coached in the game as an assistant with San Francisco from 2006-08.

"The Senior Bowl provides our staff an up-close look at some of the top prospects in this year's draft," Joseph said. "Having coached the Senior Bowl in the past, it's a tremendous evaluation tool spending all week with these players in a variety of group and individual settings.

"From the meeting rooms to the practice field, the Senior Bowl experience lets us see how these prospects work and prepare in a competitive environment."

In addition to their coaches, the Broncos' football-support staffs — athletic training, equipment, video, operations and PR — will work the Senior Bowl week.

Senior Bowl practices from Jan. 23-25 will be televised live by NFL Network while the sessions from Jan. 24-25 will be covered live by ESPNU.

Coaching the Senior Bowl hands Broncos important opportunity

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
January 4, 2018

Hundreds of NFL personnel members will arrive in Mobile, Alabama, later this month to see the next, best NFL players — and Vance Joseph, John Elway and the Broncos will have a few of the best seats available.

When the Broncos descend upon Mobile from Jan. 23-27, they'll be presented with a unique opportunity. And with the fifth-overall pick in the 2018 NFL Draft, the Broncos will certainly be paying close attention to the 100-plus players in attendance.

During the practices — which run from Jan. 23-25 — the Broncos will receive an up-close look at a variety of prospects, and that should provide valuable intel for when Denver puts together its board during the scouting process. Though the Broncos will have plenty of other chances to evaluate players ahead of the draft — via the Scouting Combine, pro days, in-person visits to UCHealth Training Center — there's always the chance that a memorable connection in Mobile could pay dividends on draft day.

“The Senior Bowl provides our staff an up-close look at some of the top prospects in this year's draft,” Joseph said. “Having coached the Senior Bowl in the past, it's a tremendous evaluation tool spending all week with these players in a variety of group and individual settings.

“From the meeting rooms to the practice field, the Senior Bowl experience lets us see how these prospects work and prepare in a competitive environment.”

And that, perhaps, is the advantage the Broncos will gain in late January over other NFL teams. While every general manager and head coach will receive the chance to see these players at events that range from the Senior Bowl to the Combine, they can't receive the same sort of first-hand knowledge that Elway and Joseph can gain from coaching them in that environment Joseph mentioned.

The opportunity, which hasn't been awarded to the Broncos since 1989, has presented value for plenty of other franchises in previous years. The Dallas Cowboys coaching staff worked the game in 2016, which is when they got one of their first looks at Dak Prescott, who won the game's MVP award playing against the Cowboys-led North Team.

If you look back even further, the Chargers coached the Senior Bowl in 2004 and then drafted four future Pro Bowl players, including Philip Rivers and Shaun Phillips.

This year, the Broncos will receive a long look at a number of talented positions, but the quarterback position may be of particular interest.

Quarterbacks Mason Rudolph, Luke Falk and Baker Mayfield are just a few of the players who have accepted invitations to play in the contest.

For Elway, the practices and game will give him more than just a look at how they begin to adjust to the NFL-style game. He may also gain the best insight possible into their mental make-up, which he said Monday could not be understated when evaluating college quarterbacks.

“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,” Elway said Tuesday. “When the world feels like it’s caving in, are they going to be able to battle through that and not lose their confidence? ... 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. 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.”

Elway, Joseph and the Broncos will get that look at quarterbacks and other players alike when the fourth week of January arrives.

The Broncos may be coaching the North Team, but the possible importance of this trip down south should not be understated.

NFL TV viewership takes heavy hit again in 2017

By A.J. Perez

USA Today

January 4, 2018

Viewership for NFL broadcasts during the regular season dipped once again in 2017 --- and by a larger percentage than last year.

The average audience across the NFL's broadcast partners --- CBS, Fox, NBC, ESPN and NFL Network --- dropped 10%, according to data provided to USA TODAY Sports. While 33 of the top 50 TV programs since Week 1 in September were NFL games, this season's decline follows an 8% decline in 2016.

NFL broadcasts had an average minute audience of 14.9 million compared to 16.5 million in 2016.

CBS, Fox, NBC and ESPN had a smaller audience than 2016.

ESPN, which included its streaming audience, had the lowest drop among the four networks at a 7.7% decline. Fox had a 9.1% drop, NBC dipped 10.4% and CBS fell 11.2% compared to 2016.

While the audience fell, NBC's Sunday Night Football still is on pace to be the most-watched prime time show for a record seventh year in a row. ESPN's Monday Night Football dominated the key male demographic (ages 18-49) for all 16 of its broadcasts.

The Sunday afternoon broadcasts on Fox and CBS also easily outpaced competing programming.

Ex-Player Jim Kovach Helps Search for Medical Answers to Football's Concussion Problem

By Tom Taylor

MMQB

January 4, 2018

The more science teaches us about head injury, the more football seems to be doomed. But could science also save football? Might medicine offer us a miracle cure for degenerative brain disease?

Since 2008, pathologists at Boston University have been repeatedly raising the alarm about the effects of life between the lines, finding ever-greater numbers of cases of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), suspected to be a consequence of repeated head injury, in the brains of deceased NFL players. The current count is 110 out of 111. While the number of diagnosed concussions in pro football was down last season (from 275 to 244), it was still higher than the average over the past five years (243). Unsure of whether the game is worth the risk, several players have walked away from football in spite of promising careers—49ers linebacker Chris Borland in '15, Bills offensive lineman A.J. Tarpley in '16, Ravens offensive lineman John Urschel in '17.

Rule changes and equipment innovations can't alter the contradiction between physics and biology. The average weight of recruits posting a 40-yard dash at the NFL combine is up by 16.8 pounds since 1987, while the average time is a shade faster by 0.05 seconds. The result is that the average momentum of those players is up by 8.4%, in barely more than a generation. Evolution doesn't move that fast. The extra collision energy goes into further rattling our bodies and brains. We are not designed to take these hits.

"With just the amount of physics that I learned to get into medical school and the knowledge of the forces within the brain," says Jim Kovach, a medical doctor, lawyer, entrepreneur, and former player, "my personal opinion is that it would be impossible to truly mitigate the coup-contrecoup—the shaking of the brain, the physical contusion of the brain and the cerebrospinal fluid that is caused by head impacts."

While Kovach doubts concussions can be eradicated from football, the seven-year veteran of the league is hoping the long-term consequences of head impacts can be averted. "I was a relatively undersized middle linebacker who could diagnose plays really well," he says. "[But] I had a career that was marked by very good form—putting my helmet square in other people's chests. That's what linebackers do."

In August 2016, researchers at a Novato, Calif., based company called Raptor Pharmaceuticals discovered an interesting type of molecule: relatively biologically inert, but transformed into substances similar to existing drugs when exposed to free radicals called reaction oxygen species (ROS). Dubbed captans, these molecules promised to have few unwanted side effects, and to more easily pass through the blood-brain barrier—the semipermeable membrane that separates circulating blood from the extracellular fluid in the brain—than typical neuroprotective drugs.

Concussions can lead to the creation of higher concentrations of reactive oxygen species in the brain, raising the oxidative stress on neurons. If that stress is too high, the neurons may die and trigger a cascade that affects other nearby cells. Head injury can also lead to the release of too much of a

neurotransmitter called glutamate, overloading neurons and disrupting their ability to function normally. This can also lead to neuron death, and neuroprotectants that dampen the over-excitation of the cells can be used to calm the glutamate storm.

The theory behind captans is that they could be taken as a prophylactic before injury. When a concussion causes a spike in ROS, the captans will react with those free radicals and neutralize the oxidative stress. Additionally, the transformed captans will then act as neuroprotectants to de-excite the neurons at the site of injury, and only there. “[Pathology after concussion] is like a ripple effect,” says Sara Isbell, Mercaptor’s CEO and co-founder, “we prevent those ripples from expanding.” When Raptor was bought out by Horizon Pharma in September 2016, Isbell and other members of the research team founded a new company called Mercaptor Discoveries to develop captans. Kovach, who has served on the NFL Head, Neck and Spine Committee, joined Mercaptor’s advisory board in August.

Kovach’s final year playing college football at Kentucky, 1978, was also his first year in medical school. The Saints drafted him in the fourth round the following June, and he brought his medical textbooks with him. He played through the 1985 season—a year after he gained his MD—then studied law in retirement, graduating from Stanford University in 1990. He then served eight years as the COO for biotech firm Athersys, five years as president of the Buck Institute for Research on Aging, and is now an innovation and entrepreneurship consultant for the UC Davis School of Medicine.

Kovach credits his academic studies and later work as a reason for why his mind may be healthier than those of other ex-players. A longitudinal study, begun in 1986, on aging and Alzheimer’s disease called the “Nun Study”—the subjects were 678 nuns—has shown connections between learning sophisticated language skills at an early age and a reduced risk of developing AD, and between regular mental exercise and reduced symptoms of AD even when there is underlying brain degeneration.

But Kovach has seen too many of his friends and former colleagues taken down by brain disease to be sure that he will be immune. He played in the 1979 Senior Bowl alongside defensive end Mark Gastineau. Gastineau, a 10-year veteran with the Jets, was diagnosed with dementia and both Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases last year. Kovach was selected in the same draft as receiver Dwight Clark, and later played with him with the 49ers. Clark announced in March that he has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease. Saints coach Dick Nolan picked Kovach in 1979. Nolan died after battling both Alzheimer’s and prostate cancer in 2007. Kovach is sure there are others who may not have a diagnosis, or may not have decided to go public.

Captans aren’t the only potential medical treatments that might offer some sort of cure against the triggering or progression of CTE. Other possibilities include antibodies that might direct the immune system to destroy types of protein molecules that accumulate during the disease, or gene editing to replace genetic variants that appear to raise the risk of developing CTE.

Mercaptor is currently studying captans in animal models. Isbell predicts that by mid 2019, the company could start initial human trials to test for adverse reactions in healthy patients, and that within five years there could be clinical trials for patients with, or at risk of, developing neurodegenerative diseases.

If the research holds up, and if it leads to the development of new neuroprotective drugs, Kovach says he’ll be a willing patient. “I’ll raise my hand and say ‘Yes, me too,’” he says. “It’s naïve to think that there’s no chance that I could get [CTE]. It’s tragic to believe that you will, but you can’t believe that you won’t, either.”

Elway: Broncos' No. 1 goal is to upgrade QB position

By Kevin Patra

NFL.com

January 4, 2018

The Denver Broncos laid the failure in 2017 at the feet of the quarterback.

After watching Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch flounder all season, GM John Elway stated the obvious on Tuesday: Denver's "No. 1 goal" is to upgrade the QB spot this offseason.

"I think there is no doubt we've got to get better at that position," Elway said, via the team's official website. "For us to have a chance to get better, we've got to get better at that position."

Broncos quarterbacks finished 2017 with a 73.0 passer rating for the season, 31st in the NFL -- only the Cleveland Browns signal-callers were worse. Denver's trio of QBs also ranked 31st in INTs (22), 27th in completion percentage (58.7), 27th in yards per attempt (6.5) and T-25th in passing TDs.

"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."

Behind a porous offensive line, Siemian cratered, tossing a bevy of terrible interceptions before ending the season injured. Osweiler is Osweiler.

One problem for Elway heading into the offseason is the little in-game evaluation the team received on former first-round pick Paxton Lynch. The second-year pro started just two games and was injured in his first start of the season. In the 2017 finale, Lynch led a quick-pass offense and showed that he has the arm to be a starting QB. The raw signal-caller, however, repeatedly threw late, displaying a tendency to be slow reading his progressions.

Elway must decide if Lynch's struggles are simply part of the process of a growing quarterback with limited snaps or a sign the team needs to move on.

"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."

If Elway determines Lynch isn't the long-term answer, would he pull the trigger on a rookie QB with the No. 5 overall pick in April's draft? Will the Broncos already have a veteran signal-caller in place by then after chasing one in free agency, like Kirk Cousins?

Could Elway be angling to bring another Manning to Denver?

NFL Network's Mike Garafolo reported Wednesday that Giants offensive coordinator Mike Sullivan will interview for the Broncos' open QBs coach gig. Eli Manning had two of his best seasons with Sullivan as his quarterback coach (2011, 2015). While there are several layers needed to be peeled back before Eli could be shipped to Denver, perhaps Elway's ultimate answer to his quarterback quandary is to trust the Manning family to carry the load once again.

Wouldn't that be a fun springtime story?

Broncos, Texans coaching staffs to coach in 2018 Senior Bowl

By Dan Parr

NFL.com

January 4, 2018

The Broncos and Texans coaching staffs will coach the two teams of NFL draft prospects in the 2018 Reese's Senior Bowl.

The Broncos will coach the North squad, and the Texans will coach the South. The game will be held on Jan. 27 and broadcast exclusively on NFL Network (2:30 p.m ET).

Mike Klis of 9news first reported the news.

"We are thrilled to have the Houston Texans and Denver Broncos as the two coaching staffs for our game," said Senior Bowl Executive Director Phil Savage. "Both organizations are well respected across the National Football League and it is our honor to welcome them to Mobile."

The Broncos hold the fifth overall pick in this year's draft.

"We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl," said Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway. "On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experience gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field."

"The Senior Bowl has a great tradition and we are excited to be a part of it."

The Texans do not hold a selection in the first two rounds -- Houston sent its first-rounder to the Browns in the Deshaun Watson trade and its second-rounder to Cleveland, as well, as part of the trade that sent Brock Osweiler to the Browns.

The Senior Bowl, held each year in Mobile, Ala., is a week-long event that hosts 110 of the nation's top seniors and fourth-year juniors that have graduated. The players take part in practices from Tues.-Thurs. and the game is held on Saturday. All 32 NFL teams send representatives to the event to interview prospects, record measurements and conduct on-field evaluations.

Most of the spots for this year's Senior Bowl have been filled. Heisman winner Baker Mayfield is among the 100-plus prospects that have accepted invitations.

Recent Senior Bowl participants include Kareem Hunt (2017), Carson Wentz (2016) and David Johnson (2015).

Vance Joseph, Broncos coaching staff will coach North Team in 2018 Senior Bowl

By Grant Meech

KOAA

January 4, 2018

The Broncos will get even more extra work in the off season.

Vance Joseph and the rest of the coaching staff will coach the North team in the 2018 Senior Bowl in Mobile, Alabama at the end of January.

More information on the announcement is listed below from the Denver Broncos Public Relations staff. Vance Joseph was retained by Broncos GM John Elway on Monday following a 5-11 season.

The Denver Broncos' staff will coach in the 2018 Reese's Senior Bowl on Saturday, Jan. 27, at Ladd-Peebles Stadium in Mobile, Ala., it was announced by Senior Bowl officials on Wednesday.

The Broncos will coach the North Team and the Houston Texans will coach the South Team in the 69th Senior Bowl, which will feature many of this year's top senior collegiate football players and NFL draft prospects. There will be three practices leading up to the Senior Bowl, which kicks off that Saturday at 1:30 p.m. CST and is broadcast by NFL Network.

This represents the seventh time the Broncos have been invited to participate in the Senior Bowl, having previously coached the game in 1970, '71, '75, '81, '86 and '89.

"We jumped at the opportunity for the Broncos to work the Senior Bowl," President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway said. "On both the coaching and personnel sides, the experience gives us a chance to meet these prospects and get to know them on and off the field.

"The Senior Bowl has a great tradition and we are excited to be a part of it."

Broncos Head Coach Vance Joseph will be working his fourth Senior Bowl. He coached in the game as an assistant with San Francisco from 2006-08.

"The Senior Bowl provides our staff an up-close look at some of the top prospects in this year's draft," Joseph said. "Having coached the Senior Bowl in the past, it's a tremendous evaluation tool spending all week with these players in a variety of group and individual settings.

"From the meeting rooms to the practice field, the Senior Bowl experience lets us see how these prospects work and prepare in a competitive environment."

In addition to their coaches, the Broncos' football support staffs—athletic training, equipment, video, operations and PR—will work the Senior Bowl week.

Senior Bowl practices from Jan. 23-25 will be televised live by NFL Network while the sessions from Jan. 24-25 will be covered live by ESPNU.

NFL lawyers locked in battle over concussion settlement

By Josh Kosman
New York Post
January 4, 2018

Lawyers representing many former NFL players pushed back hard on Wednesday against a suggestion they cap their total fees at 30 percent when pursuing a payout from the roughly \$1 billion concussion settlement.

Last month, a court-appointed expert said the 191 players who have had their concussion claims approved risked paying out as much as 67 percent of their settlement in legal fees.

Former players pay two separate legal fees — one to lawyers who filed their claims and a second to the lawyer who negotiates their settlement.

The expert, Harvard professor William Rubenstein, suggested lawyers receive a total payout of 30 percent of the settlement — 15 percent each to the lawyers who filed the claims and those who negotiated the payout.

In six separate briefs filed on Wednesday, lawyers asked federal court Judge Anita Brody not to cap their fees.

“It is not reasonable to expect former players with significant, if not catastrophic, cognitive impairment to navigate the claims process without the help of sophisticated legal assistance,” said Jason Luckasevic, credited with being the first to sue the NFL over concussion claims.

Wednesday was the deadline for lawyers representing the more than 20,000 players who have filed to be part of the settling class to reply to Rubenstein’s suggestion.

The settlement covers living players who retired before July 7, 2014, and families of some players who have died.

If Brody accepts Rubenstein’s suggestions, players will be able to keep more of the roughly \$1 billion settlement.

The NFL has already paid \$112.5 million into a common fund for the lawyers who prepared the settled suit.

Rubenstein considers it double-dipping for lawyers to be charging additional fees for submitting settlement applications.

“Some players ... face the possibility of paying nearly two-thirds of their recoveries to these two sets of lawyers,” Rubenstein said in court papers filed in December.

The lawyers, in asking Brody not to set a cap, said the NFL was making settlements hard to collect, and that was creating much work for them.

As of Dec. 11, a total of 1,913 former players or their families applied for a concussion settlement. The NFL has processed 234, or 12 percent, of the applications, according to court records.

The NFL has approved and paid out on 191 of those applications a total of \$241 million — or an average of \$1.26 million per claim.

The other claims, representing a total of 18 percent of the approved applications, were rejected.

“Professor Rubenstein’s assumption that claimants would enjoy a streamlined process has proven to be incorrect,” a second lawyer, Gene Locks, said in a Wednesday filing.

“The NFL’s obstruction has required sophisticated individual representation for each former player,” Locks said. “Very few claims have succeeded without a litigated fight over alleged deficiencies, audits, and appeal.”

Luckasevic, in court papers, said of 39 players’ claims he has handled through the entire settlement process, 30 received monetary awards — nine have been denied.

The NFL is appealing seven of his clients’ awards, and he is appealing four of the denials.

The NFL did not return calls.

Reports: Broncos hire Sean Kugler as offensive line coach

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
January 4, 2018

The Denver Broncos have hired Sean Kugler as their new offensive line coach, according to multiple reports.

Kugler replaced Jeff Davidson as Denver's offensive line coach. Davidson was one of six coaches let go by the Broncos on Monday.

Kugler has spent time with three previous teams in the NFL. He served as tight ends and offensive line coach of the Detroit Lions from 2001-04, an offensive line coach with the Buffalo Bills from 2007-09 and joined the Pittsburgh Steelers in 2010.

He left the Steelers to take the head coaching job at UTEP, his alma mater, in Dec. 2013. He resigned from that job in October after an 0-5 start this season.

Broncos and Texans to coach Senior Bowl teams

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
January 4, 2018

There was plenty of uncertainty about the Broncos and Texans coaching staffs heading into the offseason.

Now, they're going to have a little extra work to do.

According to Mike Klis of KUSA, the two teams will handle the coaching in this year's Senior Bowl.

While such duty gives teams a head start on scouting some of the top prospects in the 2018 NFL Draft, it's hard to know how much it's going to help Bill O'Brien.

The Texans are without their first-rounder (sending it to Cleveland so they could draft Deshaun Watson a year ago), their second-rounder (for the Browns taking Brock Osweiler off their hands), and their fifth-rounder (which went to Seattle in the Duane Brown deal).

They do have a pair of thirds (their own and Seattle's from the Brown deal), but a total of just five picks.

Denver has the fifth overall pick, and nine total picks.

Report: Broncos considering Ben McAdoo for QB coach vacancy

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
January 4, 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.

Report: Broncos to interview Mike Sullivan for QB coach

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
January 4, 2018

Most people saw the 2017 Giants offense and turned the channel as quickly as possible.

The Broncos apparently had a different reaction. They are reportedly considering former Giants head coach Ben McAdoo as their quarterbacks coach and he'll apparently have some competition from a member of his coaching staff in Jersey.

Mike Garafolo of NFL Media reports that the Broncos will interview Giants offensive coordinator Mike Sullivan for the job. Sullivan, who was on the Jaguars staff when Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave ran the offense in Jacksonville, had two stints as the quarterbacks coach for the Giants sandwiched around a couple of years as the offensive coordinator in Tampa.

He moved up to offensive coordinator with the Giants when McAdoo became the head coach in 2016 and took over offensive playcalling duties during the 2017 season, although the move didn't do much to spark a unit hamstrung by injuries, poor offensive line play and other shortcomings.

That left them as one of a handful of teams to score fewer points than the Broncos, but that lack of on-field success may not keep the men overseeing the unit from landing on their feet.

Aqib Talib wants to “retire a Bronco” but knows he might not return

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

January 4, 2018

Broncos cornerback Aqib Talib wants to finish his career in Denver, but he knows the reality: He might not return next season.

“If I wasn’t [returning], it wouldn’t be the most surprising thing in the world,” Talib said on Denver’s Altitude 950. “You have three corners making big money and that’s rare to have. I had conversations with our staff during our exit meetings and stuff, so it’s kind of up in the air. But I wouldn’t be surprised if I’m still here.

“Just put it like this: I had good conversations with [coach] Vance [Joseph], with [defensive coordinator] Joe Woods. I mean, things change. But there’s a chance I will be back.”

There’s also a chance he won’t.

Talib, 31, carries a cap hit of \$12 million next season but only \$1 million in dead money. Thus, the Broncos could reap a hefty savings, which they can use with Bradley Roby’s salary cap figure jumping from \$2.2 million to \$8.5 million and Chris Harris counting \$10.4 million against the cap.

“I definitely want to be back. I’d love to retire as a Bronco,” Talib said. “It’s probably the funnest locker room. I met real friends on this team. We got great memories — Super Bowl 50. Not even just the Super Bowl. Off the field, memories together. I love the guys on the team. I love the staff. I’d love to come back.”