

Broncos hire Greg Williams to coach cornerbacks and Zach Azzanni as wide receivers coach

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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The Broncos added two more names to their coaching staff Wednesday. Greg Williams was hired as a defensive backs coach focusing on the cornerbacks and Zach Azzanni was named wide receivers coach.

Williams was the Indianapolis Colts' defensive backs coach the last two seasons and was previously an assistant on the Chargers' defensive staff for seven years, coaching the linebackers and later the secondary. In Denver, he'll join Marcus Robertson, the lead secondary coach who was hired in 2016 on Vance Joseph's original staff.

Williams played receiver and defensive back at the University of North Carolina under coach Mack Brown (1994-97), and competed in training camp with the Bears and Giants before playing in NFL Europe, the Arena League and the XFL.

As the Broncos have revamped their coaching staff this season, they've taken a specialist approach with some of their positional coaches. On the offensive line, new hire Sean Kugler will coach the interior linemen, while Chris Strausser will coach the tackles, much like in the secondary, where Williams will specialize with the cornerbacks.

Azzanni, who takes over for longtime receivers coach Tyke Tolbert, has a year of NFL coaching experience as the receivers coach on John Fox's staff in Chicago last year, as well as 18 years as a college assistant. A former receiver at Central Michigan, Azzanni returned to his alma mater in 2007 and helped lure Antonio Brown as a walk-on. Brown is now a six-time Pro Bowl selection and the league's leader in receiving yards.

Azzanni's other coaching stops include Tennessee (2013-16), Wisconsin (2012), Western Kentucky (2011), Florida (2010), Bowling Green (2001-06) and Valparaiso (1999-00). He is the second Bears assistant to join the Broncos staff this year, along with running backs coach Curtis Modkins.

The Broncos also officially announced the hire of Tom McMahon as special teams coordinator. McMahon was previously the Colts' special teams coordinator and helped former punter Pat McAfee and kicker Adam Vinatieri to multiple Pro Bowl selections and all-pro designations.

While on 104.3 The Fan on Wednesday, McAfee gave McMahon a ringing endorsement and called him "an incredible coach" and that "Denver will absolutely love him."

"What Tom McMahon did — he has the ability to reach everybody in the room," McAfee said. "A special teams coordinator is the only guy that has to teach the entire team. It's not just offense, it's not just defense, it's everybody. He has to talk to offensive linemen just like he has to talk to D-linemen, corners and kickers and punters on a daily basis. He just has this relatability about him."

“He’s a small little thing. He’s tiny. I mean, he’s a tiny thing. His nickname is Midge and he seems as if he never sleeps. ... The guy stays at the office all day, all night all season. But watching him work in practice and in the meeting room is truly a thing of beauty and I was absolutely mind-blown when that guy got to the Colts and I’m very thankful for everything that he’s done for my career, Vinatieri’s career.”

The Broncos parted with six assistants after their 5-11 season but have filled many of the vacancies. Among the remaining vacancies is a linebackers coach, to take the spot of Fred Pagac, and possibly a replacement for Phil Rauscher, formerly an assistant to Joseph who left for an offensive line coaching position in Washington.

New roles

The recent hires and altered titles of Broncos coaches for 2018:

Bill Musgrave, offensive coordinator
Tom McMahon, special teams coordinator
Mike Sullivan, quarterbacks coach
Zach Azzanni, wide receivers coach
Curtis Modkins, running backs coach
Sean Kugler, offensive line-guards/centers
Chris Strausser, offensive line-tackles
Greg Williams, defensive backs/cornerbacks

Wyoming's Josh Allen accepts Senior Bowl invite, joins group of eight QBs

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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It's official: Josh Allen is in.

The Wyoming quarterback accepted his Senior Bowl invite and will join a group of seven other quarterbacks that will be coached by the Denver Broncos and Houston Texans in Mobile, Ala., later this month.

The others are Oklahoma senior and Heisman winner Baker Mayfield, Oklahoma State's Mason Rudolph, Western Kentucky's Mike White, Richmond's Kyle Lauletta, Washington State's Luke Falk, Virginia's Kurt Benkert and Troy's Brandon Silvers. The full roster consisting of more than 100 players is expected to be announced next week.

Though the game is typically reserved for college seniors, graduating fourth-year juniors, such as Allen, are also eligible. The 6-foot-5, 240-pound quarterback is expected to be a first-round pick after completing 56 percent of his passes for 1,812 yards, 16 touchdowns and six interceptions last season at Wyoming, and is one of dozens of prospects that will garner the eyes of the Broncos later this month.

The week-long event, which includes three days of practices before the game on Jan. 27, will give the Broncos plenty of time and a close-up view of dozens of options for the upcoming draft. Allen is certainly one.

Allen closed out his college career at the Idaho Potato Bowl in Boise, where he tossed three touchdown passes in the first quarter alone as Broncos general manager John Elway and director of player personnel Matt Russell watched from the sidelines.

The Broncos they "jumped at the opportunity" to coach at the Senior Bowl and will handle the North team, which is expected to include Mayfield.

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

The Broncos head into the draft armed with picks, including the No. 5 pick that they could use on one of this year's top quarterback prospects. In the team's year-end news conference, Elway as well as head coach Vance Joseph said they weren't sure the direction they would go to improve at the quarterback spot but admitted they needed to, somehow.

"That position didn't perform as well as we wanted it to," Elway said. "I thought it would perform better than it did. It's not just on them. I think there are a lot of circumstances that went into that and put them in tough situations. We didn't perform as well as we liked. That's obviously a position that we feel like we have to get better at going into the next season."

Broncos hire cornerbacks coach Greg Williams, receivers coach Zach Azzanni

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

Jan. 11, 2018

The Denver Broncos have hired Greg Williams to become their new defensive back specializing in cornerbacks.

Williams will assist Marcus Robertson, who will return for his second season as the Broncos' head defensive backs coach. Joe Woods remains the Broncos' defensive coordinator for a second season. 9News was the first to report of Williams' hire that the Broncos later confirmed in a press release.

The Broncos also put out word they are hiring Zach Azzanni as their receivers coach.

Williams was the Indianapolis Colts' defensive backs the past two years. Some of his best work could be seen in Rashaan Mathis, who has improved from journeyman to one of the top five cornerbacks available in the free-agent market this March.

Prior to Williams' time with the Colts, he spent seven seasons with the San Diego Chargers as an assistant linebackers and assistant secondary coach.

He played some receiver and kickoff returner before becoming a two-year starting defensive back for North Carolina and coach Mack Brown from 1994-97. Williams went to training camp with the Bears and Giants before playing in NFL Europe, the XFL and Arena League.

He got his coaching start as an intern with Arizona State, an assistant at the College of DuPage, then as a defensive backs coach at Arkansas Tech and Pitt before breaking into the NFL with the Chargers in 2009.

With the Broncos, Williams will replace Johnnie Lynn as Robertson's assistant.

Azzanni worked last season with Chicago Bears' head coach John Fox. Azzanni has an extensive college backing background, including a year with Urban Meyer at Bowling Green.

Since the Broncos' season ended on December 31, head coach Vance Joseph has tweaked his coaching staff not only in personnel but with their responsibilities.

For instance, to replace Jeff Davidson as offensive line coach, Joseph hired Sean Kugler as offensive line/guards and center coach, and promoted former offensive line assistant Chris Strausser to offensive line/tackles coach.

On defense, Joseph will replace outside linebackers coach Fred Pagac with a "pass-rush" coach. Reggie Herring, who coached Broncos' inside linebackers the past three years, will now oversee both inside and outside linebackers.

The new pass-rush coach, which has not yet been determined, will bounce between the meeting rooms of coach Bill Kollar's defensive linemen and Herring's linebackers.

An updated look at Joseph's new coaching assistants:

Position Former coach ... New coach

Special teams Brock Olivo Tom McMahon

Offensive line Jeff Davidson Sean Kugler/Chris Strausser

Quarterbacks Klint Kubiak* Mike Sullivan

Running backs Eric Stutesville ... Curtis Modkins

Receiver Tyke Tolbert Zach Azzanni

DB/Cornerback Johnnie Lynn Greg Williams

Outside linebacker Fred Pagac To be determined

Asst to head coach Phil Rauscher To be determined

*Kubiak is remaining with Joseph's coaching staff in another capacity.

Broncos' QB hunt, salary-cap structure could force out some familiar names

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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For many who wore a Denver Broncos uniform in a disappointing 5-11 season, the proverbial other shoe has not yet dropped, and it won't for weeks.

Among all the choices to be made, the Broncos have three high-profile veteran players who have each played in at least one Pro Bowl in their time with the team -- and who likely don't know their fate for 2018.

"It's uncertain for everybody," is how running back C.J. Anderson has put it. "... You have a season like we had and you know they're going to change things all over. Me? I don't know, that's not my decision -- that's upstairs. We'll see."

Scan the Broncos' salary-cap table for the 2018 season, talk to players in the locker room and look at how things have gone in previous seasons when they have faced roster decisions, and Anderson, cornerback Aqib Talib and wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders are all in the same contractual boat.

All three are starters, all three have at least two years left on their deals and all three are high-priced veteran players at positions where the Broncos may be looking for a bit of a makeover. As this past season drew to a close, coach Vance Joseph summed up what the weeks and months to come will bring with this: "I don't know who will be back."

Part of the reason for this is the Broncos' salary-cap structure. Because they've spent the past two seasons with most of the quarterbacks still on their rookie contracts, their salary-cap charges at the position were far lower than those of their NFL peers.

So among the Broncos' six biggest contracts against the salary cap in 2018, there are two wide receivers and two cornerbacks. And if the Broncos are going to use the No. 5 pick of the draft -- or any pick in the top 10 -- on a quarterback or sign one in free agency, or do both, that structure simply may not work any longer.

Talib is scheduled to count \$12 million against the cap in the 2018 season, Sanders \$10.94 million. Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas (\$12.03 million) has the second-highest cap hit for '18, behind linebacker Von Miller, and cornerback Chris Harris Jr. (\$10.37 million) is sixth.

Anderson has the 12th-highest cap figure (\$4.5 million), but the Broncos have used a pick on a running back in each of the past two drafts and Anderson's contract is structured in such a way he could be released with no "dead money" charges.

Talib's deal gives the Broncos an out as well, given he can be released with a "dead money" charge of \$1 million, far less than is usually the case for a contract with as many years remaining (two) and for as much as Talib signed (\$57 million) in 2014. Talib recently pointed out that with Harris, at No. 6, and

Bradley Roby, with the No. 8 cap figure (\$8.526 million), at cornerback, the Broncos may simply not want to have three players at the same position among their eight biggest cap charges.

In a recent appearance on Altitude 950-AM, Talib said, "[There are] three corners making big money, so it's kind of up the air."

Talib, who was just named to his fourth Pro Bowl in his four seasons with the Broncos, also was asked if he believed he would return for next season after meeting with Joseph and defensive coordinator Joe Woods on New Year's Day, when the players went through their exit physicals. "It's a chance I will be [back]," Talib said. "And if I wasn't, it wouldn't be the most surprising thing in the world. ... Put it like this ... I had good conversations with Vance and Joe Woods. I mean, things change. There's a chance I will be [back]."

For his part, Sanders was limited after a Week 6 ankle injury and missed four games in all, including the last two of the season. He didn't have a touchdown catch after Week 2.

Some around the Broncos have pointed to Sanders' Instagram post last month that included, along with the advice to "stay humble" and "trust your instincts," a closing line that read, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it," as an early sign he was unsure of his status. Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway has made quarterback the team's top offseason priority, and with the offseason having just gotten underway, he has lumped many of the other decisions to be made under "part of the discussions we'll have."

"But you know changes are coming," Anderson said. "How can they not? But as players, it's out of our hands. All you can do is get back to work and wait and see."

Broncos fill more assistant coach openings

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

Jan. 11, 2018

Broncos coach Vance Joseph is going with experience this time, hiring Tom McMahon to replace Brock Olivo as his special teams coordinator.

Joseph gave Olivo his first shot at coaching special teams last season, but Dave Toub's longtime assistant in Kansas City oversaw one of the worst special teams in the league and was among six assistants Joseph fired last week.

Rookie punt returner Isaiah McKenzie fumbled six times but kept his job for most of the season, a sore spot with several veterans who felt there was a sense of privilege among the members of the 2017 draft class.

Olivo's units had trouble getting the right personnel onto the field, twice telegraphing trick plays because of it, and they were even whistled for delays on kickoffs .

Denver's special teams gaffes led to 24 points by the Patriots in New England's 41-16 win in Denver on Nov. 12 and Joseph drew criticism the next day for sticking with Olivo .

However, Olivo was one of six assistants fired after a hugely disappointing 5-11 season when Joseph said he needed to "change the culture" on offense and special teams.

McMahon is a 26-year coaching veteran who has coached NFL special teams for the last 11 seasons, including the last five in Indianapolis, Kansas City in 2012 and St. Louis from 2009-11.

The Colts featured one of the league's most consistently solid special teams units during McMahon's five seasons in Indianapolis. He became available after the Colts fired head coach Chuck Pagano last week.

Joseph praised McMahon's "direct teaching style that emphasizes fundamentals," noting he "has a proven track record developing young players on special teams that will bring leadership and energy to this important phase of our team."

Joseph also promoted Chris Strausser to coach the offensive tackles and hired ex-Colts assistant Greg Williams to coach defensive backs and ex-Bears assistant Zach Azzanni to coach wide receivers.

Strausser, who was an assistant offensive line coach under Jeff Davidson last year, will coach the tackles with Sean Kugler coaching the guards and centers in a new setup along the O-line, which has been the Broncos' bugaboo going back to Peyton Manning's time in Denver.

Last year's first-round draft pick, left tackle Garrett Bolles, was among the league's leaders in penalties and often allowed an early mistake to affect him and the team adversely the rest of the game.

Broncos agree to terms with new special teams, OL, secondary coaches

By Troy Renck

KMGH

Jan. 11, 2018

The Denver Broncos continued their hiring spree Wednesday, agreeing to terms with three more veteran coordinators who will try and help Vance Joseph right the ship at Mile High in 2018.

After a woeful year on special teams, the Broncos agreed to terms with Tom McMahon to be the new special teams coordinator. They also promoted assistant offensive line coach Chris Strausser to be the offensive line-tackles coach, and named Greg Williams as the new defensive backs coach.

McMahon spent the past four years as the special teams coordinator for the Indianapolis Colts after a year as special teams coordinator with the Kansas City Chiefs that followed three years with the St. Louis Rams.

Colts' punter Pat McAfee earned Pro Bowl honors under McMahon in 2014 and 2016, and kicker Adam Vinatieri and long snapper Matt Overton also earned Pro Bowl nods under McMahon.

McMahon coached at the high school and college levels for 14 years before transitioning to the NFL with the Atlanta Falcons in 2007.

The Broncos parted ways with Brock Olivo after the season after a lackluster year that included several muffed punt and kick returns.

Strausser will join Kugler, who was named the guards and centers coach last Friday, in coaching the offensive line, which hopes to improve on its 2017 showing.

Williams will take over coaching the No Fly Zone, though it's still up in the air if he'll have Pro Bowler Aqib Talib on his roster. He spent the past two seasons as the defensive backs coach for the Colts and coached linebackers and the secondary with the Chargers beforehand.

Colts defensive backs tallied 13 interceptions and 81 passes defended this past season.

The Broncos will add Zach Azzani as their receivers coach. He last coached with the Chicago Bears. It leaves outside linebackers position remaining.

However, they are likely to address in different manner, emphasizing the importance of coaching the pass rush.

The Broncos need a player to breakthrough, ideally Shane Ray. Ray was poised for a big year last season, but tore ligaments in his left wrist in training camp. He played through pain, but never rebounded.

What coaching staff changes mean for Broncos, Vance Joseph

By Troy Renck

KMGH

Jan. 11, 2018

When a team finishes 5-11, it creates 20-20 vision on the future.

The Broncos define themselves on winning, on contending. Whether coach Vance Joseph can lead them back to the playoffs remains uncertain. One thing crystallized from the stream of losses: change was necessary.

Joseph enters the second season of his four-year deal needing to execute a U-turn. The dynamics of the coaching staff were not working. Joseph deserves blame, of course. With input from multiple sources, he assembled the previous group. It backfired horribly. In the case of offensive boss Mike McCoy, as outlined multiple times, he functioned as if he were still a head coach, running an offense that has a proven record of success but with quarterbacks named Peyton Manning and Philip Rivers, not Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch.

First-time special teams coordinator Brock Olivo brought energy, passion and awful results. There were issues with his available talent, revealed as the Broncos became younger and more athletic midway through the season. However, Olivo suffered from not keeping things simple. The Broncos special teams cost them one, if not two victories. That goes beyond unacceptable to unimaginable.

The common thread in the positions filled by Joseph over the last 10 days: experience and edge. That leads to a fair question: Why move on from running backs coach Eric Studesville and receivers boss Tyke Tolbert? Both are terrific. This falls into the category that sometimes change is necessary because players need to hear a different voice.

The reality is that the Broncos have not developed young players with any consistency. Is that all on the coaches? Hardly. But again, Joseph is working to keep his job this season. He has to be comfortable with a group that will challenge players every day (Studesville did, and is the most unfortunate casualty in the sweep. He interviewed for the Giants head coaching job on Wednesday).

Which brings me back to Joseph. Working under the premise the group will do fine during the week, his new staff must excel on game day. Let's be honest, that's where Joseph struggled, along with rookie bosses Joe Woods, who improved over the final month, and Olivo.

The game moved fast. The Broncos became reactionary, too often looking confused and disorganized. Paranoia rules the coaching world. I will never forget hours spent talking to Tony La Russa and Buck Showalter about how success is the result of preparation. Those managers would run through every possible scenario in a game before the first pitch. It always felt like they were controlling the chess match, constantly one move ahead of the opponent.

In Joseph's case, practice must translate to game day or he will not be around for game days in 2019. I am not going to tell you I know the strengths and weaknesses of all the new coaches. I don't. I do know they will be asked to push players and accelerate the growth of rookies.

Of all the additions, the most notable for me is Tom McMahon. He carries an 11-year resume as a special teams coach. Special teams on game day last season were a mixture of cringes and disappointment. Privately, players fumed about the mess, furious after the Patriots debacle and the endless fumbles by Isaiah McKenzie (One player screamed an obscenity at McKenzie as he walked to the locker room after he failed to go out of bounds to secure a field goal attempt at Washington).

McMahon knows the drill. He comes highly recommended, including by former Colts punter Pat McAfee, who said on 104.3 The Fan, "He has the ability to reach everybody in the room. It seems as if he never sleeps. Watching him work, at practice and in the meeting room is a truly a thing of beauty."

The Broncos' special teams ranked near the bottom of every meaningful category. Of all concerns for Joseph, this should not be one. Having McMahon should lend stability, decrease silly mistakes, and increase production.

Will that matter enough? Here's the deal. I have covered a lot of bad teams. The key to improvement is everyone becomes a little better, leaving the aggregate making the biggest impact.

I am not naive enough to insist Joseph and his new crew can pull off the rebound. I do know Joseph knows what he didn't know a year ago, and will be more suited for the game-day Bunsen burner.

When the Broncos open next year, they will feature seven new coaches. It represents a path to recovery. And if they are able to sign a certain Washington quarterback who wears No. 8, well that would place them on the toll road to redemption.

Footnotes

Been asked multiple times over the last few weeks: the Broncos are not expected to play any international games next season. ... The Broncos last vacancy is outside linebackers coach. This might take a little longer. The position will change, with a narrow focus on teaching/coaching the pass rush. ... Greg Williams is listed as a defensive backs coach. He will coach the cornerbacks with DB boss Marcus Robertson focusing on safeties.

Broncos name Zach Azzanni as Wide Receivers Coach

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

Jan. 11, 2018

The Broncos named Zach Azzanni their new wide receivers coach, Head Coach Vance Joseph announced Wednesday.

Azzanni spent the 2017 season in the same position with the Chicago Bears during his first season as an NFL coach.

Before he joined Chicago's staff, Azzanni spent 18 years in the collegiate ranks, where he most recently served as Tennessee's passing game coordinator/wide receivers coach.

He also served as Tennessee's wide receivers coach/recruiting coordinator (2013-14), Wisconsin's wide receivers coach (2012), Western Kentucky's offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach (2011) and Florida's passing game coordinator/wide receivers coach (2010).

Azzanni began his coaching career at Valparaiso in 1999 as the team's wide receivers coach. He then moved on to Bowling Green, where he served as a graduate assistant (2001-02) and wide receivers coach (2003-06).

Before Azzanni made the move to Florida, he spent three years at his alma mater, Central Michigan. He served as the Chippewas' assistant head coach/wide receivers coach and was named the Wide Receivers Coach of the Year in 2009 by FootballScoop.com.

The Broncos' new coach has coached a number of talented players, including former Tennessee receiver Marques North, Wisconsin wide receiver Jared Abbrederis, Western Kentucky's Jack Doyle and Florida's Tim Tebow.

Azzanni also worked with Steelers receiver Antonio Brown when the two were at Central Michigan.

Azzanni replaces Tyke Tolbert in the role.

Broncos name Greg Williams as Defensive Backs Coach

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

Jan. 11, 2018

The Broncos have named Greg Williams as Defensive Backs Coach, the team announced Wednesday.

Williams arrives in Denver with nine years of NFL coaching experience and 15 years of coaching experience overall. He spent the last two seasons as the Colts' defensive backs coach and the seven years before that as an assistant linebackers coach (2009-12) and assistant secondary coach (2013-15) with the Chargers.

Under Williams' guidance, the Colts' defensive backs recorded 13 interceptions and 81 passes defensed in 2017 and eight interceptions and 68 passes defensed in 2016.

Williams began his coaching career in 2003 at Arizona State as an intern before moving on to College of DuPage as an assistant coach from 2004 to 2005. In 2006, he began a two-year stint at Arkansas Tech as a defensive backs coach and recruiting coordinator. Williams then moved on to the University of Pittsburgh as a secondary coach and defensive graduate assistant.

Prior to his coaching career, Williams was a wide receiver and defensive back at the University of North Carolina from 1994-97. In his professional football career, Williams competed in training camp with the Bears and Giants and then played in NFL Europe, the XFL and the Arena League.

Chris Strausser named Offensive Line-Tackles Coach

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
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The Broncos announced on Wednesday that Chris Strausser has been named Offensive Line-Tackles Coach.

Strausser joined the Broncos' coaching staff in 2017 after coaching 28 years at the collegiate level, including 19 years coaching offensive linemen.

With a focus on the offensive line's tackles, Strausser will be tasked with providing guidance to 2017 first-round pick Garrett Bolles in his second year and the rest of the team's tackles.

Strausser and Kugler have a common bond as former Boise State offensive line coaches.

Broncos agree to terms with Special Teams Coordinator Tom McMahon

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
Jan. 11, 2018

Head Coach Vance Joseph added to his staff Wednesday when the Broncos agreed to terms with new Special Teams Coordinator Tom McMahon.

“We’re very excited to add Tom McMahon to our staff,” Joseph said. “He’s an experienced special teams coach with a direct teaching style that emphasizes fundamentals. Tom has a proven track record developing young players on special teams and will bring leadership and energy to this important phase of our team.”

McMahon, who has spent 11 years in the NFL, just finished his fifth season as special teams coordinator with the Indianapolis Colts. He served as the Chiefs’ special teams coach in 2012 and previously coached three years in St. Louis as the Rams’ special teams coordinator.

The 26-year coaching veteran has worked with his fair share of impressive players. While in Atlanta, where he spent a pair of seasons from 2007-08, McMahon coached kick returner Jerious Norwood.

In St. Louis, he coached Danny Amendola, who led the NFL in 20-plus yard punt returns in 2009 and 2010.

Then, in Indianapolis, McMahon coached future Hall of Fame kicker Adam Vinatieri and All-Pro punter Pat McAfee. The Colts’ punter set several franchise records under McMahon’s tutelage before he retired ahead of the 2017 season.

As a unit, Indianapolis’ special teams ranked near the top of the league. In 2015, the group set an NFL record for fewest kickoff return yards allowed, and they ranked in the top three in opponent kick-return average.

In 2017, the Carroll College product continued to show his skill in working with individual players when he helped punter Rigoberto Sanchez to one of the best rookie seasons in NFL history. The Colts were just one of four teams to force multiple special-teams turnovers without giving the ball away on special teams.

McMahon replaces former special teams coordinator Brock Olivo.

Mile High Stadium Naming Clusterf*ck and Revenge of the Nerds

By Michael Roberts

Westword Denver

Jan. 11, 2018

This week, crews are removing Sports Authority signage from what has been known in recent years as Sports Authority Field at Mile High, presumably because the Denver Broncos are sick of playing in a stadium emblazoned with the name of a company that declared bankruptcy in March 2016 and liquidated all its assets a few months later. Since acquiring stadium naming rights in August of that year, Broncos executives have tried and failed to line up a new sponsor, and a branding expert says the type of tech companies most able to afford the \$10 million per year the team wants are hesitant to get involved in a business relationship that could well conjure painful personal memories.

"It's the revenge of the nerds," says Darrin Duber-Smith, marketing professor and senior lecturer at Metropolitan State University of Denver. "Tech people don't like sports unless it's soccer, and I think they have a fear of the sports realm in general. It's alien to them. These were the kids picked last in pick-up games — but now that nerds have become chic, it's time for them to use sports as a marketing platform."

Given the Broncos' history of success (including a Super Bowl victory in February 2016), many observers expected naming rights to be snapped up quickly. But they weren't, and in June 2017, ten months after the Broncos began shopping for suitors, Duber-Smith offered a number of explanations, including the experience of Sports Authority, which he believes was killed by the stadium deal. "I remember doing interviews when Sports Authority put its name on the stadium," in 2011, he told us at the time. "My big warning was, 'I'm not sure Sports Authority is a big enough or healthy enough company to commit that much money from their marketing budget each year.' And I was right."

In a September 2017 followup, Duber-Smith said the Sports Authority name might stay on the stadium for years because of falling prices for venue naming prompted in part by an overabundance of inventory. "The only thing worse would be to leave it blank," he maintained in an interview for that post. "They really don't want to do that, because fans don't understand that in 2017, you need to have a venue naming-rights partner. It's not going to be Mile High Stadium; they don't want people to get used to having no [sponsor] name on the stadium. And people shouldn't want that, either, because the ticket prices would go up. Broncos ticket prices aren't that high compared to a lot of the league, and the venue naming-rights partner softens the blow for consumers."

Does that mean Duber-Smith feels the Broncos are making a mistake by removing the Sports Authority signs before inking a new pact? No — because, in his view, "conditions have changed. The Broncos had one of the worst seasons in the history of the franchise. Fans want to see progress in fixing what happened — and getting rid of an association with a dead company is one way to do that."

He adds: "This is the lesser of two evils. Before, the lesser of two evils was keeping the name on the stadium because they wanted to get a new partner. They figured they'd get one within a year and it would be no big deal. But now the name has started to stink. Perception-wise, they had to take the name off the stadium, because it could take years for them to get a naming-rights sponsor."

The Broncos are clearly being cautious when it comes to a new stadium-branding partner, and no wonder, since its last two have been fiascos to varying degrees. In 2001, Invesco, a financial-services firm, signed a contract that was set to run through July 31, 2021. But by 2007, the company was in flux, moving its headquarters to Bermuda and, later, Atlanta. The company still exists today, and according to a November 2017 press release, its assets under management topped \$937 billion. However, the changes in Invesco's operation meant keeping its name on the Broncos stadium no longer made fiscal sense, which is why the naming rights were sold off to Sports Authority in 2011.

Sports Authority's collapse five years later makes the Broncos "two-time losers" in the naming-rights game, Duber-Smith believes — and getting things wrong three times in a row would be both costly and embarrassing. So he doesn't expect the team to jump at any short-term solutions, such as a one- or two-year deal of the sort that caused the Miami Dolphins's base to briefly be dubbed Land Shark Stadium thanks to an agreement with singer Jimmy Buffett.

Moreover, as Duber-Smith points out, "there aren't nearly enough big brands that can afford to commit the amount of money it takes to make this work over fifteen, twenty or thirty years. A lot of them already have large-scale naming-rights agreements — some more than one."

However, Duber-Smith goes on, "a sector that's ripe for the picking is technology. How many tech companies are sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars? Look at Google, Facebook, Apple. But almost no tech companies are involved in sports marketing at this level."

Indeed, the most prominent tech firm to put its name on a sports venue is Oracle, whose branding is on the arena the NBA champion Golden State Warriors call home. But that pact already has an expiration date. The Warriors are building a new stadium in San Francisco, to be called the Chase Center after JPMorgan Chase, which reportedly paid around \$300 million for a twenty-year agreement in 2016.

This windfall appears to be the exception rather than the rule these days — and two additional factors complicate matters from the Broncos' perspective.

"The first problem is that they have an old stadium, and it's easier to get a naming-rights sponsor for a new stadium than an existing, broke-down palace," Duber-Smith points out. "They only got about \$4 million a year for the USC coliseum, and the University of New Mexico only got \$1 million a year [from a company called Dreamstyle Remodeling] for two venues — their arena and their football stadium. That's like giving it away for free."

Secondly, Duber-Smith goes on, "there's the lease on the Broncos' stadium. It only has thirteen years left, and there may not be a brand that will want to sign for thirteen years. Most don't want to sign for less than fifteen, because it takes forever to make these deals optimal. That's why most of them are being written for twenty years."

Right now, the Broncos are optimistic, publicly anyhow, that they'll line up a new sponsor by the beginning of the 2018-2019 season — and if they don't, they'll use what's described as a placeholder name. For the latter, Duber-Smith suggests a tribute to ailing owner Pat Bowlen as a moniker rather than referring to it as Mile High Stadium — because, again, fans who'd like the name to remain permanently would be upset if it's changed again.

In the meantime, the stadium's official name remains Sports Authority Field at Mile High for events already scheduled to take place there over the coming months, even though the signs will have been removed before any of them take place.

The result is further confusion — just as it is for the squad that plays at the stadium.

Broncos hire Zach Azzanni as wide receivers coach

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

Jan. 11, 2018

The Broncos made official the hiring of Zach Azzanni as wide receivers coach Wednesday.

Azzanni has coached wide receivers the past 19 years, including last season with the Bears. He coached at the college level for 18 years.

Azzanni previously coached at the University of Tennessee (2013-16), the University of Wisconsin (2012), Western Kentucky (2011) and the University of Florida (2010). His first game coaching with the Gators was the 2010 Sugar Bowl as Tim Tebow threw for a career-high 482 yards.

He also spent time at Central Michigan, Valparaiso and Bowling Green.

Broncos hire Greg Williams as cornerbacks coach

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
Jan. 11, 2018

The Broncos moved quickly to part ways with several assistant coaches after the end of the regular season and they've spent the last few days filling many of those spots.

On the heels of announcing the hires of special teams coach Tom McMahon and offensive tackles coach Chris Strausser, the team has announced an addition to their defensive staff. Greg Williams will be the team's cornerbacks coach this season.

Williams was the defensive backs coach for the Colts the last two seasons and spent the previous nine years on the Chargers staff. He will work with Marcus Robertson, who joined the team last year.

In addition to hiring Williams, Nicki Jhabvala of the Denver Post reports that the Broncos have hired Zach Azzanni as their wide receivers coach. Azzanni held the same role with the Bears last season.

Broncos promote Chris Strausser to offensive tackles coach

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

Jan. 11, 2018

The Broncos promoted Chris Strausser to offensive line/tackles coach, head coach Vance Joseph announced Wednesday.

Strausser, a coaching veteran of 29 seasons, spent last season as the Broncos' assistant offensive line coach. In his new role, Strausser will work with Sean Kugler coaching the team's offensive line. Kugler will coach the guards and centers.

Strausser and Kugler previously coached together at Boise State.

Strausser spent 19 seasons coaching offensive linemen at the collegiate level, most recently as associate head coach/offensive line at the University of Washington from 2014-16. He was at Boise State for seven seasons.

He also has coached at the University of Colorado, Portland State, San Jose State and Foothill College.

Giants complete interview with Eric Studesville

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

Jan. 11, 2018

The Giants have completed their interview with Eric Studesville, the sixth coach to meet with the team about its head coaching position. He is the first candidate not to have spent 2017 as a coordinator.

Offensive coordinators Josh McDaniels of New England and Pat Shurmur of Minnesota and defensive coordinators Matt Patricia of the Patriots, Steve Wilks of the Panthers and Steve Spagnuolo of the Giants previously interviewed for the job. McDaniels, Shurmur and Spagnuolo all have head coaching experience. Studesville was 1-3 as the Broncos' interim head coach after McDaniels was fired in 2010.

Giants chairman Steve Tisch has participated in only one of the interviews, sitting in on Wilks' interview Tuesday. The Giants said in their Wednesday release about Studesville that Tisch also will interview candidates "as part of the process."

Studesville has 17 years experience as a running backs coach, including three seasons with the Giants (2001-03). The Broncos fired him as their running backs coach after the season.

Diversity group calls for NFL to investigate Raiders for possible Rooney Rule violation

By Mark Maske
Washington Post
Jan. 11, 2018

The Fritz Pollard Alliance, the diversity group that works closely with the NFL on its minority hiring, has asked the league to investigate the Oakland Raiders for what it calls a possible violation of the Rooney Rule related to the process by which the team hired Jon Gruden as its coach.

“We are deeply concerned by reports that the Oakland Raiders’ owner, Mark Davis, came to an agreement with Jon Gruden about him becoming the Raiders’ next head coach before interviewing any candidates of color,” Cyrus Mehri and N. Jeremi Duru, attorneys for the group, said in a written statement to media organizations. “If so, the Club violated the Rooney Rule, which was instituted by the NFL in 2003 and requires teams to interview at least one candidate of color for open head coaching and general manager positions.

“As soon as we learned of the reports, we formally requested that the NFL thoroughly investigate the matter to conclusively determine whether the Rooney Rule was violated — and if it was violated, to impose an appropriate punishment.”

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

Both the league and the Fritz Pollard Alliance previously had said the Raiders were in compliance with the minority interviewing rule, which is named for late Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney.

The Raiders formally introduced Gruden as their new coach Tuesday after signing him to a 10-year contract that apparently could be worth as much as around \$100 million. Davis fired Jack Del Rio as the Raiders’ coach on the same day the team’s season ended.

The Raiders’ view is that they complied with the Rooney Rule by interviewing their own tight ends coach, Bobby Johnson, and Tee Martin, the offensive coordinator at the University of Southern California.

Former NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue fined Matt Millen, then the Detroit Lions’ president, \$200,000 in 2003 for failing to interview a minority candidate before hiring Steve Mariucci as the team’s coach. Tagliabue told NFL owners during a meeting that year that any future violation of the rule could result in a fine of \$500,000 or more for conduct detrimental to the league.