

In Broncos Country, we're certain voting for the Pro Football Hall of Fame is dirty politics

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
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What's it say about America when there are more qualified candidates for the Pro Football Hall of Fame than president of the United States?

Not only is John Lynch far better at playing cover-2 than Hillary Clinton, he might be better equipped to sit in the Oval Office than Donald Trump.

Please forgive me. I know your beef: Stick to sports. Right?

But on the eve of the Super Bowl, football becomes all about politics, when 47 Hall of Fame electors debate in a room for eight hours to decide which of your favorite players are deemed immortal, as opposed to merely darn good.

Then, for weeks on end, NFL fans across the country complain about the inane outcome of the vote and how the voting system is rigged. It's a pretty fair summation of the current state of politics in America, don't you think?

The Hall's induction Class of 2018 is an amazing collection of talent, including Ray Lewis, Randy Moss and Brian Dawkins, who delivered the last 188 soul-rattling tackles of his brilliant career for the Broncos. So what's there to be upset about?

Plenty. In Denver, we're 100 percent convinced it's a football injustice that Broncos owner Pat Bowlen has yet to be enshrined in Canton, Ohio, just as in Washington, D.C., there are folks demanding a recount because offensive tackle Joe Jacoby can't kick down the door to the Hall.

We the people ... are aggrieved. We like football. But we love to gripe.

As best I understand it, they are holding the Super Bowl in Minneapolis, where the high temperature Sunday is predicted to be a balmy 6 degrees, so Sports Illustrated writer extraordinaire Peter King could go ice fishing before he messed over your favorite gridiron giant in the Hall of Fame voting.

The New England Patriots, who are less popular with U.S. citizens than the president, have been invited to smear the Philadelphia Eagles in the big game, primarily so Tom Brady can vanquish Nick Foles (who?), after beating Marcus Mariota (what?) and Blake Bortles (why?), thus proving Handsome Tom is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the most talented quarterback ever to throw a football, whether it's inflated to regulation size or not.

Broncos Country had the great displeasure this season of watching both the Patriots and Eagles trounce Denver with our own eyes, by a cumulative score of 92-39. Philadelphia was the best NFL team I saw in person. If quarterback Carson Wentz had not gone down with a knee injury, I'd say the Eagles were a lock to win, but ... oh, what the heck, let's call it Philadelphia 27, New England 24.

Lynch owns one championship ring, while Brady celebrated last season by taking home his fifth ring, which gleamed with 283 snarky diamonds. So am I to assume Brady is five, maybe six times the football player that Lynch ever was? That's absurd. Yet we look to the Super Bowl to prop up our Hall of Fame arguments, perhaps because it's easier than slogging through hours of video from all those regular-season games in September, October, November and December.

In my book, Terrell Davis was a no-doubter for the Hall of Fame from the time he carried John Elway and the Broncos to victories in the Super Bowl that had previously been out of the strong-armed quarterback's grasp. Yes, Davis is a member of the NFL's exclusive 2,000-yard rushing club, but I'm convinced what pushed his candidacy for the Hall over the top in 2017 was his visibility on the NFL Network, with a television career that's now longer than his previous, injury-shortened life as a pro running back.

The moral of the story? Get enough meaningful face time in front of the voters on TV, and you can get elected to the Hall of Fame or the White House. That's politics.

Brian Dawkins elected to Hall of Fame, John Lynch must wait at least another year

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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Brian Dawkins, known to many as “Weapon X,” will now be known to all as a Hall of Famer.

On the eve of Super Bowl LII, the former Eagles and Broncos safety was selected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, joining Terrell Owens, Randy Moss, Brian Urlacher and Ray Lewis, plus senior selections Robert Brazile and Jerry Kramer, and contributor Bobby Beathard in the Hall’s Class of 2018. The group — which includes three first-ballot selections in Moss, Urlacher and Lewis — will be enshrined in Canton, Ohio, on Aug. 4.

“We’re very happy for Brian Dawkins on his well-deserved election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame,” Broncos president/CEO Joe Ellis said in a statement from the team. “Brian established himself as one of the NFL’s most respected and beloved players over many years in Philadelphia before joining the Broncos for the final three seasons of his incredible career. Here in Denver, Brian made multiple Pro Bowls as an inspirational leader for our team and a standout in the community. All of us at the Broncos congratulate Brian on being voted to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.”

The Hall’s 48-member selection committee convened for more than eight hours in Bloomington, Minn., on Saturday reviewing each candidate and narrowing the list of modern-era players from 15 to 10 and then the final five.

Former Broncos safety and Ring of Famer John Lynch, a finalist for the fifth consecutive year, failed to make the cut and did not make it to the final round of 10, as he did in 2017.

Dawkins, meanwhile, is headed to Canton as only the ninth true safety and he could arrive with even more hardware. Currently a football operations executive with the Eagles, Dawkins is one victory away from earning the Super Bowl ring that eluded him as a player. (He helped the Eagles to Super Bowl XXXIX, against the Patriots no less, but Philadelphia lost 24-21.)

The longtime Eagle (1996-2008) and one of the franchise’s most beloved figures was drafted by Philadelphia in the second round (No. 61 overall) in 1996 and was voted the team’s defensive MVP five times. A member of the 2000s NFL All-Decade Team, Dawkins earned nine Pro Bowl selections in his career (second-most all time by a safety) and logged 1,146 total tackles, 37 interceptions, 179 pass-breakups, 36 forced fumbles, 19 fumble recoveries and 26 sacks.

“This is just my second opportunity as a finalist. Last year was my first,” Dawkins said of his Hall of Fame selection. “There were just certain things I needed to learn about myself, to learn about the process. There is a different appreciation that I have for those individuals that are up there and have waited so long. Because I know what that feels like. I know the discomfort and the anger that you can feel going through those things. So it taught me a lot about myself. But I also get a chance to express my appreciation for those individuals who have waited so long.”

Dawkins closed out his NFL career in Denver, where he played three seasons and was voted the team's 2009 Ed Block Courage Award winner. Though his time with the Broncos was brief, it had a lasting impact, as he used the second phase of his career to mentor future leaders of the team, including cornerback Chris Harris and receiver Demaryius Thomas.

"What Denver was, it was something that I had to get out of my feelings and my emotions so I could be everything I needed to be for a new team," Dawkins said. "So everything I was when I was with Philadelphia, I had to be that in Denver. That's what they were looking for. So I had to, not forget about it, but I had to be able to overcome that pain to be able to be everything I need to be. Because they needed me. There are a lot of things that I did, a lot of conversations I had with young guys there that let them do better for themselves. Had I been selfish with my time, selfish with my feelings, I would have not done what I needed to do."

Ask those then-young guys and they'll tell you Dawkins' mission was accomplished.

"He did a great job," Harris said. "We used to have an hour of film study together, with just corners and safeties when I first came into the league. He showed me formations and things like that."

Dawkins joins a long list of Hall of Famers with ties to the Broncos, including cornerback Willie Brown (inducted in 1984), running back Tony Dorsett (1994), general manager Fred Gehrke (1972), defensive tackle Stan Jones (1991) and running back Doak Walker (1986).

The short list of longtime Broncos in the Hall, however, remains at five with quarterback turned general manager John Elway (2004), tackle Gary Zimmerman (2008), running back Floyd Little (2010), tight end Shannon Sharpe (2011) and running back Terrell Davis (2017).

Next year, both lists could grow; Lynch's wait could finally end, and he could be joined by Broncos owner Pat Bowlen contributor and former cornerback Champ Bailey, who will be eligible for the Hall for the first time in 2019.

But the year of 2018 belongs to Dawkins.

Brian Dawkins selected to Hall of Fame

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

Feb. 4, 2018

Brian Dawkins, a safety who played the final seasons of his 16 year NFL career with the Broncos, was elected into the Pro Football Hall of Fame here Saturday.

9NEWS was the first to report Dawkins' election. In getting the nod, Dawkins leapt passed another former Broncos Safety John Lynch, who wasn't elected even though he was finalist for a 5th consecutive year.

Jacksonville Jaguars left tackle, Tony Boselli who grew up in Boulder and played at Fairview High School, also fell short of election.

The 5 modern era players who were elected into the Hall of Fame in 2018 were Dawkins, middle linebackers Ray Lewis and Brian Urlacher and receivers Randy Moss and Terrell Owens. Senior nominees Jerry Kramer and Robert Brazile were elected to the Hall. Bobby Beathard was elected as a contributor.

Dawkins was one of the most electric and popular NFL safeties during his 13 seasons with the Philadelphia Eagles from 1996 to 2008. During that time, he earned 5 Pro Bowl appearances and 4 times was named First-Time All Pro.

Dawkins currently works in the front office of the Eagles who will play the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl LII Sunday at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Dawkins signed with the Broncos under new head coach Josh McDaniels in 2009. Dawkins was terrific that season, making another Pro Bowl before injuries caught up to his hard-hitting body-sacrificing style of play in 2010 and 2011.

Dawkins leadership reached its apex during the offseason lockout leading into the 2011 season. He organized and paid for, workouts for Broncos players with local performance coach Loren Landow.

The Broncos went 4 and 12 in 2010 but came back to win the AFC West title in 2011.

Dawkins' election was in turn a blow to Lynch, a safety who played 11 seasons with Tampa Bay and 4 for the Broncos and is in each teams' Ring of Fame.

Lynch not only was a top 15 finalist for a 5th time, he had finished in the top 10 in votes the previous 2 years. Lynch did not crack the top 10 this year.

Boselli made the top 10 voting for a second consecutive year.

Ray Lewis, Randy Moss, Terrell Owens, Brian Dawkins, Brian Urlacher among 2018 HOF class

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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It will be one of the youngest groups in the history of the Pro Football Hall of Fame as Ray Lewis, Randy Moss and Brian Urlacher were all selected Saturday for enshrinement in the class of 2018.

All three players were in their first year of eligibility and join Terrell Owens and Brian Dawkins as the modern-era selections to be enshrined. Those five players join longtime personnel executive Bobby Beathard (contributor) and seniors committee nominees Jerry Kramer and Robert Brazile for enshrinement.

The Hall of Fame's board of selectors met Saturday, the day before Super Bowl LII, to select the class. The 15 modern-era finalists were trimmed to 10 and then five. Those five finalists were then voted on with a yes or no for enshrinement. The contributor and two seniors nominees were voted on separately with a yes or no.

The Hall of Fame's enshrinement ceremony will be Aug. 4 in Canton, Ohio.

It was a day for the 1990s and 2000s NFL as Owens was the modern-era selection who had waited the longest, and he was in just his third year of eligibility. Dawkins was in his second year of eligibility.

Lewis was the most decorated of the group as a 13-time Pro Bowl selection, a two-time Defensive Player of the Year and a Super Bowl MVP in his career as a Baltimore Ravens linebacker.

"I've been going a long time. And now I can finally rest," Lewis said. "I want to go fishing with a cigar now and just sit back. I don't want to work out every day now.

"Growing up as a child, I know what [a Hall of Fame middle linebacker] looked like -- Mike Singletary, Dick Butkus. Who dreams of being in that category, sitting with those guys?"

Lewis started 227 games in his career and was credited with eight 100-tackle seasons.

"For 17 years, we could point to No. 52 and tell the other players: 'Follow his lead. Practice like Ray practices. Prepare like Ray prepares. Be a great teammate like him,'" Ravens general manager and executive vice president Ozzie Newsome said in a release from the team. "It was our privilege to have him as a Raven. We are all better for having him here. His play on gamedays speaks for itself.

"Even in that small group who have the honor of being a Hall of Famer, Ray stands out. When you talk about the great players of all time, no matter position, he is among the greatest of the great."

Moss, who played for five teams in his career, is second all time in touchdown receptions with 156 and had eight 1,200-yard seasons in his career. He played seven full seasons and part of another in Minnesota, site of Sunday's Super Bowl.

"The door knocked and I started getting excited," Moss said of Hall of Fame president David Baker alerting him he has been elected. "All the emotions caught the best of me because it's been a long journey, and it ends in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Tears of joy."

In the days leading up to Saturday's selection meeting, some wondered if Urlacher would be chosen in the same class as Lewis, as two high-profile players at the same position in largely the same era. The athleticism and production of the former Chicago Bears middle linebacker tipped the scales.

Urlacher was an eight-time Pro Bowl selection and the league's Defensive Player of the Year in 2005.

Owens, a finalist for the past three years, had been a hot-button candidate with his own public criticisms of the board of selectors after he had not been chosen for the Hall in 2016 or '17.

A third-round draft selection of the San Francisco 49ers in 1996, Owens ranks eighth all time in receptions (1,078), second in receiving yards (15,935) and third in receiving touchdowns (153). He played for the 49ers, Philadelphia Eagles, Dallas Cowboys, Buffalo Bills and Cincinnati Bengals in a career that spanned 15 years.

"Terrell Owens gave our organization eight great seasons of service and some terrific memories that will live on in 49ers lore," CEO Jed York said in a statement congratulating the six-time Pro Bowler. "He is one of the most accomplished wide receivers in the history of the NFL, and very deserving of this selection to the Pro Football Hall of Fame."

Owens, who is the only player to score a touchdown versus each of the current 32 teams, acknowledged his selection Saturday in an Instagram post featuring a Hall of Fame hat.

Dawkins played 13 of his 16 NFL season for the Eagles, who will face the New England Patriots in Sunday's Super Bowl. A nine-time Pro Bowl selection, he was a rare player to have finished a career with at least 35 interceptions and 20 sacks.

"This is tremendous news, and I could not be more proud of Brian. Being inducted into the Hall of Fame is an honor he truly earned," Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie said. "He epitomized everything we love about the game of football. His intensity, his passion, his love of the game and his leadership were always dialed in at the highest possible level.

"He connected in every possible way with the city of Philadelphia and our legion of Eagles fans across the country."

But no former player waited longer for enshrinement than Kramer, who played his last season with the Green Bay Packers in 1968. He was the only guard selected to the NFL's 50th anniversary team and was a lead blocker for one of the league's iconic plays in the Packers' sweep. Kramer also cleared the way for Hall of Famer Bart Starr to score the winning touchdown in the Ice Bowl, the Packers' 21-17 win over the Cowboys in the 1967 NFL Championship Game.

"In the old days when the quarterbacks called their own plays, since most of them were right-handed, they called most of the plays to the right. So the defense would put their best men on that half of the field. Therefore, Jerry Kramer, as a right guard, played against the best defensive tackle every week. He

still made All-Pro five times," said former Packers linebacker and 2013 Hall of Fame inductee Dave Robinson.

Brazile was a seven-time Pro Bowl selection as well as a four-time first-team All-Pro. The player known as "Dr. Doom" was named to the NFL's all-decade team of the 1970s.

Beathard was a personnel executive for five teams in his career, including Super Bowl winners in the Miami Dolphins and Washington Redskins. He was part of 10 division winners and four Super Bowl winners overall, including the 1972 Dolphins team that finished undefeated.

Because it takes an 80 percent yes vote for a finalist to earn enshrinement, the votes sometimes cancel each other out if players are clustered at one position group. With two wide receivers in Owens and Moss as well as two linebackers in Lewis and Urlacher selected for enshrinement, it was a difficult day for five former offensive linemen who were finalists.

Joe Jacoby didn't make the cut from 15 finalists to 10, while Tony Boselli, Alan Faneca, Steve Hutchinson and Kevin Mawae did not make the cut from 10 remaining modern-era finalists to five.

Jacoby and former cornerback Everson Walls were both in their final year of eligibility as modern-era candidates. They now move to the seniors category and can only be considered for enshrinement if the seniors committee selects them as a nominee, a difficult proposition with the current backlog. Walls had not made the cut from 10 to five.

Former Patriots cornerback Ty Law was also eliminated in the cut down from 10 to five. Wide receiver Isaac Bruce, running back Edgerrin James and safety John Lynch were eliminated in the cut down from 15 to 10.

"I'm glad I didn't have to vote for this class," Urlacher said. "It's a great class."

As for next year, tight end Tony Gonzalez, cornerback Champ Bailey and safety Ed Reed will be in their first year of eligibility.

Brian Dawkins makes Hall of Fame; John Lynch falls short

By Troy Renck
KMGH
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Brian Dawkins will forever be known as an Eagle. However, he left an imprint during his three-year stay in Denver that makes it impossible to tell the Broncos history without mentioning his name.

When referring to Dawkins, it now comes with a new title: Hall of Famer. Dawkins walked through the doors of Canton and into the arms of history on Saturday when he was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame on his second attempt.

John Lynch, a Broncos Ring of Famer, failed to receive the call from the Hall for the fifth consecutive year. The election featured a Philly flavor with former Eagles receiver Terrell Owens joining Dawkins. The class included linebackers Ray Lewis and Brian Urlacher, and wide receiver Randy Moss. Also voted in were senior finalists Robert Brazile and Jerry Kramer and former Chargers and Redskins executive Bobby Beathard, who made it as a contributor, much to the dismay of Broncos' fans who felt owner Pat Bowlen was more deserving.

"We're very happy for Brian Dawkins on his well-deserved election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame," Broncos CEO Joe Ellis said. "Brian established himself as one of the NFL's most respected and beloved players over many years in Philadelphia before joining the Broncos for the final three seasons of his incredible career."

Dawkins made a brief stay with the Broncos, but he created good memories and helped change the culture for young players. He reached the Pro Bowl twice in three seasons, earning All-Pro honors in his first season in 2009. He served as a captain every year.

"A career unlike any other. A man who brought as much to his teammates off the field as he did on the field," told former Broncos teammate Ryan Harris, a tackle who played two seasons with Dawkins, to Denver7. "He taught guys how to take care of their bodies, how to be a father, how to be a husband. And he was a great football player. His emotion, talent, and dedication went beyond all others in his era."

Dawkins was known for his passion and fire for game. He brought an authentic edge that inspired those around him. Cornerback Chris Harris remembers Dawkins fondly.

"Just his intensity. And he was great to learn from on how to prepare for games," Harris told Denver7 on Saturday.

The class of eight will be inducted into the Hall of Fame in Canton next summer. Lynch remains hopeful his turn will arrive next year.

"Congrats to a great and deserving Class," Lynch tweeted. "Disappointed but humbled to be a finalist. Thanks to everyone for the support."

The book on (future Broncos quarterback?) Kirk Cousins

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

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Several big-money Broncos are openly and vigorously lobbying for Kirk Cousins as their next quarterback. Is it fair to assume they'll take a pay cut to bring him here?

"We need to find a way to make that happen," C.J. Anderson said on NFL Network.

"We need Kirk," Von Miller said on Dan Patrick's show. "I would like to have Kirk."

Whether he arrives via the NFL draft, free agency or trade, the next quarterback of the Broncos can't be a stopgap. He must be an alpha, a leader, a dynamic personality. The Broncos locker room is Dr. Jekyll (defense) and Mr. Hide (offense). The next QB's job is the balancing act.

Kansas City's trade of Alex Smith to Washington opens the door for such a move — to Colorado? Minnesota? Arizona? New York (Jets, not Giants)?

"I expect to be a free agent come March 14," Cousins said on Sirius radio.

Does Cousins, 29, possess the chutzpah to work in the shadow of quarterback greats John Elway and Peyton Manning in Denver? Last week I read Cousins' book — "Game Changer: Faith, football and finding your way," published by Zonderkids in 2013 — to learn if Captain Kirk is the right man for the job.

One news publication that follows the Spartan football team closely ranked me as the 20th best recruit out of a signing day class consisting of, you guessed it, 20 players. -Page 39

Perfect. The Broncos must eradicate the entitlement that was the theme of a season-ending press conference with bigwigs Joe Ellis and John Elway: "A characteristic kind of seeped into our building," Ellis said. Before Michigan State stepped in, Cousins had only scholarship offers from Northern Illinois, Toledo and Western Michigan (and a grayshirt offer from the University of Colorado, where he would have delayed enrollment until January). He once stood fifth (out of five) on Sparty's depth chart. At 170 pounds out of Holland (Mich.) Christian, Cousins had to work to become, potentially, a \$30-million-per-year NFL quarterback.

I'd like to think Jesus would have made a great football player. -Page 46

Tebowmania, meet Cousinshysteria. "Game Changer" is a 200-page devotional from a devout Christian who is unafraid to share his beliefs with the world. His unbending Christian faith is the driving force behind Cousins' improbable rise — from MAC-level college prospect to most-coveted NFL free agent since Peyton Manning. Instead of the rap music that fills locker rooms, Cousins pregames with Lincoln Brewster's rendition of "Everlasting God." When Cousins was drafted in the fourth round by the Redskins, one of his first prayer requests was a church near the team's practice facility. Got a sticky situation on third-and-long? Cousins has a Bible verse for that.

I wasn't a Notre Dame fan, but I was a fan of the movie "Rudy." -Page 64

Who isn't? This is a man of the people. Plus, Rudy could help on special teams.

In that moment, I determined to do everything in my power in my four remaining years to bring Michigan State to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl. -Page 88

Cousins and the Spartans never made it to the Rose Bowl. In the 2011 Big Ten title game — despite Cousins completing 15 of 17 passes in the first half and three touchdowns overall — they were beaten by Wisconsin and quarterback Russell Wilson. Who in Broncos Country can't relate? But it's how you respond to losing a big one to Russell Wilson — two years later, preferably, in Super Bowl 50 — that really matters.

In fact, I took school very seriously. I was the kind of guy who got nervous before a 10-point quiz in sophomore geometry class. -Page 106

Enough with the measurables. Can the next quarterback here please think the game? The first red flag rose above Paxton Lynch when then-coordinator Rick Dennison said the team had to shrink the playbook for a game against the Jacksonville Jaguars. (In contrast, Manning was so detailed in his approach that he would ask the third-string quarterback which corners of the field the wind had affected his pregame warmup routine.) In evaluating the next quarterback, the Broncos must value social skills and cognitive ability over height ("he's tall") and arm strength. Point, Captain Kirk.

It's scary to admit, but all three of us (siblings Kirk, Kyle, Karalyne) sang and danced in musicals. Video recordings are locked away. -Page 110

As Von Miller would tell him, dancing isn't only encouraged at Mile High. It's a way of life.

It appears that many social media users are begging for the praise of man. We can't wait to post the next clever comment; we can't wait to upload the next awesome pictures (of ourselves). -Page 146

This being a deep dive into Captain Kirk's persona, his social media history must be a point of emphasis. Cousins (@KirkCousins8) has tweeted 10 times in 2018. He's tweeted a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King ("Accept finite disappointment. But never lose infinite hope."). He's tweeted a 30-day diet ("this is just brutal"). A dedicated Big Ten fan, he honored the late, great Keith Jackson ("Whoa, Nelly. He will be missed."). His Instagram is a collage of wife Julie, infant son Cooper and their Labradoodle, Bentley. Good. They're dog people. So is Colorado.

Chapter 12: No one succeeds alone -Page 162

Yes, 14 of the last 15 AFC champions had Manning, Tom Brady or Ben Roethlisberger at quarterback. (The lone exception was Joe Flacco in 2013. We won't talk about that.) But two straight seasons without a playoff appearance strongly suggests the Broncos have issues other than quarterback they must address. The Broncos have \$27 million in cap space. That's not enough to claim Cousins and fill holes at tackle, tight end, running back and linebacker. One man's plan: sign Cousins, use the No. 5 pick to take the best player in the draft, Alabama defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick, who replaces \$12 million cornerback Aqib Talib. Then address the rest in the draft, where the Broncos have struggled, and free agency, where they have flourished.

“Kirk, this is Mike Shanahan of the Washington Redskins. We will be selecting in two picks and we’re going to draft you.” -Page 176

The ex-Broncos coach — who should be up for the Ring of Fame any day now — owns a steadfast belief in Cousins. Shanahan drafted Cousins even after he took another quarterback, Robert Griffin III, in the same draft. Then last week Shanahan doubled down on his Cousins love, telling the New York Daily News: “There’s no doubt in my mind that he’s a special player.” If references are available upon request, a great one is just down the road in Cherry Hills.

Is Kirk Cousins qualified for Broncos Country's biggest job? Book it.

Former Bronco, Brian Dawkins, elected to Hall of Fame, John Lynch must wait at least another year

By Staff

Associated Press

Feb. 4, 2018

Ray Lewis and Brian Urlacher terrorized opposing offenses from the middle of the field. Randy Moss and Terrell Owens did the same to defenses on the outside.

The two hard-hitting linebackers and two big-play receivers highlighted an eight-person class voted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame on Saturday. Former Broncos safety Brian Dawkins also received at least 80 percent support from the 47 Hall of Fame voters, along with contributor Bobby Beathard and senior nominees Jerry Kramer and Robert Brazile.

But the biggest stars of the class are the two linebackers that made it on their first tries, and the pair of lightning-rod receiver who sometimes caused as many problems for their own teams as for the opposition. Moss also made it on his first try, while Owens needed to wait for his third year on the ballot to get enough support.

"I've been going a long time. And now I can finally rest," Lewis said. "I want to go fishing with a cigar now and just sit back. I don't want to work out every day now."

Moss and Owens each played for five teams in their careers as they often wore out their welcome with their inability to get along with teammates and coaches at times.

But at their best, there were few players ever able to strike fear in defenses as much as Moss and Owens, who were both all-decade selections for the 2000s.

"The door knocked and I started getting excited," Moss said of Hall of Fame President David Baker alerting him he has been elected. "All the emotions caught the best of me because it's been a long journey and it ends in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Tears of joy."

Moss burst on the scene as a rookie in Minnesota in 1998 when he caught a league-leading 17 TD catches and helped lead the Vikings to the NFC title game. His combination of speed and athleticism made him the game's most dangerous big-play threat and led to the phrase "You got Mossed" for embarrassed defensive backs.

He led the NFL in TD catches five times, including his record 23 for New England in 2007, and earned four All-Pro selections. He finished his career with 982 catches for 15,292 yards and ranks second all-time with 156 TD receptions.

Owens, who didn't attend the announcement, entered the league as a third-round pick by San Francisco in 1996 but developed into a star known for some memorable playoff appearances, including his winning 25-yard TD catch to beat Green Bay in 1999; his 177 yards in a comeback win against the Giants in 2003; and his nine catches for 122 yards in the 2004 Super Bowl against New England just seven weeks after breaking his leg.

Owens ranks second to Jerry Rice with 15,934 yards receiving and is third on the all-time touchdowns receiving list with 153.

Lewis is widely considered one of the greatest middle linebackers, winning two AP Defensive Player of the Year awards and earning eight All-Pro selections. He anchored a dominant defense for the 2000 Baltimore Ravens in a season that ended with him winning Super Bowl MVP, then retired as a champion after Baltimore closed his last season with a title win over San Francisco in February 2013.

"Growing up as a child, I know what that looked like, Mike Singletary, Dick Butkus," Lewis said. "Who dreams of being in that category, sitting with those guys?"

Lewis joined tackle Jonathan Ogden as the only Ravens voted into the Hall of Fame as both of the team's first-round picks in its initial season of 1996 received the high honor. Lewis' career was also marked by legal problems off the field. He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of obstruction of justice after initially being charged with murder in connection with two killings following a Super Bowl party in Atlanta in January 2000. Lewis was also fined \$250,000 by the NFL.

Urlacher wasn't far behind Lewis with his play on the field and is the latest in a line of great Chicago middle linebackers to make the Hall, joining Butkus, Singletary and Bill George. He was the Defensive Player of the Year of 2005 and joined Lewis on the 2000s all-decade team.

Dawkins spent most of his 16-year career in Philadelphia, earning five first-team All-Pro selections for his versatility that included 37 career interceptions and 26 career sacks. He became the first player in NFL history with a sack, interception, fumble recovery and touchdown catch in the same game against Houston in 2002.

Kramer got passed over 10 times previously as a finalist before finally getting enough votes as a senior to become the 14th member of the Vince Lombardi Packers to make the Hall. Kramer helped anchor the Green Bay line for 11 seasons, winning six NFL titles and making the block that cleared the way for Bart Starr's TD sneak in the "Ice Bowl" for the 1967 NFL championship.

Brazile was a finalist for the first time after a 10-year career for the Houston Oilers that included five straight All-Pro selections. Beathard, also not on hand Saturday, helped build four Super Bowl champions in Miami and Washington and made seven trips to the title game during more than three decades as a personnel executive with a sharp eye for talent.

Five offensive linemen were among the 15 finalists, with tackle Joe Jacoby getting eliminated in voting that reduced the candidates to 10, and tackle Tony Boselli, guards Alan Faneca and Steve Hutchinson, and center Kevin Mawae getting cut in the next round of voting.

Cornerback Ty Law also made it to the final 10 in his second time on the ballot. Defensive backs John Lynch and Everson Walls, receiver Isaac Bruce and running back Edgerrin James were the other candidates eliminated in the first cuts.

"I'm glad I didn't have to vote for this class," Urlacher said. "It's a great class."

Brian Dawkins selected to Pro Football Hall of Fame

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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While the wait goes on for John Lynch, it ended Saturday for Brian Dawkins.

Dawkins was selected as one of five modern-era inductees to the Pro Football Hall of Fame class of 2018, giving him a fitting reward for a 16-season career in which he earned nine Pro Bowl selections -- including two with the Broncos -- and four first-team All-Pro nods.

One of the game's best defensive weapons during his years on the field, Dawkins melded instinctive pass defense with in-the-box thumping as well as any player in the modern era.

A member of the All-Decade team for the 2000s, Dawkins is one of four players in league history to post at least 25 sacks and 30 interceptions in his career. One of the other three players, Baltimore's Ray Lewis, will join Dawkins in the 2018 class.

After 13 seasons with the Philadelphia Eagles -- who have since retired No. 20 in his owner -- Dawkins jumped to the Broncos as a free-agent signee in 2009. He immediately made an impact and had a late-career renaissance with the Broncos, earning a second-team All-Pro selection and a Pro Bowl nod for his 2009 performance.

"It [was] a blessing for them to open the door the way they opened the door for me when I got here, knowing that I was a guy coming off my 13th year and a lot of people were saying at the time I should retire then," Dawkins said in 2012 as he reflected on his Broncos years.

"They gave me that opportunity to come here and just be me. It [was] a blessing to be able to play for another organization that, to be honest with you, I feel loves me, and that's what you really want as a player, somewhere you really feel appreciated. I really felt appreciated."

A team captain throughout his three seasons with the Broncos, Dawkins returned to the Pro Bowl after the 2011 season before he announced his retirement after 16 pro seasons.

Dawkins will become the first pure safety to have played in the last 30 seasons inducted into the Hall of Fame. Last year, the Hall selected Seattle's Kenny Easley, a Seniors Committee nominee whose career ended after the 1987 season.

Easley and Dawkins give the Hall safeties in consecutive years for the first time since 1978-79, when Larry Wilson of the St. Louis Cardinals and the Detroit Lions' Yale Lary -- who was also a punter -- were a part of successive classes.

The addition of Easley and Dawkins to the Hall's ranks represents a good pair of steps toward ensuring the safety position is properly represented in Canton. But with Lynch, Steve Atwater and others still waiting for their chance, there is a long way to go.

"We'll see," Dawkins said. "It's just frustrating for me, because I think what has happened with the safety position, I believe that everybody that has basically started to quote the same things: 'Last line of defense,' [and] 'He's an eraser of mistakes.' Well, there are a lot of safeties that are way more than that, and I consider myself to be one of those individuals -- game-changers. So we have game-changers that are still waiting in the [wings] right now.

"A guy that I model my game after in Darren Woodson, he was a game-changer for the Dallas Cowboys; he won himself a couple of Super Bowls. Hopefully the narrative begins to change and we look more at the effect they had on games, not just as a center fielder. You can put anybody in center field. But it takes a special guy to be able to change games on a consistent basis, and I believe a lot of those guys who are still waiting did that."

Lynch was passed over for induction despite being a finalist for a fifth consecutive year.

With Dawkins joining the Hall, Lynch becomes the only defensive player with at least nine Pro Bowl selections and two All-Pro appearances eligible for induction who is not a part of the Hall of Fame. Lynch is also the only player to earn at least four Pro Bowl selections with two different teams who is not in the Hall.

Lynch is a member of the Broncos Ring of Fame and Buccaneers Ring of Honor, making him one of the few players to be a part of two teams' elite collection of players.

He was one of the pillars of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' dominant defenses in the late 1990s and early 2000s before being released in 2004 after 11 seasons with that team.

During Lynch's first three seasons in orange and blue, the Broncos allowed fewer touchdown passes than all but one other team (Baltimore). Teams didn't want to throw at Champ Bailey on the outside and didn't want to test Lynch across the middle; together they made Denver's defense one of the most feared in football.

But Lynch's contributions to outstanding defenses with two teams were not enough to push him over the goal line and into the Hall of Fame this year.

Players, coaches continue to resell Super Bowl tickets, despite ban on the practice

By A.J. Perez
USA Today
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About one-third of Super Bowl tickets go to the 30 NFL teams not playing in the game. NFL rules state that those tickets are not to be sold for a profit on the secondary market, but that's where some can be found as the New England Patriots and Philadelphia Eagles prepare to meet in Super Bowl LII on Sunday, according to ticket brokers.

One broker told USA TODAY Sports that about 80% of the tickets he's had up for sale this week — with prices starting at \$3,500 apiece — came directly from players and coaches and from their agents. The broker was granted anonymity because the practice of selling those tickets is banned by the NFL.

Players can purchase two tickets under terms of the collective bargaining agreement, which states the tickets are "subject to reasonable safeguards to avoid scalping of the tickets." That doesn't count the bigger allotment that goes to the teams involved in the Super Bowl.

"NFL personnel cannot resell above face value," NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said in a statement to USA TODAY Sports.

Face value for Sunday's game starts at \$950, but the players often get tickets that run \$1,250, the broker said. Seats in that range were available on secondary-market websites such as StubHub and TickPick for about \$4,000 on Saturday night.

TickPick has its ticket distribution site for Super Bowl LII set up in a downtown Minneapolis hotel and the company's co-CEO Brett Goldberg told USA TODAY Sports some of the brokers he's spoken with this week get much of their inventory from players.

"There are going to be certain brokers who have relationships with agents and players," Goldberg said. "That's their angle."

The broker who spoke to USA TODAY Sports said it's players who are "35 through 53" on the roster who are the most likely to resell their Super Bowl tickets.

"The players you are talking about here usually aren't the ones making multimillion dollars," Goldberg said.

The practice has been going on for at least several years. In 2015, shortly after Super XLIX, a unnamed defensive player for the Seattle Seahawks told SI.com he sold eight tickets for between \$3,000 to \$4,000, and that most of the players were aware of the opportunity.

Some NFL teams make players pick up their tickets at the site of the Super Bowl, but with dozens of players roaming around the Mall of America this week — site of radio row and other player appearances — that's not exactly a deterrent.

Goldberg said Saturday afternoon about 900 tickets had come onto TickPick's site over the previous 24 hours. While brokers in town prefer to sell tickets to fans directly since they don't have to pay the fees charged by secondary ticket sites, they still often list the seats for sale on multiple sites at once.

And while many brokers have preexisting relationships with players and their agents, Goldberg said brokers are known to go to parties in the days leading up the game with wads of cash to purchase tickets from players and anyone else looking to offload the seats.

"Brokers will hear you have a ticket and they'll say, 'Hey, I have \$2,500 cash. Want me to buy your ticket from you?'" Goldberg said. "It's one thing for them to list the ticket on TickPick and you can make \$2,500 or \$3,000 versus somebody offering you \$2,500 or \$3,000 in cash right now."

Such transactions are legal in Minnesota, which — like many jurisdictions over the years — repealed their laws that prohibit selling tickets for above face value more than a decade ago.

There's only been one major Super Bowl ticket scalping scandal and it involved a Vikings coach. Mike Tice was fined \$100,000 and assistant coaches Dean Dalton and Rusty Tillman were each fined \$10,000 each in 2005.

The NFL sells luxury ticket packages through its On Location Experiences service. The outlet sells the tickets as part of packages with concerts and other experiences, which range in price this week from \$6,299 to \$13,499. Those packages have sold out, although PrimeSport — which the NFL purchased in December — had more than 100 seats listed with the cheapest seat on sale for \$2,600 about 24 hours before Sunday's 6:30 pm kickoff.

While the NFL's rules against selling tickets also applies to coaches and team employees, the teams themselves are exempt to a degree. They are allowed to sell tickets above face value as long as they're sold as part of a sponsorship deal where the tickets are bundled as part of travel packages.

But Goldberg said it's not unusual for teams to sell their ticket allotment directly to brokers.

"Some brokers are getting them almost exclusively from the teams," Goldberg said. "If you're a broker with a front-door deal with the team, where you buy 500 season tickets during the regular season, it's reasonable to expect you're going to get Super Bowl tickets from that team."