

# Nick Foles, once a backup on the brink of retirement, dethrones the Patriots to win Super Bowl MVP

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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Four hours before kickoff at U.S. Bank Stadium on Sunday, Eagles defensive tackle Fletcher Cox jogged onto the field donning a training mask with the a dog and the word “Underdog” emblazoned on the side.

An image of Cox warming up with his mask flashed on the big screens and a sparse but very pro-Eagles crowd erupted in cheers that morphed into the “Fly Eagles Fly” chant. For every No. 12 Patriots jersey in the stands Sunday at Super Bowl LII, there was a sea of green Eagles jerseys, many sporting the plastic dog masks that had become symbolic of their team’s unlikely rise.

The Eagles — the No. 1-seed underdogs with a backup quarterback under center, a second-year head coach on the sideline and an offense as exciting as their story — were the favorite non-favorites and by the night’s end had done what many before them failed to.

They dethroned the Patriots, by a score of 41-33. They sent Tom Brady home from a Super Bowl without a new shiny trophy. They beat the best in the biggest show when so few believed they ever had a shot of making it here some two months ago.

During the week-long festival in Minnesota, coach Doug Pederson told his team to embrace the moment. Embrace being an underdog.

Besides he — and they — knew it no other way.

Throughout the week, the Eagles maintained a “we do what we do” mentality, shunning the glitz that came with playing the Patriots and ignoring the doubts that came with being a winless franchise in the Super Bowl. The Eagles had been here once before and lost to none other than Brady and his cohorts (XXXIX), but this time was different. This time the Eagles had not just a feel-good story but the odds-toppling history and offense to boot.

No play, no moment mirrored the Eagles’ journey more than Nick Foles’ touchdown catch — not a pass, but a catch — with 38 seconds remaining in the first half. The Eagles owned the most fourth-down conversions in the league during the regular season (17) and Pederson reached into his bag of tricks for this fourth-and-1 at New England’s 1. Foles, in shotgun to start, shifted to behind his right guard as running back Corey Clement fielded the snap and tossed the ball to tight end Trey Burton, who unleashed a pass to Foles in the right corner of the end zone.

A hush fell over the crowd before the house nearly came down.

“That play we’ve been working on for the last couple of weeks and just made it the right time, right opportunity,” Pederson said. “Guys executed it brilliantly.”

The name?

“Philly special,” Pederson said.

The Eagles took a 10-point lead and 350 net yards into the halftime break which historically has been meaningless against Brady and the Patriots (see: Super Bowl LI and this year’s AFC Championship).

But the Eagles didn’t falter. They did what they did all season.

They prevailed.

In the third quarter, Foles threaded the needle on a touchdown pass to Clement, who was in double coverage in the back of the end zone.

Then, after the Patriots claimed the lead for the first time in the fourth, the underdogs marched back up field, as Foles found tight end Zach Ertz to convert another fourth-and-1, then found Ertz again for a diving, 11-yard touchdown catch.

“We’ve been doubted since Day 1,” Ertz said. “We owe it to God, first and foremost. This team, no one picked us. We come out here and we’re world champions.”

To seal it, defensive end Brandon Graham heeded the advice offered by Broncos’ linebacker Von Miller last week and strip-sacked Brady for the only sack of the game.

Miller told him that would be the ticket to beating Brady. And Miller, the Super Bowl 50 champion, would know.

“I knew I had a one-on-one with the guard,” Graham said. “I knew he liked to be aggressive so I tried to act like I was pulling. I snatched it right off and Tom Brady’s arm was right there and I went for the ball.”

The chess match was one with gaudy numbers — a Super Bowl record 1,151 yards and 74 points — but no player was bigger and more clutch than Foles. The backup once on the brink of retirement who finished 28-of-43 in passing for 373 yards and four total touchdowns. The guy the Eagles signed simply to spell their star-in-the-making, Carson Wentz.

The fill-in-turned Super Bowl MVP who bested Brady and recorded passer ratings of 100.1, 141.4 and 100.6 in three playoff games.

“I’m so happy for Nick. A lot like this football team, a lot of people counted him out and didn’t think he could get it done,” Pederson said. “I believed in him, the staff believed in him, the players believed in him. We just needed time. We needed time together to work out some things and this whole postseason Nick has shown exactly who he is and what he’s capable of doing.”

Foles, the only quarterback with both passing and receiving touchdowns in Super Bowl history, goes down as a savior to Super Bowl-starved town.

And he and his underdog Eagles will be remembered as the top dogs when so many counted them out.

“We have been wanting this for a long time, and I am just blessed to be a part of it,” Foles said. “We have such a great group of guys, such a great city to play for and I am proud to be a Philadelphia Eagle.”

In good company

Nick Foles became the 10th backup quarterback in NFL history to lead his team to a Super Bowl victory Sunday when the Eagles upset the Patriots 41-33. Of the nine other QBs to do so, three are in the Pro Football Hall of Fame and one, Tom Brady, is expected to be a first-ballot hall of famer.

| Backup QB replaced | Team          | Super Bowl    | Hall of Fame |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Nick Foles         | Carson Wentz  | Eagles LII    | Active       |
| Tom Brady          | Drew Bledsoe  | PatriotsXXXVI | Active       |
| Trent Dilfer       | Tony Banks    | Ravens XXXV   | No           |
| Kurt Warner        | Trent Green   | Rams XXXIV    | Yes          |
| Jeff Hostetler     | Phil Simms    | Giants XXV    | No           |
| Doug Williams      | Jay Schroeder | Redskins XXII | No           |
| Jim Plunkett       | Dan Pastorini | Raiders XV    | No           |
| Terry Bradshaw     | Joe Gilliam   | SteelersIX    | Yes          |
| Roger Staubach     | Craig Morton  | Cowboys VI    | Yes          |
| Earl Morrall       | Johnny Unitas | Colts V       | No           |

# 29 Super Bowl records set or tied in Eagles' win over the Patriots

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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A total of 29 Super Bowl records were set or tied in the Philadelphia Eagles' 41-33 win over the New England Patriots. The full list, via Elias Sports Bureau:

## SUPER BOWL RECORDS SET IN SUPER BOWL LII

Most Games – 8, Tom Brady

Most Games, Head Coach – 8, Bill Belichick

Most Passes, Career – 357, Tom Brady

Most Completions, Career – 235, Tom Brady

Most Passing Yards, Career – 2,576, Tom Brady

Most Passing Yards, Game – 505, Tom Brady

Most Touchdown Passes, Career – 18, Tom Brady

Most Games, Team – 10, New England

Most Points, Game, Losing Team – 33, New England

Most First Downs Passing, Game, Both Teams – 42, New England vs. Philadelphia

Most Total Yards, Game, Team – 613, New England

Most Total Yards, Game, Both Teams – 1,151, New England vs. Philadelphia

Most Net Passing Yards, Game, Team – 500, New England

Most Passing Yards, Game, Both Teams – 874, New England vs. Philadelphia

Fewest Punts, Game, Team – 0, New England

Fewest Punts, Game, Both Teams – 1, New England vs. Philadelphia

Most Missed PAT Conversions, Game, Both Teams – 4, New England vs. Philadelphia

## SUPER BOWL RECORDS TIED IN SUPER BOWL LII

Most Passes, None Intercepted, Game – 48, Tom Brady

Most Field Goals, Game, Both Teams – 5, New England vs. Philadelphia

Most First Downs, Game, Both Teams – 54, New England vs. Philadelphia

Most Passes, Game, Both Teams – 93, New England vs. Philadelphia

Most Touchdown Passes, Game, Both Teams – 7, New England vs. Philadelphia

Fewest Times Sacked, Game, Team – 0, Philadelphia

Fewest Times Sacked, Game, Both Teams – 1, New England vs. Philadelphia

Fewest Punt Returns, Game, Both Teams – 0, New England vs. Philadelphia

Fewest Yards, Punt Returns, Game, Both Teams – 0, New England vs. Philadelphia

Fewest Fumbles, Game, Team – 0, Philadelphia

Fewest Fumbles Lost, Game, Team – 0, Philadelphia

Most Missed PAT Conversions, Game, Team – 3, Philadelphia

# Valor Christian expected to name one of two NFL veterans as its new football coach

By Kyle Newman

Denver Post

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Valor Christian is expected to name a new head football coach this week, according to sources close to the search.

The finalists are Ed McCaffrey and John Howell, who are both NFL veterans who have a son on the Valor Christian football team.

The position has been vacant since Rod Sherman stepped down Dec. 22 following a 57-11 record over five seasons and three Class 5A state titles with the school.

Whichever of the two is named the new coach will be inheriting a program with enormous expectations. The Eagles have won seven state championships and lost just two postseason games in the last nine seasons.

McCaffrey played 13 seasons as a wideout in the NFL, including nine with the Broncos. After his playing career concluded, he became a radio broadcaster. His youngest son Luke is expected to be the team's starting quarterback as a senior this fall.

The Waynesboro, Penn., native's three older sons also made a name for themselves in football following storied careers at Valor Christian. Max is a wideout for the San Francisco 49ers, Christian is a running back for the Carolina Panthers and Dylan plays quarterback at the University of Michigan.

Each of the McCaffrey sons played a crucial role in helping Valor Christian win multiple state championships. Christian and Dylan won the Gold Helmet award, presented annually by the Post to the state's top football player, while Luke is a two-time All-Colorado selection.

Howell — who served as Valor Christian's defensive backs coach last season — played at Colorado State before being selected in the fourth round of the 2001 NFL draft by Tampa Bay. The former defensive back played four seasons with the Buccaneers, including in their Super Bowl XXXVII win in 2002, and two years with the Seattle Seahawks.

# Here's one very far-fetched way we could keep it named Mile High Stadium

By Marshall Zelinger

9NEWS

Feb. 5, 2018

When the Denver Broncos take the field next season to start their journey to Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta, they may play in a stadium with no name.

Last week, former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb had an idea for people with deep pockets to pony up the cash for the name Mile High Stadium. He also targeted businesses and the marijuana industry to chip in to make it happen.

But there is one kind of far-fetched way residents of the Denver metro area could step up for less than the cost of one latte.

Sports Authority Field at Mile High, previously known as Invesco Field at Mile High, and commonly known as Mile High or Mile High Stadium, is going through a bit of an identity crisis.

Sports Authority as a company shuttered in 2016, but the venue that plays host to the Denver Broncos and the Denver Outlaws bore its name until quite recently.

Now, the question is: Who will step up and take that sponsorship?

Naming rights money helped cover some of the \$30 million to replace the jumbotron and electronics in the stadium. That money is also needed to constantly replace concrete on the concourse, and a dip in the parking lot that causes flooding you don't know about until it happens.

Naming rights money will also be needed to replace 27 HVAC systems -- they have a lifespan of 15 years and the stadium is turning 17. At \$150,000 each, that's \$4 million right there.

Fixing the cracked concrete on the stairs outside the stadium on the north side could cost anywhere between \$60,000 and \$160,000.

Three expansion joints need repair, which are kind of important because they connect sections of the stadium together. That's \$105,000 each.

Eventually, every seat will need to be replaced. Today's estimate rings in around \$17 million over the next five years.

Also, 200 heat pumps, more than 500 electric heaters, 15 escalators and 13 elevators need to be replaced.

So, that's gotta add up to a pretty penny.

But before you start a GoFundMe page to pay for the name "Mile High Stadium", consider the Broncos' estimate they need \$500 million to keep this stadium updated over the next 30 years (Before you say it, the pot tax can't help us here. It's for marijuana enforcement and school construction).

Starting in 1991, metro area taxpayers paid a pretty (fraction of a) penny to build what would become Coors Field.

It was kept in place to its 20-year expiration to pay for new Mile High.

To cover the \$289 million of the \$400 million price tag, voters -- at the time -- in six metro area counties paid one tenth of a penny on every dollar.

Those counties in the taxing district were Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas and Jefferson (Broomfield became a county in 2001 and is part of it).

That tax went away in 2012. But what if those counties voted to bring it back? \$500 million over 30 years is \$16.6 million, but we can cut that in half because as of today, the money from naming rights is half of the revenue the stadium makes.

The Broncos' lease and concerts and events (like the Taylor Swift show coming up on May 25) make up the rest and also help pay for upgrades.

So how do we get \$8.3 million a year? We wouldn't need that same tenth of a penny tax; we'd only need one-tenth of one-tenth of a penny, or about \$3.30 per adult in those seven counties (there's about 2.5 million adults, according to the Colorado Demography Office) per year.

If it was on the ballot -- and it's not right now -- voters would just need to decide if they have an appetite for that tax. To get that ball rolling, enough signatures would have to be garnered from the public to put it on the ballot or the legislature would need to agree on a bill to put this back on the ballot.

But before you go out and get your canvassing on, 9NEWS asked the Broncos if they'd also have an appetite for the public kickstarting the Mile High name and we got a very PR response that essentially says "no thanks."

"We are 100 percent focused on securing a long-term corporate naming rights holder, and we continue to have productive conversation with perspective partners."

So, there's that.

# Verify: Does Denver's mile high altitude really affect the outcome of sports games?

By Aaron Matas

9NEWS

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## THE QUESTION

We've all heard it. Denver area sports teams have an edge because they live and train a mile above sea level.

But whether altitude alone is enough to affect the outcome of games has long been a matter of debate. 9NEWS Sports team set out to verify just how out of breath opposing teams are at a mile high.

## WHAT WE FOUND

The Verify team started its search by talking to Dr. Inigo San Millan. He runs the sports performance program at the University of Colorado's Sports Medicine and Performance Center in Boulder.

The facility brings in athletes from around the world to test how they perform at different altitudes.

The data from all those athletes led Millan to the conclusion that every for 1,000 feet of elevation gain, a person loses 2 percent of their ability to consume oxygen and gets exhausted 4 percent faster than they normally would.

At one mile above sea level, that's a 10 percent drop in your body's ability to transport oxygen and 20 percent drop in time to exhaustion.

"That could be substantial, especially when we talk about high exercise intensities," Millan said.

For example, let's look at hockey.

One of the best players in the NHL is Washington Capitals' Alex Ovechkin, who plays his home games at sea level. Ovechkin averages about 20 minutes of ice time per game. That means – if Millan's numbers are true -- Ovechkin should drop to about 16 minutes of ice time when he plays in Denver.

9NEWS checked Ovechkin's ice time for his last appearance at the Pepsi Center in November and found he played 16:49 against the Avalanche.

Fatigue is not the only problem, Millan said.

People who live at sea level don't sleep as well when they visit Mile High City. They also dehydrate more easily.

"Another thing we see, the lactate production from the muscles, at altitude at high intensities, it is much higher," Millan said.

That causes more than cramps. Lactate gets in the way of proper muscle function and slows people down.

Lastly, people burn fats and carbohydrates differently at higher elevations.

“If you don’t have a good nutrition plan coming here, both for hydration as well as carbohydrates mainly, your glycogen storage might be lowered as that’s going to affect you out in the field,” Millan said.

All of those statistics makes it sound like Colorado teams enjoy a significant home field advantage, so we asked Millan straight out if that’s the case.

“It doesn’t matter the sport. When you come to altitude and you want to compete, you’re going to suffer, you’re going to pay for it,” Millan said. “And if someone is waiting for you here, right, with the knife well sharpened, they should take advantage of you.”

So, how can altitude be a part of a team’s winning strategy?

“You just crank it up, the tempo, especially in the third and fourth quarter, because that’s when the other team should go down,” Millan said.

He also suspects mile high coaches would benefit from changing their practice routines.

“One of the things we are trying figure out is those, especially the lineman, they are not very fit to start with. The training for them even at this altitude that they are adapted might not as tolerable as for other lineman at sea level,” Millan said. “And they might travel through the week more fatigued or accumulate more fatigue towards the weekend compared to other lineman coming from sea level.”

Visiting teams can also take steps to mitigate the effects of altitude.

Acclimating to the mile-high air takes at least nine days – an amount of time that’s not practical for professional sports teams to spend in Denver ahead of a game, Millan said.

What they should do instead is arrive as close to game time as possible. That way they avoid some of the negative effects like poor sleep and dehydration.

Finally, it’s important for away teams to know about any medical conditions that might prevent players from competing at high altitude.

Former Pittsburgh Steelers safety Ryan Clark fell gravely ill after playing the Broncos in 2007.

Clark has a genetic abnormality called Sickle cell that affects red blood cells. At high altitudes Sickle cell can cause serious problems with spleen function. Clark ultimately had his spleen and gall bladder removed after the 2007 game.

**BOTTOM LINE:**

Altitude affects an athlete's performance. Teams who practice at sea level tire 20 percent faster and transport 10 percent less oxygen in their bodies when they compete in Denver.

But a team's overall ability matters too. Altitude gives mile-high teams an edge, but it can't win games.

# Nate Solder: From Buena Vista to Boulder's campus to caring dad to 4th Super Bowl

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

Feb. 5, 2018

Life is heavy for Nate Solder.

His job is to protect the blindside of perhaps the best quarterback of all-time in Tom Brady against a strong Philadelphia Eagles' pass rush today in Super Bowl LII. Never gone from his thoughts is his young son, Hudson, has been undergoing a second round of weekly chemotherapy treatments for kidney cancer.

Luckily for Solder, he is a big man from the small mountain town of Buena Vista who seems to handle it all with equanimity. Solder eases his burden by maintaining a brave front, a positive attitude, and playing football before more than 100 million people today in Super Bowl LII.

"Well, it is heavy, that's why football is so fun," Solder said at the New England Patriot media session Thursday. "You get to go out there, compete at a high level and have some fun, tear it up with your buddies. Really that's kind of the relief from all the heavy stuff back home."

Solder's routine, when it's not Super Bowl week, is to drive on Tuesday mornings with his wife, Lexi, and Hudson from Foxborough, where the Patriots play, practice and prepare, to the Jimmy Fund Clinic in Boston. Hudson, who was diagnosed with the kidney cancer when he was 3 months old, is 2 ½-years old now.

"He's doing awesome," Solder said. "He's still doing chemotherapy. Handling it really well. The chemotherapy is working. They haven't started growing again – all the tumors are shrinking. It's tough, but he's doing great so there's a lot of hope in the whole matter."

Even if nothing can be more serious than your child's health, Solder doesn't complain. He understands in other aspects his life is idyllic.

Starting with growing up in one of the most scenic towns on earth in Buena Vista, a town of roughly 2,600 people and 8,000 feet in elevation.

"That's a great community to be from," he said. "Those people are so amazing. I stay in touch with several of them. We started doing our (football) camps there in July. We're going to continue doing that. We're so excited about that. A lot of kids showed up last year, hopefully, we're going to continue to grow there. But being from there, the close ties I have with so many people there, it's a special place."

In 2005, the same year Jake Plummer and Champ Bailey led the Broncos to the AFC Championship Game, Solder was a Class 2A All-State tight end and linebacker in his senior year high school year for the Demons. That winter he averaged 15 points and 8 rebounds a game for the basketball team.

"Skilled" players are not restricted to receivers, running backs and quarterbacks.

He arrived at the University of Colorado as a 6-foot-7, 245-pound tight end. He left as a 6-8, 305-pound consensus All American left tackle. He was New England's first pick, No. 17 overall, in the 2011 NFL Draft – the same event where the Broncos took pass rusher Von Miller with the No. 2 overall choice.

And now Solder is about to finish his seventh NFL season by playing in his fourth Super Bowl even though he overcame testicular cancer in 2014 and a season-ending torn biceps injury early in 2015.

“The whole thing has been such an adventure,” said Solder. “I’m from Buena Vista, a small-town kid. I never thought I’d be here. I’m so thankful for the opportunities I’ve had. I just do the most I can with what I’ve been given and it’s been a lot. It’s been a very exciting adventure.”

His two-year, \$20.06 million contract will essentially expire in a few hours and he will then receive the leverage of free agency where he could make more.

Would he like to return home and play a few years for the Broncos?

“Man, I’m just looking forward to this game, looking forward to the opportunity to be here,” Solder said. “I don’t want to look past that.”

Spoken like a Patriot. In media circles there has been speculation Solder may retire if he doesn’t re-up with New England because his family has such a deep trust and comfort level with the Jimmy Fund Clinic in Boston. He clarified that position this week.

“Actually, I haven’t discussed that,” he said. “Some people have made stories about that.

“My focus has been totally on the Eagles right now. We’re going to have some conversations after this game. For now, we’re going to leave that till then.”

At this point, it would be a mild surprise if the Broncos pursued Solder. He’s going to be a big-ticket commodity and the Broncos may need to place most of their offseason resources into their quarterback position.

If they did go after him, they would get a Nate Solder whose body might be more beat up than it was when he left Buena Vista and Boulder. But as he turns 30 in April, Solder is also a much better left tackle than he was a first-round rookie for the Patriots.

“I’m also more developed, too,” he said. “I’ve gotten stronger. I’m in better shape. More mature. There’s so many factors. I’ve had such awesome coaching with how competitive they are in New England. The high level of coaches they’ve had here from Dante Scarnecchia to Bill (Belichick) to Josh McDaniels, they’ve been so awesome that I’ve become a much better player.”

Solder has been a great Patriot – is anything more impressive? Other than saying, you know, you’re a great husband and father and a Colorado native.

“Oh man, I love Colorado,” he said. “I don’t know what’s going to happen but that’s a great place to be from. I have tons of friends still there. It’s an amazing spot.”

# To really upgrade at QB, Broncos' salary cap will need attention

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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There are two well-known facts about the Denver Broncos and an offseason that was kick-started in earnest the moment Sunday's Super Bowl concluded.

They are on the hunt for a quarterback -- or two. And they know it's going to cost money to make that happen, perhaps a pile of it.

With the season's last game in the books, the Broncos will get back to the task at hand. How they now arrange their salary-cap expenses will determine what they can do at the position is what president of football operations/general manager John Elway has called the offseason's top priority.

Elway has also said the Broncos have to decide what "makes sense with the dollars and cap-wise" by the time the new league year opens, including free agency, in March.

At the moment, the Broncos have 59 players signed for the 2018 season. If the salary cap is in the neighborhood of \$178 million per team as some expect, they would have between \$24.5 million and \$26.7 million available -- some players have playing-time escalators from this past season that will increase their 2018 base salaries.

That is enough space to do business, but not enough to dive into free agency with the financial zeal it would take to sign, or trade for, high-profile quarterbacks like Kirk Cousins, or Drew Brees in the unlikely event that the New Orleans Saints did not re-sign him.

The Broncos can create additional cap space by releasing players with years remaining on their contracts, but often those kinds of deals belong to starters who were secured with big, multi-year deals. It means in an effort to lure free agents, the Broncos would have to walk the line between making cap space and avoid weakening a roster that finished 5-11 to the point top-shelf hopefuls would look elsewhere.

Earlier this offseason, Elway was asked if that meant the team would tinker with its biggest strength -- defense -- to upgrade the offense.

"I really don't like taking away from a strength; I don't like doing that," Elway said. " ... I like what I know rather than what I might not know even though I think it might help us."

Given a player like Cousins on the open market is expected to command more than what the league's highest-paid quarterback is making per year -- the deal of the Detroit Lions' Matthew Stafford averages \$27 million -- the Broncos will need to create plenty of space to sign a marquee player or two. They also need to cover their draft class and training camp.

There is also the matter with quarterbacks Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch playing under their rookie contracts the last two seasons. The Broncos have been able to use the salary-cap space most teams devote to quarterbacks elsewhere. To now sign a quarterback, use a first-round draft pick on one, or both, will take some adjustment. And the list of players whose contracts could create space, either by their release or a re-negotiation, includes familiar names.

The Broncos could shop players they might later release, but many teams believe they are set to release high-profile veterans before free agency begins, so finding a trade partner may be difficult.

Five players with cap figures of at least \$10 million are on the Broncos' roster for 2018 -- linebacker Von Miller (\$22.5 million), receiver Demaryius Thomas (\$12.03 million), cornerback Aqib Talib (\$12 million), receiver Emmanuel Sanders (\$10.93 million) and corner Chris Harris Jr. (\$10.36 million).

They have three more scheduled to have figures of at least \$8 million in defensive end Derek Wolfe (\$9.08 million), guard Ron Leary (\$8.79 million) and corner Bradley Roby (\$8.526 million). Those eight are the most likely candidates for the Broncos to consider, along with running back C.J. Anderson, in the coming weeks.

Anderson's contract is written in a way that the Broncos would have no "dead money" -- salary-cap charges for players no longer on the roster -- if he is released; his savings would be the full \$4.5 million he is scheduled to count against the cap. Also, Talib's deal, with just a \$1 million dead-money charge, would create \$11 million worth of room if he is released -- and the Broncos believe Roby is ready to be a starter. Sanders' deal would create \$5.6 million worth of room in addition to a \$5.538 million charge if he is released.

The Broncos have not been prone to carrying hefty dead-money charges -- they have just \$366,000 worth on the books for 2018 and \$264,265 of that is from their trade of Ty Sambrailo last summer.

It leaves the Broncos with what Elway has lumped into "a lot of things to consider," and he has neither mentioned any players specifically nor awarded votes of confidence. But if they're going to write a big check for a new quarterback, they'll have to carve out room to do it.

# Eagles' upset win should give hope to Denver Broncos fans

By David Ramsey  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
Feb. 5, 2018

A year ago, the Philadelphia Eagles watched the Super Bowl at home on their big-screen TVs.

They started the 2016 season with three wins before skidding to nine losses in 11 games. They were despised and rejected in the City of Brotherly Love, where a sports team must earn every drop of love. They finished last in the NFC East. They were given virtually no chance to rule the NFL in 2017-2018.

Sunday, nearly all of the Denver Broncos watched the Eagles defeat the Patriots in yet another Super Bowl thriller.

The Broncos, as you remember, won three of their first four games this season before losing 10 of 12, leaving Vance Joseph dangling on the coaching cliff. Mile High was strangely quiet and empty for the season finale.

The Broncos finished first in the NFL in 2015, and last in the AFC West in 2017. Hundreds of thousands who loved the Broncos with the vaporous love of fans now want to kick their former heroes. Fall Sundays aren't the same in Colorado.

Despairing Bronco fans, remember this: In the NFL, the mountain of revival can be climbed by the most unlikely of teams. The Jaguars, who stumbled to a 3-13 record in 2016, came achingly close to dropping the Patriots and traveling to Sunday's Super Bowl.

The Broncos have joined the ranks of the unlikely. Vegas oddsmakers tend to know what they're doing because they deal with cash, not empty talk. On Sunday, only a few minutes after Philadelphia began to quake with joy, Vegas announced the Broncos faced 40-1 odds to win the 2019 Super Bowl. The Raiders and Chiefs are 30-1. The Patriots, of course, are only 5-1.

Those Broncos odds look right to me. The offense is a disaster with a massive hole at quarterback. The defense is filled with talent and celebrities, but surrendered 92 points in consecutive losses to the Eagles and Patriots.

Kirk Cousins, the \$30-million man, is tempting as a fix. He's an overachiever, a deep thinker who uses his mind to overcome his average, by NFL standards, arm. He's passed for more than 4,000 yards the past three seasons. He's 29, still in the middle of his prime. He's a true free agent.

But...

He's won 26 of 58 starts, and the Redskins finished a dead-middle 16th in points scored in 2017. In Washington's final three losses, the Cousins-led offense scored a total of 34 points.

Is Cousins worthy of \$110 million – give or take \$5 million – in guaranteed cash? Remember, signing Cousins will severely limit the money needed for the rest of the Broncos rehabilitation project.

And this is a big project.

Eleven months ago, Joseph was introduced to the Rocky Mountain Region, and he essentially read from a script provided by his boss, John Elway.

"It's a football team that's not broken," Joseph said. "This job won't be a rebuild. It's my job to find the small tweaks to make this team a winning team again."

A revolution was needed, but Elway instead oversaw a few tweaks. We all suffered through the disaster of a result.

Even in the Patriots era, the NFL remains packed with surprise. A year ago, Eagles fans were even more grumpy than usual. Their team had collapsed. They had no solid reason to believe their decades-long wait for NFL supremacy would end.

The wait ended Sunday with victory over a dynasty.

For Bronco fans, this highly entertaining upset lifts a little of the gloom from a dark and weird season.

The Eagles turned on a light of hope.

# Mason's Mailbag: February grab bag

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
Feb. 5, 2018

You can tweet questions to me with the hashtag #AskMase or use the submission form to your right (if you're viewing on a standard browser) or at the bottom of the page if you're on the mobile site.

Who watches the Pro Bowl? Fans of teams already eliminated want their distance and are looking towards free agency and the draft, and fans of the Patriots and Eagles have their eyes set on the Super Bowl. I have always loved how the All-Star Game in baseball is made more meaningful by dictating home team of the World Series. What do you think of the idea of having the Pro Bowl victor being the first tiebreaker for draft order? This has the added benefit of appealing exactly to the fans (and players!) who care most and gives 30 of 32 teams' fans a real reason to care and a stake for players as well.

-- Paul B.

According to reports this week, 8.6 million people, a 14-percent increase over last year -- that's who watches it. So obviously there is some level of interest in the game.

As for your idea ... I only like using the Pro Bowl as a replacement for the coin flip such as the one that will break the draft-pick deadlock between the 49ers and Raiders, who are deadlocked on strength of schedule. The Pro Bowl result is basically as random as the coin toss, so why not? But as for it being the first tiebreaker, rather than strength of schedule -- I disagree.

First, let's be pragmatic and look at it in the short term. Since you're here, I assume you are a Broncos fan. This year, the current draft-pick tiebreaker helped the Broncos, pushing them to the No. 5 slot in the draft. It also helped them get the Senior Bowl coaching gig, allowing them to receive some extra information into a significant chunk of the draft class. Why would you want something that would have negated all that?

As for baseball -- the concept of having the All-Star Game determine home-field advantage lost its luster to the point that it was ditched after the 2016 All-Star Game. As an avid enthusiast of the sport, I am thankful. I grew to despise the idea of having home-field advantage potentially come down to a starting pitcher from a 65-97 team working in a relief appearance against a pinch hitter from a 71-91 squad.

How do you see Alex Smith being traded to Washington and the now definite availability of Kirk Cousins affecting the Broncos' path to solving their QB issues? Does the reported Smith extension mean anything for negotiations with Cousins? I wouldn't think Cousins could ask for any more than what Smith got. Would you?

-- Dylan Conner

I don't think it has much of an effect. As I discussed on Orange and Blue 760, I did not expect Cousins to return to Washington, simply based on my reading of the situation even before this week's reports. I also did not think the Chiefs would trade Smith within the division. The only thing that is altered by what broke Tuesday night is the fact that teams can start formulating their plans with a bit more knowledge

of the situation; it would not surprise me if as much as 25 percent of the league's teams have interest in Cousins.

It is probably unwise to assume what Cousins will ask for if he gets a chance to hit the open market. That said, the comparisons between the two are fascinating, as they have similar recent production levels. Over the last three seasons, they rank sixth and seventh in passer rating, with Cousins at 97.5 and Smith at 97.2. Cousins has the superior touchdown rate, completion percentage and yardage per attempt; Smith has the better interception rate and is a more productive runner, averaging 5.14 yards per carry (although Cousins actually has more rushing touchdowns, holding a 13-8 edge there). Really, the only difference in determining contract value is age -- Smith is 33; Cousins is 29.

What do you think about the idea of the Broncos trading for Nick Foles after the Super Bowl?

-- Thomas Trandal

It always takes two to make a deal, and if you are the Eagles, why would you trade Foles unless some other team makes an offer that likely exceeds reasonable market value?

Carson Wentz's rehabilitation timeline could take him right up to the start of the 2018 regular season, and with Foles around, the Eagles do not have to rush Wentz back; they know they have a quarterback with whom they can win. Furthermore, Wentz is still on his rookie deal, so they do not have any cap issues created by carrying the contracts of Foles and Wentz into 2018.

# Texans deny Broncos' request to interview Wes Welker

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

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The Broncos requested permission to interview Wes Welker for their then-vacant wide receivers coaching position, Mike Klis of Denver's 9News. The Texans denied the request despite it being a promotion for Welker.

Welker currently serves as an offensive assistant. The Texans hired the former NFL wide receiver a year ago, with Welker having a relationship with coach Bill O'Brien from their time together in New England.

The Texans obviously think a lot of Welker as a coach.

Denied permission to talk to Welker, the Broncos instead hired one-year NFL coach Zach Azzanni as their wide receivers coach.