

Broncos notes: Chiefs owner implies Broncos were not getting Alex Smith

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

Feb. 8, 2018

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Two years removed from parade, Broncos struggling to find Super fits

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

Feb. 8, 2018

It will likely pass with a murmur at most, but Friday is an anniversary of sorts for the Denver Broncos.

An anniversary of one of the city's best moments in its long love affair with the team, and a measuring stick for how quickly things can slip from your grasp in the pro football life if you're not careful, not diligent, not shrewd and perhaps are a little bit unlucky.

Friday will be the two-year anniversary of when roughly one million folks gathered in the streets of downtown Denver, some before sunrise to secure the best spots, to celebrate the Broncos' Super Bowl 50 victory. A day linebacker Von Miller has called "a forever kind of day."

Yet two years later, here are the Broncos, a team that has now missed the playoffs in each of those two seasons and finished 2017 at 5-11. Sunday's Super Bowl -- in which the Philadelphia Eagles defeated the New England Patriots 41-33 -- was a reminder of how much work there is to be done.

Early in this offseason, president of football operations/general manager John Elway was asked if the Broncos would be able to quickly return to Super Bowl worthiness. He hinted at the workload when he took a step back from his usual Elway-esque "there is no Plan B" confidence.

"We hope so, you never know," he said. "I think that when you're 5-11, there are obviously some issues that we have to get handled. I think that is our goal. ... I don't want to raise the expectation level by saying, 'Yes, automatically we're going to get back there.'"

The Broncos got their own Super Bowl preview in November, when they faced the Eagles and Patriots in back-to-back weeks. The Broncos were outscored 92-39 in those two games combined and allowed seven touchdown passes.

Sunday's title game underlined again how Denver's top priority must be Elway's professed desire to improve at quarterback and on offense. Both teams, the Eagles especially, played with bravado, a go-for-it confidence the Broncos rarely showed in 2017, even on the team's beloved defense.

The Eagles converted 10 of 16 third downs and went 2-for-2 on fourth down, despite playing in the highest-pressure situation the NFL has to offer. That enabled Philadelphia to win a game in which its defense allowed a staggering 613 yards and didn't force a punt.

Behind all of that offensive history, the Eagles took a roster with its foundation in the draft and got top performances from the players they had acquired in the months leading up to and even during the season. None more than the game's MVP, quarterback Nick Foles, who was reacquired during the spring as a free agent and signed to a two-year, \$11 million deal.

Foles is a player with some football scars but showed on the game's biggest stage that he had learned from his journey. While the Broncos struggled to find their identity on offense for much of the season -- they ran the ball more than they threw it in just five games in 2017, but all five were their victories -- the Eagles had a plan, and stuck to it when Foles replaced the injured Carson Wentz.

Their top two rushers in the Super Bowl -- LeGarrette Blount and Jay Ajayi -- were add-ons who flourished. The Eagles traded for Ajayi just before they faced the Broncos in November, and that was the first game he played for Philadelphia.

Objectively, the Broncos don't have a player like Eagles defensive tackle Fletcher Cox, though few teams do. But from a talent perspective, many personnel evaluators would say Denver's group of Miller and cornerbacks Aqib Talib, Chris Harris Jr. and Bradley Roby is a rare find as well.

The Eagles -- beyond having Tom Brady at quarterback -- did this season what the Patriots have done for some time. They knew what they were looking for as they reeled in players to fit roles, and then those players were coached to play at the top of their abilities in those roles.

In the minds of those who rank rosters inside the league, few Broncos players reached a higher level in 2017, and Denver didn't seem to have a plan for what kinds of players it was looking for to fill jobs. That, too, is a Super Bowl lesson and something Elway, who has won the title game both behind center and as an executive, had observed as well.

"We have to do a better job with that," he said. "We didn't do a great job of that this year."

Broncos have much work to do to get back in Super Bowl mix

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
Feb. 8, 2018

Here's a look at the Super Bowl prospects of the Denver Broncos, who finished the season 5-11. The tiers consist of: Realistic Super Bowl expectations; Should contend, but there are question marks; Middle of the pack; Lots of work to do; and Nowhere close.

Westgate odds to win Super Bowl LIII: 30-1

Lots of work to do: The Broncos still have a Super Bowl MVP on their roster who is in his prime in linebacker Von Miller, and they also have a locker room with plenty of players who experienced what it takes to win a Super Bowl to close out the 2015 season.

But they also have a coach in Vance Joseph who was almost fired after this past season, they have enormous questions at quarterback and they are poised for a roster makeover that just might see some of the team's most notable players moving on.

The Broncos' first order of business is what they plan to do at quarterback. They are in a rather odd situation because despite going through this past season with four quarterbacks they drafted -- Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler, Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly (injured reserve) -- they figure to give both free agency and the draft a long look at the position.

Whether that means an all-in mega-deal in free agency or using the No. 5 pick in the draft on a quarterback -- or both -- remains to be seen. But the team's top football decision-maker, John Elway, has declared quarterback the top priority of the offseason and has said the Broncos won't get better until they are better at the position.

Doing that will take salary-cap space the Broncos have not devoted to quarterback the past two years. And that could cost some high-profile players their roster spots as the Broncos make those adjustments.

Players such as cornerback Aqib Talib and running back C.J. Anderson have said they are unsure about their futures, and even the longest-tenured Broncos player -- wide receiver Demaryius Thomas -- has said he's not sure how everything is going to look in 2018.

That means Joseph likely will face plenty of pressure if things don't go well in his second year on the job, especially if the Broncos roll out a couple of big-money contracts in free agency. The bottom line is that many of the Broncos kept saying they were better than their record this past season -- and that might have been their most painful lesson of all because the Broncos earned every bit of that 5-11 finish with how they went about their business.

Almost a year later, Calais Campbell still one who got away for many

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

Feb. 8, 2018

In the almost constant review of the Denver Broncos season that has gone on in the weeks since the 5-11 finish, a name that has popped up more than occasionally as a symbol of how things got to this point is Calais Campbell.

Campbell was the Broncos' big target in free agency last March, a Denver native, no less, who had grown up watching John Elway – the team's top football decision-maker – win back-to-back Super Bowls at quarterback.

And the Broncos lost a bidding war, or chose not to fight, take your pick, when Campbell signed a four-year, \$60 million deal with the Jacksonville Jaguars. Campbell, who is exactly the kind of inside presence the Broncos have lacked in the defensive line to help Von Miller in the two playoff misses of the last two seasons, then fair or not became somewhat of a symbol of the Broncos making the safe play when they need more.

Campbell, at 31, finished this past season with a career-best 14.5 sacks and was named a first-team All Pro for the first time in his career. And the question, in the numbers-crunching side of decisions that are made, is whether Campbell can keep up that level of play the remainder of the contract as he ventures deeper into his 30s.

But in and around the team's faithful Campbell is the hometown guy the Broncos didn't go high enough to get. They weren't the damn-the-torpedoes team that signed Peyton Manning, DeMarcus Ware, Aqib Talib, T.J. Ward and Emmanuel Sanders – all were named to at least one Pro Bowl after signing with the Broncos – in a two-year span on the way to a Super Bowl win.

And with so many free-agency decisions to be made in the weeks to come, many wonder if Elway is ready to spend as he tries to walk the line between salary-cap stability and returning the Broncos where he wants them in the league's pecking order. At the Senior Bowl last month Elway vowed "we'll be prepared for free agency ... we'll sit down and see make our plan."

Elway, a self-professed "numbers guy" who knows the road to repeated struggles in the league is paved with bad drafts and bad salary-cap management, also said the team has to do "what makes sense cap-wise ... as we look two, three years down the road, too."

With all of the numbers swirling about what it will take to sign a front-line quarterback in free agency, a player such as Kirk Cousins might command the largest contract ever signed by a quarterback, Elway has yet to publicly declare the Broncos are ready to go all-in for a quarterback in the open market.

The Broncos also have the No. 5 pick in the draft so have to sift through how to spend their free-agency dollars in relation to what their plan is with their draft picks, including the earliest the team will pick in the opening round since the Broncos selected Miller No. 2 overall in 2011.

But since the free-agency haul of 2014 – that was when Ware, Talib, Ward and Sanders signed with the Broncos – Elway has taken a far more measured approach to the open market. Last March, for example, guard Ron Leary and tackle Menelik Watson were the first players the Broncos reeled in.

Part of that was necessary given those contracts had followed Manning's blockbuster and the Broncos had re-signed their own players such as Demaryius Thomas, Chris Harris Jr., Derek Wolfe and Miller along the way. Miller's deal was the largest for a defensive player in the league's history.

Now that Sunday's Super Bowl has effectively put a period on the 2017 season, the Broncos are back on the treadmill with repairs to be made, decisions to make on the money to spend, or not to spend, and one of the most important drafts of Elway's tenure. All with Elway weighing the issue he addressed both at season's end and at the Senior Bowl -- how much is too much with so much work to be done.

Or as Miller has put it: "I don't think anybody thinks he's just going to sit back. ... We know what John Elway will do."

The Latest: Man charged with assaulting AP photographer

By Staff

Associated Press

Feb. 8, 2018

The Latest on Thursday's parade plans for the Super Bowl-winning Philadelphia Eagles, and the continuing arrests stemming from violence after Sunday's victory (all times local):

5 p.m.

Philadelphia police have charged a city man with assaulting an Associated Press photographer during street celebrations after the Eagles won the Super Bowl.

The arrest was one of eight announced Wednesday stemming from violence and vandalism late Sunday and early Monday.

Police say the AP photographer was struck in the face with his own camera and punched multiple times in the head, suffering cuts, bruises and other injuries. They say the AP photographer was attacked after telling the man he was too busy taking photos to talk with him.

The man was charged with aggravated assault and other counts.

Among the other arrests were a man accused of helping flip a car and two men who police say threw bottles at police vehicles.

11:40 a.m.

Philadelphia is gearing up and shutting down for its first-ever Super Bowl parade, with universities, schools and city offices all shuttering and mass transit being shifted to serve the needs of parade-going Eagles fans.

Practically the entire city will be closed for business for Thursday's celebrations, including all museums, the Philadelphia Zoo and city courts.

The parade starts near the stadium and ends at the art museum steps that Sylvester Stallone climbed in the "Rocky" movies.

Officials say fans should expect dramatic surprises.

Meanwhile, police have begun making more arrests for vandalism that broke out after the Eagles won their first Super Bowl by beating the New England Patriots on Sunday.

Among the new wave of arrests was a 20-year-old accused of flipping over a car.

Here's why Josh McDaniels, a true Patriot, rejected Colts

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
Feb. 8, 2018

Why did Josh McDaniels reject the Indianapolis Colts after agreeing weeks ago to become the head coach of the Colts?

Easy answer, really.

McDaniels is a true New England Patriot and a true follower of head coach/grumpiest-man-on-earth Bill Belichick.

Remember when Belichick defied and betrayed his mentor Bill Parcells? Belichick was under contract to coach the New York Jets for the 2000 season, but Belichick decided he wanted to coach the Patriots. Parcells had nurtured Belichick's career. Parcells had groomed Belichick to become a head coach.

Didn't matter. Belichick bolted anyway.

Why? Because Belichick believes, strongly, in doing what is best for Belichick. That's his way. That's the Patriot way. Me first. You second.

McDaniels had wooed assistant coaches. McDaniels had clearly said he would coach the Colts.

Didn't matter. McDaniels bolted back to the Patriots.

Why? McDaniels is really, really into what's best for McDaniels.

Me first. You second. The Patriot Way.

Of course, the Colts will likely come out ahead in all this. In Colorado, we know all about McDaniels and his goofy, arrogant ways. He arrived on The Front Range as The Boy Wonder.

Didn't take long for us to figure out he's really The Boy Blunder.

One last thing: As McDaniels returns to the Patriots dynasty, he has a superb chance to direct the offense of yet another Super Bowl champ.

But he better hope he follows Belichick as Patriots head coach.

No other NFL team will hire him. Not after his classless abandonment of the Colts.

Falcons owner Arthur Blank awaits Pat Bowlen's HOF election, praises Joe Ellis

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
Feb. 8, 2018

Atlanta Falcons owner and chairman Arthur Blank is right there with the entirety of Broncos Country when it comes to eagerly hoping Broncos Owner Pat Bowlen's election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame is rapidly approaching.

"I would say [the] sooner the better," Blank told 9News' Mike Klis. "Pat is a great friend and a great contributor to the National Football League. You go back and look at the 100 years of the NFL and you [see] these gentlemen, these families, were the foundation of the league. Pat and his family was certainly one of the foundational families. He served on every committee. Did everything the commissioner asked him to do. He was a great partner in the true sense of the word.

"I think about him often. I hope he's OK, as well as he can be, and certainly wish his family well."

After Bowlen stepped away from monitoring the Broncos' day-to-day operations to fight Alzheimer's disease in 2014, President and CEO Joe Ellis began leading the organization, and Blank praised the admirable work Ellis has done in Bowlen's stead.

"I sent Joe a note after one of the meetings we had," Blank told Klis. "I'm on the finance committee, Joe made a presentation on behalf of the family and the trustees and the process that Pat wanted to go through."

@psmyth12

Arthur Blank also with strong praise for Broncos Prez/CEO Joe Ellis:

".... I only wish in my case when we all reach that (ownership transition) that I have somebody like a Joe Ellis running our franchise. It will be my family at that point but he has done an incredible job."

NFL rebuild rankings: Which teams are in best shape for extended future?

By Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz

USA Today

Feb. 8, 2018

With the NFL season over, every team can consider itself a contender again — for now.

The Philadelphia Eagles' successful run to Super Bowl LII (after consecutive losing seasons) should serve as inspiration to organizations that found themselves home this January. Some have the ingredients to make a similar surge next season, while certain playoff teams could be in for a fall.

Here's our look at all 32 teams, ranked from best to worst on their outlook for the extended future:

1. **Eagles:** The underdog act is over. With a 25-year-old, MVP-caliber quarterback in Carson Wentz on the mend, Philadelphia has a robust core eyeing to build off the franchise's first Super Bowl title. The Eagles have a tight salary-cap outlook in 2018 but face minimal losses from a group with few weaknesses.
2. **Vikings:** Yes, Minnesota has a Mall of America-sized hole at quarterback with Case Keenum, Teddy Bridgewater and Sam Bradford set to hit free agency. But with plenty of spending room and an enviable roster, the Vikings should be able to find a satisfying resolution. Perhaps no other team is as good at developing homegrown stars, as there's outstanding talent at the skill positions and throughout the NFL's top-ranked defense.
3. **Patriots:** Tom vs. Time is a battle the NFL's latest MVP intends on winning, even if his opponent is undefeated. As long as Brady shows no signs of slowing — and coach Bill Belichick remains at the helm — New England shouldn't slip far. TE Rob Gronkowski's non-committal remarks about his future will keep many on edge until he reveals his plans, and the defense also needs to be addressed after being repeatedly sliced in the Super Bowl.
4. **Falcons:** They might be poised to pull off what Minnesota fell short of by becoming the first team to play in the Super Bowl as a host. OC Steve Sarkisian still must prove he can capitalize on his array of weapons, but the pieces are all there. Don't overlook breakout star LB Deion Jones and what might be the NFL's next great defense.
5. **Jaguars:** Is this The Good Place for Jacksonville? A defense loaded at every level and top-ranked run game led by Leonard Fournette indicates the Jags are here to stay. But keeping Blake Bortles under center, which the team appears content to do for another year, seems like a substantial limitation.
6. **Rams:** There's no better young troika than coach of the year Sean McVay, 32, offensive player of the year Todd Gurley, 23, and defensive player of the year Aaron Donald, 26. Taking the next step, however, depends on the continued development of QB Jared Goff. Potential salary-cap sacrifices and losses in free agency could send the defense in the wrong direction.
7. **Saints:** Once a veteran-dependent group, New Orleans has given itself a rush of vitality with a sterling rookie class led by RB Alvin Kamara and CB Marshon Lattimore. Yet this is still Drew Brees' show, and the

quarterback's expected return should give New Orleans all the confidence it needs to make another serious push.

8. Steelers: Despite boasting a league-best eight Pro Bowlers, Pittsburgh hasn't done enough to close the gap on New England. The often deadly offense can still run cold at times, while LB Ryan Shazier's injury revealed defensive shortcomings. Keeping Le'Veon Bell is essential, though striking an agreement might not be easy (or cheap).

9. Packers: After grumbling about the loss of his quarterbacks coach, Aaron Rodgers returned to a more upbeat tone by noting his last comeback from a broken collarbone resulted in an MVP campaign. So long as the franchise centerpiece stays healthy, the Pack should be able to run with the elite despite deficiencies elsewhere. Joe Philbin could help Rodgers and the offense get back to top form in his second stint in Green Bay, but Mike Pettine could be the real boon in the staff shake-up for a perennially uninspiring defense.

10. Cowboys: Is Dallas done with drama for a while after the Ezekiel Elliott suspension saga? Even if Dez Bryant's looming contract ordeal is ironed out, it's clear that Dak Prescott needs more help from his receiving corps. DE Demarcus Lawrence is a promising piece who deserves a hefty contract in free agency, but the defense is still disproportionately reliant on LB Sean Lee.

11. Chargers: They proved they won't settle for second banana in Los Angeles. Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram constitute the NFL's best young pass-rushing duo, while the fourth-ranked offense remains in good hands with Philip Rivers and Melvin Gordon. But it's past time to fix the farcical kicking woes and porous run defense.

12. Texans: The top of the roster is sterling, as Deshaun Watson and J.J. Watt provide tantalizing possibilities as they mend from injuries, while DE Jadeveon Clowney and WR DeAndre Hopkins also stand among the best at their respective positions. Yet the offensive line gave up 54 sacks, and the secondary was burned for 30 touchdowns. Without a pick in the first two rounds, Houston might have to wait for remedies.

13. Seahawks: Ticking ever closer to a reset? Still, it's unclear exactly what form that might take. With CB Richard Sherman rehabbing a torn Achilles and Pete Carroll casting doubt on the futures of S Kam Chancellor and DE Cliff Avril — theories of DE Michael Bennett's departure have also been floated — the vaunted defense looks like it could be in for a major shift. Russell Wilson's output (he had a hand in all but one of Seattle's offensive touchdowns) was nothing short of heroic, but that formula ultimately proved untenable.

14. Chiefs: Let 'er rip, Pat Mahomes. After Kansas City sent Alex Smith to Washington following a career year, last year's big-armed first rounder should have free rein of an explosive offense. His first season as a starter might be a facsimile of his Texas Tech days, as the defense is still in bad shape (though the return of Eric Berry and acquisition of Kendall Fuller will boost the secondary).

15. 49ers: San Francisco has an impressive setup after closing the year on an NFL-best five-game win streak under Jimmy Garoppolo. The full breakout might be a year off, however, as Kyle Shanahan and John Lynch continue to rebuild the roster. Expected to have more salary cap space (\$113 million) than any other team, the Niners could choose to make a big splash in free agency.

16. Titans: Tennessee was the only playoff team to make a coaching change. Whether the Titans picked the right replacement in Mike Vrabel, who had just one year of coordinator experience in Houston, remains unclear. Marcus Mariota regressed in 2017 but could also use a more creative playbook and assistance from his supporting cast after he threw 13 touchdowns and 15 interceptions.

17. Panthers: Between the expected sale of the franchise by Jerry Richardson and interim GM Marty Hurney being put on paid leave amid allegations from his ex-wife, few clubs face more uncertainty. And that's to say nothing of the changes made on Ron Rivera's staff, which will have two new coordinators, including Norv Turner taking over the offense.

18. Broncos: John Elway is in the batter's box, waiting to take his big swing for a quarterback. Whatever move he makes might not be a cure-all for a group that underwent an eight-game losing streak last season. But Von Miller and the rest of the defense help position Denver to make a big leap if a competent passer is obtained.

19. Raiders: The Silver & Black aren't waiting for their Vegas move to put on a show. Jon Gruden's return raises both the team's profile and expectations. Though many will focus on how he handles Derek Carr after last year's struggles, the defense also needs to become more than the Khalil Mack solo act.

20. Redskins: Even after landing Alex Smith, Washington still doesn't know how to find a graceful end to the Kirk Cousins saga. Smith should settle in nicely with coach Jay Gruden's offense, though might undergo the same struggles Cousins did in developing a rapport with Josh Doctson and the rest of the receiving corps. Better luck on the injury front could provide a spark in 2018, but more consistency is needed.

21. Ravens: After spending most of the last five years in a post-Super Bowl stasis, Baltimore is headed for major changes. GM Ozzie Newsome is entering his last season, and John Harbaugh has been given a playoff mandate. For now, the story remains the same, as a formidable defense will be tasked with carrying Joe Flacco and his second-rate supporting cast.

22. Lions: Leading Detroit isn't rocket science, which new coach Matt Patricia once studied. But notching the franchise's first postseason win since the 1991 season might be similarly vexing. While Matthew Stafford provides a nice foundation, Patricia will have to find answers for a lackluster pass rush and long-dormant run game.

23. Cardinals: Larry Fitzgerald is the last link to the most successful run in Arizona's history, and it's still not clear what his 2018 plans are. RB David Johnson's return should re-balance the offense, while the sixth-ranked defense has cornerstones in sack king Chandler Jones and Patrick Peterson, who's now seven-for-seven on Pro Bowls in his career. With a murky outlook at quarterback and along the offensive line, however, Steve Wilks' first year as head coach is shaping up to be rocky.

24. Bills: Ending the NFL's longest playoff drought shows they're in good hands with Sean McDermott. But even returning to postseason in the near future could prove difficult, as Buffalo lacks building blocks. Change at quarterback is likely afoot, and the offense needs to find other weapons beyond LeSean McCoy, who turns 30 in July.

25. Bears: Chicago is trying the Sean McVay plan by pairing new coach Matt Nagy with Mitchell Trubisky after the quarterback's uneven rookie campaign. Retaining Vic Fangio as defensive coordinator

constitutes a win, but the Bears' rebuild looks more like a steady climb rather than rocket-fueled ascension.

26. Dolphins: Hard to assess a team that both bedeviled the Patriots yet was on the business end of a 40-0 drumming from the Ravens. Miami's true self likely lies somewhere between those polarities, though dropping eight of their last ten was a discouraging trend. Ryan Tannehill's return could keep them afloat, but it's hard to see how this group gets much better given the lack of wiggle room on the salary cap.

27. Buccaneers: Jameis Winston and Dirk Koetter are entering a defining season after their partnership showed signs of maxing out after a disappointing 5-11 campaign. Even if the offense gets back on track, the pass rush needs substantial help, and the secondary might undergo significant changes.

28. Bengals: Status quo is quite the surprise given a divorce from Marvin Lewis seemed inevitable. The Bengals actually boast intriguing young talent — RB Joe Mixon, CB William Jackson III and DE Carl Lawson are shaping up as high-level starters — but progress will be hard to come by until the offense line is sorted out.

29. Giants: Pat Shurmur's measured approach seems ideal for what was a volatile locker room. Despite lingering questions about Eli Manning's longevity and Odell Beckham's contract, the G-Men have the tools to rebound quickly. But limited cap space will prevent them from spending away their problems.

30. Colts: So ... who wants this job after Josh McDaniels bailed? If Andrew Luck heals, the franchise quarterback could again carry an otherwise lacking roster. But this is a team undone by the pass rush on both ends, as no offense gave up more sacks (56) and just one defense tallied fewer (25).

31. Browns: With cap space expected to exceed \$110 million and five picks in the first two rounds, including the No. 1 and 4 overall selections, it's time for new GM John Dorsey to capitalize on a stockpile of assets. There is some emerging talent on the roster, especially on defense. But Hue Jackson has exhausted his excuses after a 1-31 run.

32. Jets: This won't be a fun situation to step into, even for the next quarterback. Perhaps no team is more bereft of talent, though last year's rookies represent a step in the right direction. Smart drafting, which hasn't occurred consistently for some time, remains essential for long-term building, especially given New York's failed free agency forays in recent years.

Agent's Take: Franchise-tag deadline and NFL's other crucial offseason financial dates

By Joel Corry
CBSSports.com
Feb. 8, 2018

Following the biggest offensive display in Super Bowl history and an Eagles championship, all NFL teams have now entered the offseason, which means financial decisions take center stage.

Decisions made in the early part of the offseason can have long-lasting ramifications. Here's a look at key offseason dates running through the first week of the 2018 league year, which begins March 14.

Some dates have league-wide importance. Others can potentially affect specific player contracts and the salary cap of individual teams because they are crucial to the timing of contract restructures, pay cuts and players being released. Notable players have been highlighted on the appropriate date with how the event is specified in their respective contracts.

Feb. 5

The waiver system began for 2018. Players with fewer than four years of service for benefit purposes are subject to waivers and their contracts can be claimed by other teams. Players with four or more years of service become free agents when released and can be immediately signed.

Feb. 7 (third day of waiver period)

\$3.4 million* of Saints tight end Coby Fleener's \$6.3 million 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed.

Raiders cornerback David Amerson's \$5.5 million* 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed. By releasing Amerson on Feb. 5, the Raiders created \$6 million of 2018 salary-cap room.

* - guaranteed for injury at signing

Feb. 9 (fifth day of waiver period)

Cardinals wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald's \$11 million* 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed. Fitzgerald hasn't decided if he is going to retire or continue playing.

The salaries of several Seahawks are fully guaranteed: safety Kam Chancellor's \$6.8 million* 2018 base salary, \$4.9 million* of Russell Wilson's \$15.5 million 2018 base salary, and \$4.5 million* of wide receiver Doug Baldwin's \$8.25 million 2018 base salary. Center Justin Britt's \$7.75 million* 2018 base salary also becomes fully guaranteed. It will reduce to \$2.75 million if the Seahawks commit to making the necessary \$5 million payment to exercise an option for Britt's 2020 contract year. This can be done as early as the first day of the 2018 league year on March 14 but no later than the fifth day (March 18).

Browns linebacker Christian Kirksey's \$5 million* 2018 base salary and \$7 million* 2019 base salary are fully guaranteed.

This is the first day for the Broncos to exercise options on contracts for cornerback Chris Harris and wide receiver Demaryius Thomas. A \$1.1 million payment is required to pick up Harris' 2018 contract for \$7.4 million. A \$4 million payment is required to pick up Thomas' 2018 and 2019 contract years, totaling \$22.5 million. The deadline to exercise their respective options is the last day of the 2017 league year, which is March 14.

Broncos offensive tackle Donald Stephenson's 2018 contract year voids. Stephenson becomes an unrestricted free agent at the start of the 2018 league year. The Broncos will have a \$1 million salary cap charge from the bonus proration relating to Stephenson's 2018 contract year.

* - guaranteed for injury at signing

Feb. 20 (22 days prior to 2018 league year)

The two-week period in which teams can designate franchise or transition players begins. Steelers running back Le'Veon Bell, 49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo and Cowboys defensive end Demarcus Lawrence are most likely to be franchised. Lawrence's franchise tag number should be \$17.3 million if the 2018 salary cap is set at \$178.1 million. Bell was franchised in 2017; a second franchise tag on him provides for a 120-percent increase over his \$12.12 million 2017 number. Bell's would be \$14.544 million. Redskins quarterback Kirk Cousins has been designated as a franchise player the last two seasons. It would be \$34,478,784 to franchise Cousins for a third time at a 44 percent raise over his \$23,943,600 number for 2017.

This is the deadline for the Jaguars to exercise an option in tight end Mercedes Lewis' contract. A \$500,000 payment is required to pick up his 2018 contract year for \$3.5 million.

This is the last day for the Jets to pick up options for a 2018 contract year with offensive tackle Ben Ijalana (\$4.75 million), outside linebacker Josh Martin (\$1.8 million) and defensive tackle Steve McLendon (\$3.375 million). To pick up Ijalana, Martin and McLendon's respective option years, \$500,000, \$150,000 and \$250,000 payments are required.

Feb. 27-March 5

The NFL Scouting Combine takes place in Indianapolis. Meetings between agents of impending free agents and teams routinely occur at the combine, although these types of discussions are prohibited by NFL rules. Teams are rarely penalized for tampering with players from other teams when those players are scheduled to become free agents.

March 6

The period for designating franchise or transition players ends at 4 p.m. ET. The 49ers could franchise quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo for \$23.307 million (assumes a \$178.1 million 2018 salary cap) if a long-term deal isn't in place before this deadline.

March 9 (five days prior to 2018 league year)

This is the final day for the Bears to pick up an option for offensive guard Josh Sitton's 2018 contract year worth \$8 million. The period began on Feb. 9.

March 12-March 14

NFL teams are allowed to negotiate with the agents of prospective unrestricted free agents during a two-day period beginning at noon ET on March 12 and ending at 3:59 p.m. ET on March 14. During the two-day window, prospective unrestricted free agents can't visit teams or have direct contact with team employees, except those from their current clubs. A player's ability to re-sign with his current club isn't affected by the rule. The negotiating period does not apply to unsigned players receiving restricted free agent, franchise or transition tenders. Players who don't have an agent are also prohibited from having discussions with teams during this period.

March 14 (end of 2017 league year)

2017 league year ends at 3:59 p.m. ET.

Saints quarterback Drew Brees' 2018 through 2020 contract years void to make him an unrestricted free agent when the 2018 league year starts. There will be an \$18 million salary-cap charge for the Saints because of the bonus proration from these contract years.

Chiefs linebacker Derrick Johnson's 2018 contract year voids. Johnson is an unrestricted free agent at the start of the 2018 league year. The Chiefs will have a \$2.25 million salary-cap charge from the bonus proration relating to Johnson's 2018 contract year.

This is the deadline for the Eagles to pick up options on defensive end Chris Long and wide receiver Torrey Smith's future contract years. Long's 2018 through 2021 contract years, each worth \$2.25 million, would be triggered. The last three years are voidable. The Eagles would get Smith in 2018 for \$5 million.

Buccaneers offensive tackle Demar Dotson becomes an unrestricted free agent if this deadline to exercise an option his 2018 contract year worth \$4.725 million isn't met. A \$150,000 payment is required to pick up the 2018 year.

This is the last day for the Bengals to pick up an option for cornerback Adam Jones' 2018 contract year worth \$6.5 million.

This is the final day for the Ravens to pick up an option for cornerback Brandon Carr's 2018 contract year of \$6 million, which includes of a \$1 million first day of the league-year roster bonus.

March 14 (first day of 2018 league year)

The top 51 begins: Only the top 51 salaries (i.e.: cap numbers), including unsigned franchise, transition, restricted free agent and exclusive rights tenders, on a team count against the salary cap during the offseason. All teams must be under the salary cap prior to 4 p.m. ET.

The 2018 league year and free agency begin at 4 p.m. ET.

The trading period begins at 4 p.m. ET. Quarterback Alex Smith's reported trade from the Chiefs to the Redskins can become official.

The Eagles' 10-day window to exercise an option for wide receiver Alshon Jeffery's 2021 contract year opens. Making the required \$6.5 million payment to pick up Jeffery's 2021 season would lower his fully-guaranteed 2018 base salary from \$7.75 million to \$1.25 million. Jeffery's \$11.75 million 2019 base salary, which was guaranteed for injury at signing, becomes fully guaranteed on March 16.

Cardinals defensive back Tyrann Mathieu's \$5.75 million 2018 base salary and \$8 million of his \$10.75 million 2019 base salary, both currently unsecured, are fully guaranteed. Mathieu also has a \$5 million roster bonus due on the third day of the league year (March 16).

This is the first day of a five-day period for the Panthers to pick up their option for offensive tackle Matt Kalil's 2021 contract year, which requires a \$10 million payment. If Kalil's 2021 option year is declined, the Panthers will still owe him the \$10 million provided he is a member of the team on March 19 (the sixth day of the league year). Payment of the \$10 million will reduce Kalil's fully-guaranteed \$11 million 2018 base salary to \$1 million.

The salary for the 2018 option year with 2014 first-round picks, which was guaranteed for injury upon exercise, becomes fully guaranteed. Some of the players include Texans defensive end/outside linebacker Jadeveon Clowney (\$13.846 million), Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles (\$19.053 million), Raiders defensive end Khalil Mack (\$13.846 million), Buccaneers wide receiver Mike Evans (\$13.258 million), Titans offensive tackle Taylor Lewan (\$9.341 million), Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham, Jr. (\$8.459 million), Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald (\$6.892 million) and Cowboys offensive guard Zack Martin (\$9.431 million).

Panthers running back Jonathan Stewart's \$1 million roster bonus is payable.

March 16 (third day of 2018 league year)

Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford's \$9.5 million* 2018 base salary, \$13.5 million* 2019 base salary and \$3.5 million* 2019 fifth-day-of-the-league-year roster bonus are fully guaranteed.

Bills quarterback Tyrod Taylor's \$6 million roster bonus is due. His \$1 million 2018 base salary is already fully guaranteed. The Bills are expected to try to trade Taylor before the roster bonus must be paid.

Raiders quarterback Derek Carr and offensive guard Gabe Jackson have money fully guaranteed: Carr's \$7.4 million* 2018 base salary and Jackson's \$4.25 million* 2018 base salary. Carr's fully guaranteed \$15

million roster bonus is payable. Jackson's \$4.25 million \$6 million roster bonus that's guaranteed for skill and injury is also due.

Patriots quarterback Tom Brady's \$14 million 2018 base salary, which is unsecured, becomes fully guaranteed.

Of Cardinals linebacker Chandler Jones' \$12.5 million* 2018 base salary, \$9 million is already fully guaranteed. The remaining \$3.75 million and \$11.5 million of his \$16.5 million* 2019 base salary are fully guaranteed.

The Super Bowl champion Eagles have several contract guarantees vest. Of defensive tackle Fletcher Cox's \$15.6 million 2019 base salary, \$7.75 million is already fully guaranteed. Another \$7.75 million becomes fully guaranteed. Of tight end Zach Ertz's 2018 base salary, \$5,861,473 was previously guaranteed. An additional \$2 million of his 2018 base salary is secure. Defensive tackle Timmy Jernigan's \$11 million 2019 base salary is fully guaranteed. Of offensive tackle Jason Peters' \$6.75 million 2018 base salary, \$4.5 million becomes fully guaranteed. There were corresponding injury guarantees when the four players signed their contracts.

Jets defensive end Muhammad Wilkerson's \$16.75 million 2018 base salary, which is already guaranteed for injury, becomes fully guaranteed. By releasing Wilkerson, \$11 million of salary cap room will be gained.

The base salaries of multiple Chiefs become fully guaranteed. Of safety Eric Berry's \$8.9 million* 2018 base salary, \$4.8 million is fully guaranteed (\$4.1 million of this base salary was fully guaranteed at signing). \$10.2 million of Berry's \$12.4 million 2019 base salary was guaranteed for injury when he signed his contract last February, and \$2.95 million of the \$12.4 million becomes fully guaranteed. Of offensive tackle Eric Fisher's \$11.15 million 2018 base salary, \$8,217,023 is already fully guaranteed. The remaining \$2,932,977 and \$1,567,023 of Fisher's \$9.85 million 2019 base salary are fully guaranteed. Tight end Travis Kelce's \$6.8 million* 2018 base salary becomes fully guaranteed. Of offensive tackle Mitchell Schwartz's \$5.7 million 2018 salary, \$2.34 million* is fully guaranteed. Of Laurent Duvernay-Tardif's \$6.203 million 2019 base salary, \$2.253 million becomes fully guaranteed (\$6 million of the \$6.203 million was guaranteed for injury at signing).

Bears quarterback Mike Glennon has a fully-guaranteed \$2.5 million roster bonus payable.

A couple of Panthers have salary guarantees vest. Of defensive tackle Kawann Short's \$12.5 million* 2018 base salary, \$9 million is already fully guaranteed, and the remaining \$3.75 million becomes fully guaranteed. Offensive guard Trai Turner's \$4.703 million* 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed.

Steelers wide receiver Antonio Brown (\$6 million), guard David DeCastro (\$3.79 million), cornerback Joe Haden (\$1 million), quarterback Ben Roethlisberger (\$5 million), defensive end Stephon Tuitt (\$7.5 million) and offensive tackle Alejandro Villanueva (\$3.5 million) have roster bonuses payable.

The base salaries of a few Vikings become secure. Defensive end Everson Griffen (\$3.9 million*), defensive tackle Linval Joseph (\$1.15 million*), offensive tackle Riley Reiff (\$9.1 million*), cornerback

Xavier Rhodes (\$10.4 million*) and safety Harrison Smith (\$7.65 million*) have their 2018 base salaries fully guaranteed. Joseph's \$5 million injury-guaranteed roster bonus is payable, and \$2.85 million of wide receiver Adam Thielen's \$3.85 million* base salary is fully guaranteed. \$1.15 million of running back Latavius Murray's \$5.15 million 2018 base salary was guaranteed for injury upon execution of his contract. The entire \$5.15 million is fully guaranteed.

Browns offensive guards Joel Bitonio and Kevin Zeitler's salary guarantees are triggered: \$1,335,223 of Bitonio's \$6.5 million* 2019 base salary is fully guaranteed, and half of Zeitler's \$10 million* 2018 base salary (the other \$5 million of which was already fully guaranteed) becomes fully guaranteed, while \$3.5 million of his \$10 million* 2019 base is also secure.

\$12 million* of Giants defensive end Olivier Vernon's \$12.75 million 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed.

\$11.115 million* of Dolphins safety Reshad Jones' \$13.015 million 2019 base salary is fully guaranteed.

\$6.5 million of Bills offensive tackle Cordy Glenn's \$9.25 million 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed. \$1.5 million of his 2018 base salary became fully guaranteed in March 2017.

Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers and cornerback Casey Hayward's respective \$5 million and \$1 million roster bonuses are due.

Of Saints tackle Terron Armstead's injury-guaranteed \$10.2 million 2018 base salary, \$6.2 million is already fully guaranteed, and the remaining \$4 million becomes fully guaranteed.

Packers wide receiver Davante Adams (\$5 million), tackle David Bakhtiari (\$6 million) and linebacker Nick Perry (\$4.3 million) are due roster bonuses.

Rams wide receiver Tavon Austin's \$3 million* 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed. His fully guaranteed \$5 million 2018 fifth day of the league year roster bonus is payable.

* - guaranteed for injury at signing

March 18 (fifth day of 2018 league year)

Colts quarterback Andrew Luck's \$12 million 2018 base salary and \$6 million fifth-day-of-the-2019-league-year roster bonus become fully guaranteed. The items contained injury guarantees when Luck signed his contract in 2016.

Texans wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins' \$12.5 million* 2019 base salary becomes fully guaranteed.

More Eagles have salaries fully guaranteed: \$5 million of defensive end Vinny Curry's \$9 million 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed, \$5 million of safety Malcolm Jenkins' \$8.6 million base salary is fully guaranteed, and \$2 million of safety Rodney McLeod's \$6 million 2018 base salary becomes fully guaranteed (the other \$4 million was already fully guaranteed). There were injury guarantees relating these amounts when Curry, Jenkins and McLeod signed their contracts. Super Bowl LII MVP quarterback Nick Foles' fully-guaranteed roster bonus is due.

Browns offensive tackle Joe Thomas' \$5 million roster bonus is payable. There is speculation that the 10-time Pro Bowler will retire.

A few Broncos have base salaries become fully guaranteed: \$9 million of Broncos linebacker Von Miller's \$17 million* 2019 base salary; \$6.9 million* of wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders' \$8.15 million 2018 base salary, and safety Darian Stewart's \$4.5 million* 2018 base salary.

Giants quarterback Eli Manning's \$5 million roster bonus is payable.

The salaries of a couple of Redskins players are fully guaranteed: cornerback Josh Norman's \$13.5 million* 2018 base salary; and \$8 million* of tight end Jordan Reed's \$8.25 million 2018 base salary.

Cornerback Darelle Revis' \$1.015 million 2018 base salary and \$8.8 million in 53-man roster bonuses (\$550,000 per game) are fully guaranteed. Both are currently unsecured.

This is the last day for the Falcons to pick up their option for Desmond Trufant's 2022 contract year, which requires a \$7 million payment. If Panthers pass on it, he will still be owed the \$7 million provided he is on their roster on March 19 (the sixth day of the league year). Half of Trufant's \$8.5 million* 2018 base salary was fully guaranteed when he signed in 2017, and the other half guaranteed becomes fully guaranteed on March 16.

A group of Dolphins have salaries fully guaranteed: \$3.64 million of safety T.J. McDonald \$5 million* 2019 base salary (his fully guaranteed \$4.25 million roster bonus is also due), \$2 million of wide receiver Kenny Stills' \$7.975 million* 2019 base salary, and \$8.5 million of defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh's \$16.985 million 2018 base salary. Quarterback Ryan Tannehill has \$5.525 million of his \$17.475 million 2018 base salary fully guaranteed.

Jaguars defensive tackle Malik Jackson has \$10.5 million of his \$13.5 million* 2018 base salary fully guaranteed. Teammate Telvin Smith's \$8 million* roster bonus is payable. The linebacker's roster bonus was fully guaranteed on March 14.

Cowboys center Travis Frederick's \$10 million* 2018 base salary is fully guaranteed.

With \$7.25 million of Giants defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul's \$11.25 million* 2018 base salary already fully guaranteed, the remaining \$4 million becomes fully guaranteed.

Of Buccaneers linebacker Lavonte David's \$8.75 million* 2018 base salary, \$3,818,291 is fully guaranteed.

Titans defensive lineman Jurrell Casey had \$8.6 million of his \$10.6 million 2018 base salary already fully guaranteed; the remaining \$2 million* becomes fully guaranteed.

* - guaranteed for injury at signing

Chiefs CEO didn't want to trade Alex Smith to Broncos

By Chris Wesseling

NFL.com

Feb. 8, 2018

When John Elway set his mind on upgrading the Broncos' quarterback situation in 2018, Alex Smith seemed to be in play as a potential trade target.

While the Browns and Cardinals lost out to the Redskins for Smith's services, NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport reported last week, we now have reason to believe that Denver was never a realistic landing spot.

Speaking with Mike Klis of KUSA in Denver last Saturday, Chiefs chairman and CEO Clark Hunt strongly implied that his organization was unwilling to consider bolstering a division rival.

"I think it's pretty typical in the NFL not to seek trades within the division," Hunt explained. "That's pretty standard fare particularly when we're talking about a high-profile player."

There are several schools of thought on that issue.

After Tom Brady led the Patriots to the first of their eight Super Bowl appearances this century, Bill Belichick traded established franchise quarterback Drew Bledsoe within the division, collecting a first-round pick from Buffalo.

An executive with the Bengals going back to their 1968 inception, owner Mike Brown has touched on the league tradition of a "premium" price tag applied to inter-division trades.

Then there's the majority opinion held by Clark and others that it's simply taboo to diminish one's own odds by helping out a direct competitor for the division crown.

As with most NFL ideas, though, that position is fluid, depending on the specific player(s) involved, the relative strength of the rival's roster and the possibility of an escalating price tag.

In this case, it seems likely that Clark's football brain trust understands the reality that the Broncos might be a mere quarterback away from knocking the Chiefs off their perch and regaining control of the AFC West.

Even with Smith out of the picture, Elway has a prime opportunity to turn his franchise around via an aggressive push in the impending Kirk Cousins sweepstakes.

Chiefs weren't interested in trading Alex Smith to Broncos

By Michael David Smith
Pro Football Talk
Feb. 8, 2018

Kansas City has agreed to trade quarterback Alex Smith to Washington. But there's one quarterback-needy place the Chiefs wouldn't have considered sending Smith to: Denver.

Chiefs owner Clark Hunt told Mike Klis of 9 News in Denver that trading Smith to a division rival wouldn't have served the Chiefs' interests.

"I think it's pretty typical in the NFL not to seek trades within the division," Hunt said. "That's pretty standard fare particularly when we're talking about a high-profile player."

There had been some speculation that Denver could have traded cornerback Aqib Talib and a draft pick to get Smith, similar to the package Washington sent (cornerback Kendall Fuller and a third-round pick) in the trade the two teams agreed upon. But the Talib speculation doesn't make a lot of sense: The Chiefs are near the bottom of the league in available cap space in 2018, and Talib has an \$11 million base salary. The Chiefs liked Fuller because he's under contract for two more years at \$700,000 a year. That's the kind of player a team in bad cap shape needs to acquire.

But it sounds like the Chiefs wouldn't have sent Smith to Denver no matter what the Broncos offered. Teams do sometimes trade players within their division (Philadelphia shipping Donovan McNabb to Washington comes to mind), but the Chiefs like being on top of the AFC West while the Broncos struggle to find a quarterback, and Kansas City doesn't want to put a starting quarterback in Denver.