Broncos host QB Josh Rosen on pre-draft visit

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 5, 2018

The Broncos' quarterback rounds continue. Tuesday night, former UCLA quarterback Josh Rosen dined with Broncos brass and Wednesday he visited the team's Dove Valley training facility for one of its 30 pre-draft visits.

Friday, the Broncos will work out former Southern California quarterback Sam Darnold in Los Angeles, and during the week of April 16, the Broncos will host Heisman-winner Baker Mayfield. Mayfield will have dinner with Broncos officials April 16 and visit their facility the following day.

Since December, the Broncos have done extensive homework on the top four quarterbacks in the upcoming draft — Rosen, Darnold, Mayfield and Josh Allen — and attended bowl games and pro days. Coach Vance Joseph and his staff led the North team at the Senior Bowl and spent nearly a week with Mayfield and Allen, and all four quarterbacks met with the Broncos at the NFL combine in February.

Rosen, 21, is regarded by many draft analysts to be the most NFL-ready quarterback this year. Although there is no consensus No. 1 within the class, each has something that has given analysts pause. Among Rosen's? His durability; he dealt with several knee injuries and underwent shoulder surgery in college.

"He can throw it," Broncos general manager John Elway said at the NFL combine. "Arm talent-wise, he can throw it as good as anybody and he's a competitor, so he's got the tools to be a — and the bottom line is you have to have confidence to play that position. So if he's over-confident, that's not bad."

The Broncos have eight picks in the draft, all in the first five rounds. For only the third time in the Pat Bowlen era (since 1984), they own a top-five pick and, after signing Case Keenum to a two-year deal, have plenty of options. Paxton Lynch, a former first-round pick, remains on the roster and for now is the second-string quarterback. Chad Kelly, last year's Mr. Irrelevent of the draft, is No. 3.

Although their starter is set for 2018, the Broncos could still snag a quarterback with their first-round pick if there's one they love. But they don't have to, thanks to Keenum.

"It's kinda funny — everyone thinks they know where we're going," Elway said at the recent owners meetings. "I don't know where we're going yet. We'll have to wait and see. We got a lot of good options, which is a good thing."

Von Miller a part of investigation by Florida Wildlife Commission after catching hammerhead shark

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 5, 2018

Broncos linebacker Von Miller is a part of an investigation by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) following a recent fishing trip with friends off the coast of Miami.

Miller caught a 9-and-a-half foot hammerhead shark and posted video of the catch on social media. The crew, which was following the instruction of a captain on a guided fishing tour, had not set out to catch hammerhead sharks and their surprise was captured on tape.

After seeing the footage, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), vowed "to ensure that Miller is held accountable if killing this animal was, as we suspect, illegal."

Miller posed for a photo with the shark, then released it back into the ocean. But after condemnation from PETA, the FWC decided to look into the matter.

"The FWC has received the images and video and is looking into whether or not a violation occurred in this incident," Carol Lyn Parrish, the commission's public information coordinator, said in a statement.

TMZ first reported FWC's investigation.

Because the investigation is ongoing, the commission declined to provide further details, including who among the group is being investigated, since Miller was under instruction on a fishing tour; what they're being investigated for; and the potential punishment if they're found to be in violation of any law.

According to regulations posted on the commission's website, however, hammerhead sharks are classified as "group 3" sharks and harvest in state waters is a second-degree misdemeanor. In Florida, second-degree misdemeanors are punishable by up to a $500 fine and 60 days in jail, as determined by a judge.

Miller, an avid hunter and fisher, has regularly posted clips of his expeditions on social media and as part of his new Facebook Watch show, but has never received a complaint from a government agency.

Hesse's mock draft for Broncos: Just say no to QB and take sure thing in Nelson

By Mike Klis
9NEWS
April 5, 2018

There are times to take charge and times when taking charge means delegating authority.

I learned a long time ago the draft and all it consumes is a time to delegate. It is an exercise in futility to 100 percent of those who try, including NFL general managers, scouts and coaches.

As for the mocksters and draftniks, bloggers and talking heads who think they know? They don't know.

Richard Hesse knows. A lifelong Broncos fan who admits to a demented passion for evaluating prospects in the annual draft ever since Floyd Little was the local pick in 1967, Hesse is right often enough for notice.

Here are his selections for each of the Broncos' eight draft picks as they sit today:

1. (5) Quenton Nelson, guard, Notre Dame

If Broncos' general manager John Elway doesn't take one of the Big 4 quarterbacks with this pick, he would have done a wonderful job of subterfuge. In no previous draft has Elway spent so much time evaluating a position. Before he is through with the process, he will have personally attended Pro Days, workouts and practices, while also engaging in multiple in-person meetings with each of the Big Four quarterbacks: Sam Darnold, Josh Allen, Baker Mayfield and Josh Rosen.

But Hesse is like me. Why would the Broncos have signed quarterback Case Keenum to a two-year, $36 million contract if they were going to take a quarterback at No. 5? The Broncos were not 5-11 last season on poor quarterback play alone. They need players.

Hesse believes the Broncos should take the best, non-QB player available. He adds that Penn State running back Saquon Barkley is his first choice, but he doesn't think he will be there at No. 5.

Nelson may be a guard – a position ordinarily not considered worthy of a top 5 pick – but the Broncos can't afford to miss with another high-round selection. Nelson is considered the No. 1 can't-miss prospect in this draft. A projected 10-year starter and multiple Pro Bowler.

Again, if Barkley is there, Barkley is the pick.

2. (40) Sony Michel, running back, Georgia

Given the uncertainty of their own 1,000-yard rusher C.J. Anderson, it seems Elway is planning to draft a running back within the first three rounds. If they don't get Barkley in the first, Michel is among the several quality backs who figure to be available in rounds two or three.

This is considered a deep class for running backs – although it will be difficult to match the class of 2017 when Leonard Fournette and Christian McCaffrey were taken in the top 8, Dalvin Cook was selected in the second round and Alvin Kamara and Kareem Hunt became steals in the third.

Michel rushed for 3,203 yards and 28 touchdowns his final three seasons at Georgia even though he split tailback carries with Nick Chubb.

If the Broncos do take Barkley in the first or Michel is gone by pick No. 40, Hesse would like the Broncos to take either Dallas Goedert, a 6-4, 255-pound tight end from South Dakota State, or Will Hernandez, a guard who played at UTEP for Broncos' new offensive line coach Sean Kugler. Hernandez would not be under consideration if the Broncos took Nelson in the first.

3.   (71) Josey Jewell, linebacker, Iowa

This is the round where Hesse earn respect over the mock pretenders. He had the Broncos taking the 6-2, 236-pound Jewell with this pick two days before 9News reported Wednesday the team was visiting with Jewell.

The Broncos are clearly planning on taking an inside linebacker in the draft as they are also visiting this week with Ohio State's Jerome Baker and Washington's Keishawn Bierria.

The preference is a three-down linebacker who can possibly replace Brandon Marshall in 2019 while also filling in for Corey Nelson this year. (Marshall is under contract in 2019 and 2020 but with far less guaranteed money than the $5 million that was locked in on March 18).

Corey Nelson, who had been the Broncos' No. 3 linebacker, left for free agency and the Eagles.

3. (99) Michael Gallup, receiver, Colorado State

In my opinion, receiver is the Broncos' No. 1 need going into the draft. The two starters, Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders, are coming off three consecutive years of declining yards production and both have their 30th birthday behind them.

The team also lost its top two backups in Cody Latimer and Bennie Fowler III to free agency.

Jordan Taylor is the leading candidate for the No. 3 receiver role but he won't be ready until training camp because of hip surgery.

Carlos Henderson, a third-round draft pick a year ago, is coming off a wasted rookie season on injured reserve.

This is not considered a strong receiver draft class, although there is some strong, second- and third-round talent like Gallup, who had 176 catches for 2,685 yards and 21 touchdowns in his two seasons for the Rams.

Hesse has Oklahoma State receiver James Washington as his backup choice. Gallup and Washington, the NCAA's receiving yards leader with 1,549 in 2017, were both coached by Broncos new receivers coach Zach Azzanni at the Senior Bowl.

4.   (106) Kyle Lauletta, quarterback, Richmond

The Senior Bowl MVP averaged 3,380 passing yards, 26 touchdown passes against just 10 interceptions in his final two seasons for the Spiders.

The Broncos need a fourth quarterback to join Case Keenum, Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly, although their fourth guy could be anywhere from the No. 5 pick in the first round to undrafted free agent.

If Lauletta is gone, Hesse would like Mississippi State offensive tackle Martinas Rankin in this spot.

4.   (113) Ian Thomas, tight end, Indiana

The Broncos could use hitting on two of these three picks in a 15-spot stretch in the middle of the draft.

The Thomas selection assumes the Broncos would not land Goedert in the second round. Thomas is a 6-5, 250-pound raw talent who was a junior college transfer and one-year starter for the Hoosiers.

Thomas played for the South team against the Broncos' staff in the Senior Bowl. I was more impressed with another South-side tight end, Jordan Akins of Central Florida.

But, hey, I got to learn to let go. This is Hesse's show.

If somehow Rashaad Penny is still around by the start of the fourth round and the Broncos haven't been able to pick up a running back by then, Hesse believes Denver should do what it takes to go get the NCAA's leading rusher from San Diego State.

Hesse listed this before the Broncos had Penny in for a visit on Tuesday.

5.   (149) D.J. Reed, cornerback, Kansas State

Only 5-foot-9, 188, but he's quick and a good tackler – which makes him a nice slot corner. And the Broncos need a young nickelback.

This is also the round where a team supplements the depth of its roster with special teamers. Again, Reed is a gamer.

As for the long-and-lean cornerbacks who are all the rage in today's NFL, Hesse likes the 6-1, 190-pound Isaac Yiadom of Boston College.

5.   (160) Lowell Lotulelei, defensive tackle, Utah

The younger brother of Star Lotulelei, who the No. 1 overall draft pick of the Carolina Panthers in 2013 who just signed a five-year, $50 million contract with the Buffalo Bills.

Lowell isn't as good as his big brother, but at 320 pounds, he could develop into a run-stuffer.

Sleeper pick: Michael Dickson, punter, Texas

Had the Broncos stayed with 11 picks, which was their tally after the Aqib Talib trade, and selections in the sixth and seventh rounds, a punter would have been more likely.

If the Broncos don't make a bid for veterans Marquette King or Donnie Jones -- contact has , who recently became available, they could try to make a trade back into the final two rounds if Dickson, an Australian who has a strong leg but also a master at the pooch kick, or Alabama's J.K. Scott of Mullen High is available.

Ex-Raider punter Marquette King has Denver "high on his list"

By Mike Klis
9NEWS
April 5, 2018

Having just nailed a majestic punt in Denver's Mile High air that goes out of bounds inside the Raiders' 5-yard line, Marquette King takes a wide swoop towards the opposing sideline and perform his Buckin' Bronco dance right in front of Jon Gruden.

The 15-yard unsportsmanlike penalty for taunting spoils the moment a bit, but it's easier to imagine such a scenario taking place after King's agent revealed Wednesday there has been at least one conversation involving the Broncos and the recently released talented and flashy punter.

"Marquette would love an opportunity to come visit there," Wynn Silberman, King's agent, told 9NEWS. "Obviously, Denver is a punter's dream. They're high on his list."

King has a strong leg who finished third in the NFL with a 42.7-yard net and second in 2016 with a 48.6-yard gross average.

King, 29, had been the Raiders' punter the previous five seasons until he was unceremoniously released last week by Gruden, Oakland's new head coach.

Apparently while serving as a color commentator on Monday Night Football in recent years, Gruden didn't appreciate some of King's flamboyant antics.

The Broncos have a talented young punter in Riley Dixon who did have a bit of a sophomore slump in 2017 after an impressive rookie season. Dixon ranked 9th in net punting in 2016 but fell to 22nd in 2017.

King drew $2.5 million last year and was scheduled to make $3 million as one of the league's highest-paid punters in 2018 before he was released.

Dixon, a seventh-round draft selection out of Syracuse, is scheduled to make $630,000 this year. Although it would be a surprise if the Broncos did let go of Dixon, management has been letting special teams know it was not happy with its 2017 performance.

First, special teams coordinator Brock Olivo was fired and replaced by NFL veteran special teams coordinator Tom McMahon. Then top core special teamers Bennie Fowler III, Cody Latimer and Corey Nelson were allowed to leave for free agency. After that, undrafted players were brought in as competition for current kicker Brandon McManus and longsnapper Casey Kreiter.

Receiver has not often been a quick-fix position in draft for Broncos

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
April 5, 2018

When it comes to their work in the NFL draft over the past three decades or so, the Denver Broncos mostly have seen their efforts to add players who can catch stymied by those wide receivers' inability to catch on.

It is a dilemma that has appeared and reappeared leaguewide at the position, but it has been particularly pronounced in the Broncos' attempts to find immediate help at wide receiver in the draft. And given they are on the hunt again, they once again are fighting their own history in finding players who can make what has become one of the more difficult transitions for NFL rookies.

"It's the matchups and the physical side of it,'' is how Broncos coach Vance Joseph put it this past season. Receivers "just don't see too many people get right up and cover them in the college game, and in this league defensive backs are going to be physical and they can run with you. So there is some adjustment.''

So much so that, try as they might, the Broncos rarely have seen a rookie wide receiver make a significant impact in his inaugural season no matter what kind of player he eventually becomes. Since 1990, the Broncos have used 31 draft picks on wide receivers, including Isaiah McKenzie and Carlos Henderson last April.

Among those 31 players, just five finished their rookie seasons with more than 20 receptions; only one -- Eddie Royal with 91 receptions and five touchdowns in 2008 -- finished with more than 35 receptions. And 13 finished their rookie seasons without a reception, whether because they were injured, cut or simply didn't play much.

Sure, some went on to 1,000-yard seasons -- Demaryius Thomas (first round in 2010), Eric Decker (third round in 2010) and Brandon Marshall (fourth round in 2006) -- and one went to the Hall of Fame at another position -- tight end Shannon Sharpe (seventh round in 1990) -- but as the Broncos search for help in the passing game once again, it might not be a given that help will come from a draft pick.

Twice in the past two decades, Denver took three receivers in different draft classes -- 1999 and 2000 -- and those six players combined for eight catches in their rookie seasons. That's the line the Broncos and others in the league walk as they evaluate both for the potential of a plug-and-play wideout as well as long-term potential.

Last season, the top two rookie pass-catchers at the position leaguewide -- the Steelers' JuJu Smith-Schuster (58 catches for 917 yards and seven touchdowns) and the Rams' Cooper Kupp (62 catches for 869 yards, including 42 receptions for first downs) -- were second- and third-round selections, respectively. The Jaguars' Keelan Cole was the only other rookie wide receiver to finish with at least 40 receptions last season, and he went undrafted.

"It's hard -- you're just used to more room,'' Thomas said. "What you say is 'open' is a lot different, and all the routes and how you have to run them even to get to the ball. It's different, a lot different than maybe how you played [the position] in college.''

For the Broncos, it has been a decidedly bumpy ride. During John Elway's tenure as the team's chief football decision-maker, the Broncos have selected four wide receivers in the past seven drafts combined.

Tavarres King didn't make the team coming out of his first training camp in 2013. Cody Latimer, selected in the second round in 2014, finished with two receptions as a rookie. And in 2017, McKenzie was benched as the punt returner and finished with just four receptions, while Henderson spent the season on injured reserve (thumb).

The Broncos did not make a high-profile addition at wide receiver in free agency as they continue to search for ways to force defenses to quit focusing their coverages on Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

The Broncos will have all this on their mind during the draft weekend as they try to find players who will not only develop over the long term but add a little something in the short term, too.

"[Defenses say] let's take away your two best guys and force a tight end, the slot or the back to beat us,'' Joseph said. "We didn't do a good job there. We have to do better there. Obviously, having [tight end Jake] Butt back is going to be big for us. ... Carlos Henderson, he missed last year as a third-round pick. We're counting on that kid to come in and play for us, especially in the slot. ... Someone has to go into the slot and win the one-on-ones so we can get fair coverages on third downs.''

Mel Kiper, Todd McShay now have split decision on Broncos' No. 1 pick

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
April 5, 2018

As the NFL draft closes in and the Denver Broncos continue to do their homework on the quarterbacks on the board, ESPN's Mel Kiper Jr. and Todd McShay dove in with a two-round mock draft.

And in his fourth mock draft, Kiper still sees the Broncos using the No. 5 overall pick on a potential quarterback of the future, as the Broncos were poised to work out USC's Sam Darnold in Los Angeles on Friday. Kiper, as he did in his last mock draft, sees the Broncos selecting Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield at No. 5 while McShay has the Broncos taking a swing at the best pass rusher on the board in North Carolina State's Bradley Chubb.

Both had Darnold, Wyoming quarterback Josh Allen, UCLA quarterback Josh Rosen as well as Penn State running back Saquon Barkley off the board by the time the Broncos' No. 5 pick came up. Chubb, who won both the Ted Hendricks and Bronco Nagurski awards this past season as the nation's best defensive end and best defender, respectively, had 22 tackles for loss to go with 10 sacks this past season.

In recent weeks, Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway has called it "wide open" when asked what the team might do at No. 5.

"It's going to be important for us to find guys that can help our football team," Elway said. "We'll continue to work that."

As they moved to the second round, Kiper and McShay each believed the Broncos will try to address some uncertainty in the offensive line with Georgia's Isaiah Wynn. Wynn played at left tackle this past season for the Bulldogs after he had started the two previous seasons at left guard.

He projects to a guard in the NFL and is a technically sound, athletic player who many talent evaluators believe will be ready to play quickly. The Broncos hope to move Ron Leary back to left guard and have an opening at right guard that a player like Wynn could fill.

Broncos' Von Miller part of investigation over shark catch

By Staff
ESPN.com
April 5, 2018

Denver Broncos linebacker Von Miller is used to catching quarterbacks for a living. However, a recent catch has left some people salty.

Miller is part of an investigation by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) following a recent fishing trip with friends off the coast of Miami.

Miller, who was on a guided fishing tour, landed a 9½-foot hammerhead shark on the outing, posting photos and video of the catch on social media.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) saw the social media posts and took Miller and company to task promising "to ensure that Miller is held accountable if killing this animal was, as we suspect, illegal."

Following PETA's public rebuke, the FWC began investigating the matter.

"The FWC has received the images and video and is looking into whether or not a violation occurred in this incident," Carol Lyn Parrish, the commission's public information coordinator, said in a statement.

Miller, who posed for a photo with the shark on the boat, later released the animal.

Hammerheads are classified as "Group 3" sharks, according to the commission's website, and the harvesting of them in state waters is a second-degree misdemeanor. In Florida, second-degree misdemeanors are punishable by up to a $500 fine and 60 days in jail, as determined by a judge.

Miller is an avid hunter and fisherman who routinely posts photos and videos of his outdoor endeavors on social media, but he has never received a complaint from a government agency.

The case for Broncos taking quarterback with fifth overall pick

By Troy Renck
KMGH
April 5, 2018

On Wednesday, the Broncos hosted UCLA quarterback Josh Rosen for a visit. At Denver7, we considered the merits of a photographer capturing Rosen walking into the Dove Valley facility. It was determined such treatment remains reserved for Peyton Manning.

Still, Rosen's arrival in Denver continues to stoke the fascinating conversation surrounding the Broncos this month: Will they take a quarterback with the fifth overall pick in the upcoming draft?

General manager John Elway told me after the Case Keenum press conference -- remember, he's the new starter on a two-year deal with $25 million guaranteed -- that the team planned to visit with the top signal-callers. As such none of their meetings and travels to see Rosen, Josh Allen, Sam Darnold and Baker Mayfield should come as a surprise. The Broncos have been nothing if not consistent. They could select a quarterback if they fall in love with one. They also know they need to look like they will select a quarterback -- it is the smokescreen and allergy season after all -- to increase leverage if another team like Buffalo wants to trade up into the spot.

There's no denying what fans witness April 26-28 will become the most pivotal draft in Elway's tenure. He has guided the Broncos to five playoff berths, two Super Bowls and one championship in seven seasons. However, the Broncos need a caffeine boost after going 7-15 over their past 22 games, including 2-10 over their final 12 last season that nearly cost first-year coach Vance Joseph his job.

To avoid posting back-to-back losing seasons for the first time since 1972, the Broncos require multiple starters in the draft. Last spring went awry as only first rounder Garett Bolles contributed. The return of a healthy tight end Jake Butt and receiver Carlos Henderson could change how the class is viewed, but there are no guarantees.

Hitting on this draft class could shove the Broncos back to respectability, back to postseason. Which returns me to the quarterback question. A compelling argument exists take one, but how will that make the Broncos better this season?

Their entire mindset since last year's humbling failure has been to win now. Any quarterback selected arrives as a backup on a depth chart clogged with a former first round pick in Paxton Lynch, who appears to be in a make-or-break season with the Broncos. As it stands, he will be in a competition with Chad Kelly for the backup spot.

Yet, the intrigue remains. How can the Broncos not take their quarterback of the future? My look at how the top four could fit:

Baker Mayfield, Oklahoma: Mayfield brings accuracy, edge and attention. If the Broncos take Mayfield, they might as well rent a tent to place over training camp. Welcome to the circus. Every pass Mayfield throws will be followed by tweets that he should start. I told Elway that Keenum, in some ways, was

Mayfield before Mayfield. Keenum was undersized, doubted in high school, college and the pros. He proved critics wrong emphatically last season. However, concern lingers he is the biggest one-hit wonder since Soft Cell's "Tainted Love." Mayfield has no interest in backing up anyone. He admitted as much multiple times at the NFL combine. Would that impact Keenum -- unlikely -- or the locker room (perhaps)? Mayfield could play right away with a creative offense similar to the run-pass option concepts employed by the Eagles and Chiefs. Again, Mayfield possesses unique talent. But how does him watching from the sidelines part or all of the upcoming season help the Broncos win? The caveat: Elway decides he wants part of his legacy as GM to be leaving Denver with his longterm solution at the position (either with Mayfield or one of the other in the top group).

Josh Allen, Wyoming: Allen won the offseason. Given the questions concerning his accuracy and underwhelming stats against moderate competition, Allen could not have done more over the past four months. He is the blueprint -- 6-foot-5, 237 pounds, with an arm that he told me has thrown a football 82 yards. Allen could use a year as an understudy so that makes more sense for the Broncos' situation with Keenum. That said, there's almost no chance Allen is available with the fifth pick. He's expected to go in the top three selections, and it would come as no surprise if Cleveland took him first overall.

Josh Rosen, UCLA: If former Bruins coach Jim Mora Jr. keeps talking about his California neighbor, Rosen could be available in the second round. I kid because I care. Mora, while being candid to apparently help steer him to the New York Giants, did Rosen no favors. He said Rosen needs to know why and to be engaged. It cast Rosen as a millennial and prompted questions about his commitment to football. Fair? I don't know. I know Rosen is the most polished, pocket-passer ready of any of the quarterbacks. He is an interesting case, and despite questions, I believe he goes in the top 3 picks.

Sam Darnold, USC: If you like Allen, you like Darnold. You might even love him because he has similar athleticism and size and delivered against top competition. Had Darnold left school after the Rose Bowl against Penn State, I have no doubt he would have gone first in the draft. Turnovers last season create pause. He embraces the idea of going to Cleveland. I root for him. But I don't wish the Browns on anyone given their graveyard of young quarterbacks over the last 20 years.

The quarterback most connected to the Broncos remains Mayfield. He makes this process bubble with interest more than any of the other candidates. I don't see it. Not because of Mayfield, but rather the Broncos' multiple needs. If defensive end Bradley Chubb or, in an upset after a run on quarterbacks, running back Saquon Barkely is on the board, it's hard for me to fathom the Broncos passing. Chubb, despite playing in a 4-3 scheme in college, would provide an immediate impact in the pass rush. The Broncos finished with 33 sacks last season, ranking 22nd overall (yes, it did not help that Denver rarely played with a lead). Barkley would inject a home-run hitter for an offense that sorely needs playmakers. The idea of him as a four-down player is silly. No team is going to expose its starting running back to consistent work on kick and punt returns. Still, Barkley's explosion would be tempting if he's on the board.

As planned, the Broncos have kept all options open this offseason. They could take any of the aforementioned quarterbacks. But it doesn't mean they will.

Broncos welcome QB Josh Rosen to UCHealth Training Center for visit

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 5, 2018

The Broncos kicked off a series of visits with the top quarterbacks in this year's NFL Draft when they welcomed UCLA's Josh Rosen to UCHealth Training Center on Wednesday.

The 21-year-old prospect had dinner with the Broncos' brass on Tuesday night before he spent Wednesday at the Broncos' facility meeting with coaches and executives.

Rosen completed 62.6 percent of his passes in his final season for the Bruins and threw for 3,756 yards and 26 touchdowns.

The Broncos hold the fifth-overall pick in the 2018 NFL Draft, which begins on April 26.

Broncos' Von Miller under investigation after catching hammerhead shark in Florida

By A.J. Perez
USA Today
April 5, 2018

Wildlife officials in Florida are investigating Denver Broncos linebacker Von Miller over a hammerhead shark he caught during a recent fishing trip off the coast of Florida.

Miller would face up to 60 days in jail and a $500 fine, as determined by a judge, if the Broncos star is convicted of the unlawful capture of a hammerhead shark, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The crime is a second-degree misdemeanor.

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission began an investigation after People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) called the possible violation to the commission's attention.

Hammerhead sharks are prohibited for capture in Florida waters.

"The FWC has received the images and video and is looking into whether or not a violation occurred in this incident," Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission spokesperson Carol Lyn Parrish said in a statement to USA TODAY Sports and other outlets.

Miller posed with the shark before he released it back into the ocean, according to The Denver Post.

Prohibited species must be released immediately and unharmed, according to the commission's website. The site also states that photographs or measuring of the species can be done, but only during the active act of release, and should not delay release in any way.

"Not every encounter with a shark is intentional or wanted,'' states the commission's website, which provides detailed information for the proper handling and release of a shark.

TMZ was the first outlet to report the investigation.

NFL mock draft 2018: Projecting first-round trades

By Nate Davis
USA Today
April 5, 2018

The NFL draft is only three weeks away ... which is to say we've officially entered the pre-draft rumor mill phase, which is billowing smokescreens and wild speculation fueling the league's version of silly season. Delightful. So following the Rams' lead — GM Les Snead has already made five significant offseason trades after obtaining WR Brandin Cooks from the Patriots on Tuesday evening — our latest mock draft will delve deep into the trade market while adding grist for a mill now in overdrive.

(And in a year when so many highly capable quarterbacks are coming out, this could provide a reasonably realistic slice of what's to come on April 26, when the draft room phones could be ringing even more than usual.)

1. Browns — Josh Allen, QB, Wyoming: Yup, the latest buzz links Allen and his ballistic arm to Cleveland. But before you dismiss the notion, consider that new Browns GM John Dorsey traded up last year, when he was running the board in Kansas City, to select Patrick Mahomes, who, like Allen, probably had the biggest fastball and most upside — and risk — of any incoming passer. And even though arm strength remains a dubious trait when forecasting NFL success, it's definitely a nice attribute for quarterbacks who play in the AFC North's cold and windy climes. Like Mahomes, Allen would also reap the benefits of joining an up-and-coming roster while sitting behind a veteran, Tyrod Taylor in this case.

2. **PROPOSED TRADE** Bills (from Giants) — Sam Darnold, QB, USC: OK, let's have some fun. Buffalo didn't believe in Taylor and certainly didn't invest in AJ McCarron at a level that would suggest team brass believes he'll replicate his championship feats at Alabama. But with Darnold, widely regarded as the best overall quarterback in the draft, on the board in our scenario, GM Brandon Beane has to complete his systematic trek to the top of the board to get the long-awaited successor to Jim Kelly. But this won't come cheaply given the price the Jets already paid (three second rounders) just to move up three pegs. Giants GM Dave Gettleman could reasonably expect Beane to fork over the 12th and 22nd picks of this draft and next year's first rounder.

3. Jets (from Colts) — Josh Rosen, QB, UCLA: Had he not been born in 1943, Joe Namath might have been a Millennial right out of central casting. So don't expect GM Mike Maccagnan to flinch at taking Rosen — there's probably no rookie QB better equipped to step right into Gang Green's lineup — no matter how much former Bruins coach Jim Mora elaborates/equivocates about him.

4. Browns (from Texans) — Saquon Barkley, RB, Penn State: Dorsey will owe the football gods quite an offering if he winds up with the quarterback of his choice and Barkley, who's almost universally regarded as the draft's best player and perhaps the perfect guy — see Todd Gurley, Ezekiel Elliott, et al. — to relieve pressure on a sidekick like Allen.

5. Broncos — Denzel Ward, CB, Ohio State: Denver let perennial Pro Bowler Aqib Talib go and may lose Bradley Roby to free agency next year. Cover corners grow on trees in Columbus, Ohio, and Ward is ripe for the picking, capable of stepping into Talib's shoes and keeping the No Fly Zone devoid of enemy TD passes.

6. Colts (from Jets) — Bradley Chubb, DE, North Carolina State: Though GM Chris Ballard surely remains open for business as he rebuilds the foundation around Andrew Luck, he'll be hard pressed to bypass a pass rusher (and relentless run stopper) of Chubb's caliber — especially since he's capable of closing out games and enabling Luck to hand off more.

7. **PROPOSED TRADE** Giants (from Buccaneers) — Quenton Nelson, G, Notre Dame: Gettleman strikes again. Using the 12th pick acquired from Buffalo as bait, he gets back on the horn with Bucs GM Jason Licht, who took DE Jason Pierre-Paul off his hands last month. Knowing he has to get in front of Chicago, which employs Nelson's former Fighting Irish O-line coach (Harry Hiestand), Gettleman could also send Licht a third rounder to flip from 12th to seventh. Why do it? Nelson may be the best player in the draft not named Saquon. He would help the Giants win now and later regardless of which quarterback he's protecting and will surely help revive a dormant ground game. All that aside, Gettleman's mancrushes are reserved for his beloved "Hog Mollies."

8. Bears — Minkah Fitzpatrick, DB, Alabama: They spent free agency putting new pieces around QB Mitchell Trubisky and would surely like to count Nelson as part of that effort. Barring that, there's probably not another offensive player on GM Ryan Pace's top-10 radar. But Fitzpatrick would enhance a defense charged with combating slot receivers like Randall Cobb, Golden Tate and Stefon Diggs. Fitzpatrick could eventually settle into a safety combo with former 'Bama teammate Eddie Jackson if Adrian Amos moves on in free agency next year.

9. 49ers — Derwin James, S, Florida State: The Niners have been busy building a Seattle-style defense laden with former Seahawks, including CB Richard Sherman and Super Bowl XLVIII MVP Malcolm Smith. James isn't exactly Earl Thomas or Kam Chancellor but is a special player whose makeup is a combination of skills that include some of the best attributes of Seattle's star safety tandem.

10. **PROPOSED TRADE** Cardinals (from Raiders) — Baker Mayfield, QB, Oklahoma: Maybe Arizona won't have to go that far for its long-term answer under center. We've got GM Steve Keim sending a third- and fifth-round pick to Oakland in order to swap their Round 1 slots and jump the Cards ahead of Miami, which has been widely linked to Mayfield. The fiery Heisman Trophy winner has every intention of playing right away and given his ability — and fellow Sooner Sam Bradford's lengthy medical chart — it might very well be Mayfield feeding Larry Fitzgerald and David Johnson under the capable tutelage of OC Mike McCoy.

11. Dolphins — Roquan Smith, LB, Georgia: Miami's defense was merely average with Ndamukong Suh, which speaks volumes. Last year's linebackers didn't prove very effective despite the benefit of lining up behind Suh and the double teams he commanded. Hence, a strong case to be made for a guy like Smith, who's far more capable of making plays on his own while bringing a nice streak of leadership.

12. **PROPOSED TRADE** Buccaneers (from Bengals via Bills and Giants) — Mike Hughes, CB, Central Florida: Tampa Bay doesn't have to drop far (or look beyond state lines) to snag a player who can further remedy the NFL's worst defense in 2017 while also adding juice to the Bucs' return game.

13. Redskins — Vita Vea, DT, Washington: No team gave up more rushing yards last year than the 'Skins. Vea's 6-4, 347-pound frame alone will obstruct running lanes, but he's also uniquely mobile for a man his size and has shown the ability to bag quarterbacks, too.

14. **PROPOSED TRADE** Chargers (from Packers) — Tremaine Edmunds, LB, Virginia Tech: Bolts GM Tom Telesco admits needing more from his linebackers. It's probably worth surrendering a fourth-round pick in order to leapfrog the Raiders for Edmunds, 19, who already packs 253 pounds onto his 6-5 frame. Yet his size doesn't appear to impede his range, and that could bolster the AFC's worst run defense, which is sometimes left vulnerable up the middle when Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram are roaring around the edges.

15. **PROPOSED TRADE** Raiders (from Cardinals) — Da'Ron Payne, DT, Alabama: Jon Gruden would probably like another toy for his offense, but the smart play is putting more talent around Khalil Mack and a defense that ranked 23rd.

16. Ravens — Marcus Davenport, DE, Texas-San Antonio: Outgoing GM Ozzie Newsome's final first-round pick might be best spent on a player who could ultimately supplant Terrell Suggs, who remains Baltimore's best pass rusher at age 35. Davenport would benefit from Suggs' wisdom and on-field presence before the seven-time Pro Bowl selection winds down.

17. **PROPOSED TRADE** Packers (from Chargers) — Calvin Ridley, WR, Alabama: Jordy Nelson is gone, and Randall Cobb might be in a year. Ridley effectively mixes the skills of both, ready to run polished routes now and able to provide the deep speed lost with Nelson's departure.

18. **PROPOSED TRADE** Steelers (from Seahawks) — Rashaan Evans, LB, Alabama: Pittsburgh's defense — and Super Bowl aspirations — fell apart last season after LB Ryan Shazier was lost in Week 13. Pittsburgh GM Kevin Colbert probably can't wait for Evans, whose abilities largely mirror Shazier's, and would likely have to part with a third rounder and additional sweetener to get Seattle to drop 10 slots. But the championship window for Ben Roethlisberger, Antonio Brown and others may close soon, and this is the kind of bold move that could secure a record seventh Lombardi Trophy.

19. Cowboys — DJ Moore, WR, Maryland: WRs Dez Bryant and Allen Hurns and TE Jason Witten are all nice weapons but essentially classify as rebounders. Moore is an explosive asset who could take this offense to another level.

20. **PROPOSED TRADE** Patriots (from Lions) — Harold Landry, OLB, Boston College: New England suddenly has a fair amount of holes yet also an ample supply of mid-round picks to move up. Why not deal with old buddies Bob Quinn and Matt Patricia, who have a lot of work to do in order to remain relevant in the NFC North? New England's inability to get a key defensive stop was on full display in Super Bowl LII. Landry might be the answer to the question that's lingered since Chandler Jones was offloaded two years ago.

21. Bengals (from Bills) — James Daniels, C, Iowa:Trading for LT Cordy Glenn was a major step in the right direction, but Cincinnati's O-line is not yet sufficiently fortified.

22. **PROPOSED TRADE** Giants (from Chiefs via Bills) — Taven Bryan, DT, Florida: Much of the focus in New York has been on offensive deficiencies, however the defense could also look appreciably different under new coordinator James Bettcher. Bryan is another talented big man likely to intrigue Gettleman and could project as a three- or five-technique depending on the front. And with the 2019 first rounder we gave Gettleman in the Buffalo deal, he remains well equipped to make a run at a quarterback next year if Eli Manning disintegrates.

23. Patriots (from Rams) — Mike McGlinchey, OT, Notre Dame: Though WRs Danny Amendola and now Cooks are gone, it's far more important to prioritize a bouncer for Tom Brady, who's spent nearly every snap of his career capably protected by Matt Light and new New York Giant Nate Solder.

24. Panthers — Christian Kirk, WR, Texas A&M: Carolina is installing a new offense under veteran coordinator Norv Turner. But despite the presence of scatback Christian McCaffrey, TE Greg Olsen and WRs Devin Funchess and Torrey Smith, there's definitely immediate and long-term room for a player like Kirk, who can operate outside when not capably manning the slot. He could also take over return duties now that McCaffrey has become the lead back.

25. Titans — Leighton Vander Esch, LB, Boise State: At 6-4 and 256 pounds, he's built almost exactly like new Tennessee head coach Mike Vrabel, an extremely versatile player during his 14-year NFL career. Vrabel could be the perfect sculptor for Vander Esch, who could give this defense a boost whether he's lining up inside or on the edge.

26. Falcons — Will Hernandez, G, Texas-El Paso: Atlanta's roster has very few holes. But Hernandez would represent a marked improvement without being a reach in the first round.

27. Saints — Harrison Phillips, DT, Stanford: There's a reason New Orleans wanted Suh. Phillips doesn't have Suh's gifts — certainly no knock on him — but his motor never stops, and his combination of strength and techniques refined as a three-time state wrestling champion in Nebraska would make him a formidable presence between Cam Jordan and Sheldon Rankins.

28. **PROPOSED TRADE** Seahawks (from Steelers) — Joshua Jackson, CB, Iowa: Seattle GM John Schneider likes to work the board and historically moves down, an approach which makes even more sense as he reloads the roster this year. At 6 feet and 196 pounds with exceptional ball skills, Jackson is almost a football clone of Sherman, who is slightly taller.

29. *PROPOSED TRADE** Dolphins (from Jaguars) — Lamar Jackson, QB, Louisville: Ryan Tannehill's problematic knee casts further doubt on a career that seemed to be maxing out at adequate before he initially went down in 2016. Jackson has significantly more upside, and Adam Gase, who's worked with all flavors of quarterback, could be the guy to maximize his highly intriguing potential. It makes sense to trade back into the first round in order to get the prized fifth-year contract option, especially with a quarterback. Meanwhile, Jacksonville could ask for an additional third rounder while taking Miami's Round 2 selection (42nd overall).

30. Vikings — Jaire Alexander, CB, Louisville: Mike Zimmer co-signed the massive free agent gamble on QB Kirk Cousins. Probably wise to now get him one of the corners he values so deeply, especially if Terence Newman doesn't come back or finally breaks down once he turns 40.

31. *PROPOSED TRADE** Lions (from Patriots) — Sony Michel, RB, Georgia: The Alvin Kamara comparison he seems to invite is apt and would greatly enhance an offense that's gotten little capability or reliability from its backs. Michel and LeGarrette Blount would be a potent tandem.

32. Eagles — Hayden Hurst, TE, South Carolina: Philly loves double-tight sets, but Zach Ertz had to say goodbye to Trey Burton and Brent Celek this offseason. Hurst would be an upgrade over both.

Answering the Crucial Question for Each Top Quarterback in the 2018 NFL Draft

By Andy Benoit
MMQB
April 5, 2018

It's an unprecedented draft when it comes to the quarterback position, with possibly four passers being drafted in the first five picks, and maybe five or six going in the first round. But maybe the most shocking of all? There's no clear front-runner.

Each quarterback comes with a significant, complex question. Examining those questions takes us to the heart of great NFL quarterbacking philosophizing.

SAM DARNOLD, USC
What do you make of out-of-structure plays?

Darnold's best work comes when he's outside of the pocket throwing on the move—and this is done by improvisation as often as by design. It's great when it works, but it can make for an inconsistent offense when it's part of a quarterback's foundation. Take the Seahawks' 2017 season for example: For the first two and a half months, Russell Wilson was an MVP candidate. But the last six weeks, Seattle averaged 268 yards of total offense a game, which ranked 29th over that span. To no one's surprise, the Seahawks lost three of their last four games and missed the playoffs.

The blame isn't entirely on the quarterback, but when an offense is accustomed to him running around, it becomes difficult to steady the boat once it starts rocking. Players amend their fundamentals to accommodate the sandlot style QB. Unfortunately, these amendments aren't synchronized like a structured play. Receiver A amends things one way, Receiver B another. The amendments are fundamentally flawed (that's why they weren't drawn into the play originally), so the coach has trouble evaluating his receivers and concocting new plays. Small problems build upon small problems, creating bigger problems.

Sandlot quarterbacking shouldn't be fully discouraged, though, because it also has the ability to make something out of nothing. That's where Wilson can be brilliant, and it's also where teams can get smitten with Darnold. He's not the runner that Wilson is, but as an on-the-move thrower, he exhibits many of Wilson's traits—and some teams will think Darnold can potentially be of Wilson's ilk.

Darnold gets a boost from being five inches taller and 15 pounds heavier than Wilson, meaning he has no trouble seeing from the pocket. As a coach's thinking goes, he can be taught to hang in there on traditional dropbacks, using his mobility only as a last resort. When you put it that way—a Russell Wilson-type mover with the size to stay in the pocket and see the whole field—Darnold becomes an easy first overall pick.

But then factor in the decision-making. Darnold threw 13 interceptions in 14 games last year at USC, and almost every game there were other risky plays that put his coaches' hearts in their throats. Bad decisions usually get punished by NFL defenses. Say Darnold is the next Russell Wilson, only he's

promised to have six more turnovers a year than Wilson. Do you still take him first overall? What if it's eight more turnovers? Ten?

What's concerning is if Darnold's mistakes start piling up, it's easy to envision him falling into the trap of using his legs far too often. For a pro quarterback, mobility can be an asset, but it can't be your foundation. What coaches must ultimately decide is, Can Darnold use his legs appropriately in our system, and can our system create more appropriate chances for those legs?

JOSH ROSEN, UCLA
How do you take a quarterback's personality into consideration?

There's no question that Rosen, stylistically, is the most pro-ready QB in this draft. He is the easiest to envision in the NFL, with his game predicated on reading the field and making timing-and-rhythm throws—both things that usually translate well to the highly structured pro game. Rosen's arm is unremarkable but strong enough. He's not Kurt Warner, but his precision accuracy is in the plus column; with some improvements, it could propel him to stardom.

The concerns with Rosen are personal. He can be strikingly honest—in his interview with Bleacher Report's Matt Hays published last August, he said:

"Look, football and school don't go together. They just don't. Trying to do both is like trying to do two full-time jobs. There are guys who have no business being in school, but they're here because this is the path to the NFL. There's no other way. Then there's the other side that says raise the SAT eligibility requirements. OK, raise the SAT requirement at Alabama and see what kind of team they have. You lose athletes and then the product on the field suffers."

Some in the NFL will like that he's smart and outspoken, while others will say he's too smart for his own good. There's a fine line between intelligent honesty and obnoxious contrarianism. Many NFL people don't want players who even toe it, especially at quarterback.

Rosen's UCLA coach, Jim Mora, recently told The MMQB's Peter King, "[Josh] needs to be challenged intellectually so he doesn't get bored…If you can hold his concentration level and focus only on football for a few years, he will set the world on fire."

Let's say Rosen is as smart but also as biting as he sometimes appears. Does that matter? You heard discouraging stories about Jay Cutler over the years, but Cutler still wound up starting 153 games. He lost just over half of them, but that was due to on-field factors like erratic mechanics and decision-making. Of course, you could always argue that if Cutler weren't so prickly, he would have been more coachable and amenable to correcting his flaws. The problem is we don't know this for sure, we're only guessing. Even those who were around Cutler daily can only guess here—it's armchair psychology stuff.

Plus, there are other examples that muddy the picture. Ben Roethlisberger wasn't exactly beloved by teammates early in his career. He had to mature, but the Steelers still had a lot of success before he did.

Rosen isn't Cutler or Roethlisberger. Which gets to the heart of the problem with evaluating quarterbacks not as players, but as people: each is different. And in what ways those differences manifest on the field is anyone's guess. An unhappy quarterback disenchanted with life off the field

might stink it up on Sunday because his life is miserable and full of distractions. Or, he could light it up on Sunday because gameday offers a break from the misery.

Also keep in mind that all of a QB's personality factors can be impacted by the city he lives in, the players he's around and the coaches he plays for. Every team believes their culture is the one that can work for the player, but none actually know this. Plus, cultures change. By the time Rosen completes his rookie contract, statistics say that more than 40 of his original teammates will be gone and he'll be on a second, or even third, coaching staff. And so you have more guesswork. That's why QBs with personality questions can slide down boards: there's simply too much guesswork.

JOSH ALLEN, WYOMING
Can you expect a QB's accuracy to improve once he goes pro?

Accuracy is like comedic timing or singing: it can be polished and honed, but not taught and created. No one questions Allen's arm strength, which is off the charts in terms of distance and, much more importantly, velocity. The question is whether Allen's footwork and mechanics can improve enough for that arm to consistently hit the target.

In many respects, Allen compares to Cam Newton. Mechanically, they're different styles of throwers, but their results are similar. Newton is a first-class fastball pitcher who puts a few well outside the strike zone each week. The Panthers have worked around this, though at times it's been too much to overcome. The tradeoff is you get some completions, particularly down the seams, that you wouldn't get with, say, a Kirk Cousins.

Allen also compares to Newton as a runner. Allen isn't quite as swift or light-footed, but he's faster than he looks and, at 240 pounds, he's theoretically built to endure up to 10 carries a game. Many of Wyoming's multi-option gap scheme run concepts (think pull-blockers with QB reads) can be compared to Carolina's. That changes your entire rushing attack.

Notably, Allen can be a better on-the-move thrower than Newton. Designed rollouts are not big in Carolina's offense, but they were in Wyoming's. Allen was especially effective on designed movement to his right, and with that arm, an intensive refinement of footwork and mechanics could make him effective going left.

It's up to the Browns to determine how much of that refinement can occur while Allen adaps to the NFL. If the answer is not much, they then must determine whether they can live with Allen's inevitable extreme ups and downs. Another way to look at this: If the Panthers re-did the 2011 draft knowing what they know now, would they still take Newton with the No. 1 pick? (Maybe it helps Allen that there is no projected Von Miller, Patrick Peterson, Julio Jones, Tyron Smith or J.J. Watt in this draft.)

BAKER MAYFIELD, OKLAHOMA
How much can you boost a player's strengths and minimize his weaknesses?

At the core, this is what coaching and the draft evaluation process are all about. Mayfield has some of that Sam Darnold tendency to run around and make plays, which, along with his 6' 1", 210-pound size, is what's largely behind those irksome Johnny Manziel comparisons. The difference, though, is Mayfield is not dependent on this approach. His best work at Oklahoma came when he played within the timing and rhythm of the offensive design. The Sooners' system, at times, presented Mayfield with gimme

completions that do little to help forecast his professional outlook. But it was an expansive system that also included some NFL concepts. When Mayfield played in rhythm on these, he was excellent.

The concern is whether Mayfield can do this regularly. His discipline often vanished when he was blitzed, and his fundamentals then became grossly flawed. He could get away with it in college, where he was more dynamic than many opponents. But in the NFL, his lack of size and top-end speed will be punished. The idea with every player is to boost strengths and minimize weaknesses, but with Mayfield it's more important because he may not have the physical tools (or certainly the size) to overcome his weaknesses should they grow even a little.

Which leads us to Part B of this question: if Mayfield's weaknesses grow, can you tweak your offense to work around it? Teams who believe in Mayfield's playmaking will say yes. Teams that see his success linked almost exclusively to timing and rhythm passing will say no.

LAMAR JACKSON, LOUISVILLE
Can you mold a traditional college style superstar QB for the pro game?

Prior to last year, the answer may have been no. But then Deshaun Watson happened. The Texans brilliantly adjusted their system—on the fly, no less—to capitalize on Watson's mobility, and Watson, to his immense credit, became more willing each week to play within the pocket, refusing to use his legs as a crutch. That's imperative for successful long-term pro quarterbacking.

This near-perfect meeting in the middle between team and quarterback is uncommon, but not enough to prevent a team this year from saying, Hey, if it worked for Houston with Watson, why can't it work for us with Jackson? Like Watson, Jackson has a sense for touch passing, and he's willing to let it rip downfield. Or, at least he was when Louisville's offense, which featured pro concepts, called for it. Decisiveness can make a QB outperform his arm strength.

It should be noted, in terms of an NFL translation, Jackson is a more extreme version of what Watson was coming out of Clemson. Jackson's tendency to break down and leave the pocket was greater than Watson's because his mobility was more electrifying. Jackson presents the rare opportunity to appropriately invoke memories of Michael Vick highlight reel runs. That's notable for his development, but as we've learned time and again, including with Vick, running must be something an NFL QB can call on without relying on.

MASON RUDOLPH, OKLAHOMA STATE
Should you reach for a quarterback?

First things first: Rudolph is not of first-round caliber. His physical tools are not special enough to overcome his deficient pocket poise. He was prone to mistakes and mechanical breakdowns when the pocket muddied in college. In the NFL, those pockets muddy quicker and more often. If you can't play from them, you'll never be more than an up-and-down starter, and that's assuming you're supremely gifted. Guys with so-so toolkits who struggle in bad pockets become fringe backups or insurance salesmen.

It's uncommon for a player's pocket poise to improve once he goes pro, at least when you're starting with little poise to begin with. However, it's not technically impossible. Some teams will see Rudolph's attributes more favorably and believe that, in the right system, he could effectively run an NFL offense.

What those teams must determine is whether Rudolph can improve significantly in muddied pockets, and if so, how big of a bet should they place on it? A quarterback can be so hard to find that, to some teams, it's worth risking a first-round pick even on one who has only a small chance at panning out. Because if he DOES pan out, the payoff is huge.

A-B's sponsor shocker

By Terry Lefton
Sports Business Journal
April 2, 2018

Anheuser-Busch InBev is changing the sponsorship game, or at least its part of it.

Sports properties for years have referred to their sponsors as "partners." ABI, America's biggest sports sponsor, is bringing that notion closer to reality, instituting incentive clauses within its deals as they come to term and offering properties as much as a 30 percent bonus if specific on-field performance and marketing criteria are met or surpassed.

Such incentives have existed sporadically in the past, but ABI is believed to be the first major sponsor to make it a standard part of its sponsorship contracts.

"The traditional sponsorship model, based on fees and media commitments, does not deliver the best value for us at a time when most leagues and teams are facing challenges with live attendance and TV ratings," said Joao Chueiri, ABI's vice president of consumer connections and the former Nike marketer who has been reshaping the company's sponsorship model during his first year on the job. "We want to evolve the model and encourage fan engagement … with an awareness that each deal is unique."

So far, a handful of sports properties have signed incentive-based deals. The Minnesota Timberwolves were first, followed by the Los Angeles Dodgers, New Orleans Saints and NASCAR. The stock car circuit opted for earned media, fan engagement/social media measures, while the Dodgers, after a season in which they won the National League pennant, chose on-field performance indicators, including wins and losses.

All of ABI's 90 or so U.S. team and league sports sponsorships are up by or in 2021 and the brewer hopes to have completely overhauled its sponsorship model by then. So far, no property that has been asked to accept an incentive-laden model has said no. The good news for properties is that there's no downside: They won't get paid less if they fail to meet those targets. ABI also is instituting this new model across its portfolio of arts and entertainment sponsorships.

Chueiri said that the key performance indicators for incentives available under ABI's new sponsorship model include attendance, wins/losses and other on-field performance measures, social media and other fan engagement metrics, and brand awareness and consideration among those aware of the sponsorship. The idea is to motivate the property to ensure every fan knows that Budweiser is the official beer. It also might make a team or league choose ABI, knowing there's an upside.

ABI's marketers have been meeting with other large U.S. sports sponsors to share their vision, and it will be interesting to see if a marketer long considered the sugar daddy of American pro sports will be able to affect change across the industry. On the media side, ratings guarantees and "make-goods" are old news. On the sponsorship side, performance-based deals have been discussed for decades, but in a transaction-obsessed business they are still more the exception than the rule.

"Maybe 10 percent of all deals have incentives, and it's much more typical in NASCAR, where the difference in exposure between winning and losing cars is so huge," said Mike Reisman, president of

sports and entertainment at MKTG, with a client roster that includes heavy sports spenders such as FedEx, Toyota and Wells Fargo. "These kinds of things are increasing, and when a sponsor with the weight of ABI gets behind it, you'd think a lot of other people will."

Todd Kline, Miami Dolphins senior vice president and chief commercial officer, said his team has stadium sales-based incentives for several food and beverage sponsors. Others are tied to impressions, or if specific jewel events are booked at Hard Rock Stadium.

"Now that tracking and measuring has improved, we're not averse to these kinds of deals," Kline said. "Often they'll be a minimum guarantee structure to which you can then add incentives. The key to making these work is defining success on the front end. You need to decide on not only what you are going to measure, but who's going to measure it and how."

"There's been a lot of talk about sponsorship and partnership in this industry forever," said Tim McGhee, senior vice president at CSE, with clients including AT&T, Aflac and Coke. "Each has a specific definition, but to get to the point where they really merge, it's going to take a big, big player like A-B InBev to do it. Then it's a question of how much risk tolerance either side has."

NFL considers selling data for overseas betting

By Daniel Kaplan
Sports Business Journal
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The NFL is considering selling its scoring and playing data to gambling houses overseas, even if the Supreme Court does not overturn the ban on domestic sports gambling outside Las Vegas.

The disclosure was included in a league memo sent to teams before last week's owners meeting in Orlando.

Such a move would mark a dramatic shift for the normally reluctant NFL in the gaming space. While other leagues such as the NBA already do this, it would allow for gambling books in markets such as the U.K. to use league marks and get instant game data, which they would pay for. The NFL has had the ability to do this, but has never allowed the use of such data or intellectual property.

The development emerges as the NFL, last week, twice addressed owners on the changing gambling landscape and the various contingencies the sport must prepare for. With the looming high court decision, the sports and gambling worlds have been waiting for the NFL to address the matter, with the NBA and MLB already having staked out positions and lobbying in state capitals.

Quietly for a year, NFL Executive Vice President Eric Grubman has been working on a plan to prepare the league.

In the memo to teams, Grubman wrote the NFL would use the owners meeting to present international opportunities and ways to commercialize there this year, which means selling data and allowing use of logos. SportsBusiness Journal was read a copy of the memo.

Gambling houses need instant playing data that beats by seconds the ability of gamblers to watch games and quickly bet on the action. For example, if a team gets into the red zone, that would swing in-game betting chances, and the gambling houses need to be able to adjust the odds before those bets come in. The only way is an official data feed from the sports league that beats the bets by seconds. So the NFL is considering doing this overseas this year (leagues that do this provide the data through third parties).

Selling data overseas is just one of many permutations Grubman and his team presented to owners last week. Wading into overseas gambling would be a scenario should the Supreme Court unexpectedly maintain the gambling ban. If the Supreme Court offers a more narrow ruling or overturns the ban, selling overseas becomes one small aspect of a new domestic market.

Grubman and his team did not take a position on the so-called "integrity fee" that the NBA has proposed to generate revenue from an expanded U.S. gambling market. This would amount to a designated percentage of the gross proceeds of bets paid to the leagues (the NBA has suggested 1 percent).

 "We are skeptical it will be easy to get an integrity fee the size the NBA has suggested," said Clark Hunt, the Kansas City Chiefs owner.

Hunt in fact said Grubman's message was essentially this: Don't expect a huge revenue opportunity with the move to legalized gambling. "Beyond the sponsorship opportunities, I haven't really seen a big opportunity," Hunt said.

Shahid Khan, the Jacksonville Jaguars owner, suggested whether it's an integrity fee or something else, the NFL should be compensated for bets on NFL games.

"It makes no sense everybody down the food chain and the value chain is, you know, getting a piece of the action, and the creator is not," he said.

The NFL has been so conservative on gambling, Khan said, that when he travels, he avoids hotels that have casinos. NFL rules prohibit employees on league business from straying onto casino floors, but Khan takes that approach even when he travels in general.

The Supreme Court will rule by June. Most observers expect the court to overturn the ban, but leave the regulatory structure to individual states. That could create complications for leagues as they would have to negotiate their policies with 50 states, and not just the federal government.

Von Miller catches shark, faces investigation

By Michael David Smith
Pro Football Talk
April 5, 2018

Broncos outside linebacker Von Miller posted pictures of himself on social media with a shark he caught on a Florida fishing trip. That may have been unwise.

Miller is now being investigated after People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals accused Miller of illegally catching and killing the shark.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission confirmed to TMZ that it is "looking into whether or not a violation occurred in this incident."

Florida has bans on catching certain types of sharks, and restrictions on catching other types, and Miller could face legal consequences if his fishing trip violated state law.

Marquette King eyes punting for the Broncos

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
April 5, 2018

The Raiders cut him abruptly, and the Broncos could be giving him a landing spot.

Punter Marquette King has spoken to the Broncos about a possible alliance with the obvious goal (at least collateral goal) of tormenting the Raiders.

"Marquette would love an opportunity to come visit there,'' King's agent, Wynn Silberman, told Mike Klis of 9News.com. "Obviously, Denver is a punter's dream. They're high on his list."

Riley Dixon currently serves as the punter in Denver, and as Klis notes there's no specific reason to believe the team isn't happy with him. But if King would be regarded as an upgrade, the Broncos could be interested in exploring the possibility.

Of course, the fact that King's agent is going public with the player's interest in the Broncos may be a sign that the interest in King isn't as significant as King's agent had hoped — especially at the $3 million he was due to earn in 2018.