

Broncos hope draft is a talent grab after filling needs in free agency

By Jeff Legwold

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After the Denver Broncos were essentially one-and-done in the opening flurry of free agency, when they signed quarterback Case Keenum, president of football operations/general manager John Elway vowed that the team would be more active in the coming weeks.

And the Broncos indeed did the bulk of their work in free agency in the second week and beyond, signing defensive lineman Clinton McDonald, cornerback Tramaine Brock and punter Marquette King. They also made trades for tackle Jared Veldheer as well as safety Su'a Cravens.

"We'll look at everything we can do," Elway said. "... We don't look at it like free agency is that first weekend and that's it, it's over. There are players who can help us after those first few days."

Elway has also said he prefers to use free agency to fill needs and the draft to reel in the best players on the board, no matter the position. And while time will tell if the Broncos were right about those recent acquisitions, they each were brought in to fill a particular role.

Brock, for example, is a player that coach Vance Joseph became familiar with during their time with the San Francisco 49ers. Joseph believes Brock, who has 40 career starts, will help the Broncos affirm their decision to trade away Aqib Talib.

While the Broncos expect Bradley Roby to take Talib's spot in the starting lineup, they want Brock to challenge Roby for that job as well as give them a proven player who can be the third cornerback in specialty packages. The Broncos utilized those over 60 percent of the time last season.

"In our hearts we feel like Roby is ready to go," Joseph said. "... He's got to come back this year and compete and win the No. 2 job. Signing Brock was huge for us because Brock has been a starter on winning football teams and on top-five defenses. It's going to be interesting to watch those two guys compete and make each guy better. You need three [cornerbacks] to play great defense."

McDonald, too, came with a specific role in mind. The ninth-year veteran can play in multiple spots along the defensive front, which will be a boost with Derek Wolfe coming off neck surgery. McDonald has had at least five sacks in a season three times and has four seasons with at least 14 games played.

Joseph believes McDonald, a team captain with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, will have a significant presence in the locker room, as well.

"Clinton McDonald, the folks in Tampa just rave about him and the locker room presence that he has," Joseph said. "Obviously as a captain and not really being a full-time starter, kind of a rotational player to be named captain, that speaks to him."

With the draft class at tackle considered to be fairly thin, the Broncos still bypassed signing one as free agency opened and instead made a deal for Veldheer, who closed out the 2017 season on injured reserve (ankle). And while Veldheer has made all but 10 of his 101 career starts at left tackle, the Broncos project him to replace Menelik Watson at right tackle.

Veldheer also can be an effective mentor for left tackle Garrett Bolles, who had woes with penalties and his technique as a rookie last season.

"Jared has played a lot of football," Joseph said. "... We're looking forward to getting him in and helping our young guys grow."

King, who was released by the Oakland Raiders on March 30, is the Broncos' latest addition. He is expected to replace Riley Dixon, who was a seventh-round pick by the Broncos in 2016. Dixon has been the team's punter in each of the past two seasons, but in their review of last year's 5-11 playoff miss, the Broncos became concerned with lost field position on special teams.

With eight picks overall -- all in the first five rounds -- the Broncos hope they've done enough to make the draft a search for talent over need.

Mason's Mailbag: Rule change eliminates unnecessary play

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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@luised_97

@MaseDenver why during the NFC championship game, after the Keenum miracle-throw TD, there was no PAT made? It wasn't overtime yet. #askMase

There was a conversion play after the touchdown attempted, but the Vikings opted to take a knee. This has happened before after walk-off touchdowns on the last play of regulation when the score was enough to decide the outcome.

One other example came in the 2015 season, when the Ravens defeated Cleveland on a game-ending blocked field-goal return. After the play, then-Baltimore backup quarterback Matt Schaub took a knee, leaving the final score at 33-27.

These useless snaps led the NFL to pass a rule last month eliminating the need for a conversion play -- whether for an extra point or for two points -- after game-ending touchdowns when the result of the conversion would not change who won and who lost.

With the Tennessee Titans being the latest of teams to undergo a uniform change in recent history, do you think the Broncos are due for a uniform upgrade? On average, we've updated them every 20 years, which is how long we've had our current uniforms.

-- Alex Cheatham

This question continues to arise, so I'll answer it the same way as I answered it on Twitter this week: No changes to the uniform are in the works at this time. That doesn't mean the current uniform will remain the Broncos' primary look forever, obviously.

But the team has enjoyed a high level of success with the current overall look, whether it is with a blue or orange jersey as the primary one used. All three Broncos world championships have come with the current logo, helmet and general uniform design.

What is going on with the naming rights of the stadium? I feel that having a name will help with the identity and culture of the Denver Broncos.

-- Tony Hoffman

"[There are] still conversations ongoing. I've been encouraged by some of the conversations," Broncos President/CEO Joe Ellis told Broncos TV's Phil Milani at the NFL Annual Meeting last month. "Some of

the conversations involve tying in the development aspect [of the south parking lot area] to the naming rights. Some are stand-alone, just the name on the stadium, as well as some sponsorship elements."

One aspect of the negotiations is ensuring that the Broncos find a partner that offers stability, reducing the chances of a name change on the stadium before a contract expires.

"We have every intention of seeing it through and having a deal come to a closure here in the near future. I can't pinpoint a date," Ellis said, "but when it does happen, we look forward to having a good partner, a solid partner, that will be with us for many, many years."

With likely increased production at quarterback, does this provide more opportunity for Jordan Taylor (who I believe is underrated)?

-- Rich Lee

Potentially, but Taylor must first recover from two hip surgeries that are expected to sideline him until training camp. However, his first path to a solid spot on the roster remains on special teams.

A positive sign for Taylor came at the NFL Annual Meeting in Orlando in late March, when Head Coach Vance Joseph named him the first-team punt returner as the offseason began. Taylor's overall special-teams role expanded last year, and he should be a factor on multiple units as the Broncos look for new leaders in that phase of the team.

Everything to Know About the 2018 NFL Draft Crop, According to Gil Brandt

By Peter King
MMQB.com
April 9, 2018

Stream of pre-draft consciousness, 17 days before the first round kicks off before 75,000 fans in Jerryworld:

IT'S GIL BRANDT'S WORLD, AND WE'RE ALL LIVING IN IT

Sixty years ago, Brandt, then 25 and a baby photographer, was hired as a full-time scout for the San Francisco 49ers. Two years later, he moved to the expansion Dallas Cowboys as their chief scout. He's lived in Dallas ever since, and this will be the first time in his life that the draft is a home game for him. Now he's the NFL draft shepherd, going to almost every pro day, keeping tabs on the prospects, wooing the top ones to come to the first round of the draft, working for the league and helping organize the football side of the draft. We caught up late Saturday, and I tried to denude Brandt of everything he knows about the 2018 crop.

- On what makes this draft different: "This is going to be the most talked-about draft in history. And not just because quarterbacks could go one through four, or four of the top five picks. But this will be an incredible extravaganza. For years to come, people will compare every draft to Dallas. The saying, Everything's bigger in Texas, will definitely apply. We'll have sections all over the stadium for all 32 teams, and it'll be like a competition between all the teams and their fans. Twelve big-time college coaches will be there—Nick Saban, Urban Meyer, Chris Petersen, others. Day two's going to have the same excitement."
- On the walkup to the draft: "There's been more activity than I ever remember at all these pro days. More coaches, more assistant coaches. South Dakota State had their pro day last week, and there were six NFL tight-end coaches there to see their guy [Dallas Goedert]. But he didn't run the 40. Hasn't run it yet. He could go anywhere from low first to the third, but it's hard to know because teams don't know his speed."
- Quality of the draft: "This is a draft where 13 to 17 guys I could point to and say for sure, This guy's a first-round pick. After that, there's a lot of starting-type players who could go anywhere. Let me put it to you this way: My guy who I have 21st overall on my list could go 64th. The guy I rank 47th could go 19th. So the Patriots, with their needs and their two first-round picks, should be able to get a tackle to replace Nate Solder. They need the tackle from UCLA, Kolton Miller. He's Nate Solder, is what he is ... 6'8", 310 pounds, unbelievable 10-yard speed which is what you need for a tackle. Needs development. But [offensive line coach] Dante Scarnecchia can develop a guy like that as well as anyone."
- His order of the quarterbacks: "Rosen, Darnold, Mayfield, Allen, Jackson."
- Top of the draft: "Here's what it looks like: The running back from Penn State [Saquon Barkley] has all the characteristics needed to be an all-pro player and could go anywhere in there. Nothing would surprise me. Let's go to the quarterbacks. Josh Allen has everything you need to be a franchise QB, but he lacks accuracy, and you can't complete 56 percent in the NFL. Now Sam Darnold, he's got great

mechanics and the right attitude and approach to be great. But he throws interceptions. This is where you have to grade him—was the interception his fault? Josh Rosen started as a true freshman at UCLA. Never happened before. Started 5-0 or something like that as an 18-year-old. [Actually 4-0, and he won seven of his first nine starts]. You want to be the surest that you won't be laughed at five years down the line with one of these quarterbacks? Pick Rosen. He's a player. Lamar Jackson, immense talent, immense upside. Baker Mayfield is a guy like Drew Brees. He's got velocity, good accuracy. We all undervalued Drew. But what you don't know about anyone is which quarterbacks are gonna work like Drew Brees. Drew's gonna work his ass off. His agent could get a call during the season from a car company saying, 'We got a \$200,000 commercial for you to tape on Tuesday.' And Drew would say, 'No, I'm not gonna do that on Tuesday. That's my day to work on the next opponent.' Your job if you're going to draft one of these guys is to figure out who's like Drew Brees."

- Josh Rosen and the questions surrounding his desire: "I have zero questions about Josh Rosen. I have no problems with him at all."
- Biggest surprise in the top 10: "[Notre Dame] tackle Mike McGlinchey. He'll go in the top 10."
- Player who will go higher than everyone thinks: "Will Hernandez, guard, UTEP. Reminds me of Mike Lupati—both drafted higher than anyone thought."
- Draft invitee who fascinates Brandt: "Leighton Vander Esch, the Boise State linebacker. He'll be the first man ever invited to the draft who played eight-man football in high school. He's from Salmon River High School in Riggins, Idaho. A true rising star."
- The Super Bowl champions' plans: "I don't know what they're going to do, but I have been amazed at their presence everywhere at these Pro Days. I told [general manager] Howie Roseman, 'You must have an unlimited scouting budget—and I think you've exceeded it.' They've had coaches and scouts everywhere. They don't act like they just won the Super Bowl. They act like they're dying just to make the playoffs."
- Happiest draft invitee: "We've got 22 guys coming in, and maybe the happiest is a guy who won't be picked in the first round: Shaquem Griffin [the UCF linebacker who lost his left hand because of a birth defect at age 4]. When I called his mother to invite them, she started crying because of how much this means to the family."

ROSEN HAS A FRIEND IN AARON RODGERS

Interesting week for the UCLA quarterback, deciding how to respond to his former coach's comments in this column a week ago and ultimately settling on one word on Twitter:

Rosen is mentally and physically spent from the pre-draft pushing and pulling, and he has four on-campus visits left: Giants today, Jets on Tuesday, Bills on Wednesday and Chargers, back home in southern California, late this week. Then he'll disappear and work out and veg out for a week or so before going to Dallas for the draft.

He's developed a relationship with Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers, who had some advice to Rosen about putting his best feet forward in every visit with a team. (At least I think that's what his message to his mentee was.)

“The road is long,” Rodgers texted. “The time is short.”

Wise old owl, that Rodgers.

AN INTERESTING CRITIQUE OF JOSH ALLEN FROM DAN ORLOVSKY

I had the former Lions, Bucs, Texans and Rams backup on my podcast this week. Orlovsky’s become a must-follow on Twitter for his quarterback insight, breaking down plays of the top prospects and giving pointed critiques of what he sees. I found his take on what he considers two glaring weaknesses in Allen’s game interesting:

“The two things for me that are like major red flags ... There’s a couple of times on tape in a game where he’ll get up to the line of scrimmage and he’ll communicate with his offensive line. It looks like he’s changing your protection or setting your protection one way ... There’s a clip against Iowa where he changes a protection. The Will linebacker blitzes and everybody runs hot and Josh Allen does not move till his third step of the drop. What were you thinking? What was going on? And that shows up way too much for me. And again, that stuff is not fixable. You think Dick LeBeau is easier to do it against? When he’s got Star Wars on the back end going on? ... When the ball is snapped it’s almost like, I don’t know what’s going on ... It seems like he doesn’t have a plan and a process, and to get to the NFL level and to not be able to do the little things—if you can’t do the little things, you can’t do the big things. The little things are your plan and your process. The big things are executing against what happens. And so it just seems like he doesn’t have that as part of his DNA, as part of his quarterbacking. And that for me I go, Well, what does it matter how big he is, how athletic he is if you could throw it to the moon, the field’s a hundred yards. To not be able to adjust or react to a Will linebacker blitzing is alarming to me. Alarming.

“And then the second thing—I saw this at the combine, and it made me go watch all his tape again. But when he was throwing at the combine, he was staring at his receivers. And I was like, well, that’s a bad habit, and it’s a habit you can create just trying to be better at accuracy. So, I watched all his tape, and that showed up on tape a bunch where he would just stare at receivers when he catches the snap ... And so for me those are things that are really hard to change. You got to change years and years of having those bad habits.”

On Saturday, I read Orlovsky’s criticism of Allen to one draft-day-decider (on a team that is studying quarterbacks for this draft and could pick one) and asked if he agreed with Orlovsky.

“I’d say it’s true,” the NFL person said. “If people see Carson Wentz when they look at Josh Allen, because they’re both big guys, they are making a massive mistake. Wentz was so ready mentally for the pro game. Allen needs a lot of work there. If you pick Josh, you are taking a raw, talented kid and banking the future on your coaches being able to take that raw talent and turn him into a great player. It’s a gamble for sure.”

JOSH ALLEN SPENT FRIDAY IN AUGUSTA, WATCHING THE MASTERS

I like that. All preparation and no play makes Josh a dull boy.

SPORTS QUIZ

On Saturday, the fledgling league The Alliance of American Football announced the first of eight franchise cities, Orlando. The league said 72-year-old Steve Spurrier would coach the team.

This will be the first pro football coaching job by Spurrier since 2003. Spurrier's embarrassing 12-20 two-year run in Washington ended on Dec. 27, 2003, with a 31-7 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles.

Here's the quiz:

Who was Spurrier's starting quarterback in the last game he coached in the NFL?

Here's the bonus quiz:

Who was the replay official in the press box for the last game Spurrier coached in the NFL?

Answers in number 8 of Ten Things I Think.

THERE ARE NO WORDS

But I'll try.

The Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League has 12 teams playing through the winter, stretching from Estevan in the southern edge of the province, just above North Dakota, 500 miles north to Flin Flon; and 300 miles from the eastern part of the province in Yorkton to Kindersley in the west. The players are between 16 and 21 years old. You've doubtless heard in the last couple of days how many of the greats, from Gretzky to McDavid, have spent much of their teen years on buses traveling six, eight, 10 hours from one town to another, in pursuit of the dream. For some, the dream is the NHL. For others, like almost all of the players in the SJHL, the lottery is the NHL—and the dream is a college scholarship or playing for town pride, many of the kids Saskatchewan natives who grew up idolizing players in towns like Humboldt, population 5,800.

On Wednesday, for game four of the best-of-seven SJHL playoff semifinals between Humboldt and the Nipawin Hawks, 1,900 fans filled the local arena. Humboldt trailed in the series 2-1, but the Broncos roared into the lead in the second period. When one of the team's stars, Conner Lukan, scored late in the second, Humboldt took a 5-3 lead into intermission, and the cheering locals could feel a tied series. But Nipawin scored twice midway through the third, pushing the game to overtime.

No score in the first overtime.

No score in the second overtime.

Finally, five minutes into the third overtime, 105 minutes into the game, Nipawin scored the winner. The dejected Humboldt team trudged off the ice after one of the great games in recent league annals. Now the Broncos would have to win three straight to take the series, starting Friday night in Nipawin.

"Such an incredible game," said the radio colorman for Nipawin, Dan Ukrainetz, on Saturday from Saskatchewan. "To play a game like that, everyone there, the players and the fans, they knew every player left it all out on the ice."

On Friday night, a packed house of 1,100 in Nipawin was set to welcome the teams for game five of the series; that crowd included Ukrainetz's mom and dad. They've had season-tickets in the same seats since 1986, sitting next to the same family, incredibly enough, for all 32 of those years. "I was getting my coat on to go over to do the game," said Ukrainetz. "Everybody in town was excited—this was going to

be a great, great game between two great teams. Then I got the news. The play-by-play guy called. The game was canceled. There'd been an accident with the Humboldt bus."

Twenty minutes or so outside of town, on the equivalent of one of our county highways, the Humboldt bus, carrying 29 players, staff and a driver, was traveling north on a main road without a stop sign. A semitrailer was traveling west on a road with a stop sign at the intersection of the highway. There is no word on what happened yet, but the truck, with a load of Canadian peat, hit the bus and tore it apart.

When word came of the accident and the canceled game, Ukrainetz's mom went to the place where parents and kin—many of whom had traveled to the game in their own cars—of the Humboldt players were waiting. "That's the one thing I thought of right away—the families," said Dan Ukrainetz. "There's so many long miles families drive. They get to the arena, they look for the bus, the bus isn't there, and of course they start wondering: 'What's happened to our son?' Or brother, or nephew."

Fifteen of the 29 on the Broncos' bus died in the wreck. All weekend, support came in on a GoFundMe page, via Twitter (from Gretzky, the prime minister, hockey people everywhere), from NHL teams wearing BRONCOS in the place of the names on their jerseys. On "Hockey Night in Canada," Don Cherry asked for the country to pray. We're fortunate to have such a caring, cohesive country to our north, and it showed all weekend. Oh Canada, we admire how you've handled the worst day in so many of your citizens' lives.

"The hockey rink is the gathering place for our people throughout Canada," Ukrainetz said. "You want to know what's going on in town? Go to the rink. We've got no movie theater in Nipawin, no casino. We've got a hockey rink. That's how so much of Canada is. That's why this hits us so hard."

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

I

"Everyone told me growing up I was a football player who plays baseball. As a pitcher, I wasn't as concerned about throwing strikes as I was lighting up radar guns. When I would get mad, I'd try to throw even harder. And that doesn't correlate to success. In football, there is a mental side to the game, which is huge. But there is also that raw aggression. If I get pissed off, I can put my facemask in this guy's chin. That's where a lot of my success comes from, that pent-up aggression from baseball."

—South Carolina tight end Hayden Hurst, to Dan Pompei in an insightful story for Bleacher Report. Hurst, as a Pittsburgh Pirate minor-league pitcher throwing in the mid-nineties, got the yips and had to quit baseball. That forced him to try football, and now he could be a first-round pick this month.

II

"Every single person. Everyone in hockey. That's exactly why it hits home, because everyone has been on the bus before."

—Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid, who rode buses in junior hockey, on the bus crash involving the Humboldt Broncos of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League that killed 15 team members.

III

“It’s gotta rip the heart out of your chest.”

—Toronto Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock, who is from Saskatchewan, breaking up while speaking to reporters Saturday.

IV

“The defensive coordinator has more swag than all of ‘em, so we’ll be in good shape.”

—Rams coach Sean McVay, on the big stars the Rams have added to the defense (Marcus Peters, Aqib Talib, Ndamukong Suh), and how he thinks 71-year-old Wade Phillips will coach them up.

STATS OF THE WEEK

I

The Denver Broncos lucked into a top-five punter for very good value last week, signing Jon Gruden-reject Marquette King for three years and \$7 million, making him approximately the 12th-highest-paid punter (in average cap value) in the NFL. Not bad for King, who finished second in the league in punting average in 2016 and third in 2017, and who is 29 years old.

When the Broncos signed King on Thursday, he was positively giddy about getting to punt in altitude for half his games over the next three years. “Denver’s a punter’s paradise,” King said. “The ball definitely travels a lot further. I’ve always enjoyed punting out here in the altitude just because the ball travels further.”

The evidence in his five seasons is significant, if limited. King’s numbers in Colorado versus all other places:

	Games	Punts	Gross Average	Net Average
Denver	5	39	50.03	45.51
All Other Venues	75	387	46.48	40.68

The Broncos are going to have to work with King specifically on placement on inside-the-20 kicks—kicking as he did for Oakland could result in too many into the end zone.

II

Rams receiver Brandin Cooks, 24, is a mere 16 months older than the top receiver prospect in the draft, Alabama’s Calvin Ridley, 23. Ridley will turn 24 in his rookie season. Cooks leads Ridley in NFL games played, 61-0.

TEN THINGS I THINK I THINK

1. I think Baltimore signing Robert Griffin III doesn't mean anything about the Ravens' draft-weekend intentions. If there's a quarterback there at 16 (Lamar Jackson?) who the Ravens love, they'll take him. As they should. Since Flacco won the Super Bowl for Baltimore, there have been five seasons played in the NFL. In those five seasons combined, 31 quarterbacks have started at least 40 games. Flacco is 30th in passer rating in those five seasons, at 82.1.

2. I think if HBO intended to show Joe Paterno as an altogether doddering old man who had no business coaching Penn State in his last few years in "Paterno" Saturday night, HBO succeeded. I have no dog in this fight, and there is no question whatsoever that Paterno was allowed to coach that team far too long. But was it really that bad? Was he really that bad? Check out Conor Orr's commentary on "Paterno."

3. I think one of the best free-agent signings of the second wave of the free market is New England procuring wide receiver Jordan Matthews after his lost and injured season with Buffalo in 2017. New England signed him for one year and about \$4 million. Mike Reiss reported in his Sunday column that Matthews wanted to play with Tom Brady and, presumably, could have signed for more years and money elsewhere. Love this for the Patriots because Matthews will play this year at 26, is now healthy, and in his three NFL seasons prior to 2017 with Philadelphia, averaged 75 catches and 891 yards. He's the kind of big target (6'3") the Patriots and Brady needed.

4. I think I don't understand why uniform numbers can't be simple. Just like I never understood why the Bucs made the numbers on their new uniforms unintelligible, I don't get Tennessee's new digits either. Why can't a 2 look like a 2, and not a Z? Why make numbers make you do a triple-take?

5. I think, while I'm on my 60-year-old-man riff, what's up with "uniform launch parties" or "uniform unveilings?" I see the Jaguars are having one April 19, on the heels of Tennessee drawing 20,000 for theirs last week. I don't get unveiling uniforms being a news event. How did we get to this point? You know, it's okay to not have everything be a big event. It's okay for teams to say, "We've got nothing going on this week. Go cover something else." And it's okay for media to say, "We'll run a photo of your next uniform on our site. That's enough." And be done with it.

6. I think now I'll stop screaming for you to get off my lawn.

7. I think this Johnny Manziel admission to Dan Patrick just really rubbed me the wrong way: "Guys are good in the NFL because they know film, they study hard, and they work even harder in the off-season. I didn't know that. I feel like if Cleveland did any of their homework, they would have know that I'm a guy that didn't come in every day and watch film ... When I get to Cleveland, I have a quarterback in the room [Brian Hoyer] that's not helping me. And it's not really his job to, but nobody was there, helping me. And it was hard. I struggled ... There was a lot of winging it, and not a lot of, you know, knowing what I was doing."

One: It's not the starting quarterback's job to help the backup take the job from him. It would be nice if the starter did that, but in my experience, many more starting quarterbacks over time have been okay but not super-helpful to the first-round pick who's there to put the starter out of business. Two: "Nobody was there, helping me." What? Dowell Loggains, quarterback coach, and Kyle Shanahan, offense coordinator ... They didn't help? They weren't there to help? Their office doors were closed? That is, to be charitable, a disingenuous claim by Manziel. To be uncharitable, it is downright lame.

8. I think the answers to the Steve Spurrier quizzes surprised me.

The starting quarterback for Washington in the 2003 season finale—and one of six quarterbacks to throw passes for Spurrier in his two NFL seasons—was Tim Hasselbeck.

The replay official in FedEx Field for Spurrier's last game? Dean Blandino.

9. I think I can't say this enough: If San Francisco safety Eric Reid does not get signed, it sends a chilling message about free speech to every NFL player who would think about protesting anything. Colin Kaepernick being unsigned is reprehensible enough. But if Reid, Kaepernick's protest partner with the Niners in 2016, is not signed to a representative safety contract this spring, every player will know the league's mantra: Get in line, or this will happen to you when your contract expires—no matter how good you are.

10. I think these are my other thoughts of the week:

a. Story of the Week: by Abe Streep, writing for the New York Times Magazine, on the Arlee Warriors high school basketball team in Montana, which plays to win basketball games and to urge young people to not kill themselves.

b. It's so encouraging to read about young adults who see the bigger purpose in life. The Arlee Warriors do.

c. Plus haunting black-and-white photos by Devin Yalkin. His photo of the team on the school bus home from the state championship game is absolutely marvelous, a work of art.

d. Streep with an emotional and great close, which you'll understand when you read this: "The world is never so hopeful as when the old honor the young."

e. Column of the Week: by Dan Balz of the Washington Post, you know, one of those papers that makes everything up, going all the way back to Watergate, when it made up the stories that forced Richard Nixon to resign in disgrace. Balz writes about what a tough week it was for the truth for our president.

f. Sports Column of the Week: by Howard Bryant of ESPN.com, "NFL Players Have Succumbed to Protest Pressure." Well-reasoned and smart.

g. Sideline/Dugout Interview of the Week: by Sophia Minnaert of FOX Sports, with Brewers shortstop Orlando Arcia after a game-winning hit.

h. So many good things about that interview—the quick translation from Spanish to English, the deft spinning away to avoid the Gatorade bath ... all like she's taking a walk in the park. That is just tremendous.

i. News item: Conor McGregor, appearing to be in some sort of non-earth orbit and accompanied by a crew of burly "friends," goes batcrap and destroys a bus by throwing things like a dolly and a steel barrier at it and through its windows.

j. McGregor has always seemed like such a well-adjusted guy.

k. Coffeenerdness: No more butterscotch lattes at Starbucks. They say it's "seasonal." I say it's "fantastically outrageous."

l. Beernerdness: Happy National Beer Day! I celebrated with Vitamin Water Zero lemonade. Haven't you heard? It's Sober April!

m. Including today, the Red Sox had three scheduled days off in a six-day period. Play three, sit three.

n. First-pitch-of-the-season temperature at Coors Field on Friday afternoon: 27. Fahrenheit.

o. When the Mariners woke up in Minneapolis on Saturday morning, it was 11 degrees. First-pitch temp: 27.

p. Not that I'm paying close attention or anything, but in his nine-game Yankee career, Giancarlo Stanton has seven hits and 20 strikeouts.

q. That includes 16 strikeouts on the season-opening six-game homestand, and striking out to end Sunday's 8-7 loss to Baltimore.

r. My prediction is that will not last.

s. Anyone see a little of a Greg Bedard look in Patrick Reed? Pretty gutsy of Reed, hanging on after Jordan Spieth nearly had the comeback of the year.

t. I'm not a big-enough hockey fan to know the impact of the retiring Sedin twins, Henrik and Daniel of the Vancouver Canucks. But how great was it that in their last game ever in Vancouver on Thursday, the game went to overtime, and Henrik Sedin passed to Daniel, who scored the winning goal in the 4-3 victory over Arizona.

u. Congrats are in order for my old HBO friend Jason Hehir, who directed the "Andre the Giant" documentary on HBO. Looking forward to it—particularly to see how the "Princess Bride" stuff is treated.

v. Congrats are in order, too, for my old Montclair friend Mike Goldstein (Mike from Montclair to you WFAN listeners), the first-year varsity softball head coach at Montclair (N.J.) High School. He got his first head-coaching victory Friday over Essex County rival Belleville, 8-0, on the road. Couldn't happen to a better guy.

w. Thank you, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, for streaming so much informative content over the weekend so we could follow closely the news from Saskatchewan. What a touching vigil Sunday night. Thanks for being a good public servant when it was so necessary.

THE ADIEU HAIKU

Draft season home stretch.

Mindful of this Parcellism:

"No one knows nothin'."

Marquette King is fired up about playing at altitude

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
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NewRaiders coach Jon Gruden apparently put a low premium on punters, but Marquette King's likely to be very happy at high altitude.

Via Peter King of SI.com, the new Broncos punter has flourished in games in Denver, with his already strong leg having even more pop there.

In five games in Denver, his 39 punts have averaged 50.03 gross and 45.51 net yards. In 75 games anywhere else, his gross average was 46.48 and his net was 40.68.

So basically, King's five yards better per kick at elevation.

"Denver's a punter's paradise," King (Marquette, not Peter) said. "The ball definitely travels a lot further. I've always enjoyed punting out here in the altitude just because the ball travels further."

Of course, there's more to special teams success than just being able to kick the tar out of the ball, and the Broncos coaches are going to have to work to get King used to the difference to keep him from just blasting everything through the end zone.

But getting King (Marquette, not Peter) for a three-year, \$7 million deal seems like good business, since he was already one of the league's strongest punters (and fun, which it's important to remember the game is still allowed to be).

Draft will give fans of each team their own section

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
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In 17 days, the draft does Dallas — and Dallas will do the draft like no other city ever has.

“This is going to be the most talked-about draft in history,” NFL draft historian and custodian Gil Brandt tells Peter King of SI.com. “And not just because quarterbacks could go one through four, or four of the top five picks. But this will be an incredible extravaganza. For years to come, people will compare every draft to Dallas. The saying, Everything’s bigger in Texas, will definitely apply.”

Here’s a new twist that has never been done before, in part because the draft has never been held in a football stadium. “We’ll have sections all over the stadium for all 32 teams, and it’ll be like a competition between all the teams and their fans,” Brandt said.

The competition will be rigged, because it will essentially be a home game for Cowboys fans. But the fans of the 32 teams surely will have one thing on which that can all agree: Every time the Commissioner walks to the podium, they’ll be speaking with one, unified voice.

Will XFL pivot toward old-school football?

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
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The XFL has been quiet since announcing its plan to return in 2020. But the preparations continue for the resurrection of the sports league that captured the imagination (but not nearly enough dollars) of American football fans in 2001.

Per a source with knowledge of the situation, the XFL quietly continues to conduct the research and planning necessary to give the XFL a solid foundation. With 22 months to go until the games begin, the XFL has plenty of time to figure out how to do things the way it wants to do them.

With the Alliance of American Football planning to start a year earlier than the XFL — and already dropping teams in non-NFL cities like Orlando — the XFL will need to factor the AAF's apparent goals and objectives into the crafting of the new XFL game. Will the XFL put teams in the same cities where the AAF will be playing? If the AAF picks non-NFL cities, will the XFL decide to put football teams in towns that already are served by the NFL?

The biggest philosophical question relates to the style of play. The XFL, according to Vince McMahon, will attempt to be at the forefront of player safety. With the NFL taking safety to the extreme via the new helmet rule, the looming elimination of the kickoff, and the eventual (possibly) removal of the three-point stance, maybe the XFL's vow to "reimagine" football should include turning back the clock.

Although liability concerns may cause the XFL to shy away from old-school, rock 'em, sock 'em football, no players can claim that they don't understand the risks — and any competent lawyer can draft a player contract containing a waiver that will include a full and complete acknowledgement that, in return for the opportunity to play and the compensation that goes with it, the player accepts the risks inherent to the specific type of game the XFL will play.

As a practical matter, getting sued is a sign of success. If the XFL opts to play football the same way that the NFL and the AAF will play it, the XFL may never come close to generating nearly enough interest and revenue to survive.

Said McMahon in January, "We'll be asking football fans what they want and what they don't want." But the answers the XFL gets will depend on which fans are asked what they want and what they don't want.

As explained in November 2016 in the aftermath of an extensive SI.com article looking at the state of football in America, a silent majority of football fans may want old-school football. It's generally regarded as uncouth or non-mainstream for reporters or broadcasters to say that, since most who cover sports have tried (consciously or not) to steer the discussion toward an unconditional embrace of safety, safety, and more safety in football.

Meanwhile, plenty of fans don't want safety, at least not at the professional level. MDS recently made an excellent comparison between football and karate. Parents don't want to see their kids get kicked in

the face, but those same parents will pay \$64.95 every four or five weeks to watch adults kick each other in the face during UFC events.

Plenty of football fans may feel the same way. But with the NFL pushing hard for safety (in large part to influence lower levels of the sport to follow the NFL's lead) and most of the media pushing for even more safety advances and in turn (at times gleefully) predicting the demise of the sport, many of those who buy tickets and consume TV broadcasts and otherwise support the sport may want to see football like it used to be. For the XFL, that may be the target audience, and that may be the ticket to creating a league that not only will compete successfully with the AAF, but also will potentially shift its schedule to traditional football season, with much greater results than the USFL experienced.