

# If the Avalanche's playoff series vs. Nashville was a country music song, how would it go?

By Mark Kiszla  
Denver Post  
April 10, 2018

The Denver Post's Mark Kiszla on Monday answered questions from readers about the Avalanche, Nuggets, Broncos and Rockies. Here are the highlights.

Is Semyon Varlamov going to be available for the playoffs or will the Avalanche be going all the way with Jonathan Bernier?

Kiz: Barely a half hour after the Avalanche advanced to the playoffs by eliminating St. Louis, coach Jared Bednar was asked about Semyon Varlamov's availability for Round 1 vs. Nashville. Bednar said there was no chance. And he did it so forcefully that I wouldn't count seeing Varly between the pipes again until next season.

If quarterbacks go 1 through 4 in the NFL draft, who would you take at No. 5?

Kiz: I might not be very smart. But I am consistent. From the jump, my two favorite players for the Broncos at No. 5 have been Penn State running back Saquon Barkley and Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson. Nothing's changed. I'm not saying that Barkley and Nelson would be the only good choices for the Broncos with the 5th pick. But I have said the best pick for the Broncos at No. 5 is not a quarterback. And I've said it consistently. (Consistently dumb? Perhaps.)

Bigger challenge for the Nuggets in the last two games: Blazers or TWolves? And why?

Kiz: Portland is a better team than Minnesota.. But that last one is on the road. In the T-pups' house. Both are must-win games for the Nuggets, if you ask me. Winning a gotta-have-it game on the road is tougher, especially if it's also a must-win for the home team.

What are the Broncos doing at tight end?

Kiz: They are waiting for Jake Butt to get healthy and be the tight end that the Broncos promised us he would be when they drafted him last year.

What do you think of the new rule limiting mound visits? I feel like the pitcher is kind of out there on an island a little more now. Good and bad, in my opinion.

Kiz: The pace of baseball is perfect. Perfect if you need an excuse to fall asleep on the sofa with the game on TV. The idea to limit mound visits was fine in principle. Not certain what sage advice is ever given during a mound visit. Outside of "Make him hit your pitch," how much is a catcher or manager really going to say? But will limiting those silly visits to the mound really speed up play? Check back with me after my nap during the next 3 hour, 30-minute game.

I was surprised Bud Black said he's not worried about the Rockies offense. I think it's getting pretty close to panic button time. Your thoughts?

Kiz: Baseball is a slow grind. It requires the same patience of bringing out all the colors of a garden after a long winter. Some fans like the poetry of that. Me? I'm a little impatient for gardening, or waiting for Trevor Story to learn he doesn't have to hit every ball over the fence. Pushing the panic button, however, never does much good in baseball. Calling up David Dahl from the minors might help the Colorado offense, though.

Gronk in Orange and Blue?

Kiz: If the Patriots are really going to break up the band ... and as long as we're dreaming ... I would rather see Tom Brady in orange and blue. Wouldn't you?

The Avs may not win this series (then again, they might), but this matchup should be a lot of fun. Do you see it as the most entertaining of all the first round matchups in the West?

Kiz: Any trip to Nashville is a lot of fun, whether there's hockey involved or not. But the first-round matchup in the West that I will really enjoy is LA Kings vs Vegas Knights. The Knights are going down.

I am not sold on the QB's in the draft to the degree that "the experts" are. Only solid guy appears to be Rosen and the others are projects to be coached up. Praying that we draft Barkley, Chubb or Nelson or trade down with Buffalo. Your thoughts?

Kiz: Josh Rosen is the most polished QB in this draft. I would not take him. I hope the Broncos do not, even if Rosen is available at No. 5. Maybe it's just me, but Rosen gives off a Jay Cutler vibe. Icky. Bradley Chubb is a heckuva defensive lineman, but he seems to be a 4-3 defensive end to me. Trading down is an interesting idea, but only if Buffalo is willing to surrender both of its first-round picks.

I'm thinking all these visits the Broncos are making with QBs are deception to get a quarterback-hungry team trade up with them. What are the chances of Buffalo trying that?

Kiz: I'm thinking John Elway is playing it both ways with all these QB visits. He's getting to know the QBs better. And he's making teams like Buffalo more anxious to trade. Kudos to Elway.

What's the deal with Ryan McMahon? He's not being given a chance to play and is riding the pine. Probably going to mess with his timing and head. Between Parra and Desmond (who often looks lost), why not work McMahon into the rotation?

Kiz: Amid the Rockies' offensive inconsistencies, Ian Desmond has actually provided some decent pop. It's Desmond that has stood in Ryan McMahon's way. I had high hopes for McMahon coming out of spring training. I still have high hopes for him. But some regular at-bats down in AAA might be the best plan of action for McMahon at this point.

Ian Desmond does have a double and two home runs, so maybe you call that "pop" if you squint a little, but his .229 OBP is a killer.

Kiz: I was just trying to be nice, because they don't call me Mr. Sunshine for nuthin. I am no Ian Desmond fan. I never understood why the Rockies signed him, much less for \$70 million. He's Mr. Crabbypants. And his best years seem to be behind him.

The loss of Erik Johnson is a killer. How do the Avalanche stop Filip Forsberg and the rest of this really really deep Preds team?

Kiz: Short answer: The Avs probably don't. Nashville winning the series in 5 games would be no surprise. Want a more optimistic answer? Jonathan Bernier has to play out of his mind in goal for the Avalanche ... and he steals one, if not two, victories. Then, if Nathan MacKinnon also skates like the real league MVP, Colorado has a shot.

True or false, the Nuggets NEVER needed Milsap and his \$90 million contract at all. The young core of Gary Harris, Jamal Murray and Nikola Jokic proved to be sustainable and successful this year. Do you agree? Also, can we resign Will Barton?

Kiz: This much is true: I was never fond of signing Paul Millsap to a \$30 million salary. And I said/wrote it repeatedly before the deal went down. Millsap is simply not a franchise player, and paying franchise money to a less-than-franchise player often has negative repercussions in a league with a salary cap. And this is true, even if you argue that his contract is only guaranteed for two years. I was told he was a bridge player. A bridge to where? If Denver does not make the playoffs this year and next year, that's one expensive bridge.

Love that you're doing this lunch chat, though surprised that you're here talking with all of us chumps instead of being at the Bednar post-practice presser.

Kiz: You're a lot more fun. What's more, I can't eat leftover spaghetti pie while hanging around Avs practice. But I can do lunch and chat at the same time. Walk and chew gum? Not so much.

If the Avs' playoff series against Nashville was a country music song, how would it go....?

Kiz: I went to high school in Nashville, at a time when it was all country all the time and there wasn't even a dream of an NHL or NFL franchise in Music City. The old-school country singer I like best is George Jones. So let's go with one of his hits, often covered through the years, as the theme song for this Avs-Preds series: "The Race is On." Sing it with me: "Well, the race is on, and here comes pride in the backstretch ..."

What else? Avs playoff prediction? Can they win this series?

Kiz: Can Avs win this series? Yes. But it's highly unlikely. I'd give Colorado no more than a 15 percent shot of pulling off the upset.

The Preds are my favorite to win it all, so this series is just a bonus for this Avs fan. Even if the Preds sweep, I won't be upset. Huge turnaround from last season and we are headed in the right direction – bravo to the coach, the team and Joe Sakic (for sticking with Jared Bednar and his system). My question – what does Sakic do this off season to get a legit top four D-man to pair with the condor (while the the young core continues to develop)?

Kiz: Preds seem to be the class of the West. But the Prez Trophy winner doesn't always do so hot in the NHL playoffs, if memory serves. Top 5 D-man for the Avs? Hasn't that been on the wish list forever? Hard to find.

Is subscribing to the Post (which I do) the best way we can support the great work you all are doing? Anything else we can do?

Kiz: Thanks for asking. And thanks more for subscribing. As somebody who has worked at The Post for 35 years, your support means a lot and is never taken for granted. Whether we're talking music or video games or journalism, good content costs money to produce. Want to do more? Tell a neighbor to subscribe, because it's good fun to make fun of the knucklehead the Post employs as a sports columnist.

Impress us with your parting shots, Kiz: (1) Avs/Preds series prediction; (2) Donk's 1st Rd pick(s); (3) Rox end of season record; and (4) Nugs playoff prediction.

Kiz: I believe sports commentators that make predictions that are hard and fast rather than a measure of probability are probably better suited to scream at Stephen A Smith on TV. With that in mind, here goes ...

1) The Avs have a 15 percent chance of upsetting the Preds. What a great story it would be if Colorado pulls it off. But pushing the series to 6 games is probably as far as the Avalanche can go

2) Today, and today only, my guess is the Broncos don't listen to me about Saquon Barkley or Quenton Nelson and they take Baker Mayfield. He would make training camp must-see football.

3) I predicted 92 wins for the Rockies (which I'm regretting already).

4) Nuggets are hot, hot, hot. But there's no more than a 50-50 chance they win both games and get in the playoffs.

# Broncos evaluation of Big Four QBs continues with Josh Allen visit

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

April 10, 2018

If the Broncos do take a quarterback with their No. 5 overall draft pick and he turns out to be a bust, it won't be from lack of preparation.

Josh Allen, the most physically gifted of the Big Four quarterbacks, is visiting Broncos' general manager John Elway, head coach Vance Joseph and the offensive coaching staff today at the team's UHealth Training.

It will be the third significant meeting between the Broncos and Allen, the talented if inaccurate prospect from Wyoming.

A breakdown of Broncos' visits with the Big Four:

Baker Mayfield (4): Senior Bowl, NFL Combine, Pro Day, pre-draft visit in Denver next Monday and Tuesday.

Josh Rosen (3): Combine, Pro Day, pre-draft visit in Denver last week.

Allen (3): Senior Bowl, Combine, pre-draft visit in Denver today.

Sam Darnold (2): Combine, private workout.

Mike Shanahan might warn against overstudying. For competitive reasons, Shanahan, the Broncos' head coach in charge of football operations from 1995-2008, didn't always meet with his top draft prospects because he didn't want to tip off other teams as to his interest.

When he took Jay Cutler in the first round of the 2006 NFL Draft, Shanahan talked to others who knew the Vanderbilt quarterback, but he didn't meet him until he drafted him with the No. 11 overall pick.

A decade later, such strategy is rarely employed in the NFL, and Elway isn't hiding from the fact that even though he just signed free-agent Case Keenum to a two-year, \$36 million contract and drafted quarterback Paxton Lynch in the first round just two years ago, taking another QB with the team's No. 5 overall pick is a real possibility.

Allen is the quarterback who most resembles the style Elway employed when he was the Broncos' quarterback from 1983-98. Allen is big (6-5, 233 pounds) with an incredibly powerful arm, who can also move around. The concern is he only completed 56.2 percent of his passes in his two full-time seasons with the Cowboys.

Then again, Elway was a 56.9 percent career passer.

Eventually, the bulk of the evaluation will lead back to the college tape. But as there are so many intangibles involved with the quarterback position like poise, confidence, ability to lead and character, the Elway-led Broncos' decision makers are getting a feel for the Big Four while they're away from the playing field.

# Broncos know No. 5 pick has to be able to handle more than football

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 10, 2018

Should the Denver Broncos stay put in the first round of the NFL draft and use their No. 5 pick on a player they hope can help lead the rebound from last season's 5-11 record, that player will also join a rather exclusive club in the franchise's history.

That's because the list of those the Broncos have picked at No. 5 in the draft since the AFL-NFL merger in 1970 consists of one name: tight end Riley Odoms.

The Broncos selected Odoms No. 5 in 1972. He went on to play 12 seasons -- he played two games in 1983, which was current president of football operations/general manager John Elway's rookie season -- and finished with 396 catches for 5,755 yards as well as 41 touchdowns.

While that is likely a testament to the Broncos' ability to maintain competitiveness in Pat Bowlen's tenure as the team's owner -- the team has more Super Bowl appearances than losing seasons since Bowlen purchased the team in 1984 -- the bottom line is the Broncos simply haven't been a part of the draft's top five that often. Odoms was the first top-five pick the team had in the common draft era and they've had just five overall with linebacker Von Miller the most recent.

Miller was the second pick of the 2011 draft and was Elway's first draft pick in his current job. Miller's selection was also the first top-five pick the Broncos had in a draft since 1991 when the team selected Mike Croel at No. 4.

It's why Elway has said: "It's not where we want to pick very often, if ever. But we're there now and we want to make the most of the opportunities we have to find those guys who can be Denver Broncos for a long time."

It's also why the Broncos have tried so hard to this point to look beyond the football component as well. Certainly they want as talented a player as they can find with each draft pick. But a top-five pick is rare ground for the organization, and the high expectations that will arrive with the pick -- if the Broncos remain at No. 5 or even try to move up -- will be part of the equation. Even as Miller has emerged as one of the league's best players it can be easy to forget he was pulled from the lineup at times in his first season for missed assignments on the field as well as suspended for six games in his second season for violation of the league's substance abuse policy.

Miller has since come to appreciate the value of his offseason workouts as well as "making sure everything you do is to get better."

He added, "I want to be great and when you first come in maybe you don't understand all of what you have to do to be great."

"This league is about working, getting better and handling success as well as the tough times," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said recently. "That's for everybody, players, coaches, everybody. You always want your best players to also be the players who know that."

# The best NFL free-agency values, worst overpays of 2018

By Mike Sando  
ESPN.com  
April 10, 2018

NFL free agency reached peak frenzy before the signing period officially opened as teams embraced the confusingly named "legal tampering" period.

Despite all the excitement, most rosters are a little worse off now than they were before. That's because many depth players remain unsigned, while many of the signings featured desperate teams overpaying to fill needs.

With assists from general managers and others around the league, I've put together a ranking of the 10 best value signings and the 10 worst overpays.

## Worst overpays

1. Sammy Watkins, Kansas City Chiefs  
Deal: Three years, \$48 million

The good news is that Watkins is young, talented and joining a team coached by Andy Reid, who excels at maximizing personnel. The bad news is that Watkins simply has not been very productive, a leading reason he is on his third team in eight months.

The Chiefs are paying Watkins as though he's a sure bet. They were not the only team willing to spend big for him. Dallas was also interested, as was Chicago. It seems like a case of teams valuing a player based more on their draft reports than what the player has done since college.

Watkins' annual average is a shade under what Mike Evans got in Tampa Bay and twice what Paul Richardson received in Washington. (Watkins and Richardson have nearly identical numbers over the past two seasons, albeit in eight fewer games for Watkins.)

Watkins ranks 57th in receptions, 30th in receiving yards and 17th in receiving touchdowns since entering the league in 2014, which could indicate he simply needs more opportunities.

2. Star Lotulelei, Buffalo Bills  
Deal: Five years, \$50 million

The Bills are getting a run-stuffing defensive tackle who has missed only two games over five seasons, but the price seemed steep for a player with "no rush at all," in the words of one general manager. Sean McDermott coached Lotulelei in Carolina and will surely maximize him in the Buffalo defense. But is that familiarity worth \$18.5 million fully guaranteed? The Panthers seemed to come out ahead by signing Dontari Poe to a shorter, cheaper deal for three years at \$28 million.

### 3. Nate Solder, New York Giants

Deal: Four years, \$62 million

The Giants were negotiating from a position of extreme desperation within a market featuring few established starting tackles. This deal reflects those realities.

"What they paid [Solder] was unbelievable," an evaluator said, "but they had to help their quarterback, and that helps him."

It would be tough to fault the Giants for overpaying a top-shelf left tackle given their issues along the offensive line. Solder has not recently been a top-shelf left tackle, however, and there is a good chance he will fail to meet unrealistic expectations after the Giants made him the highest-paid offensive lineman in the league. They'll pay \$34.8 million guaranteed to Soldier over the next two years.

### 4. Trey Burton, Chicago Bears

Deal: Four years, \$32 million

Burton comes to Chicago knowing the offensive system Matt Nagy is installing with the Bears, and if Burton becomes the next Jason Kelce as the Bears hope, then this will be money well spent. The reality for now, however, is that Chicago invested \$18 million fully guaranteed in an undrafted special-teams contributor who averaged 19 offensive snaps per game last season while finishing with 23 receptions.

### 5. Sam Bradford, Arizona Cardinals

Deal: Two years, \$40 million

Just as the Giants were desperate for tackle help, the Cardinals faced dire circumstances at quarterback. They structured their deal with Bradford to mitigate risk while giving the team an option for 2020. That was smart. Still, they are paying \$15 million guaranteed for a quarterback who lasted less than six quarters last season, has a "degenerative" knee, according to Mike Zimmer, and has missed 33 of his past 64 games.

If Bradford holds up, this deal could push him past \$150 million in career earnings without him ever being above average over an extended period. His 48.8 Total QBR since 2015 ranks 29th out of 36 quarterbacks with at least 1,000 snaps since then.

### 6. Trumaine Johnson, New York Jets

Deal: Five years, \$72.5 million

Johnson commanded the largest signing bonus for a cornerback in NFL history (\$20 million) as a good player with zero Pro Bowls and zero All-Pro selections through six strong seasons. This deal will pay him \$34 million fully guaranteed over the next two seasons, which is \$10 million more than Malcolm Butler is getting in Tennessee.

### 7. Anthony Hitchens, Kansas City Chiefs

Deal: Five years, \$45 million

The Chiefs are paying \$9 million a year for a linebacker not everyone sees as a three-down player. Two evaluators agreed that Hitchens is a good player but not a difference-maker. They thought he could

struggle in coverage, while noting he would be transitioning from a 4-3 base defense in Dallas to a 3-4 base defense in Kansas City. With good linebacker depth in the draft, comparable alternatives could be available for much less money.

#### 8. Taylor Gabriel, Chicago Bears

Deal: Four years, \$26 million

The 5-foot-8, 165-pound Gabriel appears ideally suited for playing indoors on artificial surfaces. He'll do that at least four times per season when facing Detroit and Minnesota, but the conditions in Chicago could be difficult for him, particularly later in the season. That is why one evaluator predicted Gabriel's production could fall off during the more inclement months.

#### 9. Jimmy Graham, Green Bay Packers

Deal: Three years, \$30 million

The Packers basically swapped out the 32-year-old Jordy Nelson for the 31-year-old Graham. Nelson has an outstanding chemistry with Aaron Rodgers. Graham does not. Both players averaged an alarmingly low 9.1 yards per reception last season while failing to reach 60 catches, but Graham did it with Russell Wilson at quarterback, while Nelson was stuck with Brett Hundley for much of the season. Nelson has averaged 12.7 yards per reception and 0.9 touchdowns per game since the start of 2016 when catching passes from Rodgers. Graham has averaged 11.8 yards per reception and 0.5 touchdowns per game with Wilson over that span.

#### 10. Jonathan Stewart, New York Giants

Deal: Two years, \$6.9 million

Stewart should provide welcome leadership at running back as new general manager Dave Gettleman works to build the Giants' culture.

As for the production part? Stewart is one of 20 running backs with at least 800 carries over the past six seasons. He ranks 19th among them with a 3.92-yard average per attempt, ahead of only ex-Giant Rashad Jennings (3.86). The 31-year-old Stewart remains 19th on the list when excluding runs from inside the 5-yard line, which can suppress per-carry averages.

#### Best values

#### 1. Drew Brees, New Orleans Saints

Deal: Two years, \$50 million

The drama wasn't so much over whether Brees would leave New Orleans for another team, it was whether Brees would maximize his leverage.

Brees could have forced his way onto the market to extract the richest possible contract from the Saints. Going that route would have made \$18 million in dead money from his previous deal accelerate into the 2018 cap. The team could have been all but forced into making an over-the-top offer ahead of the deadline.

Instead, Brees signed a two-year deal with \$27 million guaranteed, about the same guarantee Blake Bortles is getting on a two-year extension in Jacksonville. Brees lowered his projected cap figure by \$4 million, and the Saints used the additional flexibility to bolster their defense.

Brees never became a free agent, so he would not qualify for a list limited to players who reached the market, but his deal on the eve of free agency meant everything for the Saints. New Orleans -- though less reliant on Brees thanks to a solid running game and improved defense -- might have finished last in the NFC South without No. 9.

2. Julius Peppers, Carolina Panthers  
Deal: One year, \$5 million

Peppers is old, as in Josh McCown old (they are both 38). But Peppers has not missed a game over the past 10 seasons. He's coming off an 11-sack campaign with the Panthers and has 29 sacks over the past three years. Carolina brought him back on a one-year deal for less than what Vinny Curry is getting from Tampa Bay.

3. Sheldon Richardson, Minnesota Vikings  
Deal: One year, \$8 million

Richardson was not a consistently dominant force in his one season with Seattle, but he was not a disappointment, either. He seemed to be a candidate for an expensive extension through much of the 2017 season. The Vikings got him on a one-year deal that carries a lower annual average than other deals for interior defensive linemen Star Lotulelei and Dontari Poe. There is little risk for Minnesota. The Vikings are so dependent on their four-man rush that adding Richardson makes particular sense for them.

4. Bradley McDougald, Seattle Seahawks  
Deal: Three years, \$13.5 million

Seattle's safety needs are real with Kam Chancellor potentially finished and Earl Thomas entering the final year of his contract amid rumors about a possible trade.

McDougald was an excellent bargain signing last offseason on a one-year deal for \$2 million. He started nine games for a defense that surprisingly ranked sixth in efficiency over the season's second half, when playing without multiple starters. This three-year deal gives Seattle longer-term stability at the position, with McDougald able to play either spot.

McDougald appeared primed for a big payday last offseason. Now, thanks to a cratering safety market, Seattle could wind up having him for four years and \$15.5 million.

5. AJ McCarron, Buffalo Bills  
Deal: Two years, \$10 million

NFL teams routinely pay big money to questionable quarterbacks simply because there's scarcity at the position and a player might have upside. That did not happen here.

The 27-year-old McCarron has a 2-2 starting record (including playoffs) with five touchdowns, one interception and a middling 49.3 Total QBR. His third-down scoring pass gave Cincinnati a late lead in a playoff game against Pittsburgh, and if teammate Jeremy Hill had not lost a fumble, the narrative surrounding McCarron might have been different. Buffalo signed him for about the same as Chicago paid for Chase Daniel, plus incentives.

6. Richard Sherman, San Francisco 49ers  
Deal: Three years, \$27.15 million

This is a heads-we-win, tails-you-lose deal for San Francisco. The team is protected if Sherman does not regain top form following the torn Achilles tendon he suffered in November, but if Sherman does flourish, the 49ers can lock in additional years at sub-market value. That's great for the team given how much money corners command.

San Francisco is getting a player who seems supremely motivated to prove his former team, Seattle, wrong for letting him go. Sherman's practice habits and knowledge of the 49ers' scheme make him an asset to younger players on a less-established defense.

7. Eric Ebron, Indianapolis Colts  
Deal: Two years, \$13 million

The Colts are getting a reasonably productive 24-year-old who did not miss a game last season and whose contract gives them two years of control without dead-money risks beyond this season. The \$6.5 million annual average for Ebron is less than the \$8.5 million he earned under his fifth-year option in Detroit last season, and less than what Trey Burton is getting in Chicago.

While Ebron has not lived up to his draft status as the 10th overall pick in 2014, the perception is exaggerated by the fact that so many other first-round picks from that class became stars. That context is irrelevant to the Colts. Their investment is smaller. Their opportunity cost is nil.

Low touchdown production could be a concern, though. Ebron's 11 touchdowns through four seasons ranks eighth among nine first-round tight ends selected in the 10 drafts from 2005 to 2014. The other numbers for Ebron -- 56 games, 186 receptions, 2,070 yards, 5.1 average yards after the catch and 7.3 percent drop rate -- line up with Vernon Davis' four-year numbers with San Francisco. Davis was also seen as overdrafted before maturing into a productive player. The Colts are making a medium-sized bet that Ebron can also emerge.

8. Tyrann Mathieu, Houston Texans  
Deal: One year, \$7 million

Mathieu did not accept a pay cut from Arizona; he took one from Houston on a prove-it deal. There's a chance Mathieu is just a decent slot corner at this point in his career, but there's also a chance he'll take another step forward in his second season back from injury. There's some risk for Houston in that the Texans already have multiple key players coming off injuries, but the upside for Mathieu justifies the investment.

9. Mike Wallace, Philadelphia Eagles  
Deal: One year, \$1.9 million

The Eagles traded Torrey Smith and arguably upgraded with Wallace, who has much better production over the past two seasons and should benefit from leaving Baltimore's stagnant offense. Wallace's annual salary is less than half what Cordarrelle Patterson is earning on the deal he signed with Oakland before the Patriots acquired him.

Over the past two seasons, Wallace has seven receptions on passes traveling at least 30 yards past the line of scrimmage, which is tied for 12th in the league with Doug Baldwin and Will Fuller. It is six more than Smith and Patterson, and only one fewer than Julio Jones and A.J. Green.

10. Russell Bodine, Buffalo Bills

Deal: Two years, \$5 million

Losing Eric Wood to injury retirement was tough for the Bills, but they rebounded with what could be good under-the-radar signing. Bodine has started 16 games in each of his first four seasons. He is 25 years old. And while there are certainly centers who are more talented, Buffalo is getting a young, dependable player at a position with importance that can be underrated.

# What if Broncos trade C.J. Anderson, draft a running back

By Troy Renck  
KMGH  
April 10, 2018

Driving south on I-25 this morning, the visual struck me.

The removed signage from Mile High Stadium leaves the structure looking barren, naked. Banners promote concerts -- Taylor Swift is dealing with "Reputation" issues it appears, and the Denver Outlaws own a championship legacy -- but the facility looks like an outfit screaming for accessories.

In many ways, it symbolizes the current state of the Broncos' offense.

It desperately needs an identity, a foundation to create a pathway to success. There's no easy way to put it: The Broncos offense the past two seasons was awful. Denver bottomed out a year ago, averaging 18.1 points, ranking 27th in the NFL. The Broncos scored 125 points in the first half last season, third worst. Is it any wonder they trailed nearly ever minute of their eight-game losing streak?

The only thing the Broncos did moderately well was run the ball, averaging 115.8 yards per game. C.J. Anderson produced his first 1,000-yard season, recovering from knee surgery to grind out a personal milestone in a forgettable team campaign. So the premise of this column is going to challenge the senses: What if the Broncos trade C.J. Anderson and draft a running back in the first three rounds?

Let me make clear that Anderson was not a problem. He provided bursts on days when hope remained faint. Yet, he is due \$4.5 million this season with no dead cap money if traded or released. It makes him vulnerable. According to multiple NFL sources, the Broncos had a verbal agreement in place to send Anderson to Miami for right tackle Ja'Wuan James before Miami surprisingly nixed the deal.

The sands have shifted since. The Broncos signed quarterback Case Keenum to a reasonable two-year contract with \$25 million guaranteed, leaving room to keep Anderson if the team sees fit. However, the idea of trading Anderson on draft day -- the team moved Kapri Bibbs to the 49ers a year ago -- remains a possibility depending on how the selections fall.

I can create an argument for keeping Anderson and complementing him with Devontae Booker, and De'Angelo Henderson. Booker is set to start if Anderson is moved, but has yet to prove he can remain productive over a full season. It represents a risk to go into the season without a versatile back (I thought that would be Jamaal Charles a year ago, but he was a ghost in uniform for reasons that will never make any sense).

Let's get to the point. The Broncos must consider adding playmakers, and running back represents a place to find help. My look at some options:

Saquon Barkley, Penn State: A scenario, unlikely two months ago, exists for Barkley to remain on the board when the Broncos select at No. 5. He is dynamic, strong, versatile and breathtaking. The notion he's a four-down back remains misguided. No team will use its starting running back on special teams

regularly, exposing him to injury. Give Barkley 12-to-15 carries a game with four catches, and it's hard to see the Broncos not improving. History suggests paying a running back big money is not a path to a championship, but it could help Denver regain credibility.

Sony Michel, Georgia: I saw roughly four of Michel's regular season games last season. I was intrigued. Then I watched the Rose Bowl against Oklahoma and was sold. He can make guys miss, and, while slippery, is strong enough to produce yards after contact (the knock against Booker). Michel in the second remains an intriguing proposition. There's no guarantee he will be there with growing buzz he goes late in the first round. And let's not forget the Broncos' success stories with Georgia running backs (Terrell Davis, Olandis Gary). Of course fellow SEC star Derrius Guice would provide a boost for the Broncos, but the LSU back figures to be snatched up in the top 15 picks.

Rashaad Penny, San Diego State: Penny led the nation in rushing last season. He is 5-foot-10, 224 pounds, a bullish physique that creates power and leverage. Most appealing about Penny, who visited the Broncos, is his ability to run routes, while showing good hands. In absence of a slot receiver emerging, the Broncos best bet in the passing game to augment Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders could be a running back in space. Penny is definitely on the radar.

Ronald Jones, USC: Jones is a proven runner in a big-time conference. He was USC's most reliable weapon last season. I like Jones. I would like him more if he showed more experience in the passing game.

Kalen Ballage, Arizona State: A local product from Falcon High School, Ballage is a tall, powerful back with surprising speed. Ballage, pictured, never operated as the feature back in college, sharing carries. Low mileage could help him in the NFL. Ballage represents a potential complementary piece given his soft hands in the passing game. The Broncos know him well after coaching him at the Senior Bowl.

Akrum Wadley, Iowa: Another player who showed well at The Senior Bowl. Wadley brings a solid resume of improvement each season and versatility. He projects at the next level if used correctly. Oregon's Royce Freeman is another player worth monitoring in this deep running back class.

This represents a draft to find a back. Even in the third round, quality should be on the board (Remember, the Chiefs drafted Kareem Hunt in third round last season and he led the league in rushing). If Barkley sits unwrapped at No. 5, I imagine it will be difficult for the Broncos to pass on that present.

# Wyoming QB Josh Allen visits with Broncos

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

April 10, 2018

With the 2018 NFL Draft just over two weeks away, the Broncos welcomed yet another top quarterback prospect to UHealth Training Center.

Former Wyoming star Josh Allen visited Denver on Monday as he became the latest quarterback to receive an opportunity to meet with Broncos coaches and executives.

The Broncos already hold some degree of familiarity with the 21-year-old prospect, as Head Coach Vance Joseph and his staff led the North Team in January's Senior Bowl.

Allen, who worked with Quarterbacks Coach Mike Sullivan and Offensive Coordinator Bill Musgrave, finished that game with 158 passing yards and two touchdowns in limited playing time.

During his two years as a starter at Wyoming, Allen completed more than 56 percent of his passes for 5,015 yards and 44 touchdowns.

Denver holds the fifth-overall pick in the 2018 NFL Draft, which begins April 26.

# Marquette King on release: 'I can be a zombie if you want me to'

By Jim Trotter

NFL.com

April 10, 2018

Punter Marquette King is entering his seventh NFL season. He has seen players come and go. He knows the NFL is a business as well as a game. But if he needed a reminder at how quickly life can come at you, he got it a day or two before his March 30 release from the Oakland Raiders, while binge-watching the final episodes of "Narcos," a Netflix drama chronicling the rise and fall of Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar.

"It's crazy how you can have something one day and it's taken from you the next," King said on Sunday, recalling what was on his mind when he was watching the show.

Less than 24 hours later, after King coated his breakfast French toast with butter and maple syrup, Raiders general manager Reggie McKenzie called to say the team would be releasing him that afternoon. The news stunned King, who had stopped by the training facility earlier that morning to visit the new coaching staff. He didn't want to show up empty-handed, so he brought a box of Snickers for head coach Jon Gruden and a bottle of limoncello for special teams coach Rich Bisaccia.

"They always say Gruden gets intense, and Bisaccia is Italian, so I just tried to find things that would be perfect for them," he said.

The coaching staff was out that day, so King headed to a friend's place before going out for a late breakfast. He was stopped on the way inside the restaurant by a fan, who praised him and expressed pride that King was representing Oakland. One of his first thoughts after receiving the call from McKenzie: "Oh, snap. My boy's about to delete the picture we just took."

King laughed after telling the story. He has a new team and a new city to call home after signing with the rival Denver Broncos last week. The shock is subsiding. But the disconnect was real in the moment.

"It was like you've been punched in that MMA game and you're in a daze, and if you get hit one more time, you'll get knocked out," King said. "That's what it felt like. I finished the meal, but everything was surreal. It's one of those things where, God forbid, but if somebody calls and says somebody has died that you're close to, there's nothing you can do in that moment. It's going to hit you a little later. But it definitely felt unreal."

King, who earned second-team All-Pro honors in 2016, was coming off a season in which he ranked fourth in the league with a net average of 42.7 yards per punt. The \$2.4 million salary King was due for 2018 factored into the Raiders' decision to cut ties, but so did the organization's belief that the punter needed to show greater maturity on and off the field by eliminating unsportsmanlike penalties, post-kick celebrations and social media postings that might be considered harmless to most but are viewed as unnecessary by teams.

"You can't judge me by what you see on TV or social media, and sadly, a lot of people do that," King said. "If those things were an issue, just sit down and tell me. I can be a zombie if you want me to. But everybody knows what they sign up for when they get into professional sports. You know there are going to be ups and downs, and you've got to be able to handle them regardless of the situation, with professionalism and a positive attitude.

"That's why I thanked Reggie McKenzie for the opportunity he gave me. I know I played well, so I wasn't stressing about what was to come. It would have been different if I had a bad year, but I had a good year and I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't break the law or do any domestic violence or hurt people or disrespect people. I'm looking forward to helping Denver, but I do have a huge chip on my shoulder. It's going to be fun to play the Raiders twice a year."

# Insurers ask for NFL concussion documents

By Daniel Kaplan  
Sports Business Journal  
April 10, 2018

Insurers suing the NFL over concussion claims want four former league-affiliated doctors, and one current one, to turn over documents allegedly in their possession that could show how much the league knew about the risks of playing football. This likely would make them the first individuals to be subject to discovery requests over the NFL's knowledge going back decades about the dangers of head injuries.

A New York state judge has scheduled a hearing for Tuesday morning requiring the NFL to answer why these five should not have to comply with the requested subpoenas. Thus far the NFL has ignored the requested subpoenas, precipitating the public court hearing, according to a court filing from the insurance companies.

"If this gets out to the public it would be a Pandora's box, it will be the NFL's worst nightmare coming true," said Michael Kaplen, a trial attorney specializing in traumatic brain injury, and who filed briefs several years ago opposing the NFL concussion settlement on behalf of the Brain Injury Association of America. "That's why they settled the case with the players to begin with because they didn't want to release this type of documentation."

The NFL last year settled thousands of head injury claims, an agreement worth likely upward of \$2 billion. The league is counting on insurance money to pay a large part of that amount.

The league and former players struck the deal without discovery into what the league knew about the dangers of head injuries. The insurers are suing, contending that if the league did know about the dangers, that would be fraud and invalidate their coverage contracts with the NFL.

The five doctors have served at various points over the last two decades on critical NFL medical committees. Because of that, the insurance companies wrote in a motion last month, they likely possess documents relevant to the claims.

Among the documents sought are all correspondence between the committees and players and the league. Pointedly, the insurers are looking for information from the mid 2000s when the NFL sought to discredit a medical journal article on chronic traumatic encephalopathy in football players from Dr. Bennet Omalu. The league at that time tried to get the journal *Neurosurgery* to revoke the article (the episode was featured in the movie "Concussion"). CTE has since been found in the brains of more than 100 deceased NFL players.

The editor of *Neurosurgery* at the time was Michael Apuzzo, who also advised NFL medical committees. He is one of the five the insurers want information from.

The insurers also are seeking all correspondences related to the deaths of former players Mike Webster, Justin Strzelczyk, Terry Long and Andre Waters, as well as the brain injury suffered by former running back Merril Hoge.

While most of the discovery request stretches back to the mid 2000s, the insurers also are seeking information about the NFL's alleged role in 2015 in pressuring the National Institutes of Health not to award funding to a doctor at Boston University who had been critical of the NFL.

The NFL and the lawyer for the insurers, Mark Hamilton of Kennedys CMK LLP, did not reply for comment.

The brain injury trial attorney, Kaplen, is dubious any of the discovery will occur, much less see the light of day.

"What the insurers are doing ... is they are inviting you, the press, to get hold of these discovery demands and trying to force the NFL's hand in reaching an agreement with them," he said. "There is no way in the world that the NFL wants this information out; that is why they paid an unlimited settlement to the players."

# 2018 NFL Draft mock trades: Top-five picks, Odell Beckham, Le'Veon Bell and much more

By R.J. White  
CBSSports.com  
April 10, 2018

It's April, which means it's NFL Draft season, when front-office smokescreens and an IV drip of mock drafts are the name of the game. We've already seen several trades this offseason that affect the first round, with two draft-pick swaps (Jets-Colts, Bills-Bengals) and the Patriots recently picking up another first-rounder by trading Brandin Cooks to the Rams.

Don't think for a second that those deals will be the end of the wheeling and dealing. With six potential first-round passers on the board and many teams needing a new franchise quarterback either now (Browns, Jets, Bills, Cardinals) or in the next 1-2 years (Giants, Broncos, Dolphins, Ravens, Chargers, Patriots, Saints, Steelers, Jaguars), the first half of the draft should see much more shakeup before the first round is over. And a run on quarterbacks would push other premier prospects further down than expected, allowing a team in the 20s that probably didn't imagine having access to the perfect prospect the ability to nab him with a relatively minor trade up.

There are also big-name NFL talents who could be dealt before, during or just after the draft. Odell Beckham's name has popped up in trade rumors. Earl Thomas has as well. Would you be that shocked if the Steelers shipped away Le'Veon Bell if they still haven't come to terms on a long-term deal by the deadline?

While it's impossible to say for certain what trades are going to go down between now and the end of the draft, we know for a fact that some trades will happen, some involving draft-pick swaps and some involving players. They always do. We're not going to be able to predict them all here, but what we will do is run through some trade scenarios that make some sense on both sides.

Hat tip to Rich Hill of Pats Pulpit for his legwork building a new trade value chart based off recent actual deals made by NFL teams.

QB trades in the top five

No. 2 pick

To Broncos for No. 5, No. 71 and 2019 first-rounder

The Broncos are loaded in this draft, with two picks each in the third, fourth and fifth rounds. If they're looking to move up for a specific quarterback and if they're willing to part with next year's first-rounder to do it, they can certainly find the right sweetener among their cache of 2018 picks to entice the Giants to take their offer. The Giants might not want to move too far down if they have their eye on a top non-QB prospect, so this trade would strike the perfect balance for them to still pick up a Saquon Barkley or Bradley Chubb.

To Bills for No. 12, No. 22 and 2019 first-rounder

If the Bills are going to make the jump all the way to No. 2, I think it's going to take three first-rounders. The Giants would be taking themselves out of range for the blue-chip prospects, and it's on Buffalo to make it worth their while. And you can see that type of deal appealing to the Bills, even at that high price; they land a top-two QB to build their franchise around and still have three more picks in the top 65 to put together an immediate playoff contender.

No. 4 pick

To Broncos for No. 5, No. 99 and No. 149

The Broncos know that other teams will be looking to trade up into the four-spot to draft a QB, so if they have their eye on a particular signal-caller, they're going to have to explore a trade similar to the one the Bears made to move up one spot for Mitch Trubisky. That took two threes and a four, and while this deal wouldn't be as steep, I still think it'll take three picks to get done. The Browns have no picks between No. 64 and No. 150 after their offseason moves; the Broncos have five picks during that stretch. If the Browns are angling to trade back into the first round from the early second, or to acquire future picks, having this package would give them more flexibility.

To Bills for No. 12, No. 96 and 2019 first-rounder

This obviously wouldn't be as big of a price as the one to move to No. 2, but you'd have to assume the Browns would insist on picking up an extra first-rounder next year to move out of the top 10. They have five picks in the first two rounds this year, and adding assets in next year's draft would help spread the wealth. Since the late third-round pick in both these offers is the same, these two offers boil down to the difference between getting No. 149 for a negligible move to No. 5 or a 2019 first for a move down to No. 12. I think I'd prefer the latter, but if the Browns become locked in to Chubb or Barkley at No. 4, the Broncos deal could work too.

No. 5 pick

To Bills along with No. 99 for No. 12 and No. 22

Of course, if the Broncos aren't actually committed to taking a quarterback with their pick, or they aren't happy with who is left over after three are off the board, they could conceivably look to move down with a team that does want that quarterback still available. Getting both the Bills' first-round picks would be a big ask, but if the Broncos kick in one of their many mid-round picks, the Bills should be willing to jump up for the right guy. With the Bills' two first-rounders, the Broncos would be in great position to add two of the following: a quality guard (Isaiah Wynn, Will Hernandez), a starting linebacker (Tremaine Edmunds, Leighton Vander Esch, Rashaan Evans), a second-tier QB (Lamar Jackson, Mason Rudolph) or a receiver (Calvin Ridley, Courtland Sutton, D.J. Moore).

To Cardinals for No. 15 and 2019 first-rounder

The Cardinals don't have quite the cache of the Bills, but if they're willing to put their 2019 first on the table to move up for a QB and if the Broncos aren't taking the QB that's available, the Cardinals might be able to pull off a move like this. Of course, the Cardinals have plenty of issues outside of quarterback to address as well, and in a tough division it might not be worth trading what could be a top-10 pick next year to select the guy three other QB-needy teams passed on. I think the Cardinals are more likely to trade down than up.

What's the deal?

Right now I'm leaning toward the Giants taking the Bills' offer of three first-round picks if the Browns take Sam Darnold No. 1. The Jason Pierre-Paul trade to me is a sign they're in rebuild mode, and an Odell Beckham trade would be the same. The Giants certainly need an heir for Eli Manning, but if it's not Darnold, I don't know that they'd be satisfied with someone else. Getting three first-rounders is huge, and they'd be in position next year to move up for a QB if they have two first-round picks at their disposal.

Stars on the move

Odell Beckham

To Browns for No. 33 and No. 35

The Browns of course have the most cap room in the league as well as three second-round picks. I doubt they'd move either of their first-rounders in a Beckham trade, but what about two near-firsts and a potential Beckham replacement for the Giants? If that's not enough, Josh Gordon is an X-factor who could be out of the league forever with another slip-up, but he at least gives the Giants a talented starter on a cheap salary. The Giants would also have the first three picks of the second round, giving them the ammo to move back into the first round if they want, or the ability to snag three potential Day 1 starters back-to-back-to-back for a playoff push while Eli Manning is still under center.

To Colts for No. 36 and No. 37

The Colts have extra ammo after their tradedown with the Jets; why not use some of it to go get one of the best receivers in the game? The Giants want two firsts for Beckham, but this might be as close as they're going to get, considering the acquiring team will then have to sign him to an enormous extension. That won't be a problem for the Colts, who have the second-most cap space in the league and plenty of ways to make more to accommodate a big Beckham deal in 2019 and beyond (five players are scheduled to make between \$4M and \$8M in 2019 yet would have no dead cap number if cut). If the Colts pair Beckham with T.Y. Hilton and a healthy Andrew Luck, and they can boost the defense with Bradley Chubb at No. 6, this is suddenly an interesting team. If this isn't enough, the Colts could think about bumping one of the picks up to a 2019 first-rounder, or throwing in another pick. One final point: the Colts acquired three second-rounders in the move from No. 3 to No. 6, a move that looked like a steal at that time. Even if the Colts had to pay three seconds to get Beckham, wouldn't you love them essentially turning No. 3 into No. 6 and a star receiver?

To Panthers for No. 24, 2019 second-rounder and DT Vernon Butler

The Panthers still have a major need at receiver, and even though a new Cam Newton contract is on the horizon, there should be plenty of room to pay top dollar for Beckham as well. The Giants don't get two firsts here, but they do land a recent first-round pick who could be developed as an eventual successor to Damon Harrison, along with one first and another quality pick in 2019. Would the Panthers be open to this type of franchise-altering move in an offseason where ownership is in flux? Probably a long shot, but with Gettleman's Carolina ties, one I'm not ruling out.

What's the deal?

I'd make Beckham a slight favorite to be dealt by the time the draft is over. While I'm not sure the Browns would pull the trigger on the above deal, the Colts put themselves in a great position to land the

game-changing receiver if two early seconds (plus maybe one other pick if needed) is enough. Beckham to the Colts, mark it down.

Earl Thomas

To Chargers for No. 48 and conditional 2019 fourth-rounder

A slow-developing safety market means the Seahawks likely won't be able to get as much as you'd think if they trade their All-Pro safety, but even though players like Tre Boston and Lardarius Webb are freely available and would cost nothing but money to add to a roster, Thomas's sheer talent could make him worth trading two picks to land and sign to a new deal. The Chargers have yet to find a replacement for Boston, and that No. 48 pick could be a good spot for them to target one. Or they can add a proven vet to what could be an elite defense in a trade like this.

To Cowboys for No. 50 and No. 116

The Cowboys have 10 picks in the draft, and Thomas would certainly put them atop his list as possible destinations once he becomes a free agent. Here, the Cowboys move their second-rounder for a guy who would immediately stabilize the back end of the defense.

To Panthers along with No. 146 for No. 55 and No. 85

This trade nets the Seahawks two Day 2 picks from the Panthers, who have two third-rounders but don't pick in the fourth round. Free safety could be a target of Carolina as early as the first round, but if they pass on the position there, a deal like this could make sense.

To Steelers along with No. 146 for No. 60 and 2019 second-rounder

This would address a massive need for the Steelers, but they'd have to do some work to fit Thomas's contract into their budget for 2018. If they can make the numbers add up, they could be the team most willing to part with two seconds in a deal for Thomas, provided they can land one of the Seahawks' numerous late-round picks in return.

What's the deal?

This time, I don't think there is one. The glacial safety market in free agency points to teams devaluing the position, for whatever reason. I don't think anyone is going to give the Seahawks what they expect to deal one of the best safeties in the league.

Le'Veon Bell

To Raiders along with No. 28 for No. 10

The Steelers are running out of time to sign Bell to an extension, but if it hasn't happened yet, why would it happen at all? If the two sides don't agree to a long-term deal by the draft, there's a case for using Bell as a chip to trade up in the first round and get in range for Lamar Jackson, Minkah Fitzpatrick or one of the top LBs. The Raiders are looking for a throwback type of offense and may be one team willing to pony up for an elite back. It'd likely take some restructuring of other players to fit Bell in (Kelechi Osemele? Rodney Hudson?), but if the front office can make it work, wouldn't Jon Gruden jump at the chance to add Bell to his offense? This one's a long shot, but file it under "stranger things have happened."

To Redskins along with No. 28 for No. 13

Another team that isn't in the best cap situation, especially for 2019, but one where adding a game-changing running back makes a lot of sense. Is an offense built around Alex Smith, Jamison Crowder, Josh Doctson and an always injured Jordan Reed really one that's going to have a lot of success? However, take the pressure off Smith with a blue-chip running back, and suddenly there's a pathway to putting up points. Washington could then take interior line help later in the first round.

To Colts for No. 37

The Steelers might be better off looking for a trade partner that has a ton of cap space and extra picks in the second round who might be a fit for Bell. The Colts check off all those boxes, with a barren RB depth chart, more than \$60 million in estimated cap space this year and next, and three picks in the second round (plus two more next year) after their deal with the Jets. If the Steelers can swing a pick in this range and pair it with No. 28, they could then move up in the early teens and be in much better position to land Lamar Jackson or a linebacker. Imagine if the Colts were able to add both Beckham and Bell while keeping No. 6 (it'd probably take the two early seconds and their 2019 first). If Luck is healthy ... yowza.

What's the deal?

While I see the sense in trading Bell, I'm not sure anyone is going to ultimately pay a premium price for a guy they know they'll have to overpay to keep, based on continuing reports of long-term negotiations with the Steelers over the last year-plus. No deal.

Dez Bryant

To Colts for conditional 2019 sixth-rounder

The Cowboys signed Allen Hurns recently and could very well use No. 19 overall on a receiver. If that's the case, there's a chance they'd look to move on from Dez's monster salary, and we've seen a little smoke this offseason about the team maybe cutting him. If the Cowboys do take a receiver early, a team with cap room like the Colts should look to swoop in with an offer of a late-rounder or a conditional pick next year, assuming they don't swing a trade for another big-name NFC East receiver first.

To Texans for conditional 2019 sixth-rounder

The Texans are a team without picks in the first and second round this year, but here's a way to add talent to a position with two great starters but not much depth behind them. Giving the team's electric young QB a receiving trio of DeAndre Hopkins, Will Fuller and Bryant would be pretty fun.

To Jets for conditional 2019 sixth-rounder

The Jets have the cap room for Bryant, but if they need more space this year, they could save \$5.55 million by parting ways with Jermaine Kearse. They have plenty of room in 2019 to keep him around as well. The team gave up the ability to add multiple potential starters this year and next by trading three second-rounders to the Colts, and this would be a way to find starting-caliber talent at a position of need.

What's the deal?

I'd love to see Dez to the Texans, but would Jerry Jones sign off on that deal? Mark me down for Dez to the Jets.

Jordan Howard

To Seahawks for No. 141

There's speculation the Bears could move on from Howard under their new offensive system, and while I wouldn't call a trade a foregone conclusion by any means, it doesn't hurt to identify a few potential suitors. It likely wouldn't take more than a Day 3 pick to land him, and Seattle has four picks in the fifth round from which to make a move.

To Redskins for No. 142

Washington has two picks in the fifth round. Howard could give the offense a nice 1-2 punch at running back with Chris Thompson.

To Raiders for No. 159 and No. 212

Jon Gruden wants to build a throwback offense, and landing a proven lead back like Howard on his cheap rookie deal could make some sense. The Raiders have three comp picks in the sixth round as well as six picks in all in Rounds 5 and 6, so they could be a rare team willing to offer two picks for the back if he's available.

What's the deal?

I like the Seahawks here, considering their stash of Day 3 picks. Howard pairs with C.J. Prosise to give the team a nice set of weapons at running back ... provided the line can do its job.

More possible first-round trades

Bucs jump for Barkley

No. 7, No. 102 and No. 202 to Broncos for No. 5

The Bucs are the team in Barkley range that probably needs him the most, but it's unlikely he makes it to No. 7. And the Jason Pierre-Paul trade leaves them a little light on mid-round picks to pull off a move up. But if the Broncos aren't committed to a QB at No. 5, maybe they'd be willing to take a couple picks for a small move down.

What's the deal?

I don't think it's happening. With the Bucs missing their third-rounder, I'd peg them more a move-down candidate than someone to move up. And they might get that chance, if four QBs go in the top six and leave one of Barkley, Bradley Chubb or Quenton Nelson available.

Bears go get Nelson

No. 8 and No. 39 to Broncos for No. 5 and No. 71

The Bears showed last year they'll move up for the right guy, and Nelson figures to be the perfect target for them this year. However, he'd make sense for all three teams picking fifth through seventh. With no

third-round pick in hand, the Bears might need to get a little creative to make something work, and here it involves a big drop back on Day 2.

No. 8 and No. 39 to Colts for No. 6 and No. 49

A similar deal to the one above, though not involving quite the drop. The Colts might be interested in a trade back if Barkley and Chubb are off the board along with three QBs, but in that case, they might want to auction their pick to the QB-needy teams and move down a little bit more.

No. 8 and No. 115 to the Buccaneers for No. 7

If Nelson gets to No. 7, the Bears should feel pretty good about landing him. But if they get nervous, the Bucs might be able to get a fourth-rounder out of them to swap picks. Considering Tampa Bay no longer has a third-round pick, that extra fourth could come in handy.

What's the deal?

None here. If the Bears are moving, it's probably down, taking a nice package from a QB chaser angling to get one of the top four arms if he slips out of the top five.

Dolphins chase a QB

No. 11 and No. 73 to Buccaneers for No. 7

If the teams in the top six are unwilling to trade down and miss out on a blue-chip prospect, it's possible we see a QB fall to No. 7 or beyond. Picture the top six going QB, QB, QB, Barkley, Nelson, Chubb. That leaves none of the big-three non-QBs on the board, but one of the four top-tier QBs available. The Bucs would be wise to trade their pick to the highest bidder. I ultimately think that would be the Bills, since they'd have been unable to move up before this point, but the Dolphins would also be in play for a QB. This is the highest I think they can get.

What's the deal?

This one is a little too far-fetched for me. If anyone is moving up from the teens for a QB, it's the Bills.

Bills get it done

No. 12 and No. 53 to Colts for No. 6

We looked earlier at what it would take the Bills to get to No. 2, No. 4 or No. 5. But if those teams balk at moving down, the Bills could still get lucky and see their preferred QB target slip out of the top five. If that happens, there's a good chance the Colts struck out on their preferred options, as the two non-QBs off the board would most likely be Bradley Chubb and Saquon Barkley. The Colts could then examine another trade down -- it's not like they don't need starting-caliber players up and down the depth chart. Outside of the top five, a deal becomes easier for the Bills to make from a matching value standpoint. If they also have to kick in a Day 3 pick this year or next to outbid another team, so be it.

No. 12 and No. 65 to Buccaneers for No. 7

A similar deal to the one above, but instead trading the Tyrod Taylor pick to move up for their guy.

No. 12 and No. 65 to Bears for No. 8 and No. 145

The Bears don't have a third-round pick, so getting one here could have some appeal if their preferred target isn't on the board.

No. 12 and No. 96 to 49ers for No. 9

The 49ers showed last year they're willing to move back, and adding No. 96 gives them ammo to move up in the second round as well. Using the pick in a trade could get them from No. 59 to around their original second-round pick of No. 43 (traded for Jimmy Garoppolo). If they use one of their earlier thirds instead, they might be able to move up to the top of the second round.

What's the deal?

I had the Bills trading up to No. 2 earlier, so these deals are moot in that scenario.

Ravens land a QB

No. 16 and No. 83 to Redskins for No. 13 and No. 142

CBS Sports NFL insider Jason La Canfora has reported the Ravens could be in the QB market this year, and they could be targeting Mason Rudolph at No. 16. But if four QBs go in the top five and none are the result of a trade up, it's possible the QB well will dry up before the Ravens are on the clock. If the Browns, Giants, Jets and Broncos all draft a QB early, the Bills and Cardinals could snap up Rudolph and Lamar Jackson in some order, shutting the Ravens out. If they see that scenario developing, they may look to get aggressive to get in front of the Cardinals, and it would take a deal like this to make it happen.

No. 16 and No. 118 to Packers for No. 14

A similar but simpler deal to the one above, with the Ravens hopping the Cardinals for a QB, likely Rudolph.

What's the deal?

If four QBs go in the top five and the Bills don't get one, I like the chances that the Packers deal above happens. It may anyway if the Ravens are locked in to Rudolph and are worried the Cardinals would take him over Jackson.

Seahawks shop around

No. 18 and No. 156 to Titans for No. 25, No. 89 and No. 125

This is a little bit of a change from the deals above, which involve a team moving up for a particular prospect. Here the Seahawks do what they can to move down and address the fact they have no picks on Day 2. This would give them a third, two fourths and three fifths instead of no thirds, one fourth and four fifths. They'd also be in position to make another trade down from No. 25 for additional picks. The Titans don't have many needs, but hopping up to this range could put them in play for a linebacker who might not be there at No. 25.

No. 18 and No. 168 to Steelers for No. 28 and No. 60

The Steelers have a huge need at linebacker but no guarantee that any of the top four prospects will make it to them. If they want to jump up for a particular linebacker, getting ahead of the Cowboys at No.

19 would be smart. Teams like the Bills, Patriots and Titans could also be eyeing linebackers in the 20s, and even if two of those are moving up, trade-down candidates like the Giants and Colts would also be in the market for the position.

No. 18 to Vikings for No. 30 and No. 62

The Vikings don't have many needs, so it stands to reason they'd be open to moving up for the right guy. I think that could be a guard like Isaiah Wynn or Will Hernandez, and getting ahead of the Lions and Bengals would be smart.

No. 18 to Browns for No. 33, No. 64 and No. 114

The Browns have already been active in the trade market, depleting some of the pick stash they had previously built up. If they're willing to deal a few more picks, or if they move down from No. 4 and add some more selections, it could make sense to swing this type of deal to go up and get a left tackle ahead of Cincinnati.

No. 18 to Colts for No. 36 and No. 49

Earlier we discussed how the Colts could use the picks attained in the Jets deal to add some premium veterans on the trade market. They could also engineer a deal like this to get an additional first-round pick, perhaps putting them in better range for a linebacker, a guard or a pass-rusher if they miss out on Chubb.

What's the deal?

I like the Seahawks to take the Titans deal and then angle for another move down out of the first round altogether. Perhaps they could get No. 36 and No. 67 from the Colts for No. 25 and No. 146. That would give the Seahawks No. 36, 67, 89 and 125 instead of No. 18, 146 and 156, and they'd still have No. 120, 141 and 168 along with two seventh-rounders. Seems like a worthy trade-off.