

Broncos release 2018 preseason schedule

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

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It will be as if Trevor Siemian never left.

And new Broncos' quarterback Case Keenum may feel like he's back practicing against the white-and-purple jerseys again.

The NFL announced its preseason schedules Wednesday and the Broncos open at hopefully-soon-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High against the Minnesota Vikings sometime between Thursday, Aug. 9 and Sunday, Aug. 12.

The game will be televised on KTVD-Channel 20, as all Broncos' preseason games will be in 2018. The Broncos have an agreement with 9NEWS to televise the club's preseason games locally for the eighth consecutive year. The entire Broncos' preseason schedule:

Minnesota Thursday-Sunday, Aug. 9-12 ... Denver
Chicago Thursday-Sunday, Aug. 16-19 ... Denver
Washington Thursday-Sunday, Aug. 23-26 ... Washington D.C.
Arizona Thursday, Aug. 30 ... Glendale, Ariz.

The exact date and times will be announced when the regular-season schedule is released in the next week or two.

Keenum was the Vikings' starting quarterback last season, leading the team to an 11-3 regular-season record and a Minnesota Miracle playoff win against New Orleans.

The Vikings opted not to bring Keenum back, though, allowing him to become a free agent. Instead, the Vikings signed free-agent Kirk Cousins away from Washington with a three-year, fully-guaranteed \$84 million contract.

The Broncos gave considerable thought to pursuing Cousins, before ultimately deciding to sign Keenum to a two-year, \$36 million contract. After signing Keenum, the Broncos traded away Siemian, their starting quarterback the past two years, to the Vikings.

As a backup, Siemian figures to play more against the Broncos in the preseason opener than Cousins will.

The guy to watch may be the Vikings' third-string quarterback: Kyle Slotter. He tore up the preseason for the Broncos as undrafted rookie last year. But Slotter was among the Broncos' final cuts and he wound up signing with the Vikings.

Other notes of interest regarding the Broncos' preseason schedule:

*The Broncos play a road game against the Arizona Cardinals during the regular season, yet play them on the road during the preseason.

Offsetting this is neither team is expected to play their top 30 non-specialist players in the fourth and final preseason game.

*It's unusual for the Broncos to play their third preseason game – deemed the most significant as most starters play close to a half – so far away in our nation's capital, especially with a quick turnaround trip to Arizona for game 4.

*The Broncos opened their previous two preseasons at Chicago against the Bears and former head coach John Fox. Each time, the game was a huge test in the Broncos' Great Quarterback Competition (which Siemian won each year).

There will be no such QB competition this year as even if the Broncos do take a quarterback with their No. 5 overall draft pick, Keenum will be the starter.

Last year, Bears' No. 2 overall draft pick Mitch Trubisky had a nice showcase debut against the Broncos in the preseason opener. This year, former Kansas City Chiefs' offensive coordinator Matt Nagy replaces Fox as head coach and Trubisky is his quarterback.

*If the Broncos again decide to practice two or three days against a team before playing them in the preseason, the Bears would be a good candidate.

The Broncos practiced against San Francisco the previous two years before playing in week 2 of the preseason and practiced against Houston before playing preseason games in 2014-15.

Denver Broncos preseason schedule for 2018 released

By Daniel Boniface

Denver Post

April 12, 2018

The Denver Broncos on Wednesday released their preseason schedule for the 2018 season, and quarterback Case Keenum is in for a quick reunion. The Broncos are set to open the preseason against the Minnesota Vikings, Keenum's former team, in the first week of preseason, Aug. 9-12.

Denver will also host the Chicago Bears in Week 2. They'll round out their exhibition schedule with games at Washington and Arizona.

Week 1: vs. Minnesota (Aug. 9-12)

Week 2: vs. Chicago (Aug. 16-19)

Week 3: at Washington (Aug. 23-26)

Week 4: at Arizona (Aug. 30)

Exact times and dates for the games will be announced at a later date.

The Broncos regular season opponents are already set for 2018, based on their regular season finish in 2017.

Denver will host the Houston Texans, Cleveland Browns, Pittsburgh Steelers, Los Angeles Rams and Seattle Seahawks in addition to AFC West foes. They will travel to the New York Jets, Baltimore Ravens, Cincinnati Bengals, Arizona Cardinals and San Francisco 49ers, in addition to their AFC West schedule.

Deep crop of running backs in draft drawing Broncos' interest

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 12, 2018

As the Denver Broncos moved through their early work in free agency they signed a quarterback, as expected.

They made some trades, as expected.

And they let several of their own free agents hit the open market to seek financially greener pastures elsewhere, as expected.

But perhaps the one surprise, at least judging from what was said in the weeks immediately following their 5-11 finish last season, is that running back C.J. Anderson remains on the roster. Even Anderson, who had his first career 1,000-yard rushing season in 2017, said he had questions about whether he was part of the Broncos' plan for 2018.

"We'll see ... I don't have any idea, that's a decision upstairs," had been his familiar refrain before he went into the offseason.

But as the Broncos begin their offseason conditioning program Monday and with the draft approaching, there is another bit of potential uncertainty on the way. That's because while much of the pre-draft buildup has centered on the quarterback class at the top of the board, it is also a year when the draft is flush with running backs.

So much so that many personnel executives in the league believe potential impact ball carriers can be found well into the draft's second day. That's not to say running back is a position of need for the Broncos; it's just at some point in the three-day draft, the "best player available" when the Broncos pick could well be a back because the group is so deep.

With Anderson and Devontae Booker atop the depth chart and a desire to see more from De'Angelo Henderson -- a sixth-round pick in the 2017 draft -- the Broncos can certainly stand pat. Coach Vance Joseph gave the indication standing pat would work just fine at last month's league meetings.

Asked about the potential for Booker to have a bigger role, Joseph said: "Obviously C.J. is still with us, so that will be a competition there. It won't be given to him. [Anderson] just rushed for 1,000 yards and he just stayed healthy for 16 weeks, so it won't be easy for Devontae."

But the runners in the draft could still impact things for the Broncos, especially since they have four picks among the top 99 in the draft. All eight of their picks are currently in the draft's first five rounds.

The intrigue could start with the Broncos' first pick -- No. 5 overall. If quarterbacks are among the first three or four players taken, the Broncos could have the chance to select from a group of players that

would include Penn State running back Saquon Barkley. Many teams consider Barkley and North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb the best players in the draft.

But there's plenty of running-back talent beyond Barkley. Georgia's combo of Sony Michel and Nick Chubb, along with LSU's Derrius Guice, USC's Ronald Jones II, San Diego State's Rashaad Penny and Auburn's Kerryon Johnson all have No. 1 back potential and could be selected before the second round is over.

Add players such as Oregon's Royce Freeman, Alabama's Bo Scarbrough and Tennessee's John Kelly, and the potential to find a primary running back is greater than it's been in recent years.

Whether the Broncos dive in will depend on how things fall on draft day or if potential trade talks include players like Anderson. There would have been quick interest in Anderson had the Broncos released him when free agency opened, but his salary could impact potential trade discussions.

At \$4.5 million, Anderson has the fourth-highest base salary at the position, in part because players like Ezekiel Elliott and Todd Gurley II are on their rookie contracts. But the Broncos are looking, as Penny was among their 30 on-site visits leading up to the draft. They were also one of the teams to formally meet with Barkley at the scouting combine in February.

President of football operations/general manager John Elway has routinely said he subscribes to taking the highest-graded player on the Broncos' draft board at the time each of their picks come around, no matter what the team needs. And they have taken players at positions that weren't at need positions in the past, including Shane Ray as a first-round pick when the team had Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware.

"We'll do whatever gives us the best guys to be Denver Broncos," Elway has said.

"I look at it where you kind of fill needs in free agency [but] in the draft you want really find those players you feel good about no matter where they play."

Mel Kiper Jr. still believes Broncos want quarterback

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 12, 2018

With just over two weeks until the NFL draft, ESPN's Todd McShay and Mel Kiper Jr. have each taken a swing at a three-round mock draft and Kiper still sees a quarterback in the Denver Broncos' future.

With four picks in the draft's first 100 selections -- all eight of the current Broncos' picks are in the first five rounds -- Kiper believes the Broncos could come away with Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield at No. 5.

Kiper then followed with LSU cornerback Donte Jackson, who is one of the fastest players in the draft, and Auburn guard Braden Smith in the second round. Clemson linebacker Dorian O'Daniel was Kiper's third-round pick for the Broncos.

In all four of Kiper's mock drafts to this point, he has had the Broncos using their first pick on a quarterback: USC's Sam Darnold in his first two mock drafts and Mayfield in the most recent two. With Connor McGovern in line to be the Broncos' starter at right guard as Ron Leary is expected to move back to left guard, Kiper sees Smith as a possible rookie starter there.

McShay had the Broncos, after signing quarterback Case Keenum to a two-year deal, looking defense to open the draft with Ohio State cornerback Denzel Ward Jr. as their first pick, followed by LSU wide receiver D.J. Chark, Nevada guard Austin Corbett and Kansas defensive end Dorance Armstrong.

Even as the Broncos traded Aqib Talib with the idea Bradley Roby would start at one cornerback spot and Chris Harris Jr. would start at the other as well as signing Tramaine Brock in free agency, Ward would still be in the mix to start from the moment he walked into the team's complex. In 2016, Ward played in a Buckeyes secondary that also included Marshon Lattimore and Gareon Conley; both were first-round picks in last year's draft.

Ward is the best cornerback prospect on the board given his footwork and elite speed, with the ability to play in the slot as a nickel cornerback as well as on the outside. His arrival would give the Broncos one of the deepest group of defensive backs in the league.

Chark, too, was one of the fastest players at the scouting combine -- he was officially timed at 4.34 in the 40 -- and would give the Broncos a speed threat to put on the field with Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. Armstrong was a defensive end for the Jayhawks, but might be looking at a move to outside linebacker in a 3-4 in the NFL.

At 6-foot-3½ inches tall and 257 pounds, Armstrong has the kind of reach Broncos coach Vance Joseph said he often looks for in a pass-rusher. Armstrong had 10 sacks as well as 20 tackles for loss in 2016, but had nine tackles for loss to go with 1.5 sacks in a 63-tackle season in 2017.

Five things you should know about the Broncos' preseason schedule

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
April 12, 2018

The final dates and times will be announced when the regular-season schedule is released later this month, but the Broncos' 2018 preseason opponents are set. They'll host the Vikings and Bears in Denver, then hit the road to face the Redskins and Cardinals. Here are five things you should know about their four-game slate.

1. The Broncos won't be dealing with a quarterback competition this year, but they will open their preseason with a quarterback reunion of sorts. Case Keenum is unlikely to play much, if at all, against his former team. But Trevor Siemian, the Broncos' former starter and now the backup in Minnesota behind Kirk Cousins, could see significant time in Denver.
2. The Week 1 game will be the Broncos' second preseason opener at home in the last 22 years. It will also be their 13th all-time meeting with the Vikings (Minnesota leads the series 7-5) and their first since 2010.
3. For the third consecutive year, the Broncos will face the Bears in the preseason. Denver leads the all-time preseason series 7-3. The Broncos' last two preseasons began in Chicago and were the first major showcases in their quarterback competitions. If there's a quarterback competition on the line in Week 2 of the preseason this year, it'll be a battle for the backup job.
4. The third preseason game, when the starters see the most playing time, will be in D.C. against a familiar face: former Chiefs starter and AFC West rival Alex Smith. It will also be a reunion for safety Su'a Cravens, who was traded to Denver after a sour ending to his tenure in Washington. The Broncos have played the Redskins six previous times in the preseason (last in 2004), and Washington has won five of those meetings.
5. For the 12th time in the last 14 years — and the 18th overall — the Broncos and Cardinals will play each other in their preseason finales. The fourth preseason game is the final tryout for players on the bubble and, in recent years, have put some players over the top. In the 2016 preseason finale in Arizona, undrafted receiver Jordan Taylor had 109 receiving yards and a pair of touchdowns to solidify his spot on the final 53.

Broncos' 2018 preseason schedule

Week 1: vs. Minnesota

Week 2: vs. Chicago

Week 3: at Washington

Week 4: at Arizona

Here's who the Broncos are going to be playing in the 2018 preseason

By Troy Renck

KMGH

April 12, 2018

The Denver Broncos will be taking on the Minnesota Vikings to begin the 2018 preseason, the team announced Wednesday afternoon, even as football season is more than four months away.

Kirk Cousins is coming to Denver after all. The quarterback, who Denver initially targeted in free agency, will start for the Vikings in Denver to lead off the preseason in Week 1.

The team will remain in the Mile High City as they face the Chicago Bears for Week 2.

You'll recall Denver beat Chicago 24-17 during Week 1 of the 2017 preseason.

The team will then travel to the East Coast for Week 3 to take on the Washington Redskins and will wrap up the preseason when they face the Arizona Cardinals in Week 4.

Week 3 is traditionally seen as a sort of "final dress rehearsal" before the regular season begins.

Broncos Insider Troy Renck said these are the tentative date ranges for the games. The final dates will be set at a later time.

Week 1: vs. Minnesota (Aug. 9-12)

Week 2: vs. Chicago (Aug. 16-19)

Week 3: at Washington (Aug. 23-26)

Week 4: at Arizona (Aug. 30)

Broncos' 2018 preseason schedule announced

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 12, 2018

Ready for some football?

The Broncos' 2018 season is still months away, but the initial slate of games was announced Wednesday as Denver released its opponents for its four-game preseason schedule.

Denver will host the Minnesota Vikings in Week 1 as quarterback Case Keenum's former team visits the Mile High City.

The Broncos will remain in Denver for Week 2 as they host the Chicago Bears. Denver defeated Chicago 24-17 during Week 1 of the 2017 preseason.

The Broncos then travel to the East Coast for a Week 3 date with the Washington Redskins. This week's contest, which is traditionally a final dress rehearsal for the regular season, will pit the Broncos against Washington's new quarterback, Alex Smith. Denver battled Smith twice a year over the past five seasons during his time with the Chiefs.

Denver wraps up its preseason schedule with a Week 4 game in Arizona against the Cardinals. The Broncos have competed against Arizona in 12 of the last 14 preseason finales.

The Week 1 game will take place between Aug. 9-12; Week 2's game will occur between Aug. 16-19; Denver will play Washington between Aug. 23-26; and the Broncos will finish the preseason on Aug. 30.

The specific dates of the first three preseason games will be announced when the regular-season schedule is released in the coming weeks.

NFL Network analysts weigh in on Broncos' fifth-pick 'dilemma'

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 12, 2018

When the Broncos are put on the clock on Thursday, April 26, John Elway will face a question that could shape the future of the franchise for the next decade.

To pick a quarterback or not to pick a quarterback?

NFL Network analysts Daniel Jeremiah and Bucky Brooks weighed in Wednesday on that question, which has been a central theme of the Broncos' offseason even after they added Case Keenum in free agency.

"Well, I think it comes down to your internal evaluation of what you have at the quarterback position," Jeremiah said. "If you think you can get Case Keenum to play at the level he played at last year ... if you believe he can sustain that level of play, then I believe you can address some other positions. That's just the challenge that you have inside that building, is where your comfort level is with him.

"There's an impact player they can get right there, that they can plug in, and if they get solid quarterback play, they're right back in the postseason next year."

Jeremiah added that if he were making the pick, it would "be tempting to me" to select a position player, particularly because the Broncos' options will be determined by the four picks ahead of them.

"At [No.] 5, they could very well miss out on three and potentially even all four of the top quarterbacks the way this could come off the board."

Brooks agreed with Jeremiah that the Broncos would be best suited to select a position player, and he said he believes they should use the pick to help their defense.

"I think where their roster currently rests, they need to get an impact player right now," Brooks said. "The defense is coming back to the pack in terms of their level of dominance, so ... you want to spark that up."

Brooks identified a pass rusher and cover corner as two potential needs for Denver.

With the addition of an impact player at one of those positions, the Broncos would be back in position to win in a fashion similar to the one they used to win Super Bowl 50, Brooks said.

"I don't know if it's imperative that they need to upgrade [the quarterback] position," Brooks said, "but I do know if they're going to play like that, they have to make sure that the other pieces of the puzzle are outstanding."

NFL releases Broncos preseason schedule; Case Keenum opens against former team

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

April 12, 2018

The NFL released the Broncos' preseason schedule on Wednesday. The regular-season schedule is expected to be announced later this month.

Preseason Week 1: Minnesota Vikings at Broncos — Aug. 9-12

New Broncos quarterback Case Keenum will take on his old team, the Vikings, and former Broncos QB Trevor Siemian will do the same as he wears purple with Minnesota.

Preseason Week 2: Chicago Bears at Broncos — Aug. 16-19

Preseason Week 3: Broncos at Washington Redskins — Aug. 23-26

Preseason Week 4: Broncos at Arizona Cardinals — Aug. 30

Regular season opponents

Home: Browns, Rams, Seahawks, Steelers, Texans, Chargers, Chiefs, Raiders

Road: Bengals, 49ers, Cardinals, Ravens, Jets, Chargers, Chiefs, Raiders

2018 NFL Draft: Here are three sleeper prospects who could be drafted in first round

By Jason La Canfora

CBSSports.com

April 12, 2018

We are nearing the pinnacle of mock draft madness.

NFL teams are busy meeting with prospects and dissecting this draft, position by position, and setting their boards. We are still two weeks away from anyone's name being called by commissioner Roger Goodell and are nestled in the calm before the storm. Not much is really happening but the draft frenzy never ends and while the true information about which teams are sold on which players hasn't even crystallized yet, the demand for daily mocks rages on.

The football people are still being largely quiet and not wanting to tip their hands too much one way or the other. And there are always -- every year -- a small handful of players who received almost no love or attention through the mock draft cycle who end up hearing their name called well before anyone projected. There are always a few players who were rated in the media as third or fourth round guys who end up going on Day 1, while other players fall.

It's inevitable and part of the process. Could be "late-rising" defensive backs like Deone Bucannon and Byron Jones in recent years, or a pass rusher like Bruce Irvin end up coveted by multiple teams in the back end of the first round after hearing for months he was going a round or two later. Sometimes the players have character risks or flaws that led to them being overlooked by the mock mafia, and sometimes these are players who frankly didn't get rated nearly highly enough by young and inexperienced area scouts, but whose tape jumps out to more grizzled position coaches and coordinators once they become more deeply involved in the evaluation process.

Whatever the reasons, it's an almost annual phenomenon and there are a few names that several of the evaluators I know the best and trust the most -- and who have steered me straight in years past in this regard -- have mentioned more than once as possibly fitting this description this time around. As these scouts begin to digest the consensus out there in the mock world, they find themselves asking why these players are not mentioned more frequently and they figure that by the time the draft actually starts these guys are gone higher than most are projecting.

Here are three such players who have popped up in my draft research thus far:

Frank Ragnow, C, Arkansas

I spoke to multiple evaluators who said they believe he is one of the 3-4 best offensive linemen in this entire draft and who believe he is a plug-and-play impact starter from Day One at center. He doesn't get mentioned nearly as much as Iowa's James Daniels -- a heck of a football player who I believe will go in round one -- or Ohio State's injured center Billy Price, but multiple people I trust believed emphatically that this is the best center in a nice crop of interior offensive linemen. "Best center in the draft for me," one scout told me. "Maybe it's the ankle injury or something [explaining the lack of hype], but this kid reminds me of Travis Frederick [Cowboys' stud center who was a 'surprise' first-round pick himself in 2013]." Strikes me that football guys are perfectly happy to not see his name appear in many mocks. He

has a great combination of size and power, strong leadership qualities and offers experience at guard as well. With teams like Seattle, Carolina, New England (if the Pats don't trade up for a quarterback) and Minnesota possibly investing first-round picks in their line and Ragnow having not allowed a sack in his college career playing in the SEC, I have a feeling he is gone in the first round.

Josh Sweat, DE, Florida State

Let's begin by all agreeing with the premise that it's almost impossible to get pass rushers anymore. Quality guys almost never hit free agency in their prime, getting to the quarterback is always at a premium, and there is precious little proven pass rushers in this draft. There are projections with all of them except for perhaps Bradley Chubb, who will be gone in the top six picks, and certain warts that teams will view differently. But the guys I talk to believe Sweat has more than enough to lure someone into taking him two weeks from Thursday. "He has the best first step in this draft for me," said one evaluator who has watched him closely. "I'd put Chubb ahead of him and [Marcus] Davenport, but Sweat is the third-best pass rusher in this draft. And he's got all the numbers you look for, too -- height, weight, speed, all of it. Those guys don't last long on draft day." The issue for Sweat is a medical, primarily, with a knee perhaps worrying some teams. "Maybe he's down because people are down on him because they had him playing five-technique at Florida State at 250 pounds, but that's not how I write him up. This kid will get it done in space. He's an edge guy. Put him at outside linebacker."

Orlando Brown, OT, Oklahoma

OK, this one's not exactly a sleeper. Everyone knows Brown by now and how he was considered the best left tackle in the nation at the start of the season and probably right up until his disastrous combine. And it was a disaster. And it will cost him millions ... I'm just not convinced its going to know him down to the mid-rounds as many would suggest. The kid is massive, his dad was an impact offensive lineman, and he played against some of the best competition in college and he dominated. Obviously, there are concerns, but in a draft this bereft of tackles -- and where the perceived top one, Notre Dame's Mike McGlinchey, is more solid than spectacular and some teams think he may have to play on the right side - there are really gonna be 100 kids taken before him? "He is the best left tackle in this draft and it's not even close," one scout told me. "Just watch the tape. Go back to the tape. He doesn't get beat. They can't get around him. Yeah, his 40 [yard dash] was horrible, but look at the first 10 yards. It's much better. What tackle is running more than 10 yards?" If I was doing a mock today I would be tempted to slot him 32nd to the Eagles (with Jason Peters nearing the end). Yeah, he might not ever get stronger and he wont be able to get by on size alone at the next level, and there is bust potential, but he's also 6-foot-7 and a first-team All American playing a premium position in a draft with almost no short things at left tackle. I don't think his slide will be as long as others seem to believe it will be.

How N.F.L. Teams Use Social Media to Promote, and Control, Cheerleaders

By Jessica Bennett
New York Times
April 12, 2018

“HOTTIE ALERT,” the Indianapolis Colts wrote on their official Instagram account for their cheerleading squad, below a photo of a string-bikini-clad cheerleader.

The post exemplified the peculiar nature of the jobs of N.F.L. cheerleaders: their social media activities are severely restricted — they often cannot disclose their affiliations with the teams, and they cannot associate with players in any capacity online — but the teams themselves aggressively market the women as sex objects.

How N.F.L. teams treat their cheerleaders has received intense scrutiny in recent weeks, since The New York Times reported that the former Saints cheerleader Bailey Davis was fired for violating a team social media policy. Dozens of current and former cheerleaders for teams in the top North American professional sports leagues have subsequently contacted The Times to share their complaints.

Here is a look at how teams promote images of cheerleaders on their official social media accounts while exerting restrictions on how individual cheerleaders use their own personal social media profiles.

The New York Times obtained a rule book for the Cincinnati Bengals’ cheerleading squad, known as the Ben-Gals, which advised the cheerleaders to “remain tasteful and representative of the organization.” What constitutes tasteful is not specified. The Ben-Gals did not respond to requests for comment on the social media policy. A spokesman for the Bengals has said the rule book has been revised. Below is an image the Bengals posted on their cheerleading team’s official Instagram account.

The Indianapolis Colts cheerleaders are allowed to have public profiles in which they can identify themselves as N.F.L. cheerleaders. But if they post photos of themselves in uniform, they must stick to official team events, according to Steve Campbell, the vice president of communications for the Colts.

“We ask that the cheerleaders present themselves in a professional manner online and on social media,” he said. “We ask them not to post any content that might reflect poorly upon themselves and the team.”

The cheerleaders’ official account is overseen by the squad and the director of cheerleading. A regular feature on the team’s official Instagram account is “cheerleader of the week,” in which the women are wearing bikinis in a photo shoot, as opposed to their uniforms, and generally features personal details, like where they are from and their education background.

They also feature the women’s birthdays, generally using photos of them in bikinis. In the post below, along with other birthday posts, the women are referred to with hashtags, but not tagged using their personal account handles.

While the rules among teams vary, nearly all N.F.L. teams exert tight control over cheerleaders' online activities. The teams say that their motive is to protect the cheerleaders from stalkers; many cheerleaders are skeptical of that claim.

When an institutional account — the N.F.L. team's Instagram account or the team's official cheerleading account, for example — posts a photo, the women are not tagged. That means the team is not pointing followers toward the women's accounts as a way to boost their personal pages. When an institutional account posts a photo of the football players, they are regularly tagged, helping the N.F.L. athletes promote their own brands.

Cheerleaders are generally identified only by first names, and occasionally last initials. Some squads require their cheerleaders to send friend requests to their directors for approval. Such restrictions are rarely, if ever, placed on football players.

Bradley Shear, founder of Digital Armour and a social media law expert who advises athletes, said that the disconnect between policies forced upon players and cheerleaders, both of whom are public-facing employees, can be problematic.

"If you're creating a policy, it can't be done in a vacuum," he said. "It's best to have a uniform policy across the board. If you have one set of rules for one set of forward-facing employees, and there's such a difference, there's a potential that it can be used in litigation as an example of unfair treatment."

By not tagging the cheerleaders, teams might argue that they are protecting the cheerleaders' privacy for safety reasons. But fans routinely tag the cheerleaders themselves.

"The threat of cyber stalking and other potential digital threats isn't a strong argument to defend a disparate social media policy, because anyone regardless of gender can be a target of online attacks," Mr. Shear said.

The cheerleading squads for the New England Patriots and the Dallas Cowboys allow the women to have public social media accounts and identify themselves as N.F.L. cheerleaders. But the teams' popular Instagram pages do not tag the women's individual accounts. So, frequently, fans find the cheerleaders' private accounts and tag them in the comments.

And the comments are often vulgar. A review of N.F.L. teams' social media accounts in recent days uncovered sexually explicit and lewd comments directed toward the women.

Mr. Campbell of the Colts said the team's cheerleaders account is monitored for offensive or inappropriate comments. There is no exact definition of what is crude and what is acceptable. If the team felt someone was being harassed online, deleting a comment is an option.

"The purpose of social media is for people to have their say, as long as they don't get out of hand," he said.

Case Keenum won't get sympathy in Denver, but he deserves it

By Jeff Diamond
Sporting News
April 12, 2018

It's difficult to feel sorry for a player who recently signed a two-year, \$36 million contract with \$25 million guaranteed. But come NFL Draft day two weeks hence, that might be how we'll feel about Case Keenum if John Elway selects Denver's future franchise quarterback.

Elway has always been enamored with big, strong-armed quarterbacks, so it's possible he will try to select one who fits that mold among Sam Darnold, Josh Rosen or Josh Allen. Elway could either trade up from Denver's No. 5 spot in the first round or sit tight and hope the QB he likes best will fall to him.

If Elway does indeed pick up one of the top-rated QBs on April 26, that would place Keenum in *deja-vu* land. Remember, after the Rams traded a boatload of picks and jumped up to the top spot in the 2016 NFL Draft for Jared Goff, Keenum eventually was bumped out of the starting role.

Keenum is much richer today with his Denver deal than he was in 2016, but it hardly seems fair that he should have to ponder the possibility of once again being the stopgap starter until a hotshot rookie is ready to play. Especially after leading the Vikings to the NFC title game last season; he was 12-4 as the starter, not including a victory in relief of Sam Bradford in Chicago, and ranked seventh in the league in QB rating (98.3) with 3,547 passing yards, a 67.6 percent completion rate, 22 TD passes and just seven interceptions. He was the NFC Offensive Player of the Month in November.

Nobody ever said life in the NFL is easy or fair, and Keenum knows that all too well after the Vikings chose free-agent kingpin Kirk Cousins over him. Despite his success and popularity in Minnesota while playing under a one-year, \$2 million contract last season, Keenum received lukewarm praise from Mike Zimmer in post-game press conferences. Then there was this zinger from the Vikings' head coach at the Combine: "Is he the guy when he was with Houston or the Rams, or is he the guy who played for us? Is it because he had a good team around him?"

Zimmer apparently knew Cousins would soon be boarding the Vikings ship, or perhaps he was still smarting from the loss to the Eagles with a Minneapolis Super Bowl berth on the line.

Regardless, with an assist from his former Texans coach Gary Kubiak (now the Broncos' senior personnel adviser), Keenum had become the apple of Elway's eye with his less expensive price tag compared to that of Cousins, thus attractive to a team with limited salary-cap room. Elway built up Keenum as the player the Broncos wanted all along over the rest of the free-agent crop. Was this revisionist history at work by the Broncos GM after he knew Cousins was priced too high and was headed north? We'll have a better idea about how much the Broncos love Keenum after we see what Elway does in the first round of the draft.

Meanwhile, an 800 percent raise is a nice consolation prize for Keenum after his former team looked elsewhere. It seems that only in the crazy world of sports contracts can a player cash in as Keenum did after one big year that ended with a disappointing playoff loss. In fact, if not for the Minneapolis Miracle

play that beat the Saints in the divisional playoffs, there would be more talk of an underwhelming postseason tarnishing his excellent regular season.

Give credit to Keenum's agent for an excellent negotiating job with a Denver contract that virtually ensures him one season as the starter. He then has \$7 million of his 2019 salary guaranteed, so he could be the Broncos' starter or an expensive backup in Year 2, but even if he's released, he'll be in great shape financially as he seeks a new team.

What will be extra challenging for Keenum is working with a less talented supporting cast than the one he had with the Vikings. So the onus is on Elway to find some help for a shaky offensive line that allowed 52 sacks last season (third worst in the league) and an aging receiving corps. Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders are 30 and 31, respectively, and coming off down seasons due in large part to poor quarterback play.

It's already an interesting quarterback room in the land where Elway and Peyton Manning set the standard while winning three Super Bowls between them. There's an enigma in 2016 first-rounder Paxton Lynch, whom Elway traded up to draft but has been a major disappointment. Chad Kelly, a talented college QB at Ole Miss who has fought through recent injuries, also is on the roster after being drafted in the seventh round last year.

By all accounts, Keenum is a great teammate who won't rock the boat no matter the outcome on draft day. But down deep, he's got to believe he has graduated from his days of keeping the seat warm until he is replaced by the proverbial future franchise quarterback.

And returning to clipboard-holding duties in Denver after leading Minnesota to a division title and one step from the Super Bowl would be hard to take.

AFC West Roster Reset: Chiefs' changes open up division race

By Chris Wesseling

NFL.com

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Before the new league year even began, the AFC West's reigning champions left the division wide open by starting over at quarterback and cutting ties with several big names on defense.

After years of settling for Alex Smith's seemingly limited ceiling, the Chiefs traded up to draft his replacement only to witness a career year from their veteran starter. Can Andy Reid continue his streak of playoff appearances with a raw but talented quarterback?

Should Patrick Mahomes stumble in his first season at the helm, the Chargers might finally reach their potential. With a loaded offense and few holes on defense, Los Angeles boasts the strongest roster in the division. The question is whether Anthony Lynn's team can avoid injuries to key players, stop blowing fourth-quarter leads and convert kicks with the game on the line.

If the Bolts are ascendant, John Elway's Broncos are the inverse. Toeing the fine line between contending and rebuilding, Denver is trying to avoid back-to-back losing seasons for the first time since 1972. To pull off that feat, the Broncos are going to need Case Keenum to represent a major upgrade on Trevor Siemian -- a prospect that would have seemed silly prior to Keenum's breakout 2017 season.

With Jon Gruden returning to the sidelines after a decade in the broadcast booth, the Raiders are the division's true wild card. Can Gruden resurrect Derek Carr's career while turning around a doormat defense?

FREE AGENCY NOTABLES

BIGGEST ADDITION: Case Keenum, quarterback.

Old Team: Minnesota Vikings. New Team: Denver Broncos.

New Chiefs receiver Sammy Watkins might offer the marquee name, but Keenum is the division's most important acquisition. Do the \$25 million in guarantees over two years mean Elway plans to bypass a quarterback in the draft, attempting instead to pull off the juggling act of fixing the ground attack, improving the offensive line and injecting much-needed youth on defense in one offseason? As esteemed as Elway has been over the past half-decade, his recent quarterback decisions -- the last-ditch attempt to keep Brock Osweiler from Houston, drafting Paxton Lynch to replace Peyton Manning, bypassing Keenum at a bargain rate last offseason and bringing Osweiler back for another go-round in 2017 -- have left the organization in a bind. Is Keenum the right man to pull Elway and the Broncos out of that tailspin?

BIGGEST LOSS: Alex Smith, quarterback.

Old Team: Kansas City Chiefs. New Team: Washington Redskins.

One of the league's most valuable quarterbacks in 2017, Smith led the NFL in TD-to-INT ratio (26:5), adjusted yards per pass attempt (8.6) and passer rating (104.7). After years of frustrating fans, coaches

and analysts with his penchant for throwing short of the sticks and leaving plays on the field, he blistered secondaries with big-time throws as one of the most lethal deep passers in the game. Second-year signal-caller Patrick Mahomes' golden arm offers a higher long-term upside on paper, but Smith's ability to avoid back-breaking mistakes, his mastery of Andy Reid's offense and his savvy pre-snap adjustments will be missed in 2018.

SLEEPER ADDITION: Marquette King, punter.
Old Team: Oakland Raiders. New Team: Denver Broncos.

Surprisingly jettisoned by Jon Gruden's Raiders after a series of Pro Bowl-caliber campaigns, King cited the "revenge factor" when he joined Oakland's long-running rivals. If Rams maestro Johnny Hekker is the most skilled punter of his generation, King boasts the biggest leg. Given a chance to boom kicks in the thin air of Denver's Sports Authority Field at Mile High, the Broncos' new punter has a chance to take down Sammy Baugh's nearly 80-year-old record for yards-per-punt average (51.4) in a single season.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Denver Broncos: What to do with the No. 5 overall draft pick? And what does that crucial choice say about the current state of the franchise? Will one of the top quarterbacks fall into Elway's lap? If so, will he decide to pass in favor of a potential stud such as Penn State running back Saquon Barkley, Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson or N.C. State pass rusher Bradley Chubb? This will be one of the most fateful decisions in Dallas later this month.

Kansas City Chiefs: The Chiefs pushed the reset button on defense, ditching big names such as Marcus Peters, Tamba Hali and Derrick Johnson. To this point in the offseason, the replacements have been underwhelming, necessitating an infusion via the draft in the secondary as well as the front seven.

Los Angeles Chargers: The Bolts did well to pick up Mike Pouncey in an effort to retool the offensive line. Now it's time to bolster the defensive line. As fearsome as Melvin Ingram and Joey Bosa might be, that pass-rushing tandem needs new hog mollies up front to occupy blockers and stuff the run.

Oakland Raiders: Gruden has acknowledged the porous defense as his top priority. That should mean a new contract for 2016 Defensive Player of the Year Khalil Mack, as well as reinforcements at all three levels of Paul Guenther's defense. Even if the Raiders get improvement from key young players such as Gareon Conley and Obi Melifonwu, they still need to hit on impact talent in the draft.

Kneeling issue arises during Bengals' meeting with Eric Reid

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
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Over the years, the Bengals have looked the other way on a variety of actual and alleged criminal activities when signing, drafting, and/or keeping players. When it comes to one specific type of conduct that is neither illegal nor a violation of any applicable rule or provision of the relationship between the NFL and its players, that could be where Bengals owner Mike Brown draws the line.

Per a source with knowledge of the situation, Brown personally met with Reid when Reid visited the Bengals on Monday. Brown, according to the source, initiated discussion regarding the issue of kneeling during the anthem. The conversation almost exclusively centered on the topic, with Brown explaining that he intends to prohibit it — and with Brown at one point asking Reid for his response.

Reid, caught off guard by the line of questioning, wasn't willing to make a commitment on the spot. Last month, Reid said he's currently not planning to kneel or otherwise demonstrate during the anthem. But Reid, who is considering other options for bringing attention to societal issues he considers to be important, hasn't made any final decisions, and he wasn't willing to do so at the direct request and behest of Brown.

After the meeting with Brown, Reid took a physical and spent time reviewing film with members of the coaching staff. He developed a clear sense that the coaches (specifically, defensive coordinator Teryl Austin) were interested in signing Reid and weren't concerned about whether he'd kneel or otherwise demonstrate during the anthem or at any other time. Late in the visit, however, coach Marvin Lewis asked Reid if he wants to clarify anything that Reid told ownership regarding the anthem. Reid said that he had no clarifications or changes to make to what he had said, and the visit ended not long after that without an offer being made to Reid.

Reached for comment by PFT regarding the alleged interactions between Brown and Reid, the Bengals provided the following statement: "The Club conducts many interviews with players throughout the year. The Club views these interviews as confidential and does not comment on them."