

Trade reports motivate C.J. Anderson entering Broncos offseason

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

April 16, 2018

Players report for the start of the offseason workout program Monday and C.J. Anderson is still a Denver Broncos running back.

Despite knowing he was on the trading block last month, Anderson will report for the Broncos' 8 a.m. team meeting and extensive physical exams on Monday.

"Just focus on me," Anderson said in an interview with 9NEWS. "Use it as motivation. But I'm going to focus on myself. I still have a job. Try to help my team win games. But at the end of the day, getting shopped around or rumors I was getting traded, I'm going to use it as motivation to show the organization I can still play at a high level."

It's not the usual circumstance for a running back coming off a 1,000-yard season who also rushed for 90 yards and a touchdown two years ago in Super Bowl 50.

Then again, it could have been worse. It can always be worse. Anderson hasn't been released a month after the start of free agency, as star receiver Dez Bryant was Friday by the Dallas Cowboys.

Bryant was let go in lieu of his \$12.5 million salary. Anderson was on the trading block in part because of his \$4.5 million salary but also because the Broncos want to create more playing time for Devontae Booker, De'Angelo Henderson and the running back they seem certain to select in the upcoming draft.

Miami and San Francisco showed the most interest in acquiring Anderson but no trade was executed.

Anderson understands he's not yet guaranteed to stay on the Broncos' roster for the 2018 season.

The Broncos have the No. 5 overall draft pick and Saquon Barkley is a possibility, if not a probability as the prevailing assumption is the Penn State running back will be taken within the first four selections.

The Broncos, though, have brought in several other running backs on pre-draft visits in recent days and this class is considered deep at that position.

"If they draft somebody who they feel can help their team win, they have every right," Anderson said. "I understand. I'm going into tomorrow, and the whole season thinking I can be traded at any time, at any moment. I'm going into this season thinking I can be cut at any moment. I'm going to use it as a motivation."

But can't that be said of every NFL player? That at any moment, they can be traded or released?

"I wouldn't say every player," Anderson said. "Not every player you heard was getting shopped around this offseason."

Clearly, Anderson has a chip on his shoulder. He's had one since he went undrafted out of Cal in 2013.

It's served him well. In the final eight games of the 2014 season, he combined for 1,057 yards and 10 touchdowns rushing and receiving to earn a Pro Bowl appearance. He had 1,176 yards rushing and receiving and seven rushing touchdowns in 2015 (counting the postseason).

He was on pace for nearly a 1,300-yard rushing/receiving season in 2016 when he was halted by a game 7 knee injury. He rushed for 1,007 yards on 4.1 yards per carry last season and added another 224 yards receiving on 28 catches.

Only now that chip has grown to the size of a boulder.

Anderson just turned 27 so he figures to have plenty of good football left in his powerful, tackle-breaking legs. But after Anderson made \$9 million the past two seasons, the Broncos may or may not want to pay him another \$4.5 million in 2018.

It figures that the longer he's a Bronco, the more likely he will stay a Bronco. But more will be known the night of Friday, April 27, when the Broncos complete the first three rounds of their draft.

By then, Anderson will have participated through the first two weeks of the Broncos' offseason conditioning program.

But can't that be said of every NFL player? That at any moment, they can be traded or released?

"I wouldn't say every player," Anderson said. "Not every player you heard was getting shopped around this offseason."

Clearly, Anderson has a chip on his shoulder. He's had one since he went undrafted out of Cal in 2013.

It's served him well. In the final eight games of the 2014 season, he combined for 1,057 yards and 10 touchdowns rushing and receiving to earn a Pro Bowl appearance. He had 1,176 yards rushing and receiving and seven rushing touchdowns in 2015 (counting the postseason).

He was on pace for nearly a 1,300-yard rushing/receiving season in 2016 when he was halted by a game 7 knee injury. He rushed for 1,007 yards on 4.1 yards per carry last season and added another 224 yards receiving on 28 catches.

Only now that chip has grown to the size of a boulder.

Anderson just turned 27 so he figures to have plenty of good football left in his powerful, tackle-breaking legs. But after Anderson made \$9 million the past two seasons, the Broncos may or may not want to pay him another \$4.5 million in 2018.

It figures that the longer he's a Bronco, the more likely he will stay a Bronco. But more will be known the night of Friday, April 27, when the Broncos complete the first three rounds of their draft. By then, Anderson will have participated through the first two weeks of the Broncos' offseason conditioning program.

Mason's Mailbag: Don't forget about Justin Simmons

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
April 16, 2018

You can tweet questions to me with the hashtag #AskMase or use the submission form to your right (if you're viewing on a standard browser) or at the bottom of the page if you're on the mobile site.

Should Su'a Cravens start over Justin Simmons so Simmons can back up and learn from Cravens on covering running backs and tight ends?

-- Taylor Rhodes

Simmons has more experience than Cravens and offers more speed and range than most starting safeties in the NFL. If anything, this is an opportunity for Cravens, with 11 games and three starts on his resume, to learn from Simmons, who has played in 26 games with 16 career starts.

As safety Darian Stewart said March 9, Simmons could be set to soar.

"I think he's going to be a Pro Bowler, man," Stewart said. "He has all the natural attributes to do that, man, and he's a smart football player. He's going into Year 3, he has me next to him helping him grow, he has great players around him, and the only way you can get there is having other players around you doing their job."

Hey Andrew, I love that the Broncos honored both Peyton Manning and Frank Tripucka with the retired No. 18 banner. But, I think it would look much better if it were, say, a "hologram" banner that showed Peyton's name from one angle, and Frank's from another, like the old trading cards. Thoughts?

-- Alan Benedict

I favor simplicity. Furthermore, I always thought the trading-card holograms looked murky and dull. I'll take the banner as is.

Much attention has gone to the QBs projected to go in the top of this year's draft, which the Broncos are reported to have met with including, Josh Allen and Sam Darnold. Have the Broncos been scouting lesser-known quarterbacks such as Texas Tech's Nic Shimonek who might also be viable options to develop behind Case Keenum?

-- Michael Sutherland

I'm sure they have scouted Shimonek and plenty of other quarterbacks, as well. Several hundred players are scouted and evaluated in each draft class, even at positions where there may not be an obvious need. It's that sort of work that allowed the Broncos to find undrafted contributors such as Chris Harris Jr. and C.J. Anderson, among others.

Why not get Kayvon Webster and Eric Decker signed before the draft so they can pick best available instead of reaching? Seems like it would be a no-brainer to bring back some valuable former players who would be awesome to have back! How much do you think they'll cost us? Is cap space a concerning factor? Thoughts?

-- Chris Frost

In regards to cap space, the Broncos went into Friday with \$10,694,385, according to the daily report posted by the NFL Players Association. A significant portion of that will be allocated to their draft picks, although with the offseason accounting that counts only the top 51 selections, there should be a bit of buffer.

They addressed the No. 3 cornerback position by signing Tramaine Brock, and they expect second-year cornerbacks such as Marcus Rios and Brendan Langley to develop. At wide receiver, second-year player Carlos Henderson and exclusive-rights free agent Jordan Taylor are expected to step forward and be part of the solution. The Broncos can supplement both areas the draft, but as of now, they feel they have players who a) have contributed as rotational contributors and b) have upside.

With what they have on the roster, the Broncos already feel like they have a squad that allows them to pick the best available player.

Case Keenum, in my opinion, will never get Denver to a Super Bowl unless we have a top-5 offensive line. Why is Elway not going all out on offensive linemen?

-- Rick Schermerhorn

Their top free-agent signee last year, Ron Leary, was an offensive lineman. So was their first-round pick. Then the Broncos traded for a proven veteran who can hold down right tackle in Jared Veldheer. Matt Paradis, a restricted free agent who is one of the game's best young centers, is expected back and will get a significant raise from his one-year tender.

It seems to me like they've actually put "all-out" resources into improving the offensive line in the last 13 months, especially considering that you can't put every dollar there, with sizable veteran contracts spread around the roster at other positions such as wide receiver, quarterback, defensive line, linebacker, cornerback, etc.

Six Ways To Draft Day: How First Half-Dozen Picks May Go

By Peter King

MMQB

April 16, 2018

The best thing reporters can do at T-minus 10 days to the NFL draft is listen to all the people they trust and know that much of what they're saying might be a best guess because so few people inside an organization (one, perhaps) truly know what that team is about to do in the draft. Do not be absolute about anything.

And maybe this is more along the lines of the closer you get to the draft, the more flaws everyone finds. But I can't find anyone in the NFL who thinks there's an Andrew Luck in this quarterback crop. That's why the top of this draft will be so hard to pick, and will be so overwrought and over-thought both before and after the first round. "I don't see Luck in this draft, and I don't see Carson Wentz, who I liked a lot coming into the draft," Saints coach Sean Payton said Saturday. He's in the market for a passer. "I'd feel a little bit uneasy if I were at the top of this draft and I decided I had to have a quarterback. The pressure to get a quarterback is so great in this league, I get that. But we can't create 'em. I wouldn't be surprised if only one of these guys is left standing in four or five years, and if so, I'd guess it would be Sam Darnold."

So here's what I think, a week and a half before Roger Goodell steps to the podium inside his best friend Jerry Jones's stadium in Arlington, Texas, and opens the 83rd draft by saying, "The Cleveland Browns are on the clock..."

CLEVELAND, PICKING FIRST

GM John Dorsey has to have made a decision by now, and my gut feeling is it's going to come down to a quarterback, Wyoming's Josh Allen or USC's Sam Darnold, with this pick. For the first three months of the college season, Dorsey scouted all players, knowing there was a good chance he'd be a GM in 2018. For the last four months, since being named the Cleveland GM, he's known he had to know everything about every quarterback because he was likely to pick one with the first overall pick. If he'd seen six Baker Mayfield games before taking the Cleveland job, don't you think he's seen every game of the top five quarterbacks, and at least privately has decided who he favors by now? Dorsey is one of the most thorough personnel people I've met in the business. I'm not saying he has written a name on the card Goodell will read yet, because I'm sure Dorsey wants to hear out smart offensive minds who may differ—namely coach Hue Jackson and offensive coordinator Todd Haley. I'm just saying I'd be surprised if deep down Dorsey didn't know who he is picking.

So put me down for Allen or Darnold here, at least as of this morning.

NEW YORK GIANTS, PICKING SECOND (OR TRADING)

I can't say with certainty, but I believe GM Dave Gettleman has looked at the five top quarterbacks in this draft and found flaws in each one. Now, he may love one quarterback, even if it's not a perfect one, and if he's there at two, who knows? But those who know Gettleman believe he would not use the second pick in a draft on a flawed player, particularly when he has a quarterback who is healthy and has won two Super Bowls—though Eli Manning has not played well in recent years—and a quarterback he

never got to see last year (rookie Davis Webb)—because of stupid Giants’ decision-making in the last month of a lost season. Gettleman has to look at this draft and think about two players:

- Penn State running back Saquon Barkley, the best back to come into the league in years. Think of Philly defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz, even with Star Wars weaponry all over his depth chart, trying to defend Barkley, wideouts Odell Beckham Jr., and Sterling Shepard and rising-star tight end Evan Engram, with a solid left tackle (Nate Solder) suddenly making Manning less vulnerable to a great pass-rush. Beckham is 25, Shepard 24, Engram 23, Barkley 21. That is pretty tempting.
- North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb, a relentless edge rusher who could step in day one and be a good bookend for Olivier Vernon on the Giants’ front. There aren’t many college edge rushers who can play the run well and the pass superbly, but this stat from his college career says he can do just that: He exceeded 20 tackles for loss and 10 sacks in each of his last two college seasons.

I truly don’t know what the Giants will do, particularly if they’ve got a bright prospect like Darnold staring at them when their 15 minutes start April 26. But I don’t see Gettleman passing on two surer things over a quarterback he’s not at all sure about. I also would be surprised if Gettleman trades the pick with two franchise players on the board, but if the Bills offer three ones to come up, he’s going to have to think about it. I doubt he’d do it, because of what he said at the combine: “You’re drafting [at two] what you think is gonna be a Hall of Fame player. So you can’t get too cute about the whole thing.”

One final piece of intel: Gettleman was the Carolina GM for five drafts, between 2013 and 2017. He never traded any of his five first-round picks. Only once did he trade one of his second-round picks, moving up 16 spots in the 2015 draft to snag wideout Devin Funchess. So there’s not much of a history there.

NEW YORK JETS, PICKING THIRD

A quarterback. My gut is Sam Darnold or Baker Mayfield, or the much-studied Josh Rosen. I’d probably lean toward Mayfield if he’s there, and he likely will be.

The one thing we know about this draft is at least two quarterbacks are going in the top three. After that, anyone’s guess.

CLEVELAND, PICKING FOURTH (OR TRADING)

I think they’d trade only for a ransom, like three ones from Buffalo (at 12) or Miami (at 11), and that’s unlikely. Dorsey went to the Gettleman school. Don’t trade a guy you project to be an annual All-Pro player (Chubb, Barkley or even North Dame guard Quenton Nelson) when you’re trying to build a great team. The one X-factor here: If Darnold survives the first three picks, one of those mega-trades might pop up. I wouldn’t do it if I were Dorsey, and I had the chance to get a player like Chubb here.

DENVER, PICKING FIFTH (OR TRADING)

I’m told a few things about GM John Elway’s draft-night preference:

1. He’s very unlikely to trade up.
2. He doesn’t think Bradley Chubb will be available here (nor do I), but he also views Quenton Nelson as a long-time great guard who could anchor his offensive line for years.

3. He hasn't given up on Paxton Lynch, and though there's a quarterback he likes a lot here (my guess is Mayfield or Darnold), having Case Keenum in the house for two years makes the drafting of a quarterback in this draft a lower priority. And if Elway picks one, Lynch would be the Rocky Mountain version of Christian Hackenberg—living on borrowed time.

4. Per Albert Breer, the Broncos are also smitten with two other ideas: trading down, or replacing Aqib Talib with Ohio State star cornerback Denzel Ward.

INDIANAPOLIS, PICKING SIXTH (OR TRADING)

The Colts are not likely to trade down to 11 or 12, because their floor sounds like it's a play-making linebacker like Roquan Smith or Tremaine Edmunds. No way GM Chris Ballard could count on one of them being there at 11 or 12. There's a chance, but it's very possible they both go in the top 10; San Francisco and Oakland, picking ninth and 10th, could take them in succession. Ballard could have his eye on Ward, which would be understandable; the Colts were last in the NFL last season in passing yards per play, allowing a gaudy 7.33. But the Colts will be very interesting to watch when they're on the clock. Ballard is the type of GM who has so many holes on his roster that he wants to be blown away.

Indy needs one of the top four quarterbacks to be there when it's on the clock, so Miami or Buffalo would be tempted to pay a premium for the pick. For the Colts to consider moving from six to 11 or 12, I'm guessing the price would be that pick plus another first-rounder, plus a mid-round pick this year or next. Buffalo, for instance, might offer 12 and 22 in the first round this year, plus a third or fourth next year. That might be worth the risk for the Colts.

TWO SIDES OF THE REUBEN FOSTER STORY

Sometimes your best draft choices are the picks you don't make.

The Saints were thinking that way last week, when San Francisco linebacker Reuben Foster—a target of New Orleans late in the 2017 first round—was charged with felony domestic violence. Authorities in California said Foster dragged his girlfriend by the hair, punched her in the head eight to 10 times, and punctured her ear drum. The 49ers are letting the legal system run its course, for now, but if the charges prove true, it's hard to imagine Foster stays on the roster of a franchise with a recent history of sordid acts by prominent players.

Saints coach Sean Payton told me Saturday he thinks New Orleans still would have chosen Wisconsin tackle Ryan Ramczyk with the 32nd overall pick last April, even if the 49ers hadn't jumped ahead of the Saints to grab the 31st overall pick, which was used on Foster. I was in the 49ers draft room last year, and the most dramatic point of the weekend was the Niners feeling they struck gold by stealing Foster from the Saints. Foster told the Niners—and later told me—that Payton was on the phone with Foster minutes before it was going to be the Saints' choice and said the Saints were going to pick Foster. Foster also said Payton asked to speak to Foster's girlfriend. According to Foster, Payton asked the girlfriend, "Are you going to be the guidance to be sure Reuben doesn't get into trouble?"

Payton confirmed that, and said periodically over the years he asked a prospective player's significant other if the Saints could count on her to help steer the player away from trouble.

“This was part of our fact-finding late in the round,” Payton said. “I hadn’t had a chance to meet his girlfriend during the pre-draft process, and we were still in the process of deciding. I think we were going to take Ramczyk anyway, but I wanted to talk to her about Reuben.”

Meanwhile, the Niners traded with Seattle to move to the 31st slot, picked Foster, and rejoiced at what they considered at the time was a big win for the franchise. Turns out it’s verging on being a huge loss for the franchise. But Payton had more of a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God-go-us feeling Saturday than a feeling of spiking the football in the end zone because Foster went elsewhere. “It’s tragic, and it’s sad,” Payton said. “I just feel awful when those things happen.”

Avoiding Foster turned out to be the stroke of great fortune that helped GM Mickey Loomis, assistant GM Jeff Ireland and Payton have the franchise’s best draft since 2006 (Reggie Bush, Roman Harper, Jahri Evans, Zach Strief, Marques Colston). Here’s how good it was:

- Cornerback Marshon Lattimore (first round, 11th overall) was Pro Football Focus’ ninth-rated corner as a rookie.
- Ramczyk (first round, 32nd) was PFF’s number four tackle, and top-rated rookie.
- Safety Marcus Williams (second round, 42nd) was PFF’s top-rated rookie safety, and 12th-rated overall. “We had him with a low first-round grade,” Payton said. “If we got him low in the first round, that would have been fine with us.”
- But when they took Williams, Payton figured the skill player he wanted badly, Tennessee running back Alvin Kamara, was gone. But when he was still available late in the second round, the Saints started working the phones, and dealt a 2018 second-round pick to the Niners to claim the 67th overall pick and the third pick in the third round. That netted Kamara, whose explosive burst helped overcome a slow start. Kamara was named the 2017 offensive rookie of the year.
- Nine picks after Kamara, the Saints used their own third-rounder to pick the poor man’s Foster, Florida weakside linebacker Alex Anzalone. They still have hopes for him to become a sideline-to-sideline playmaker, but Anzalone missed all but four games last season with an injury.

That’s the kind of draft that could keep the post-Drew Brees Saints strong contenders ... assuming they find a quarterback to be a solid heir to Brees. It’s far and away the best draft any team had in 2017, and it’s a reminder how important off-field homework is on draft weekend. Whereas Foster had a shaky past, Ramczyk had zero zits on his résumé and was steady from the first practice. The Saints had five picks among the first 76 overall, and surely they should have gotten two or three good players out of that haul. But five—if Anzalone pans out? That’s one of the best drafts in recent years.

Deep down, the Niners can justify the Foster pick as swinging and missing for a potential franchise linebacker. But the lesson for Lynch now, with the recent spate of rap-sheet Niners, is he’s got to pick Eagle Scouts. This franchise has erred with risky players once too often, and for a while, they’re going to have to pick totally clean players.

I’M HOSTING A BENEFIT WEDNESDAY NIGHT, AND YOU’RE INVITED
The bad news: It’ll cost you \$500.

The good news: It's for a great cause.

I'm on the board of New Jersey-based Write on Sports, which promotes writing, critical thinking and self-esteem in mostly at-risk middle-school students. The students are encouraged to become better writers by interviewing athletes and sports media people and writing stories about sports (which theoretically would interest them more than some other topics) in both after-school programs and in 11 summer camps.

Write on Sports is having a small dinner in a private room at the Yale Club in Manhattan on Wednesday night at 6. I'm hosting, along with Yale Club president Dev Gandhi, a fellow Write on Sports board member. Food will be good, wine better, and we're going to talk the draft, the upcoming NFL season, and anything else about football, sports and life you'd like to discuss. We've done this before, and it's really fun.

Tickets are limited. If you'd like to come, email Shannon@writeonsports.org today and procure your spot at a fun event Wednesday night. Questions? Ask me at talkback@themmqb.com. I know \$500 is steep, but this is going to be 2.5 hours of fun and grilling me. Please come.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

I

"I am highly frustrated and agitated. When you don't have a big name—I played two years, and I wasn't any good, and I couldn't stay healthy—if you don't have a Hall of Fame jacket it's hard to get a high-level job calling games in our industry."

—Mike Mayock, to SportsRadio 610 in Houston, on his feelings about not being considered for NFL game analyst jobs.

II

"I do believe there is another frontier for me beyond television."

—Troy Aikman, to The Doomsday Podcast, hosted by Ed Werder and Matt Mosley.

Aikman, the former quarterback turned Fox analyst, is covering the draft for Fox for the first time, analyzing the quarterbacks. He went to pro days for Darnold and Allen, and said on the podcast that experience has amplified his continued interest in potentially running an NFL team in the future.

III

"My dearest Darcy, I can't tell you how much joy and pride I have in the way you are living. There's not a day that goes by that I'm not proud of you."

—Leroy Haughan, the father of Humboldt Broncos coach Darcy Haughan, telling SI's Greg Bishop what he said to his son the night before the crash that took his life, and the lives of 15 others with the team. How happy Leroy Haughan must be that he was able to tell his son something so important before he died.

IV

“I have my thoughts about it, because I was out there putting my blood, sweat and tears on the field that night, and one of our best players wasn’t on the field. To tell you the truth, I don’t know why. I did ask, but I didn’t get any answers.”

—Former Patriots wide receiver Danny Amendola, now a Dolphin, to Mike Reiss of ESPN.com, on the absence of Malcolm Butler in the 41-33 Super Bowl loss to Philadelphia.

Can a player come closer than Amendola just did to saying, “What the hell was Bill Belichick doing that night?” I don’t think so.

TEN THINGS I THINK I THINK

1. I think the 2018 regular-season schedule is not done—it always comes down to a tight close the week before the draft—but my guess is the league would like to have it released late this week. My money’s on Thursday. Part of the reason for that is the NFL doesn’t want the schedule release to conflict with the draft next week, so they’ll work hard to get it done this week and maximize the spotlight on the schedule.

2. I think there are not a lot of bipartisan things our elected officials can agree on, but this should be one of them: honoring former New Orleans Saint and current ALS spokesman and beacon Steve Gleason with the United States Congressional Gold Medal. Democratic senators from Gleason’s home state of Washington and Republican senators from his adopted state of Louisiana co-sponsored the legislation, which must be approved by two-thirds of both the Senate and the House of Representatives to become law. Gleason, who is wheelchair-bound and communicates by using his eye with a special computer program, would be the 107th individual so honored by the House and Senate over the past century. Previous winners include the Dalai Lama, Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, Nelson Mandela, Colin Powell, Jesse Owens, John Wayne, Walt Disney, Jonas Salk, Thomas Edison and Charles Lindbergh. I talked to Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy about the Gleason nomination, which the senator made clear is more for his post-football work to help find a cure for ALS than for his football life, and making the crucial play—a blocked punt—in the first game the Saints played in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina nearly ruined the city.

MMQB: Why Steve Gleason?

Cassidy: “When you meet Steve, you expect that you are going to feel sorry for him. Inspirational is overused, but it is exactly the right word for him. You walk away from him thinking, I need to do something more to help people with my life. His biggest legacy in life will not be blocking that punt in that first game back in the Superdome. His biggest legacy will be his selflessness and work against all odds in trying to cure ALS for people all over the world. We are dealing with legislators on both sides of the aisle, and with the NFL, Microsoft (makers of his communication software), the ALS community and the disability community to try to make this happen.”

MMQB: Why now?

Cassidy: “I am a firm believer that we need beacons of hope in this country. We need heroes. In the midst of the opioid epidemic and of an economy that has not benefited everyone, we need to show people that things can get better. In the midst of a struggle, things can get better. We want to recognize

someone who is iconic and almost catalytic is trying to understand and help a difficult situation. If we as a country are going to have empathy for those who are disabled, let's show them someone who lives and breathes trying to find a solution to a major problem in our country."

MMQB: Here's a special-teams player who made an iconic play, and was recognized by the Saints with a statue outside the Superdome. And you nominated him more for his will to fight this disability.

Cassidy: "What is Steve's motto? 'No White Flags,' right? We can use a little bit more of that attitude in our country right now. Steve can help us all see people with disabilities in a different and more hopeful light."

3. I think, though his forte was the horses, Bill Nack, who died of cancer last week, could write anything with the best sportswriters of all time. Nack knew the horses so well I could have sworn he was on a first-name basis with Secretariat, perhaps the greatest thoroughbred of all time. Just read the first two paragraphs of his epic tribute to the fallen horse when he died at a Kentucky horse farm in 1989:

Just before noon the horse was led haltingly into a van next to the stallion barn, and there a concentrated barbiturate was injected into his jugular. Forty-five seconds later there was a crash as the stallion collapsed. His body was trucked immediately to Lexington, Ky., where Dr. Thomas Swerczek, a professor of veterinary science at the University of Kentucky, performed the necropsy. All of the horse's vital organs were normal in size except for the heart.

"We were all shocked," Swerczek said. "I've seen and done thousands of autopsies on horses, and nothing I'd ever seen compared to it. The heart of the average horse weighs about nine pounds. This was almost twice the average size, and a third larger than any equine heart I'd ever seen. And it wasn't pathologically enlarged. All the chambers and the valves were normal. It was just larger. I think it told us why he was able to do what he did."

Nack's famous story is one of the greatest in the history of the magazine. Such a normal guy. You'd never know he was revered like few others in the history of our industry. The megastars loved him and felt fortunate to be in his presence. The youngsters and new writers learned how to act when you get to the top of the business—because Nack never big-timed them. The writing world will miss him.

4. I think I think the greatest sight of the week was Ryan Shazier exiting a golf cart without assistance Saturday on the field at the Ohio State spring game, standing without holding on to anything, and waving to an appreciative crowd. His recovery from a spinal injury, clearly, is going well. "It's a good feeling to be on the field, but it hurts for a second," he told Steelers.com. "I was talking to a good friend of mine on the phone and sometimes when you are at the games, or in the moment, it kind of hurts dealing with my situation." Understandable. But it doesn't stop him, not for a moment.

5. I think the draft in Texas will have one particularly distinctive feature, which NFL director of special events Peter O'Reilly described for our Tim Rohan: "We're taking a page from the political convention playbook, if you will, of creating team delegations, which we're calling 'The Inner Circle.' So on the floor of the field of the draft, right in front of the stage, each team will have a delegation of 50 fans who will represent them. You'll see them quite a bit during the draft coverage." That's an interesting concept. But I would wonder this: What do you do with the Rams delegation, which won't have a pick on Thursday night, and won't pick Friday night till late in the third round? Or Houston, which goes pick-less

in rounds one and two? And the other team, Kansas City, with no picks in round one? Bring some coffee for them.

6. I think I can't find a likely spot for Josh Rosen in the top six. Not saying there won't be one—at all. The Jets could pick Rosen, and the Bills or Dolphins could trade up to do so. I just can't find it right now.

7. I think, in light of the news that there's been a roadblock toward disbursements of funds for players who qualify for money from the NFL's \$1-billion head-injury settlement fund, the judge and if needed, Roger Goodell, need to intervene immediately and get the money flowing—to the people and estates who clearly qualify.

8. I think, not to be pitiless to Mark Sanchez, but I don't have any sympathy or empathy for someone who tests positive for a substance that is on the banned list. Sanchez, surprisingly, was suspended for the first four games of the 2018 season. (He is now a Bears backup quarterback.) There's only one way to have a rule and that is to suspend anyone who tests positive for performance-enhancer.

9. I think, after reading this story by Juliet Macur and John Branch of the New York Times about the abuse cheerleaders face in stadiums and in crowds and at appearances, I'd recommend three things:

a. Every time a cheerleader ventures out beyond secure boundaries like stadium sidelines, she should have some form of security official with her. Sending cheerleaders, for instance, to sell their cheerleader calendars out in parking lots or outside stadiums is a recipe for disaster. Sending cheerleaders to take photos with potentially inebriated fans is even worse.

b. Follow the idea of six NFL teams, such as the Giants and Steelers: Don't have cheerleaders. I never go to a game in Pittsburgh and hear anyone say: "I wish we had scantily clad women on our sidelines yelling things no one can hear."

c. Or do what the Packers do: Have college cheerleading squads—traditional cheerleaders from local schools—cheer at the games.

Truly: I've never heard fans say that cheerleaders make a significant difference in the fan experience at a game.

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

a. Editorial of the Week: by an old friend, editorial page editor Dave Krieger of the Boulder Daily Camera, on the dire straits a Boulder institution is in—and this paper is not alone.

b. Newspapers are important, folks. We need to help save them.

c. TV Story of the Week: from Fox 2 in Detroit, a ridiculous and pathetic example of where a part of our society is.

d. I agree with the sheriff: "It is just absurd that this happened."

e. Happy 48th birthday to the first overall pick in the 1992 draft, defensive tackle Steve Emtman.

f. This would have been the 30th birthday of Joe McKnight, had he not been senselessly murdered in what appeared to be a road-rage incident. What a shame.

g. Coffeenerdness: Many questions about the ridiculous arrest of two African-American men in Philadelphia for the crime of waiting for a friend while not buying anything in a Starbucks. Is that really something that requires the police to be called? And to be arrested and held for eight hours for waiting for a friend in a coffee shop? No wonder so many people are so angry in this country.

h. Beernerdness: I've been a little down on IPAs recently, because I think one IPA tries to out-hop the next one. But last week, in the midst of my Sober April (okay, I broke it for this) the staff at The MMQB tried a bunch of Dallas beers—had no idea there were 96,000 of them—for a special NFL draft story on beers of Dallas. The best: Mosaic IPA from Community Beer Company of Dallas. Tremendous sharp flavor, with very slight citrus notes, and a nose to die for. Thanks, Community. The Mosaic IPA is a gem. (A couple pictures of the tasting [here](#) and [here](#).)

i. Crazy enough that my team is 13-2. But look how down is up in MLB through Sunday night:

Boston 13-2

Mets 12-2

LA Angels of Anaheim 13-3

Pittsburgh 11-4

Arizona 11-4

j. Sure, I can see a Mickey Callaway-Alex Cora World Series.

THE ADIEU HAIKU

My fair draft warning:

Believe 1 in 50 things

You hear in next week.

Fox says better games, ad placement for 'TNF'

By John Ourand
Sports Business Journal
April 16, 2018

Fox Sports is telling advertisers to expect a stronger "Thursday Night Football" schedule and more impactful ad placements for its NFL games this fall.

The network kicked off its NFL sales campaign last week with an exclusive advertising dinner at the upscale Italian restaurant Del Posto in the Chelsea area of New York. About 50 ad buyers from top agencies Publicis Media, OMD, Carat and others, sat at round tables adorned with white tablecloths and centerpieces made up of the NFL's official Wilson footballs.

The main theme to come out of Fox's presentation is that NFL games are the most popular programming on television and that Fox will carry more NFL games than any other network this fall. Fox will have 38 NFL game windows this season between its Thursday and Sunday schedule, and network executives projected that it will account for more than 40 percent of all NFL game viewing during the season.

The sales process is a particularly important one for Fox, which in February committed more than \$650 million annually over five years for the rights to "Thursday Night Football," plus other events including the NFL draft. That was a strikingly aggressive bid, as previous "Thursday Night Football" rights holders, CBS Sports and NBC Sports, have said they lost money on their deal, when they paid a combined \$450 million per year.

"Thursday Night Football" has been the focus of complaints by fans and players who say the quality of the games on a short week of practice pales to what they see on Sundays.

Fox executives believe the NFL is making moves to change that perception. The most noticeable of those changes should come from the strength of the "Thursday Night Football" schedule, which is expected to be released later this month. Fox executives have told NFL schedule makers that it would like to see high-quality games that normally would have anchored Fox's late Sunday afternoon window to move to Thursday night. The goal is to have the games rival "Sunday Night Football" in terms of quality.

"We committed to the NFL that we are happy to have any of the top games from our NFC package show up on Thursday Night," Eric Shanks, Fox Sports president, chief operating officer and executive producer, told the crowd.

The NFL will relax rules from previous seasons that had Thursday night games made up of teams that came from the same time zone, which means, for example, the Cowboys could play their interdivision rivals, the Eagles, Giants or Redskins, on "Thursday Night Football" this year.

Still, the league has rules in place that make scheduling Thursday nights more difficult. Thursday night rules mandate that teams will not have to play on a short week more than once a season. It's possible that the same team could play on consecutive Thursday nights, like the past couple of seasons when the Cowboys have played on Thanksgiving and the following Thursday.

“The NFC package on Sunday is the best package in football by far,” said Tom McGovern, president of Optimum Sports, who attended the dinner. “If you want to pick games for Thursday night, you want to pick them from that package. Having a cooperative partner on the NFC package opens up greater opportunity.”

Fox Sports’ top executives attended the event, including Shanks; Joe Marchese, president of advertising revenue; John Entz, president of production; and Mike Mulvihill, executive vice president of research, league operations and strategy.

During his talk, Shanks also spoke about Fox’s plan to give advertisers better placements for their messages during the game broadcasts. Shanks was short on specifics, but he used last year as an example, when the NFL implemented a new format that virtually eliminated the extra-point-commercial-kickoff-commercial rotation. Two years ago, NFL broadcasters had 503 of those “double ups.” Last year, that number was down to 46.

“We’re working with the NFL to do things this year with Thursday night that are going to be able to get brands closer to the game,” Shanks said. “That’s actually going to make the pace feel even better — feel like there’s fewer interruptions.”

Shanks also hyped its pregame show, which will be produced from New York with Terry Bradshaw, Howie Long and Michael Strahan. Long, Strahan and sideline reporter Erin Andrews attended the dinner and participated in a panel that showed why Strahan, in particular, is so important to the pregame show. Fox Sports had a 2-minute sizzle reel that it planned to show at the beginning of the event. When it failed to run — marred by technical malfunctions — Strahan made light of the situation and seamlessly started the panel session.

“Fox has a very special talent in the pregame show,” McGovern said. “How Strahan carried that room in a time of near crisis was impressive. He is a special television talent.”

49ers: Foster to miss offseason program for legal issues

By Josh Dubow
Associated Press
April 16, 2018

San Francisco 49ers linebacker Reuben Foster won't participate in the offseason program while he tends to legal matters related to his domestic violence charges.

The 49ers said in a joint statement Sunday from owner Jed York, coach Mike Shanahan and general manager John Lynch that Foster's future with the team will be "determined by the information revealed during the legal process." San Francisco begins its offseason program Monday.

Foster was charged Thursday with felony domestic violence after being accused of dragging his girlfriend and punching her in the head, leaving her with a ruptured eardrum, authorities said.

Prosecutors said the 24-year-old Foster attacked his girlfriend in February at their Los Gatos home, leaving her bruised and with an injured eardrum.

The 28-year-old woman told responding officers that Foster dragged her by her hair, physically threw her out of the house, and punched her in the head eight to 10 times.

Foster was also charged with felony possession of an assault weapon and misdemeanor possession of a high-capacity magazine after officers found a Sig Sauer 516 short-barreled rifle in his home while investigating his girlfriend's domestic violence report.

If convicted on all charges, He faces up to 11 years in prison.

The 49ers drafted Foster 31st overall last year after questions about his health and character caused him to drop from being a possible top 10 pick.

Foster delivered on the field, ranking second on the team with 72 tackles in 10 games as a rookie and looking like a key part of San Francisco's defensive future.

Foster then was charged in January in Alabama with second-degree marijuana possession before the incident in February that led to the most recent charges.

The NFL has said it is looking into possible discipline for Foster for both infractions.

C.J. Anderson using trade talk as motivation

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
April 16, 2018

Broncos running back C.J. Anderson heard the reports about the team floating his name in trade talks this offseason, but nothing materialized and he's starting offseason work in Denver on Monday.

Anderson told Mike Klis of KUSA that he's moving forward with the knowledge that he "can be traded at any time" but isn't using that as fuel for anxiety. Anderson says he's using it as fuel for the season to come instead.

"Just focus on me," Anderson said. "Use it as motivation. But I'm going to focus on myself. I still have a job. Try to help my team win games. But at the end of the day, getting shopped around or rumors I was getting traded, I'm going to use it as motivation to show the organization I can still play at a high level."

The chance that Anderson leaves the team will likely improve if the Broncos take a running back in the early portion of the draft. Parting ways with Anderson, who ran 245 times for 1,007 yards last season, would clear \$4.5 million under the salary cap.

Sean Payton: No QB prospects as good as Luck or Wentz in this draft

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

April 16, 2018

The Saints own the 27th overall pick in this year's NFL draft, which means they won't be taking one of the top quarterbacks, which frees coach Sean Payton to speak honestly about those prospects. And Payton isn't overly impressed.

Payton told Peter King of SI.com that he doesn't view any of these quarterbacks as the same kind of top-notch prospects that he thought Andrew Luck was heading into the 2012 draft, and Carson Wentz was heading into the 2016 draft.

"I don't see Luck in this draft, and I don't see Carson Wentz, who I liked a lot coming into the draft," Payton said. "I'd feel a little bit uneasy if I were at the top of this draft and I decided I had to have a quarterback. The pressure to get a quarterback is so great in this league, I get that. But we can't create 'em. I wouldn't be surprised if only one of these guys is left standing in four or five years, and if so, I'd guess it would be Sam Darnold."

This does look like a strong draft for quarterbacks, but that does not mean a future superstar is in this draft. Count Payton as someone who is skeptical that any team will find that superstar quarterback this year.

Troy Aikman sees “another frontier” beyond TV

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
April 16, 2018

Matt Millen. John Elway. John Lynch. Troy Aikman?

The Hall of Fame quarterback, who retired after the 2000 season, apparently has the itch to run an NFL team. That’s what he suggested during a recent appearance on The Doomsday Podcast from Ed Werder and Matt Mosley, via Peter King of SI.com.

“I do believe there is another frontier for me beyond television,” Aikman said.

With FOX televising the draft this year, Aikman will help cover it. As part of his preparation, he attend the Pro Day workouts conducted by USC quarterback Sam Darnold and UCLA quarterback Josh Rosen. This helped underscore Aikman’s pre-existing interest in someday running an NFL team.

Aikman joined FOX immediately after retiring, quickly becoming a member of the network’s top broadcasting team. The fact that he has stayed there for so long (even after FOX hired, to his dismay, Skip Bayless) shows how much Aikman loves what he’s doing. Still, if he’s thinking about moving on to bigger and better things, a schedule that will now include two games per week in most weeks of the NFL season may cause him to start asking himself, “Why am I doing this to myself?”

That question becomes more likely if Aikman already is thinking about something else he can potentially do to himself: Tie his name and reputation to the success or failure of an NFL team, giving up a spot he could hold for another 20 years or longer for a gig that necessarily becomes a year-to-year proposition from the first day he walks through the door.

If/when Aikman does it, he’ll join Millen, Elway, and Lynch as former players who made an unexpected right turn well after retiring, becoming key executives at a team without paying the dues that most key executives must pay before taking over.