

Lunch Special: Is releasing C.J. Anderson the right move for the Broncos?

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
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Let's cut to the chase. Is this the right move for the Broncos to release C.J. Anderson?

Kiz: C.J. Anderson got released. No surprise. He gained 1,000 yards for a bad team. He's a smart, tough, competitive football player. But Anderson was also a big supporter of running backs coach Eric Stutesville. And when Stutesville got dumped by Vance Joseph, I figured Anderson was as good as gone. Football might be a meritocracy. But just because you work in the NFL doesn't keep you immune from office politics. Tough business.

Dumping Anderson is another indication the Broncos want to forget as much about 2017 as is humanly possible. In Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson, the Broncos believe they have two capable running backs. I'm not sold ... although I will happily admit Henderson deserves a shot to show what he can do. Is the team's leading rusher for next season on the roster.

Well, let me say two things: 1) If Saquon Barkley from Penn State is available with the fifth pick in the draft, and the Broncos don't grab him, you will have to blame somebody other than me. 2) Anderson was a free agent. Booker and Henderson were not high draft picks. If recent history is any indication, then John Elway belongs to the school that a 1,000-yard rusher is a disposable item and a replacement can be easily found without using a first-round pick to do it.

With the release of Anderson, how likely do you think it is that the Broncos grab a RB in the draft? And how early would they grab one?

Kiz: I have long advocated the Broncos taking Penn State running back Saquon Barkley, if he's available with the No 5 pick in the first round. And that was before the Broncos released CJ Anderson. Barkley will be a star in the NFL. But let me add: I think the Broncos could draft other players with big Pro Bowl potential at No 5, and it seems to me that John Elway isn't necessarily a big fan of taking running backs early in the draft. Will the backs from Georgia be tempting for Denver in Round 2? Certainly. But I can't promise you that Elway will bite.

Do you give the Avs any chance of coming back in this series?

Kiz: The Avalanche was competitive in Nashville. But the Predators are way deeper and healthier. Colorado wins Game 3 and maybe, just maybe, the favorites from Nashville begin to feel a little pressure. The more likely truth? Without injured Semyon Varlamov in goal, plus defensemen Eric Johnson and Sam Girard, both also hurt, the Avalanche probably doesn't have enough talent to push this series to six or seven games. It would take a minor miracle.

Hi Kiz, loved your story about skiing with Josh Kroenke. (Look at you!) Was there any news morsel or interesting thing you learned from your day hanging out with him that didn't make it into your story? The whole read was fascinating. Thanks.

Kiz: If you read the story in the print version of your Denver Post on Sunday, I humbly thank you for digging all the way to page 9 of the sports section to find it. Skiing with Josh Kroenke was a blast. It was a unique, fun way to do an interview ... and I firmly believe in this age when The Post is facing challenges from talented competitors such as ESPN and the Athletic, that we need to find — and promote — what makes our publication unique. The tidbit that most readers would care about: Josh Kroenke does not regret parting ways with George Karl, believing Karl's strong personality had reached its expiration date for effectiveness. But Kroenke let Masai Ujiri leave as general manager, in large part out of respect for their friendship. Was that the best move for the Nuggets, especially considering Ujiri was under contract to the team? Probably not. While Kroenke is happy with the management team running the Nuggets now, he learned that what's best for the business has to be before what's best for a friendship when you're atop a sports franchise's organizational chart.

I'm curious if Josh Kroenke remembered his family owns the Rapids? Did he mention anything about them?

Kiz: I understand your concern. The Kiszla family is a big soccer family. I told Josh Kroenke a story of how the Rapids made a deep run in MLS playoffs way back in the 1990s, and how my son, then a very young boy, would answer the telephone (then hanging on our kitchen wall!) during the breakfast hour and announce: "Dad! That Phil guy want to talk to you!" Phil was Mr. Phil Anschutz. Anschutz literally owned half the teams in MLS at the time. In the interview with Kroenke, I concentrated on the Avs and Nuggets. I tried to get him to talk about Arsenal, a subject he promptly shot down. If anybody gave the Rapids too little time in the interview, it was me, not Kroenke. Jumping to a conclusion that one afternoon on skis alongside a Denver Post columnist indicates that Kroenke does not care about the Rapids would be faulty logic.

I hope you at least asked Josh Kroenke to buy the Post.

Kiz: Well, as a matter of fact, I did ask Josh Kroenke if he knew any rich guys interested in owning a newspaper, with big reach in print and online. I'm not very smart, as my readers well know. But I'm not quite as dumb as I look.

It's been great ignoring the NBA playoffs after the Nuggets got no help from sandbagging front runners at the end of the season. Hopefully other Nugget fans feel the same way!

Kiz: I love the NBA playoffs. I love 'em for no other reason than "Inside the NBA" with Ernie Johnson, Charles Barkley and Kenny Smith yapping about the games is the most fun studio show in sports. You want a prediction? I've got Rockets vs. Sixers in the NBA Finals. How about you?

Trevor Story leads all of MLB in strikeouts... just sayin...

Kiz: Trevor Story has some pop in his bat. Trevor Story wields a good glove at shortstop. Trevor Story is still young and learning. With all that being said, there are way too many Ks in the Colorado batting order. Two words: Brendan Rodgers. It would be foolish for the Rockies to rush their most cherished prospect to the big leagues before he is ready. But in July or August or September, I would expect you will see Rodgers playing some — and perhaps a lot — or shortstop in LoDo.

Broncos release running back C.J. Anderson

By Daniel Boniface

Denver Post

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C.J. Anderson's time in Denver is over.

The Broncos released the running back on Monday.

"It was an amazing five years," Anderson told Denver 7. "You know me, I will land on my feet. I'm a grinder."

The Broncos were listening to trade offers for the running back throughout the off-season but were unable to find any takers. Miami showed the most interest but the potential deal, in exchange for right tackle Ja'Wuan James, fell through.

The cost-cutting move saved the Broncos \$4.5 million in cap space this season.

"Over the last five years, C.J. developed from an undrafted player into an important member of our team," John Elway, Broncos general manager, said in a news release. "We appreciate all he did as a Bronco, especially during our Super Bowl season, and thank him for his many contributions on and off the field."

Anderson, 27, worked his way into the starting running back job in 2014 and was named to the Pro Bowl that season. He signed a four-year contract in 2016, but the deal had no guaranteed money in the final two seasons, which meant the Broncos could release Anderson without owing him anything.

When asked last month about whether veterans Anderson and cornerback Aqib Talib would return for 2018 as the Broncos looked to clear cap space, Elway gave a non-committal answer, saying, "We'll see. We'll look at that. Like I said, we're looking at every option that we can and where our football team is. I'm not saying they'll be back for sure, but I'm not going to say they are gone."

Talib was soon afterward traded to the Los Angeles Rams and Anderson is now a free agent. The 5-foot-8, 224-pound ball carrier is coming off a season in which he remained healthy, starting all 16 games for the Broncos in 2017 and rushing for 1,007 yards on 245 carries — all career highs. Anderson added 224 receiving yards on 28 catches. Anderson was just the 14th player to rush for 1,000 yards in a season for the Broncos and the first since 2013.

In his five-year Broncos career, Anderson rushed for 3,051 yards on 693 carries (4.4 yards per attempt), and 20 touchdowns. He also had 859 yards receiving on 103 receptions and four touchdowns.

Some of Anderson's top highlights with the Broncos include his 48-yard overtime scamper to beat the New England Patriots in the snow in Denver in 2015. And his 2-yard touchdown run late in Super Bowl 50 to help ice the win for the Broncos. It was the only offensive touchdown the Broncos scored in the game. The Broncos still have two running backs who they have high hopes for on the roster — Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson.

C.J. Anderson: "Excited for my next chapter, wherever that may be"

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

April 17, 2018

A few minutes before the Broncos' first team meeting of 2018 was to begin at 8 a.m. Monday, general manager John Elway called his starting running back into his office.

Elway could have delegated the difficult task to head coach Vance Joseph or someone else in the Broncos' organization, but he gave the bad news to Anderson himself.

"He said we're releasing you, this is a tough part of this job," Anderson said. "Thank you for everything you've done for us. You're a helluva football player, there's a lot of interest in you out there. You'll land on your feet."

Anderson's response?

"I just smiled, and said thank you for taking a chance on an undrafted kid," he said. "I had fun. It was a helluva way to start my career. Good luck to you all in the future."

Later, after he returned to his Denver-area home, Anderson was asked to reflect on his time with the Broncos that began when he received a \$12,500 signing bonus as a "premium" college free agent in 2013.

"I had a helluva five years," Anderson said. "Pro Bowl, won the Super Bowl. Made some game-changing plays. It was a good way to start my career. I want to thank the organization for taking a chance on an undrafted kid. I had fun. It was a good five years. I had great teammates. I learned a lot. Just excited for my next chapter wherever that may be."

He had two years at \$4.5 million each year left on his contract but none of that money was guaranteed.

The Broncos not only saved money by releasing Anderson, they opened up playing time for Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson. It is believed the Broncos will also take a running back with one of the eight picks they have within the first five rounds.

"I've got nothing but respect for Book and De'Angelo and I hope they learned a lot from me," Anderson said. "Especially Book. Book has been with me for two years now and he knows how I went about the game. I hope he and De'Angelo took something from me."

Multiple teams have already contacted Anderson's agent expressing interest in the running back. Anderson was an underdog who overachieved. He didn't start in his two seasons for the University of California and he wasn't drafted in 2013. He made their 53-man roster on the strength of his first preseason game at San Francisco. He broke out midway through the 2014 season, turning a Peyton Manning dump-off pass into a spectacular, cross-field, 51-yard touchdown.

With status in limbo, Dixon skipping Broncos offseason program

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

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It's not like a team keeps two punters.

After the Broncos signed former Oakland Raiders' star punter Marquette King two weeks ago, the team's punter the past two years, Riley Dixon, did not attend the start of the team's offseason workout program Monday.

Dixon has been advised by his agent to stay away from the team's offseason workouts until the Broncos give him clarity as what they will do with him.

It's possible the Broncos could wait until the draft to see if they can trade Dixon for a late-round pick.

Dixon was the Broncos' seventh-round draft pick out of Syracuse in 2016 and he had a fine rookie year, ranking No. 4 in the NFL in gross punting average (45.7 yards) and ninth in net punting (41.3).

He slipped to 14th in gross punting (45.6) and 22nd in net (40.2) in 2017. Dixon was hardly the first talented young punter to experience a sophomore slump, but when the Raiders surprisingly released the strong-legged King, the Broncos couldn't resist.

King received a \$500,000 signing bonus from the Broncos and he is scheduled to make another \$1.5 million in salary this year and \$2 million in 2019.

The expectation is Dixon would receive strong interest if he is released, but the Broncos may try to hold out hope they can get something for him in a trade.

Until then, it doesn't make sense for Dixon to attend offseason workouts for a team that has made it clear they are going with a different punter this year.

Baker Mayfield: Here today, back in 10 days?

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

April 17, 2018

Is the Broncos' coaching staff breaking bread at a local steakhouse tonight with the guy they will draft first in 10 days?

A Broncos contingent is dining with Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Baker Mayfield on Monday night. John Elway, the Broncos' general manager, is not attending the dinner. He has stayed consistent with the visiting top quarterback prospects by having lunch with them at the team's UCHealth Training Center headquarters.

Elway had lunch with Josh Rosen and Josh Allen during their recent visits and is expected to have a mid-afternoon meal with Mayfield at team headquarters Tuesday. (The Broncos went to Sam Darnold in Los Angeles for a private workout).

Clearly, Mayfield is under strong consideration for the Broncos with their No. 5 overall draft pick.

He's not the only one. Three other quarterbacks – Allen, Darnold and Rosen – plus running back Saquon Barkley, defensive end Bradley Chubb, Alabama defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick and Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson are also high on the Broncos' draft board.

Trading back from No. 5 is also an option.

Even though the Broncos signed free-agent quarterback Case Keenum last month with a two-year, \$36 million that includes \$18 million fully guaranteed in 2018 and another \$7 million fully guaranteed of his \$18 million salary in 2019, Elway is seriously considering acquiring another quarterback with his top draft pick.

The reasons for taking a quarterback: One, the team does not plan on picking as high as No. 5 again, so while it's up this high in the draft, it must closely evaluate the top quarterbacks. And, two, this is a strong class of quarterbacks.

Reasons for not taking a quarterback: One, they already have one in Keenum, and they already have a recent first-round draft pick in backup quarterback Paxton Lynch.

Two, the Broncos were 5-11 last year, not 11-5. Another quarterback would be a luxury, a player who would sit behind Keenum for at least one season and maybe two. The Broncos need better players now if they're going to climb from 5-11 in 2017 to 11-5 in 2018.

Three, at least two of the Big Four quarterbacks, and possibly three, will be gone by the time the Broncos are on the clock with their No. 5 pick. The Cleveland Browns will take a quarterback with either their No. 1 or No. 4 overall pick. And the Jets traded up from No. 6 to No. 3 for the intent purpose of taking a quarterback.

There's also a strong chance the Buffalo Bills will move up from No. 12 to either the New York Giants' slot at No. 2, or Cleveland's spot at No. 4.

Mayfield has been linked with the Jets at No. 3. If he slides past, will the Broncos take him at No. 5? As you would expect – and even hope – the feelings about the Big Four quarterbacks is mixed among those occupying the upstairs' offices at Dove Valley.

As much as any quarterback, Mayfield has an innate ability to move around and make plays when the play breaks down. He does have a strong, accurate arm from the pocket on intermediate throws. And his intangibles – most notably his confidence and fiery personality -- are off the charts.

The concern: He is a fraction shy of 6-foot-1, short by NFL quarterback standards. And while he moves well, he does not have the speed or quickness of Russell Wilson, another vertically challenged, but highly successful quarterback.

After dinner Monday night, Mayfield will be dropped off by a Broncos' coach or staffer at a local hotel, then complete his visit at the team's headquarters Tuesday morning. He will fly to Phoenix on Tuesday afternoon for a visit with the Arizona Cardinals. The final day for NFL pre-draft visits is Wednesday.

Broncos to release RB C.J. Anderson

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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With a deep group of running backs in the draft and the need for some additional salary-cap room, the Denver Broncos plan to release running back C.J. Anderson on Monday, according to ESPN and multiple reports.

Anderson, who had his first career 1,000-yard season in 2017, was the team's leading rusher last season and has been with the Broncos since he made the roster as an undrafted rookie in 2013.

The Broncos had matched a four-year, \$18 million offer sheet from the Miami Dolphins in 2016 to keep Anderson, 27, and that deal had two years remaining on it. The move comes as the Broncos opened their offseason program Monday.

Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson, who was a sixth-round draft pick last year, are the only two running backs on Denver's roster.

Anderson's release or a trade have been possibilities since the end of the season, something Anderson himself acknowledged several times along the way. Broncos coach Vance Joseph outlined a much bigger role for Booker at the league meetings last month.

Anderson's contract also gave the Broncos the ability to move on without any penalty of "dead money" - salary cap charges for players no longer on the roster. At \$4.5 million, Anderson would have had the fourth-highest base salary at the position for the coming season. But the structure of the deal meant if Anderson was released, the Broncos would not be charged any dead money.

There is also the matter of the draft class for the Broncos, who currently have the No. 5 overall pick with all eight of their picks currently in the first five rounds.

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 is 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.

Penny is one of the players the Broncos have had to their complex for a pre-draft visit.

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.

NFL and NFLPA ban the use of specific helmets for first time

By Kevin Seifert

ESPN.com

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The NFL and NFL Players Association for the first time have banned specific helmets for use, saying those models performed poorly in its annual testing procedures or are no longer supported by their manufacturers.

Ten helmet models from Rawlings, Schutt, SG Helmets and Riddell have been targeted for phaseout, six immediately and four by the start of the 2019 season. Approximately 200 NFL players wore one of those models in 2017, according to Jeff Miller, the NFL's executive vice president of health and safety initiatives. The NFL has been ranking helmets, from best- to worst-performing based on laboratory testing, for four years. On Monday, teams and players received the 2018 rankings, which are topped by two models from VICIS, a company that was founded in 2013.

"Over the last few years, we've seen some dynamic changes in the helmet industry," Miller said. "We've seen a number of new helmets enter the market from both new innovators, as well as new helmet models from incumbent companies, which means that there are a number of helmets for players to move to.

"And we've begun to see that over the last couple of years, players [are] moving from helmets that rank in the poorly performing areas to those that are ranging closer to the top-performing helmets. We think that is an important move, and we think that will improve player health and safety. And the purpose of continuing to rank the helmets, and the purpose of the joint decision to prohibit certain helmets this year, is to increase that continued movement into better-performing helmets."

Thirty-four helmets were tested for the 2018 rankings. They came after a season in which NFL players suffered 291 concussions, the highest number on record. NFL chief medical officer Dr. Allen Sills called that number "unacceptable" and declared a "a call to action" in February to address it.

League owners agreed in March to a significant rule change that will threaten immediate ejections anytime a player lowers his helmet and initiates contact with another player. The kickoff is under heavy scrutiny after it was determined to cause concussions at five times the rate of an average play, and plans are underway to work with teams to address a spike in concussions caused during training camp scrimmages.

Dr. Jeff Crandall, the chairman of the NFL's engineering committee, said the helmet testing recreated 24 conditions that typically occur on NFL playing fields. It measures "a number of accelerations and motions of the head," Crandall said. Helmets are ranked on how they "manage the forces" that players most often come into contact with, he added.

The tests and new policy were carried out in conjunction with Crandall, Miller and Dr. Kristy Arbogast, who is co-scientific director and director of engineering for the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and an adviser to the NFLPA.

Three 2018 draft prospects to target for all 32 NFL teams

By Steve Muench

ESPN.com

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As the 2018 NFL draft nears, I'm identifying three prospects who make sense for each team to pick on Days 1, 2 and 3. This is not a mock draft. I'm not predicting where players will land. Rather, I'm identifying prospects who fill a need and/or fit what each team likes to do schematically, using the Scouts Inc. overall and position rankings to note where each is likely to be picked.

For teams without a first-round pick, I've added an extra prospect for Day 2 or Day 3. Let's run through all 32 teams, starting in the AFC East.

AFC EAST

Buffalo Bills

Day 1: Virginia Tech LB Tremaine Edmunds

Day 2: San Diego State RB Rashaad Penny

Day 3: Southern CB Danny Johnson

Let's assume that Buffalo doesn't move up for a quarterback and they stand pat in this scenario. Preston Brown led the league in tackles last year and linebacker is one of Buffalo's most pressing needs now that he's a Cincinnati Bengal. Edmunds is a Week 1 starter with rare upside. If the Bills don't trade up, it makes sense to use one of their six picks in the first three rounds on a running back. Free-agent signing Chris Ivory adds depth but he just turned 30 and he averaged 3.4 yards per carry last year. There's a chance Penny slides to 65, and he would provide an excellent insurance policy behind LeSean McCoy. Oregon RB Royce Freeman is another option. The hope is free-agent signing Vontae Davis regains his form and locks down the starting cornerback spot opposite Tre'Davious White. Johnson would be an excellent addition as the No. 3. The undersized corner has above-average short-area cover and ball skills.

Miami Dolphins

Day 1: Washington DT Vita Vea

Day 2: South Carolina State OLB Darius Leonard

Day 3: Miami TE Chris Herndon

Miami needs to replace Ndamukong Suh and there's no better option than Vea, who is the best defensive tackle on our board and would be an excellent value at No. 11. Outside linebacker is one of the Dolphins' greatest needs. Taking Leonard with the 42nd overall pick could be considered a reach and maybe the Dolphins try to trade back and get him. I don't see him lasting until the ninth pick in the third round though and they could do worse than taking him a little early. He's a sideline-to-sideline run defender who plays fast and doesn't have to come off the field on third down. Miami needs a tight end after releasing Julius Thomas. Herndon tore his MCL and may be flying under the radar as a result. He's a former high school receiver who separates well and shows good burst after the catch.

New England Patriots

Day 1: Georgia OLB Lorenzo Carter

Day 2: Ohio State OT Jamarco Jones

Day 3: North Dakota S Cole Reyes

Adding Carter to the linebacker corps would help fill one of New England's biggest weaknesses. He has the length to set the edge and the closing speed to make plays in pursuit in addition to the ability to get after the quarterback and hold up in underneath coverage. Left tackle is arguably New England's greatest need after losing Nate Solder in free agency to the Giants. They could take one in Round 1 but his is a weak offensive tackle class. Jones is a developmental prospect who shouldn't be expected to replace Solder immediately but he has upside and getting him on Day 2 is better than reaching at No. 23. Reyes has struggled to stay healthy and he missed most of last season with an arm injury but the risk is worth the reward in the later rounds and New England doesn't pick until the sixth round on Day 3.

New York Jets

Day 1: UCLA QB Josh Rosen

Day 2: USC OLB Uchenna Nwosu

Day 3: Virginia Tech G Wyatt Teller

The Jets should take the best available quarterback at No. 3. Rosen's injury history is a concern and there has been a lot of discussion regarding his personality but he's the most technically sound and polished pocket passer in this class. The Jets need to bolster a pass rush that finished 28th in the league last year and has questions at outside linebacker, where Lorenzo Mauldin missed the 2017 season with a back injury and Jordan Jenkins has a total of 5.5 sacks in his first two seasons. Nwosu shows the ability to shave the edge and has good closing burst. The Jets need to upgrade their interior offensive line and Teller could prove to be a steal as he has the frame, length and enough strength to quickly develop into a starter.

AFC NORTH

Baltimore Ravens

Day 1: Notre Dame OT Mike McGlinchey

Day 2: Indiana TE Ian Thomas

Day 3: Idaho State C/G Skyler Phillips

Baltimore cut Austin Howard, who started all 16 games at right tackle, and it's time to get the band back together as McGlinchey started opposite Ravens left tackle Ronnie Stanley when the two were at Notre Dame in 2015. The top tackle on our board, McGlinchey is a Week 1 starter at right tackle. Ben Watson signed with the Saints after leading the Ravens in receiving last season. Thomas is a natural pass-catcher with good speed and he's an above-average blocker. Taking Phillips on Day 3 would add depth and competition along the interior offensive line.

Cincinnati Bengals

Day 1: Iowa C/G James Daniels

Day 2: Oklahoma OT Orlando Brown

Day 3: Vanderbilt OLB Oren Burks

The Bengals finished the 2017 season ranked 26th in points per game, 29th in yards per carry and 19th in sacks allowed and they need to continue to address the offensive line after trading for left tackle Cordy Glenn. Daniels is the best center in this class and he fills a pressing need with Russell Bodine departing via free agency. Brown's nightmare combine performance dropped him out of the first round and his tape is ugly at times but he almost always finds a way to get the job done. The risk would be worth the potential reward on Day 2. Vontaze Burfict is suspended for the first four games of the season, and they need an upgrade over Nick Vigil. Burks is a versatile linebacker with above-average range and the potential to develop into a starter in time.

Cleveland Browns

Day 1: Penn State RB Saquon Barkley

Day 2: Louisville OT Geron Christian

Day 3: Delaware DT Bilal Nichols

Three quarterbacks could come off the board in the first three picks, with the Browns getting USC quarterback Sam Darnold at No. 1. If that's how it unfolds, the Browns should take Barkley at No. 4 and get the best overall player in addition to the best quarterback in this class. Adding a franchise tackle to replace Joe Thomas would have been an option in a lot of drafts, but this isn't one of them. Taking Christian in the early second makes sense as a result. He has the quick set and long arms (35 inches) to push for the starting job and though he'll likely experience plenty of growing pains early he has the tools to become an effective starter. The Browns need help on the inside after trading Danny Shelton to the Patriots. Nichols is a stout run defender and one of the more underrated prospects in this class.

Pittsburgh Steelers

Day 1: Stanford S Justin Reid

Day 2: Texas LB Malik Jefferson

Day 3: Tulane DE/OLB Ade Aruna

Pittsburgh should look for an upgrade over Sean Davis and a safety to complement free-agent signing Morgan Burnett. Reid grades out as a plug-and-play starter at free safety in the NFL. He's a ball hawk with excellent speed and athleticism. Jefferson is arguably a better fit on the outside but he's a rangy linebacker with enough size to play inside in the Steelers' scheme. OLB Bud Dupree is in the final year of his rookie contract and the Steelers need to add depth and competition. Aruna's production is a little underwhelming but he flashes on tape and he tested well.

AFC SOUTH

Houston Texans

Day 2: Nevada C/G Austin Corbett

Day 2: West Georgia OT Desmond Harrison

Day 3: Central Michigan TE Tyler Conklin

The Texans don't have a Day 1 pick so there are two names to keep in mind when they get to the third round where they have three picks. Corbett should be available at No. 68 but could slide to the third round, and the Texans would do well to land him considering they need to continue strengthening the interior offensive line. Corbett projects as a versatile reserve interior offensive lineman with the skill set and frame to develop into an effective starting guard or center early in his career. Houston isn't going to

find a turnkey franchise left tackle on Day 2 of the draft but there's a lot to like about Harrison's upside and he has the raw natural ability to compete for the starting role.

Indianapolis Colts

Day 1: NC State DE Bradley Chubb

Day 2: Oregon OT Tyrell Crosby

Day 3: Michigan MLB Mike McCray

The Colts are transitioning to a four-man front under new defensive coordinator Matt Eberflus and adding Chubb would give them a cornerstone to build on. Chubb is an effective hand fighter who mixes up pass-rush moves and gets to the quarterback in a number of ways. He also has the strength to set the edge and he's relentless in pursuit. The Colts need to address the offensive line, starting with right tackle. Crosby has the size, length and toughness to win the starting job and develop into an above-average starter in time. McCray is an above-average tackler who chases with good effort, plus he shows good awareness in coverage and he tested better than expected at the combine.

Jacksonville Jaguars

Day 1: Boise State MLB Leighton Vander Esch

Day 2: Notre Dame WR Equanimeous St. Brown

Day 3: NC State OT Will Richardson

The retirement of Paul Posluszny creates a void at middle linebacker and Vander Esch is the second-ranked inside linebacker on our board. He has a rare blend of size and range. With Myles Jack and Telvin Smith flanking him on the outside, the Jaguars would have an uber-talented linebacker corps. St. Brown has the skill set to be a far more productive pro than college player considering Notre Dame's erratic quarterback play. The Jaguars would do well to add a receiver with his kind of upside. Jacksonville should be looking to add depth at tackle. Richardson is a versatile lineman with the ability to provide depth at both tackle spots and guard. Plus, right tackle Jeremy Parnell turns 32 in July and Richardson is a potential replacement when Parnell's play starts to drop off or his contract expires following the 2019 season.

Tennessee Titans

Day 1: Boston College DE/OLB Harold Landry

Day 2: Mississippi State C/G Martin Rankin

Day 3: North Dakota State MLB Nick DeLuca

Brian Orakpo and Derrick Morgan are on the wrong side of 30 and entering the final year of their contracts. Landry is an explosive edge rusher with the burst and foot speed to make an immediate impact getting after the quarterback. Plus, Landry has the work ethic to develop into an effective starter early in his career. All three starters along the interior offensive line return, but Tennessee should be looking to upgrade there. Rankin projects as a versatile reserve with the potential to develop into a starter at guard or center. The Titans should look to add competition for the inside linebacker spot vacated by free-agent departure Avery Williamson. DeLuca is a big, instinctive linebacker who plays faster than his timed top-end speed.

AFC WEST

Denver Broncos

Day 1: Oklahoma QB Baker Mayfield
Day 2: Colorado CB Isaiah Oliver
Day 3: Tennessee RB John Kelly

Denver signed Case Keenum, Chad Kelly was an intriguing talent coming out of Ole Miss last year, and the Broncos drafted Paxton Lynch in the first round two years ago. It's still hard to believe the Broncos would pass on Mayfield considering there's an argument for taking him first overall and they can't afford to pass on a potential franchise quarterback. The departure of Aqib Talib hurts. Oliver is a big corner with the size, length and top-end speed to compete on the outside. RB Devontae Booker has fumbled six times over the past two seasons and he averaged 3.8 yards per carry last season. Kelly doesn't have great timed speed but he plays faster on tape, he runs hard and he has the potential to develop into a productive receiver.

Kansas City Chiefs

Day 2: Ohio State C/G Billy Price
Day 2: Tulane CB Parry Nickerson
Day 3: Utah DE/OLB Kylie Fitts

Kansas City is another team without a first-round pick so there are two names to keep in mind on Day 2, starting with Price. The Chiefs need to bolster their interior offensive line, and Price projects as a Week 1 starter with the versatility to line up at guard or center. Corner is also a glaring need following the trade of Marcus Peters to the Rams. Nickerson, who is one of the three players to run a 4.32 40 at the combine this year, isn't just a track star. While he doesn't have great size or length, he's instinctive with above-average cover skills and the ball skills to develop into a playmaker. The Chiefs cut Tamba Hali, and they need to improve their pass rush after finishing 24th in the league in sacks last season. Fitts has struggled to stay healthy but he flashes on tape and tested extremely well at the combine. He could be a steal if he stays healthy.

Los Angeles Chargers

Day 1: Alabama ILB Rashaan Evans
Day 2: Western Michigan OT Chukwuma Okorafor
Day 3: Connecticut DT Folorunso Fatukasi

Evans is a top-15 player in his class and an excellent defender, which is what a Chargers run defense that allowed a league-worst 4.9 yards per carry needs. Adding Fatukasi in the fourth would also help bolster the run defense as he's got the frame and strength to push 33-year-old Brandon Mebane and Damion Square for the starting nose tackle job. The Chargers need a tackle capable of pushing right tackle Joe Barksdale, who turns 31 this year. Okorafor has outstanding size, above-average strength and the length to develop into an NFL starter in addition to the versatility to provide depth at both tackle spots early in his career.

Oakland Raiders

Day 1: Georgia OLB Roquan Smith
Day 2: Michigan DT Mo Hurst
Day 3: UCF WR Tre'Quan Smith

The Raiders are one of the teams expected to benefit from the run on quarterbacks in the first five picks and they land the sixth-best player on our board in Smith while filling an important need. Smith is an

instinctive, rangy tackling machine. Oakland would do well to land an explosive one-gap 3-technique to complement NT Justin Ellis and Hurst fits the bill. He's got the first-step quickness and active hands to win one-on-one battles and make plays in the backfield. Jordy Nelson turns 33 in May, and he signed a two-year deal. Smith is a raw route runner but his frame, length and speed make him an intriguing developmental prospect.

NFC EAST

Dallas Cowboys

Day 1: Florida DT Taven Bryan

Day 2: Ohio State OLB Jerome Baker

Day 3: Stanford TE Dalton Schultz

Dallas needs a disruptive difference-maker capable of pushing Maliek Collins, who is coming off foot surgery. Bryan is an explosive one-gap penetrator with elite first-step quickness and active hands. With Dallas cutting Dez Bryant, Alabama WR Calvin Ridley and Maryland WR D.J. Moore are two other first-round possibilities. LB Sean Lee turns 32 in July and he has struggled with injuries throughout his career, plus Anthony Hitchens signed with Kansas City, so linebacker is one of the Cowboys' most pressing needs. Baker is undersized but he's a rangy run defender with above-average cover skills. Jason Witten turns 36 in May, he finished with fewer than 600 receiving yards for the first time in his career last year and there's no heir apparent on the roster. Schultz is an underrated tight end prospect who didn't put up big numbers at Stanford but tested better than expected and could be a more productive pro than college player.

New York Giants

Day 1: UCLA QB Josh Rosen

Day 2: Georgia OLB Lorenzo Carter

Day 3: Oregon RB Royce Freeman

The Giants could trade back, but they shouldn't draft anyone other than a quarterback with the second pick if they don't and it should be a king's ransom if they do. Eli Manning is 37 years old coming off the worst season of his career and the Giants don't want to find themselves in a situation where they are looking for a franchise quarterback in the middle of the first round or bundling assets to move up to get one when the time comes for him to step down. Rosen is the No. 2 quarterback on our board and the most fundamentally sound passer in this class. The Giants need edge defenders that fit new defensive coordinator James Bettcher's scheme. The versatile and speedy Carter is an excellent fit and value at the top of the second round. We have a third-round grade on Freeman but he could slide to the eighth pick in the fourth round. He's a well-built back and highly efficient runner with good instincts.

Philadelphia Eagles

Day 1: Boise State MLB Leighton Vander Esch

Day 3: Texas P Michael Dickson

Day 3 Missouri DE Marcell Frazier

Jordan Hicks has sustained season-ending injuries in two of the past three years and Mychal Kendricks' future with the Eagles is unsure. Vander Esch is a sideline-to-sideline run defender with good size and excellent upside. I'm generally not in favor of drafting punters but the retirement of Donnie Jones makes punter one of the Eagles' most pressing needs and Dickson is a unique talent. In fact, he's such a

talented punter that there's a legitimate chance he's not there when Philadelphia picks on Day 3 but it would do well to land him if he slides to the end of the fourth round. Chris Long is 33, free-agent signing Michael Bennett is 32 and Brandon Graham recently turned 30, so the Eagles would do well to infuse some youth at defensive end. Frazier has short arms and he's not a powerful pass-rusher or run defender, but he has the closing speed, athletic ability and active hands to develop into an effective pass-rusher and the Eagles could get him late on Day 3.

Washington Redskins

Day 1: Washington Vita Vea

Day 2: SMU WR Courtland Sutton

Day 3: Wisconsin TE Troy Fumagalli

No team gave up more rushing yards per game than Washington last year and strengthening the defensive front is a must. Vea is the best interior defensive lineman in this class, he excels at stuffing the run and he projects as an immediate upgrade over any of the nose tackles on the roster. The Redskins need to continue to address receiver after adding Paul Richardson. Sutton is a raw route runner with good size, top-end speed and ball skills. Jordan Reed missed 10 games last year and he has yet to play in all 16 games in a season, plus Vernon Davis is 34, so adding a young tight end should be on Washington's Day 3 to-do list. Fumagalli is a crafty route runner with excellent ball skills and continues to improve as a blocker.

NFC NORTH

Chicago Bears

Day 1: Virginia Tech LB Tremaine Edmunds

Day 2: Georgia G Isaiah Wynn

Day 3: Missouri WR J'Mon Moore

The Bears cut outside linebackers Willie Young and Pernell McPhee -- plus, Lamarr Houston is unsigned, Sam Acho had three sacks in 12 starts last year and Leonard Floyd has missed 10 games over his first two seasons. Edmunds has the size, length and closing speed to make an immediate impact at outside linebacker in defensive coordinator Vic Fangio's 3-4 scheme. Chicago declined left guard Josh Sitton's option. Right guard Kyle Long has missed 14 games over the past two seasons and he had neck, shoulder and elbow surgeries after Chicago put him on injured reserve last year. Wynn is a complete player who projects as a plug-and-play starter and should develop into a top-tier NFL guard. The departure of Cam Meredith and Kevin White's inability to stay healthy make receiver a pressing need, and the Bears don't have a third-round pick. Moore has the change of direction skills to develop into an effective route runner. He ran a much faster time at his pro day than he did at the combine and he has good playing speed, making him a good value at the top of the fourth round.

Detroit Lions

Day 1: UTEP G Will Hernandez

Day 2: Arizona State RB Kalen Ballage

Day 3: Ole Miss DE Breeland Speaks

The Lions have to improve a running game that ranked last in yards per carry and yards per game last year. Drafting Hernandez to start at left guard would allow Graham Glasgow to slide over to center and move free-agent signing Kenny Wiggins into a reserve role. Hernandez is a mauling run-blocker with

above-average strength, and he's athletic enough to hold up in pass protection. The Lions signed RB LeGarrette Blount but it's a one-year deal, and Ameer Abdullah is in the final year of his rookie contract. Ballage has an outstanding combination of size, speed and lower-body explosion, plus he's an above-average receiver with reliable hands. Speaks is an above average run-stopper with the size and length to set the edge, plus he has some upside as an interior pass-rusher.

Green Bay Packers

Day 1: Alabama WR Calvin Ridley

Day 2: Auburn CB Carlton Davis

Day 3: SE Louisiana G Maea Teuhema

Green Bay cut Jordy Nelson and Randall Cobb's production doesn't match up with his cap number (\$12.7 million). Ridley is the most polished route runner in his class, is dangerous after the catch and would be an excellent complement to Davante Adams. The Packers did well to bring back CB Tramon Williams, but he's 35 years old and they need a corner capable of pushing for the starting role opposite him. Davis is at his best in press man coverage as he has the length to disrupt receivers and the top-end speed to run with them. Jahri Evans hasn't re-signed, creating a need at guard. Teuhema played out of position at left tackle last season and the suspension that led him to transfer from LSU is a concern, but he has the tools to develop into an effective guard.

Minnesota Vikings

Day 1: UCLA OT Kolton Miller

Day 2: Auburn G Braden Smith

Day 3: Northwestern RB Justin Jackson

Miller is a better tester than football player but there's a lot to like about his upside and taking him with a late first is justifiable for a team without a lot of pressing needs. He's versatile enough to provide depth at both offensive tackle spots and he could push Mike Remmers for the starting right tackle job as a rookie. If he wins that job, it would allow Remmers to move to left guard, where he lined up during the playoffs. Smith has an elite combination of size, speed and power (35 reps on bench press was tied for second-best among the offensive linemen at the combine). A three-year starter at right guard in college, he could push and eventually supplant free-agent signing Tom Compton at right guard. With Dalvin Cook coming off a season-ending knee injury and Jerick McKinnon signing with the 49ers, adding a back with the ability to contribute on third down would make sense on Day 3. Jackson is an above-average receiver with slightly above-average ball skills and the potential to develop into an effective route runner. His three-cone (4.07) and short shuttle (6.81) times are quicker than the five-year combine averages for receivers.

NFC SOUTH

Atlanta Falcons

Day 1: Texas A&M WR Christian Kirk

Day 2: Virginia Tech DT Tim Settle

Day 3: Clemson OLB Dorian O'Daniel

Taking Kirk in the first round is a bit of a reach, but I love the fit. Kirk is a tough slot receiver who separates well and has the top-end speed to threaten after the catch. With Andre Roberts signing with the Jets, the Falcons also need help in the return game and Kirk returned six punts for touchdowns in

college. Dontari Poe defected to Carolina and Ahtyba Rubin is an unsigned free agent, creating a need at defensive tackle. Settle compares favorably to Poe though not quite as freakishly gifted and he would be an excellent complement to Grady Jarrett. He's a wide-bodied run-plugger with good power and unique agility for his size. He may never be an elite interior pass-rusher but he can be disruptive. Atlanta has a talented linebacker corps but there is a glaring lack of depth. O'Daniel is an undersized but rangy outside linebacker who is an above-average tackler and excels at covering kicks. He should make an immediate impact on special teams.

Carolina Panthers

Day 1: Stanford S Justin Reid

Day 2: Washington WR Dante Pettis

Day 3: Idaho State G/C Skyler Phillips

Carolina cut Kurt Coleman and 37-year-old Mike Adams is in the last year of his deal, making safety a need. Reid grades out as a plug-and-play starter at free safety. He's a ball hawk with excellent speed and athleticism. Pettis has the speed to stretch the field, threaten after the catch and flip the field as a punt returner. He's capable of making an immediate impact in multiple-receiver sets and could push for a No. 2 role early in his career. Carolina needs a guard capable of competing for the starting spot vacated by Andrew Norwell, and center Ryan Kalil has said that 2018 will be his last season. Phillips is versatile enough to compete at guard and give Carolina a potential replacement for Kalil. Phillips' 2016 tape is better than his 2017 tape but he tested well and should be a good Day 3 value if he returns to the form he showed two years ago.

New Orleans Saints

Day 1: South Dakota State TE Dallas Goedert

Day 2: Rutgers DE/OLB Kemoko Turay

Day 3: Houston QB Kyle Allen

The Saints got an NFL-low 476 receiving yards from their tight ends last year and Coby Fleener hasn't come close to living up to expectations. Benjamin Watson, 37, signed a one-year deal. Goedert is the top tight end on our board. He has an outstanding combination of size and speed with the big hands to snatch the ball and the toughness to make plays over the middle. With Alex Okafor coming off a season-ending injury, adding a young edge rusher makes sense. Turay has the burst/bend to win with speed off the edge. He flashes the ability to win with his hands and has above-average speed to power. Allen is one of the most underrated QB prospects in this class due to his lack of experience and there's a lot to like about his upside. Playing behind Drew Brees and for Sean Payton could unlock his potential and give the Saints their quarterback of the future.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Day 1: Florida State S Derwin James

Day 2: Georgia RB Sony Michel

Day 3: LSU CB Kevin Toliver

Safety is one of Tampa Bay's most pressing needs and James is worth the No. 7 overall pick. He is one of the most versatile players in this class. He has the cover skills to match up with tight ends and above-average range in zone. He also is an excellent pass-rusher for his size and an outstanding run defender. Tampa Bay and Arizona were the only two teams that didn't have a player rush for 500 yards last season, and the Buccaneers released Doug Martin. Michel plays faster than his timed top-end speed, is

strong for his size and is an above average receiver. Tampa Bay doesn't have a third-round pick and would need to address another pressing need early on Day 3 in this scenario. Toliver is a versatile defensive back with experience lining up all over the secondary. He possesses the toughness and size to match up with bigger receivers.

NFC WEST

Arizona Cardinals

Day 1: Maryland WR D.J. Moore

Day 2: Richmond QB Kyle Lauletta

Day 3: Stanford CB Quenton Meeks

Ageless wonder Larry Fitzgerald returns but no other receiver on the roster had more than 33 catches last season. Moore is a fluid, savvy route runner who is dangerous after the catch and has the top-end speed to stretch the field. Arizona needs a young quarterback considering Sam Bradford's injury history and Mike Glennon's inability to hold onto a starting job up to this point. Lauletta is an accurate passer who gets the ball out of his hands quickly once he locates an open man and has the mobility to buy time within the pocket. Tramon Williams and Justin Bethel both left in free agency, creating a need at corner. Meeks is a big, physical corner who ran better than expected at his pro day and has above-average ball skills.

Los Angeles Rams

Day 2: Oklahoma OLB Obo Okoronkwo

Day 3: Kansas DE/OLB Dorance Armstrong Jr.

Day 3: Wisconsin ILB Jack Cichy

The Rams don't pick until late in the third round. Look for them to use the draft to address a linebacker corps that returns just one starter. Okoronkwo needs to get stronger and improve his ability to anchor against the run, but he has good upper-body power, quick hands and natural instincts as a pass-rusher. The Rams get two of my top sleepers on Day 3 if this is how their draft unfolds. While he doesn't have great top-end speed and had just 1.5 sacks last year, Armstrong is a much better football player than the testing and production would suggest. Cichy sustained a season-ending pectoral injury in 2016 and he missed the 2017 season with a knee injury, so there are obviously durability concerns. He's a tough and instinctive run-stopper when he's healthy and would complement Mark Barron.

San Francisco 49ers

Day 1: Alabama DS Minkah Fitzpatrick

Day 2: UCLA WR Jordan Lasley

Day 3: Arizona State OLB Christian Sam

Free safety Jimmie Ward has sustained season-ending injuries in three of the past four seasons and could get another look at corner. Pairing Fitzpatrick with Jaquiski Tartt would give the 49ers a young, talented safety tandem. Fitzpatrick is at his best playing close to the line of scrimmage. He has the speed to cover deep and is an above-average run defender. He's at his best at safety but has the tools to develop into an effective press corner. The 49ers could try him on the outside in an emergency. San Francisco needs a receiver to push Pierre Garcon, who turns 32 in August and missed the final eight games of the 2017 season with a neck injury. UCLA suspended Lasley multiple times and he drops too many passes, but he has the potential to be a difference-making starter in the NFL -- especially as a

vertical receiver. He could turn into a Day 2 steal. Sam may never be more than a two-down linebacker based on the tape, but he tested better than expected and is a tough run defender with the versatility to play on the strong side and in the middle.

Seattle Seahawks

Day 1: LSU RB Derrius Guice

Day 3: Miami DE Chad Thomas

Day 3: Murray State CB D'Montre Wade

Seattle needs a true No. 1 back. Guice has the balance, brute strength and pure will to regularly break initial contact and carry defenders for extra yards. In addition to having the top-end speed to break chunk runs when he gets a seam, he's explosive to and through the hole. He has shown potential in limited opportunities of developing into an effective receiver and pass-blocker. The future of 32-year-old Cliff Avril with the team is unsure following a season-ending neck injury, and Seattle traded Michael Bennett to Philadelphia. Thomas has the size, strength and length to set the edge against the run. He also flashes some upside as an interior pass-rusher. Corners Richard Sherman, Jeremy Lane and DeShawn Shead are no longer on the roster, plus Byron Maxwell remains unsigned, making corner a pressing need. Signing Dontae Johnson gives the Seahawks an adequate stopgap opposite Shaq Griffin but they should still take a corner with upside. Wade doesn't have great top-end speed or fluidity but he's long, instinctive and tough. He also plays the ball well.

With all the QB turnover recently, it's worth asking: What exactly are the Broncos looking for?

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
April 17, 2018

For the better part of six hours, John Elway worked the phones. He started with Atlanta, owner of the No. 17 pick, and worked his way down the draft order, hoping to find a seller — at the right price, of course.

It was Day 1 of the 2016 draft and the Broncos, fresh off a Super Bowl 50 victory, were suddenly without a starting quarterback or a trusted backup. Peyton Manning retired, Brock Osweiler defected to Houston and, despite trading for Mark Sanchez and attempting to acquire Colin Kaepernick, Elway was down to his final chance to land a potential franchise player.

He believed his target would make it past the Jets at No. 20, but the bigger concern was a possible suitor behind the Broncos.

Shortly after Roger Goodell took the stage in Chicago that evening, Elway cut a deal with Seattle, beating out a competing bid from Dallas to move up five spots from the cellar of the first round to No. 26. The Seahawks would get the No. 31 pick as well as a third-rounder, and Denver would take Paxton Lynch, a 6-foot-7 quarterback out of Memphis who idolized Kordell Stewart and drew early comparisons to Cam Newton.

Gary Kubiak lauded Lynch's natural athleticism. He's a "big, strong kid," who "makes all the throws, moves around very, very well" and is a great fit, Kubiak said after the first round of the draft. He and Elway both spoke of how impressed they were with Lynch's motivation, and his enthusiasm for the game.

"Paxton was the guy we had targeted. It was a long night. It's been a long couple months, actually," Elway added. "He was the guy, and we're thrilled to have him."

After two years and four starts, their grand vision for Lynch has yet to come to fruition. The Broncos insist they haven't given up on Lynch, but they've also had to look elsewhere.

Since March 2016, the Broncos have continued on a strange and fruitless search for a starter. They've tried out five quarterbacks of varying strengths and experience level acquired via trade, the draft and free agency. They drafted another (Chad Kelly) with a Hall of Fame pedigree who has yet to see the field. They most recently invested \$36 million in an undrafted veteran in Case Keenum. And they could still add another early in the upcoming draft, where they have the No. 5 selection and seven other picks, all in the first five rounds.

What are the Broncos' searching for? Looking back over their past hits and misses, it seems their model quarterback has been refined in recent years. How could they not after two playoff-less seasons behind a revolving door of quarterbacks?

The physical gifts are still important — the arm, the accuracy, the mobility. So, too, is the IQ — the dissection of defenses, the knowledge of the playbook. But over the past couple of years especially, the Broncos have also stressed a player's mental makeup and his proven record of toppling the odds.

Four months after Elway selected Lynch in the first round, Trevor Siemian, a seventh-rounder few considered to even be in the running, surprised everybody and won the starting job. Siemian, who spent his rookie year learning behind Manning, beat out Sanchez in 2016, then handily defeated Lynch in 2017.

The talk after both of those competitions wasn't so much about Siemian's size or his natural athleticism. Neither were particularly notable. After the first go-round, Kubiak said Siemian had "earned the right" to be the starter and that "if there's one thing that is a big strength of Trevor's, is how much he can handle."

"We've given him a big loaded game plan," Kubiak said. "We've given him a lot of things to get the guys right on and he can handle that stuff that's something I'm very impressed with."

When Siemian won the job again in 2017, coach Vance Joseph credited his "operation of the entire offense" and said Siemian's "decision-making and ball placement were more consistent.

"It's not simply about how tall you are, your arm strength or how fast you run," Joseph added. "There are different factors that go into being an NFL quarterback."

Siemian started the first seven games, went 3-4, had nine touchdowns to 10 interceptions, then was benched for Osweiler, who had returned to Denver, midway through last season. In his 24 games as the Broncos starter, Siemian went 13-11, completed nearly 60 percent of his passes, recorded 28 touchdowns, 24 picks and posted a 79.2 passer rating.

He was shipped to Minnesota last month.

When the Broncos' 5-11 season ended with a thud and Elway quickly began to try and figure out the quarterback situation, he spoke little of the physical traits required to play the position.

"In college, you're allowed to be a kid," Elway said in January. "You come to the NFL and the expectation levels rise, especially if you're a high pick. You're expected to be good or show signs of being a very good player early. The other half is how are they going to handle the situation and how are they going to handle the (significance) of being a quarterback in the NFL. That is the biggest part and I say it all the time. Just trying to figure out how these guys can handle the tough times, because there's going to be tough times. When the world feels like it's caving in are they going to be able to battle through that and not lose their confidence?"

He said that starting immediately as a rookie is "not ideal," but added that he did it and those that make it through are hardened for the rest of their journey. His comments throughout the offseason tipped his hat to where he would look first in trying to upgrade the position.

On the first night of the legal tampering period, the Broncos reached an agreement with Keenum on a two-year deal. The Broncos' reasoning for adding him was strangely similar to their reasoning for starting Siemian: He had beat the odds. He could handle a lot. The big moments didn't scare him.

Elway said the Broncos were impressed by Keenum's playoff run with the Vikings, when he stepped in for the injured Sam Bradford and carried Minnesota to the conference championship. He said Keenum's unconventional path — largely unrecruited coming out of school, undrafted in 2012, 0-8 in his first foray as a starter, a backup and fill-in starter the following three years — to becoming coveted starter carried weight.

The same appeal has connected the Broncos to Baker Mayfield, twice a walk-on turned Heisman-winner out of Oklahoma, who is scheduled to visit the Broncos' facility on Tuesday. The Broncos requested to coach Mayfield at the Senior Bowl, met with him at the NFL combine and attended his pro day.

Only 6 feet tall, Mayfield has his skeptics, for reasons on the field and off. Though some have compared him to Drew Brees and Russell Wilson, others have likened him to Johnny Manziel and gone so far to predict he'll be a draft bust.

But those traits his detractors latch on to are also some of the ones that intrigue the Broncos.

Maybe Mayfield fits the Broncos' refined mold.

"What I've seen is obviously there are some things that he'd admit that he'd want to take back," Elway said. "A lot of times you get tied up in the emotions of the situation and where he is. I like to see a guy with that kind of passion."

Why the Broncos released C.J. Anderson—and where they go from here

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

April 17, 2018

Before the Broncos began their offseason workout program on Monday, they informed one veteran he wouldn't be back.

Since the end of the 2017 season, the Broncos have dangled running back C.J. Anderson as trade bait and refused to confirm if he'd return or be headed elsewhere. But his release comes after Anderson produced the first 1,000-yard rushing season for the Broncos since 2013, hitting career highs in yards (1,007), carries (245) and starts (16). Anderson had two years remaining on his contract, and his release saves the team \$4.5 million in cap room.

Anderson's exit bumps up third-year back Devontae Booker to the lead role and leaves only De'Angelo Henderson behind him. The Broncos, as was the plan all along, will look to bolster the position through the draft, where they own eight picks, all within the first five rounds, and can choose from a deep class of backs.

At the start of the offseason, Anderson and cornerback Aqib Talib were two veterans on the hottest seats, in large part because of their contract status. The trade of Talib to Los Angeles saved the Broncos' \$11 million in cap space and cleared the way for Bradley Roby to assume a starting role in the defensive backfield.

Anderson, the former undrafted back out of California, has spent much of his pro career in limbo, even after the Broncos matched a four-year offer sheet to bring him back in 2016. Before reaching that deal at the 11th hour, Denver placed a low-round restricted free agent tender on Anderson that afforded the team right-of-first-refusal only if Anderson signed an offer sheet elsewhere. He did, with Miami, where his former offensive coordinator, Adam Gase, is the head coach.

The Broncos matched only when Brock Osweiler left for Houston and opened up enough space to bring Anderson back.

The uncertainty continued when the Broncos drafted Booker in the fourth round in 2016 and clearly had plans to make him The Guy in the running backs room. When Anderson suffered a season-ending knee injury that year, it was Booker who took over and led the team in rushing. When the Broncos' 5-11 season neared its end, it was Booker — whose season was delayed because of a wrist injury — taking more and more carries to eventually eclipse the workload of Anderson.

"I think he had a hell of a spring," coach Vance Joseph said of Booker. "He provides a lot of options. He can catch balls out of the backfield. He's a returner. He can run downhill on third-and-1. He can run outside and inside. He can make guys miss. He can jump over guys, we've seen him do that. Missing training camp, that hurt him because we thought it was going to be a fight until the end between him and C.J. as far as who was going to be the guy."

And when the offseason hit, it was Anderson's name on the trade block.

At the team's end-of-year news conference in January, Joseph said the Broncos' offensive identity — or at least its primary goal — is still to run the ball.

"Our philosophy hasn't changed offensively," said Joseph. "It's running the football, controlling the game and keeping third downs manageable for whoever's playing quarterback. That's the formula of winning football. That hasn't changed — around playing great defense."

For much of John Elway's tenure as an executive, he's stressed the need for a strong run game to complement the quarterback, a pairing that helped him to two Super Bowl titles with Terrell Davis in the late 1990s.

Although the Broncos' run game improved significantly to rank 12th in the NFL with 115.8 yards per game last year after finishing 27th (92.8 yards per game) in 2016, the consistency was often lacking — a reflection of the offense's struggles in general.

Denver's options for adding explosiveness and for balancing the offense are aplenty in the draft. Saquon Barkley, regarded by many analysts as the draft's most talented player, could fall to the Broncos at No. 5 (although the chances aren't great with the Browns owning a pair of top-five picks).

The Georgia duo of Sony Michel and Nick Chubb offer intrigue as well, along with San Diego State's Rashaad Penny, who took a top-30 visit to the Broncos' training facility earlier this month. Penny, the 2017 Mountain West offensive player of the year, led the nation with 2,248 rushing yards and ranked fifth with a 30.6-yard kick return average last season.

LSU's Derrius Guice, USC's Ronald Jones II and Auburn's Kerryon Johnson also have the potential to be lead backs and are likely on the Broncos' radar for options.

With quarterback Case Keenum locked up on a two-year deal, the Broncos have arguably the most options of any team in the top five. They could take another quarterback but don't have to. They could take the best player on their board, a luxury they aim for each year. Or they could try to trade back and pick up at least a couple first-round selections for their No. 5.

At the NFL's owners meetings in March, Elway admitted not even he knows what they'll do on Day 1 of the draft. But one thing seems certain: The Broncos will get a running back.

CJ Anderson was a good player for the Broncos and is a better man

By Woody Paige

KMGH

April 17, 2018

The Broncos released a Good Player, a Good Teammate, a Good Leader, and, especially, a Good Man.

Cortelle Javon Anderson – C.J. to you and me – has become a casualty to salary cap space and the Broncos' youth movement.

C.J. cut short our last practice-day conversation after 30 minutes with: "Sorry to run, but I'm going to pick up my mom at the airport. She's helping me with my clothing drive event."

What did that one quote say about C.J.? He was polite enough to do an interview, apologetic that he had to leave, concerned about his mother's arrival and excited about a charity to help the homeless he had started.

He also could run. Anderson rushed for a thousand yards last season.

Most everyone remembers that Terrell Davis was the greatest running back in Broncos' history, and Floyd Little was next, and both are enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

But not everyone recalls how C.J. Anderson was critical to the Broncos in regular-season and playoff games, and the Super Bowl victory.

He is eighth on the list of all-time rushing yardage by a Broncos' running back – and No. 1 as an undrafted free agent.

Anderson was a hard-scrabble hard worker who served the Broncos well for five regular seasons and five post-season games.

And he made the Pro Bowl in 2014.

Anderson's last post-season rush was for just two yards, but it produced the touchdown that gave the Broncos an insurmountable 22-10 lead (with a two-point play to follow) in Super Bowl 50 with 3:08 to go. He had rushed for 90 yards (and added four receptions) in one of the top Super Bowl efforts ever by a running back who was left out of the draft. He was almost as important to Peyton Manning in that game as Davis had been to Elway in Super Bowls.

Elway was the one who called C.J. Monday to tell him the inevitable – that he no longer will be a member of the Broncos. The club wanted to free his \$4.5 million salary cap number, and go with two younger running backs – DaVontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson.

And they'll draft another running back.

In a column for gazette.com Sunday, I urged Elway and the Broncos to select Penn State running back Saquon Barkley with the fifth overall pick. Will the player considered by many NFL authorities and scouts the best overall pick in the draft still be available at No. 5? Possibly. If the first four teams choosing decide on quarterbacks, the Broncos must take Barkley. The Browns will take a quarterback with one of their two picks (1 and 4), unless they trade the second, and the Jets have moved up to No. 3 to get a quarterback. The Giants are expected to take a quarterback, too, and at least a couple of teams are considering trading ahead of the Broncos to choose a quarterback. Barkley could be the odd man out in the top four.

Or the Broncos, who make draft-day deals every year with Elway at the helm, might try to make their own trade up or down.

Their choices could be a quarterback who likely won't play regularly until at least his third season in the NFL, or a running back who could be rookie of the year, a Pro Bowler and a 1,000-plus yarder to replace and improve upon Anderson.

But can he match Anderson's 234 post-season rushing yardage of the 2015 season?

The Broncos might not have reached the Super Bowl without a play C.J. made in the regular season.

In the Sunday night game on Nov. 29, at Mile High Stadium, between the Broncos and the Patriots, Anderson ran for 15 yards to present the Broncos with a 21-14 lead early in the fourth quarter.

But that's not the play.

The teams would go into overtime tied at 24, and Brock Osweiler was battling Tom Brady. The Patriots would seem to have the edge.

But two and a half minutes into the extra period, Anderson escaped left and outraced the Patriots 48 yards for the winning touchdown.

That triumph would be significant because the Broncos would lose two of their remaining regular-season games, but still manage to finish 12-4 and own the home field advantage for the postseason. With Manning back on the field after returning from a foot injury, the Broncos would defeat the Patriots in the AFC Championship. Without that 48-yard run by Anderson, the Broncos might have been forced to play the conference title game in New England.

When C.J. was ruled academically ineligible to attend the University of California, he went to small Laney College in Oakland. Each morning at dawn, his grandmother would drive him to the first train into the city from suburban Vallejo, Calif. He contemplated giving up the game, but instead drove himself in the classroom and on the field. He got a second chance at Berkeley. Then he got a chance on May 13, 2013 with the Broncos.

C.J. will find another NFL job, probably by Tuesday.

He's a good player and an even better man.

Denver Broncos release running back CJ Anderson

By Troy Renck
KMGH
April 17, 2018

Continuing an offseason makeover, the Broncos will release running back C.J. Anderson on Monday, per multiple NFL sources.

Anderson returned from a knee injury to post a career-high 1,007 yards last season. However, the Broncos are looking to go younger at the position, and the move saves them \$4.5 million in cap space with no dead money.

A popular veteran, Anderson was nearly traded to Miami several weeks ago for a right tackle, but the Dolphins backed out at the last minute.

Anderson told Denver7 that he appreciates the time he spent in Denver.

"It was an amazing five years," Anderson said. "You know me, I will land on my feet. I'm a grinder."

The Broncos have Devontae Booker and D'Angelo Henderson in their backfield, but are expected to add a player in the draft.

Broncos' General Manager John Elway praised Anderson's contributions to the team in a statement from the team.

"Over the last five years, C.J. developed from an undrafted player into an important member of our team," Elway said. "We appreciate all he did as a Bronco, especially during our Super Bowl season, and thank him for his many contributions on and off the field."

Denver Broncos release running back C.J. Anderson

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
April 17, 2018

C.J. Anderson is leaving Denver with a million memories, a Super Bowl ring and no hard feelings.

"It's business, I understand it," Anderson told The Associated Press on Monday after he was released by the Denver Broncos. "I've been here five years and it came to an end. So, I'm excited for the next opportunity."

Where that is, "I don't know," Anderson said. "I have no clue at all."

Possible landing spots include Miami, where Dolphins coach Adam Gase offered him a four-year, \$18 million deal in 2016 that Denver matched, and New England, where Patriots coach Bill Belichick is also a big fan.

Anderson hits free agency at an opportune time.

He's 27, has just 683 career carries and is coming off his best season, one in which he played in all 16 games for the first time and ran for a career-best 1,007 yards .

"I would never say it's a good time to be free," Anderson said. "All I ever tried to do was give my best effort to Denver in every way possible. I did that for five years. Now it's time to go and do that for another team."

Anderson wasn't one of the 23 running backs drafted in 2013 but the Cal alum has put up better career numbers than all of those running backs except for one: Steelers star Le'Veon Bell. Anderson's resume includes a Pro Bowl, two dozen TDs, a pair of playoff touchdowns and numerous game-sealing runs, none bigger than his TD plunge that capped Denver's 24-10 win over Carolina in the Super Bowl three years ago.

Shortly afterward, Gase, who had been his offensive coordinator in Denver, offered him the big contract that Broncos GM John Elway ultimately matched. The deal included a \$5 million signing bonus and salaries of \$675,000 in 2016, \$2.9 million last year and \$4.5 million in each of the next two years. Because there was no dead cap money in 2018 or '19, Anderson knew his release was, if not imminent, a very strong possibility this offseason as the Broncos rebuild an anemic offense following a 5-11 season.

"I knew I could be released or traded at any time," Anderson said.

His release not only clears a combined \$9 million off the books for Denver but it opens the way for Devontae Booker, De'Angelo Henderson or maybe even a pick in the upcoming draft to take over as the Broncos' featured back alongside new QB Case Keenum .

"I respect the decision whether it's a money issue or a play issue," Anderson said. "They feel like they can move on from me. I understand that. That's the beauty of our game. Now I get an opportunity to showcase my skills somewhere else."

NFL to prohibit use of certain helmets for 1st time

By Barry Wilner
Associated Press
April 17, 2018

The NFL for the first time is prohibiting certain helmets from being worn by players.

In notifying the 32 teams Monday, the league has sought to have players stop using 10 helmet varieties. Some, particularly those manufactured by Rawlings, no longer are being made and don't have support from the company. Others were found to be inferior to many of the 34 helmets the NFL and the players' union examined.

Previously, NFL players could choose any helmet as long as it passed certification standards. Six of the substandard helmets are prohibited immediately, while the other four may be worn by players who used them in 2017 but not by new players.

The 10 helmets are Rawlings' Impulse and Impulse+, Quantum and Tachyon; SG Varsity and SG 2.0; Schutt Vengeance Z10 (model 204100), Air XP (model 789002) and Air XP Pro (model 789102); and Riddell VSR-4 (model R41133). About 200 players used those helmets last season.

"Over the last few years we've seen some dynamic changes in the helmet industry, both from new innovators as well as new helmets and models from incumbent companies," said Jeff Miller, the NFL's senior vice president of health and safety policy.

"There are a number of helmets for players to move to, from those that rank poorly in performing to the ones in the higher ranking.

"The purpose of the continuation to rank helmets and the joint decision with the players' association to prohibit is to increase that movement into better performing helmets. We are encouraged this is an important step for better player safety."

A survey of players revealed at least 98 percent used one or more of the 34 helmet models tested. Data also showed that concussions were up in the NFL in 2017 to 291.

Laboratory testing showed that the VICIS Zero 1 models of 2017 and 2018 rate best for player safety. A chart specifying top-to-bottom rankings for the 34 helmets is posted at every team's training facility.

"We've begun to see that over the last couple of years players moving from helmets that rank in the poorly performing areas to those that are ranging closer to the top-performing helmets," Miller said.

The 2018 Zero1 was the only new helmet model tested this year.

"We're demonstrating our commitment by setting the pace for innovation and safety," said Dave Marver, CEO of VICIS, which has been making helmets for only four years. Marver estimated 70 players were using the Zero1 by the end of the 2017 season, and he expects "200 or more" to be in them before the upcoming season kicks off.

"We already have players on 400 high schools across the country who have ordered the helmet, and we expect 50-plus colleges to have them," Marver added. "Last year we had about 20."

Marver believes a reduced helmet price from \$1,500 a year ago to \$950 by the end of last season — a drop enabled by higher volumes and lower manufacturing costs — and a reduction in weight by a half-pound added to the Zero1's popularity.

As for its high ranking, "players feel better when they are hit, they don't feel an impact as much. They say they don't get headaches, don't have those 'seeing stars moments.' Like how the helmet fits so when they move their heads it tracks really well. And there's the wider field of view our helmet provides."

He approves of the NFL banning certain helmets.

"I was encouraged by it because the league and union have been telling manufacturers to be more assertive about encouraging players to wear the better testing helmets. We like any movement toward rigorous testing because it makes us stand out, and we found them genuinely interested in player safety."

Miller and Dr. Jeffrey Crandall, chairman of the NFL's engineering committee, mentioned potential development of helmets designed for specific positions. They cautioned such an advance is years away.

"What we have done is we now have three years of video review and looked at over 350 concussions," Crandall said. "We are starting to see trends in data. It's going to be a few more years" to gather enough information to pursue position-specific helmets.

Crandall noted that sensors will be used to evaluate helmets in college football this year. He's hopeful they will be used next year in the NFL.

"That gives us all types of information on each position," Crandall explained, "and then we can put together a test and share that data with manufacturers."

Brag on, C.J. Anderson. You earned it with the Denver Broncos

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
April 17, 2018

Some guys come out of nowhere. Doesn't happen often, but it happens.

C.J. Anderson is one of those guys. He has a championship ring and isn't afraid to tell you about it. Brag on, No. 22. You earned it. It will be a while before I forget C.J.'s improbable rise from undrafted free agent to Super Bowl 50 champion. His flashy training camp in 2013 had caught my eye so I wrote about it, and the timing of this column (from Aug. 15, 2013) is what jumps out. It was a Thursday during the tail end of training camp that Anderson busted a knee during practice. Major injuries that happen on Thursdays during the tail end of training camps are usually injuries that prevent an NFL rise like Anderson's. He made sure it didn't.

There have been better Broncos running backs than Anderson. He's ninth in career rushing yards (3,051 for Anderson), right behind Clinton Portis (3,099) and right ahead of Jon Keyworth (2,653). Even the man who released him on Monday, John Elway, had more rushing yards (3,407).

But I'm unsure if there's been a more unlikely success story. Anderson once told me the story of how he would sneak into Cal football games as a kid because he couldn't afford a ticket. Years later, he bought his dear grandmother a new car with his first big NFL paycheck to replace her broken-down '97 Saturn. He's also started a foundation for youth in his native Vallejo, Calif. Where do the two parties go from here? There will be options for Anderson, and the Broncos have issues other than running back (and running back, too!) they must address.

But Anderson's is a success story that already has a happy ending. He's got a ring that he should be happy to tell you about.

Farewell to C.J. Anderson, who used negatives to fuel surprising success with Denver Broncos

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
April 17, 2018

C.J. Anderson is a complicated soul.

Ask him a question, and he might dissect it, examining every word with the care of an enraged surgeon. He's usually on the verge of getting mad because he runs on negative fuel, which is powerful stuff. He searches, always, for doubters.

"It's you guys," he said to me after a 2016 Broncos practice. Sports writers, he said, doubted his durability and his speed. We wondered if he belonged in an NFL backfield.

Anderson smiled, but this was not one of those everyday happy smiles. This smile featured a touch of vengefulness

"But I got to prove you guys wrong, so thank you."

Anderson will depart Colorado with a full tank of fuel. On Monday, C.J. encountered yet another doubter. You probably know this doubter, who walks through life as our state's resident sports legend.

John Elway.

It was Elway who informed Anderson he no longer would play for the Broncos. Elway was not making a statement on Anderson's ability to attack NFL defenses. He made a statement on Anderson's scheduled 2018 salary, which would have run \$4.5 million.

Anderson will be running the ball somewhere in 2018, quite possibly reuniting with Adam Gase and Brock Osweiler in Miami. Count on this: C.J. already is scheming for the day he goes to battle against Elway and the Broncos.

Elway made the right move, although I'm sorry to see Anderson depart. He was one of the league's ultimate underdogs, a player who endured football rejection since he was a teen, a player who refused, always, to let others define his future, a player who willed himself into a valuable piece of a Super Bowl champ.

He failed to get a D-1 scholarship out of high school and spent two seasons laboring at Laney, a junior college in Oakland. He was certain an NFL team would draft him after his promising, if not overwhelming, two-year career at Cal. He was wrong. He spent draft day watching ESPN, waiting in vain to hear his name.

He arrived in Colorado in 2013 as a short and not especially swift free agent. He was given little chance to make the roster, but Anderson had another view. He saw himself celebrating in end zones after long runs while silencing all the teams that failed to draft him.

While laboring on the 2013 practice squad, Anderson constantly peppered Champ Bailey with questions. Bailey, NFL great, took time to nurture a no-name teammate. Champ commanded Anderson to stampede into the secondary with violent intent. Defensive backs, Champ revealed, quiver at the sight of a vicious ball carrier.

When C.J. was at his best, you could see the result of the Champ conversations. He crumpled cornerbacks with stiff arms. He busted three, four, sometimes even five tackles. He inspired fear, even among the allegedly fearless.

Off the field, Anderson could be refreshingly reflective. One afternoon, he sat in front of his locker, eating a salad garnished with mushrooms and hardboiled eggs as we embarked on a wide-ranging conversation, one that veered into philosophy books, the O.J. Simpson murder trial and the brutal, accurate football criticism he received from his mother, Neva.

His mind was, and is, fully alive. His mind is what took him from unwanted free agent to a back paid \$6 million for the 2016 season.

Elway made the right call. Anderson was not worth a \$4.5 million investment in 2018. With Anderson gone, the Broncos must attempt an upgrade at running back. In other words, they shouldn't go with Devontae Booker as lead back in 2018.

I realize running backs are not as precious as they once were. The NFL is a passing league. I get that.

But an elite running back could do much to lift the Broncos sagging offense. Reasons abound for the franchise's failure to reach the playoffs for consecutive seasons, but the main reason is the often pitiful offense. Free agency and the draft offer Elway a chance to repair his broken attack.

Anderson was solid. Anderson was determined, as only a football underdog can be determined.

But even when filled with all that negative fuel, C.J. wasn't elite and will never become elite.

Yes, I'm doubtful. Maybe someday a triumphant C.J. will thank me again.

Emmanuel Sanders excited to play with collegiate-rival Case Keenum

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 17, 2018

Emmanuel Sanders' new quarterback is no stranger to him.

When Sanders played at Southern Methodist, he fell victim to Keenum and the Houston Cougars' attack on a couple of occasions.

In 2008, Keenum threw a 26-yard touchdown pass with 24 seconds left to guide Houston to a 44-38 win. He finished that contest 28-of-36 for 404 yards and a 184.8 quarterback rating.

A year later, Keenum completed 25-of-36 passes for 233 yards and a touchdown in a 38-15 win.

After that pair of performances in their head-to-head matchups, it's safe to say Sanders is glad to have Keenum on his side.

"I love it," Sanders said Monday. "I was just talking to him, and I told him, 'Man, we've had some great battles.' When I went to SMU and he was at U of H, he was slinging the ball around. I'm happy to have him here [and] to have a new quarterback — someone who can sling the football and throw it and loves to throw it and also [is] smart enough to handle the whole playbook."

But as the Broncos return for the start of their offseason workout program, Sanders said he doesn't yet have a feel for how successful the new pairing will be in 2018.

"Everybody's been asking me how I feel about him," Sanders said. "I don't really know yet, until we get here and see the chemistry and truthfully, it's on us. It's on Case and the other quarterbacks and the wide receivers to get on the same page and turn this thing around. It's all about ... putting the work in, and it starts tomorrow."

Just how long will that chemistry take to develop?

"Nobody knows," Sanders admitted Monday. "But at the same time, it's all about working at it and having a common goal. So we're going to set that, and we're going to work toward it every single day."

Broncos release running back C.J. Anderson

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

April 17, 2018

C.J. Anderson, one of the Broncos' most successful undrafted free-agent finds in recent years, has been released, the Broncos announced Monday.

"Over the last five years, C.J. developed from an undrafted player into an important member of our team," President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway said. "We appreciate all he did as a Bronco, especially during our Super Bowl season, and thank him for his many contributions on and off the field."

Anderson, who in 2017 became the Broncos' first 1,000-yard rusher since 2013, provided plenty of highlights during his time in Denver.

He broke onto the scene in 2014 with his lone Pro Bowl selection, which was aided by plays like a 51-yard touchdown reception against the Raiders. Anderson scored a career-high 10 touchdowns that season.

Anderson's 48-yard overtime touchdown run against the Patriots in 2015 helped secure home-field advantage for the Broncos as they made a run to Super Bowl 50. He would score the Broncos' only offensive touchdown in that game, and in 2017 he added his sole 1,000-yard season.

The 27-year-old totaled 3,910 all-purpose yards during his five seasons in Denver, and he averaged 4.4 yards per carry.

Denver's running back corps now consists of third-year running back Devontae Booker and second-year back De'Angelo Henderson.

Broncos sign five exclusive-rights free agents

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

April 17, 2018

The Broncos signed five of their seven exclusive-rights free agents, the team announced Monday.

The team extended tenders to those five players — linebacker Zaire Anderson, defensive end Shelby Harris, linebacker Joseph Jones, wide receiver Jordan Taylor and tackle Elijah Wilkinson — in March.

Anderson has played in each of the Broncos' 32 games over the past two seasons, including three starts. He has totaled 37 tackles and one forced fumble.

Harris had a breakout season in 2017, beginning with his game-saving field-goal block in the Broncos' season opener. He started six games and appeared in all 16, racking up 34 total tackles, 5.5 sacks and three passes defensed.

Jones played in seven games in 2017 and totaled three tackles after he signed with the Broncos on Nov. 7.

Taylor has shown plenty of talent in his first two NFL seasons, recording 351 yards and two touchdowns on 29 receptions. With good size and great hands, the third-year veteran has provided highlight-reel catches that have left fans wanting more.

Wilkinson played in nine games in his rookie season in 2017, and he can already count Head Coach Vance Joseph as a believer.

"He's coming along well," Joseph said in November. "He's a young player. He's a physical player. He's a smart player."

Linebacker Jerrol Garcia-Williams and long snapper Casey Kreiter are the last two players who have yet to sign their exclusive-rights tenders.

Broncos release C.J. Anderson, could be in market for NFL draft's top RBs

By Lindsay Jones
USA Today
April 17, 2018

The Denver Broncos will have a new starting running back in 2018.

The team released veteran C.J. Anderson Monday morning prior to the start of the team's offseason program. The move was first reported by NFL Media.

Anderson spent the entire offseason in limbo, in part because of the \$4.5 million salaries he was due in 2018 and 2019 – with none of it guaranteed.

With Anderson's departure, 2016 second-round pick Devontae Booker becomes the likely candidate to be the team's starting running back while also opening the door for 2017 sixth-round pick De'Angelo Henderson to see increased playing time. Henderson's rookie season was derailed by a July wrist injury that required surgery.

The move to release Anderson also adds intrigue to the top to the draft, where the Broncos own the No. 5 pick. Could general manager John Elway make a play for Penn State running back Saquon Barkley with at No. 5 should the three teams picking ahead of them (the Browns own two of the top four picks) pass? In order for Barkley to be on the board at that point, the Broncos likely would need the top three teams to take quarterbacks, followed by the Browns going with a wild card — perhaps North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb.

Another possible scenario is that Elway now uses one of the team's early selections – all of the Broncos' eight picks are in the first five rounds, including two in the third – on a tailback in what appears to be a deep class at the position.

As for Anderson, a logical landing spot for the veteran is with the Miami Dolphins, with whom he previously tried to sign as a restricted free agent. Miami also expressed interest in trading for Anderson this offseason. If Anderson were to land there, he would be reunited with head coach Adam Gase and run game coordinator Eric Stutesville, with whom he had close relationships with in Denver.

Here's how the first 10 picks of the 2018 NFL Draft are most likely to play out

By Jason La Canfora

USA Today

April 17, 2018

Now less than two weeks away from the NFL draft, a few things are coming into focus.

It's clear that this selection process is going to be dominated by quarterback madness at the top. There are five-to-seven players who have the highest projections and seem locks to go in the first 10 picks, and there are 18-to-20 players truly worthy of a first-round grade. After that, evaluations tend to be all over the place, and the last 12 selections of the first round in particular could be filled with some twists and turns and players being called who weren't found on a lot of mock drafts.

It's still a little early in terms of being able to sort out the best information possible about which teams are truly leaning which way, but you do continue to hear the same names mentioned as the best of the best in this draft: Saquon Barkley, Quenton Nelson, Bradley Chubb, Minkah Fitzpatrick and Denzel Ward. The consensus I get from the evaluators I speak with is that those five are the best players in this draft overall, and if not for all of the extreme demand for passers, that is how picks 1-5 would likely play out in some order. Of course, that won't be the case when next Thursday rolls around.

At this point I am going to operate on the assumption the Browns are taking Josh Allen first overall, and then project how I believe the rest of the first round might play out. Of course, if the Browns take Sam Darnold instead, well, this becomes a total and complete study in futility. But let me take a crack at it, anyway, and assess how the first 10 picks could unfold.

1. Cleveland Browns

JOSH ALLEN, QB, Wyoming. Huge arm. Huge upside. Some potentially big flaws as well. He fits John Dorsey's M.O. when it comes to quarterbacks. He's a kid you could see Dorsey's mentor Ron Wolf taking. Wolf's son, Eliot, now works for Dorsey. May not be the safest pick given the accuracy woes, but certainly has grand-slam potential.

2. Buffalo Bills (trade with Giants)

SAM DARNOLD, QB, USC. I just don't see the Bills staying at 12 and I'm not convinced the Giants are taking a QB themselves, and while I don't think New York GM Dave Gettleman wants to go all the way back to 12, maybe the Bills trade up twice and now Gettleman ends up with Denver's original pick at 5. I'm even less convinced the Broncos really want to take a QB at 5, and I continue to hear they are open for business, so I'm going bold here with Bills GM Brandon Beane moving twice to get the second QB off the board.

3. New York Jets (from Indianapolis)

BAKER MAYFIELD, QB, Oklahoma. Everyone in the NFL knows the Jets are going QB, Mayfield's production is off the charts and the Jets can handle his personality. It could actually end up playing really well in New York in a Broadway Joe kind of a way. If you love Russell Wilson and you were intrigued by Johnny Manziel's athleticism and moxie and upside, then you could fall in love with this kid.

4. Cleveland Browns (from Houston)

BRADLEY CHUBB, DE, NC State. You could go running back here, for sure, and Dorsey very well might trade this pick as well. But the chance to put together young, cheap bookend pass rushers like Chubb and Myles Garrett in the end is much too delicious to resist. They've traded down enough in years past to get to this point.

5. New York Giants (trade with Bills via Broncos)

SAQUON BARKLEY, RB, Penn State. Gettleman gets the player he quite possibly would have taken at second overall a few slots down and picks up precious draft picks along the way. He badly needs to round out a roster that managed three wins a year ago.

6. Indianapolis Colts (from NY Jets)

DENZEL WARD, CB, Ohio State. Plenty of defensive players make sense here, and Nelson might end up being the best player in this entire draft. But a year after finding his ball-hawking safety in the first round, Chris Ballard pairs him with arguably the best corner in the draft as he tries to rebuild a longtime toothless defense.

7. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

MINKAH FITZPATRICK, DB, Alabama. Tampa needs to get right on the back end and someone to take command of that secondary. Fitzpatrick could do it from multiple positions if need be, able to toggle between free safety and play the slot or outside corner if necessary, as well.

8. Chicago Bears

QUENTON NELSON, G, Notre Dame. Chicago will do back flips if he gets down this far. The Bears just hired his old position coach from Notre Dame, he fills immediate need and helps protect a very young and raw QB from Day One.

9. San Francisco 49ers

TREMAINE EDMUNDS, LB, Virginia Tech. This 19-year old has the potential to be an explosive factor. He could help fill an immediate need on the inside given Rueben Foster's legal problems but also could be a difference-maker off the edge at the next level.

10. New England Patriots (trade with Raiders)

JOSH ROSEN, QB, UCLA. Bill Belichick and Josh McDaniels get the potential heir apparent to Tom Brady and don't have to move inside the top nine to do so. The price to land Mayfield in the top five is too steep, but Oakland is willing to move back after all the cream of the crop is gone and New England finds value with potentially the best QB in this draft at the 10th slot.

There you have it. Talk to me in a week and I might go in a complete different direction. Heck, talk to me in five hours and I might want to scrap it. But as food for thought, and with an emphasis on this being a draft where it might pay to expect the unexpected, I'll let this ride. It would make for an entertaining first few hours of the draft, if nothing else.

Broncos' release RB C.J. Anderson, could Saquon Barkley be his replacement?

By Frank Schwab

Yahoo.com

April 17, 2018

The Denver Broncos just cut running back C.J. Anderson, who started all 16 games for them last season. The Broncos have the fifth pick of next week's NFL draft. Saquon Barkley is the best running back prospect to come along in many years.

There will be a lot of dots connected after Monday's news that Anderson, who rushed for 1,007 yards last season and has been the Broncos' regular starter since 2014, was cut. That was reported by Nicki Jhabvala of The Athletic and many other outlets. The Broncos had tried to trade Anderson but couldn't find a partner.

Seeing as how the move came less than two weeks before the draft, there are some moving pieces to what seems like a fairly normal April transaction.

Does this mean Saquon Barkley lands in Denver?

The first issue is that Barkley might not be there when the Broncos draft fifth overall. Nobody seems to know what the New York Giants are doing at No. 2. The same goes for the Cleveland Browns at No. 4. And even if Barkley falls to No. 5, if a quarterback the Broncos like also falls to that spot, they'll have to be tempted. Case Keenum is on just a two-year deal. Denver needs a quarterback for 2020 and beyond.

But if Barkley falls, it really is a nice fit.

The Broncos need offensive playmakers. They're surprisingly thin at receiver and tight end after Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. They don't have a great option at running back anymore, unless you're a big believer in Devontae Booker. Barkley is such a versatile performer, and an impact player from Week 1 on, he would fix a lot of what ails Denver's offense. Barkley would be the Broncos' de facto third receiver, and maybe even battle to lead the team in receptions. It would certainly be no surprise if the Broncos took Barkley, if he's there.

What are the Broncos' options with the fifth pick?

Denver is one of the most interesting teams in a very interesting draft. They are in a great spot at No. 5. Because of the short-term deal to Keenum, a quarterback is in play if one falls. Also, if a quarterback falls, a team like the Arizona Cardinals or Buffalo Bills might overpay to trade up and get one.

If the top four quarterbacks go with the first four picks, that means the Broncos can get the top non-quarterback prospect on their board (and the Broncos don't need a quarterback, so they don't have to pull a New York Jets and completely overpay to move up). Guard Quenton Nelson would help an offensive line that seems to be constantly rebuilding. Bradley Chubb and Von Miller would make an unbelievable pass-rush duo. Minkah Fitzpatrick would make the secondary a big strength again, after the team traded Aqib Talib. And then there's Barkley.

Denver is in a great spot at No. 5 because it has a lot of cards it could play.

Why cut C.J. Anderson if there's no guarantee to get Barkley?

Anderson was slated to make \$4.5 million, and Denver didn't want to pay that. Part of the reason is that even if the Broncos don't get Barkley, they should get a very good rookie running back. This rookie running back class is very deep. There should be possible Week 1 starters in the early and middle rounds, and maybe even a couple in the late rounds. It's possible LSU's Derrius Guice is available to Denver early in the second round. If Guice is gone, and he probably should be by then, someone like USC's Ronald Jones or Georgia's Nick Chubb could be available.

Whether it's Barkley or someone else, it doesn't seem like the Broncos' starting running back is on the roster right now.

Will Anderson be a starter again in 2018?

Anderson probably won't be a 16-game starter like he was last season, but he's just 27 and coming off a nice season. He averaged 4.1 yards per carry and caught 24 passes on a bad offense that had one of the worst quarterback situations in the NFL. He's smart, versatile and would add value to many teams. Anderson's options might be limited because of that rookie running back class though. A lot of teams will draft cheap, talented options and want to roll with them instead of a higher-priced veteran like Anderson.

Panthers sale marked by uncertainty, rumors

By Daniel Kaplan
Sports Business Journal
April 17, 2018

This month is always a time for whispers and rumors in the NFL, as the weeks before the draft sees mud flung at players hoping to hear their name called. This April, however, there has been another NFL whisper campaign, and instead of rookie players, it is directed at prospective rookie owners.

The sale of the Carolina Panthers has witnessed an unusually steep level of speculation about the three known bidders, so much so that one of them — David Tepper — publicly refuted last week a New York Times report that he had backed out of the process.

But the buzz isn't limited to whether Tepper is in or out. Consider claims about:

- Media outlets having a dossier detailing the alleged ties to shady interests by bidder Ben Navarro's Mexican lending business.
- Bidder Alan Kestenbaum's rumored ties to Russian mining interests, and his long-ago partnership with late financier Marc Rich, who President Bill Clinton infamously pardoned.
- A fourth bidder could be in the mix.

Bidding for the Carolina Panthers

David Tepper

The best-known of the three, he is a limited partner in his hometown Pittsburgh Steelers and founded Appaloosa Management, a hedge fund focused on distressed debt.

Alan Kestenbaum

Chairman and CEO of Bedrock Industries, which owns and operates metals, mining and natural resource companies.

Ben Navarro

CEO of Sherman Financial, which specializes in subprime consumer lending.

Marc Ganis, a consultant whose Sportscorp has worked with NFL teams for decades, said the rumor mill reflects the fact that some of the bidders are relatively unknown.

"It is typical people who buy NFL teams are well-known before they buy an NFL team," Ganis said.

That notion was amplified last month when Bob McNair, the Houston Texans owner and like Navarro a native of South Carolina, said he had never come across the subprime lender during his time in the state.

"I don't know him, but he is from Charleston and I have a home ... and business interests down there and I have never run into him," McNair told reporters at the NFL owners meeting in Orlando.

However, the universe of individuals who can buy an NFL team has shrunk drastically in recent years as the prices have skyrocketed and league rules limit debt and the number of partners. Depending on one's source, the price for the Panthers could top \$2.5 billion. To put that in perspective, that is more than the combined total of the last two teams that were sold: the Buffalo Bills, in 2014 for \$1.4 billion, and Cleveland Browns in 2012 for \$960 million.

Tepper is of course well-known to the NFL, as the fund manager is a limited partner in the Pittsburgh Steelers. He appears to be the most qualified bidder but also the one who is willing to pay the least, sources said.

The sales process is being run by Allen & Co., which faces a tough situation. Panthers owner Jerry Richardson has very high price expectations, some say over \$3 billion. Yet the bidder with the deepest pockets, Tepper, is promising not to overpay and is believed to be in the low \$2 billion range.

The NFL wants a new owner by the league's next owners meeting, set for May 21.

NFL Insurers Seek To Compel Info From League's Concussion Doctors

By Max Rettig
Sports Techie
April 17, 2018

Insurance companies suing the NFL are looking to force the disclosure of information from NFL-affiliated doctors for potential evidence of the NFL's prior knowledge of concussion risks.

According to a report from L.A. Biz Journal, the insurance companies are seeking information from four former doctors and one current doctor. The insurers are exploring the possibility of canceling the NFL's coverage—arguing it would count as fraud—if the documents reveal what and how much the league knew about the risks of traumatic head injury. If the doctors are ordered to provide the documents, they would be the first people with league affiliation to be subject to legal discovery regarding head trauma, according to the report.

According to the report, the documents that could be in play are reported to contain communications between the league, players, and the special committees that the five doctors served on. The NFL has agreed to billions of dollars in settlements for numerous claims from former players. The league is relying on insurance money to pay at least part of that sum, and if the insurers win a fraud argument and cancel coverage, that would take a chunk out of the league's bottom line.

The report adds that while most of the requested documents are from the mid 2000s, the insurers are also seeking documentation surrounding the NFL's attempts in 2015 to block the National Institutes of Health from granting funding to a doctor who criticized the league.

The judge has scheduled a hearing for Tuesday morning regarding why the doctors should not have to comply with the requests.

SportTechie Takeaway

This is big news in that it brings a threat against the NFL of revealing documentation that would do harm to the NFL's public perception surrounding safety and concussion risk.

In 2016, the NFL promised to place \$100 million into concussion research and funding for safety improvements, and it has worked with several technology companies to make safer helmets that minimize concussion risk. The league's own research revealed in November that the NFL could move to implement helmet requirements that are specific to each position on the football field; cornerbacks and wide receivers are often at greater risk of potentially concussive hits.

Obviously none of these safety steps would be particularly convincing in the courtroom and the court of public perception should the insurers successfully force disclosure of documents that show what and how much the NFL knew about player safety and the risks of serious head injury.

Broncos officially bid farewell to C.J. Anderson

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
April 17, 2018

Running back C.J. Anderson spent five seasons with the Broncos, and the Broncos officially have decided to move on.

“Over the last five years, C.J. developed from an undrafted player into an important member of our team,” Broncos president of football operations/G.M. John Elway said in a statement. “We appreciate all he did as a Bronco, especially during our Super Bowl season, and thank him for his many contributions on and off the field.”

Anderson, undrafted out of Cal, signed a four-year offer sheet with the Dolphins as a restricted free agent in 2016. The Broncos matched, honoring the first two years before cutting Anderson loose, with \$4.5 million in salary due this year and \$4.5 million in salary due next year.

The Broncos had hoped to trade Anderson, but they could find no takers.

Denver moves forward with Devontae Booker as the top option, with the possibility that another running back could be added via the draft.

Baker Mayfield's last-minute visits include Broncos, Cardinals

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
April 17, 2018

There are plenty of people who think Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield will be a top three pick, but he's taking a few visits this week with teams picking lower.

According to Ian Rapoport of the NFL Network, Mayfield is visiting the Broncos today, and will go from Denver to Arizona to meet with the Cardinals.

The Broncos, picking fifth, have some options at quarterback since they signed Case Keenum in free agency and have a former first-rounder in Paxton Lynch they might not want to Hackenberg yet.

The Cardinals, currently in the 15th spot, are beyond the range most think the top four quarterbacks will be available.

But even after signing Sam Bradford and Mike Glennon (or specifically because they signed Sam Bradford and Mike Glennon), they'd be interested in a young quarterback to add to the mix.

Broncos sign five exclusive-rights free agents

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

April 17, 2018

The Broncos announced they have signed five of their exclusive-rights free agents.

Linebacker Zaire Anderson, defensive end Shelby Harris, linebacker Joseph Jones, wide receiver Jordan Taylor and tackle Elijah Wilkinson signed their tenders, leaving linebacker Jerrol Garcia-Williams and long snapper Casey Kreiter as the last two Broncos yet to sign their exclusive-rights tenders.

Anderson has played every game the past two seasons with three starts. He has 37 tackles and a forced fumble.

Harris started six games and appeared in the other 10 last season, making 34 tackles, 5.5 sacks and three pass breakups.

Jones played seven games with three tackles in 2017 after signing with the Broncos on November 7.

Taylor has 29 receptions for 351 yards and two touchdowns in two seasons.

Wilkinson played in nine games last season.