

Did the Broncos make a mistake not adding a QB in the draft?

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
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Columnist Mark Kiszla on Monday answered questions from readers in a live Lunch Special chat. Here are the highlights:

Do you think the Broncos made a mistake not adding a quarterback? If not with the top pick, but maybe later in the draft?

Kiz: Here's what I think I think: John Elway liked Sam Darnold and was intrigued by Baker Mayfield. Those quarterbacks were both long gone by the time Denver was on the clock at No. 5 in the first round. Elway just shelled out \$25 million guaranteed for Case Keenum. Elway might be the last supporter at Dove Valley Headquarters that Paxton Lynch has. And seldom does a day go by when somebody (often from Mississippi) doesn't ask me when Chad Kelly is going to be the next great Broncos quarterback? So do I think Elway made a mistake by not adding a QB in the later rounds. No.

No QB in the draft concerns me for two reasons. First, it seems the Broncos are one Case Keenum high ankle sprain from a five-game losing streak. Second, I don't see a developing option to replace him in two or three years, and history says it's rare to have a rookie lead a Super Bowl team. What's happening in the braintrust(?) at Dove Valley?

Kiz: Here's my theory: The Case Keenum signing has Gary Kubiak written all over it. Keenum is precisely the kind of QB that Kubiak loves. I call Keenum Matt Schaub 2.0. Is that a good thing? Well, if memory serves, Schaub did make a trip to the Pro Bowl when he played for Kubiak in Houston. But can the Broncos get back to the Super Bowl with Keenum at the controls? The truth is: It's doubtful. Keenum is a bridge. A bridge to where? That's a mystery.

Who do you think will lead the Broncos in rushing yards this year?

Kiz: Somebody just asked if I wish the Broncos had added a QB in the draft. Well, I do wish Denver had traded up in the second round to grab a running back. I liked Nick Chubb of Georgia, which could've given us Double-Chubble (please forgive me.) I liked Ronald Jones of USC. I liked Kerryon Johnson of Auburn and Derrius Guice of LSU, both of whom were passed over in favor of SMU receiver Courtland Sutton, who does have a chance to be a very good player for the Broncos. So can you tell I'm stalling? I don't know who will be Denver's leading rusher in 2018. Neither do the coaches. Let's hope it's Royce Freeman, or else that was probably a wasted pick in the third round, because I'm not sure if Devontae Booker gives Broncos Country much to get excited about.

Do you think Phillip Lindsay will be on the Broncos 53-man roster in September?

Kiz: Phillip Lindsay! Been doing this sportswriting thingy in Denver for almost 35 years, and few athletes I've met have been as upbeat and fun to watch as Phillip Lindsay! So I was glad he decided to take the \$15,000 bonus from the Broncos to stay in Colorado and try to make his NFL dream come true with his

hometown team. So mark this down: Phillip Lindsay! is going to stick with the Broncos. And do not be surprised when Phillip Lindsay! scores his first NFL touchdown in 2018. Kick return? Punt return? Circle route? It will be fun to watch how Phillip Lindsay! finds the end zone.

Sorry if I missed the joke, but what is the reason you put exclamation marks after Lindsay's name?

Kiz: Because I'm very, very excited about the Broncos signing Phillip Lindsay! And that's no joke.

Do you think the Rockies hitters are in a slump or is this the new normal?

Kiz: I think the Rockies are extremely good at striking out. And that's pretty normal throughout the major leagues, where swing trajectory is all the rage, which results in way more pitches winding up in the catcher's mitt for strike three than in the bleachers for a home run. Bringing up David Dahl helped. His name has to be regularly written on the lineup card, even after Carlos Gonzalez returns from injury, don't you think? While it's early, I don't think it's too early for general manager Jeff Bridich to at least go shopping for a bat.

What did you think of the third round pick Isaac Yiadom? Broncos did the same thing by picking a raw CB last year – Brendan Langley – and did not play as expected.

Kiz: There's nothing wrong with picking a raw talent in the draft. Here's the dealio: You have to coach em up. Among the many problems of Vance Joseph's staff in 2017 was the fact the Broncos stunk at developing their young talent. That's got to change. And change in a hurry. Or else there will be somebody else coaching the Broncos in 2019.

Hello Mark, how are you? We have a website about the Broncos in Brazil and we really like your work from The Post. Thanks for the excellent articles and opinions. Here's my question: What did you think of Vance Joseph's decision to move Bradley Chubb to OLB? I think we may be missing an opportunity to gain more strength inside the defensive line.

Kiz: I have the great good fortune to travel to Brazil for the first time in 2016, when The Denver Post sent me to cover the Olympics. And I must say: After traveling to 40-plus countries, I immediately fell in love with Brazil. Can't wait to go back! (Hint: Invite me anytime). Now let's talk football: I might be the knucklehead among Denver media that is most concerned with the Broncos moving Bradley Chubb to outside linebacker. Did Chubb get snaps in a two-point stance at North Carolina State? Yes, he did. Does he have the skill set to thrive at outside linebacker at the NFL level? I think so. But I believe Chubb would be more comfortable as a rookie if his primary job was defensive end in a 4-3 front. It's on Vance Joseph and the Broncos coaching staff to get Chubb up to speed and comfortable so he can be a true impact player in 2018, not 2019. I think nothing less than Joseph's job depends on it.

I keep hearing Paxton Lynch comes in late, leave early, just wants to play video games, is socially awkward, etc. Is this true? Have you been close enough to witness this kind of stuff firsthand, or is this merely radio chatter to create a story line? P.S. Really enjoyed your Olympics coverage.

Kiz: Thanks for the Olympics kudos. I know the Olympics have more than their fair share of problems. But I love nothing more than covering the Olympics. Paxton Lynch. I will admit: I loved him as a college player. I liked it when Denver drafted him. I met Lynch during the week Denver played in Super Bowl 50. Despite talking to him for 15 minutes for "The Sports Show," I missed it. After Lynch had been in a Broncos uniform

for about a month, I realized he was immature. He did not get what it takes to be an NFL quarterback. He could've really used a season where his only job was following Peyton Manning around. Lynch was his own worst enemy in his development. And I fear he has fallen so far behind that Lynch might never catch up. We'll see. It's make or break for Lynch in 2018.

Michael Jordan or LeBron James as the greatest basketball player?

Kiz: The greatest basketball player of all time is Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Let's start with this: How many players in the history of the game were so dominant that the rules-makers outlawed the dunk? And then what happened in response? Mr. Abdul-Jabbar developed the sky hook, the most unstoppable offensive weapon in the history of basketball. I like the Michael Jordan vs. LeBron James debate. I still like Mike in that debate, but it's getting very close.

One of the big failings of the last two seasons is the Broncos' inability to cover backs out of the backfield. Did they do anything in free agency or the draft to improve there?

Kiz: Before it became hip for draftniks to move Roquan Smith up the draft board, I was a big fan of the Georgia linebacker. (See, I have no anti-SEC sentiment.) In fact, I think Smith would have been a legit alternative for the Broncos to take with the No. 5 overall selection. That's no dis of Bradley Chubb. But I think Smith, while perhaps a bit small to play inside backer, will be a sideline to sideline force in the pros. What did the Broncos do in the draft to get better pass coverage on running backs? Not much as far as I can see.

Do you see Su'a Cravens playing linebacker more than Safety? Not sure why we draft Jewell if he will never see the field since Todd Davis will be playing 1st and second downs

Kiz: Honest admission: I don't have strong opinion on Cravens. I haven't studied the tape. But I do feel very strongly in ability to evaluate a player after watching him work in person. So, unlike some gasbags on the radio, I'm not going to pretend I'm an expert on Cravens. Todd Davis? He's a good man. Decent football player. I don't hold him in as high regard as the Broncos do.

What are the expectations for the Rapids this season?

Kiz: I'd like to start with the Rapids averaging 1.5 goals per game. And go from there.

Are there any free agent guards still available? Is Menelik Watson an option?

Kiz: No offense to Mr. Menelik Watson, but I never understood why the Broncos saw him as a viable option to fixing their offensive line woes.

Broncos CB Chris Harris Jr. voted No. 86 among NFL's top 100 players

By Joe Nguyen
The Denver Post
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Harris came in at No. 86, dropping from No. 63 in 2017. In 2016, he finished No. 52. The eighth annual ranking is determined by votes from NFL players.

“Motivation I’m coming back,” he tweeted, adding a steaming face emoji.

The 28-year-old defensive back recorded two interceptions, seven pass deflections and forced a fumble in 16 games for the Broncos last year. In seven years in the NFL, Harris has been named to three Pro Bowl teams and was a first-team All-Pro in 2016.

Keenum in charge of 11-man offense as Broncos begin Phase II

By Mike Klis

9 News

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For the first time, Case Keenum lined up the Broncos' first-team offense Monday, called out the signals, and ran a play.

Phase II of the Broncos' offseason program has begun at the team's UCHHealth Training Center headquarters. After Phase I was limited to strength, conditioning and classroom work, Phase II puts Vance Joseph and his coaching staff on the field for 90 minutes of instruction. Practice allows for 11 players to a side to run their plays, although there can be no opposing side.

Keenum, Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly – and nothing but -- are the Broncos' quarterbacks taking turns running their 11-man offensive units through plays.

Keenum is the Broncos' new starting quarterback after he signed a two-year, \$36 million contract in mid-March. Of that \$36 million, all \$18 million is fully guaranteed this season and \$7 million of his \$18 million is fully guaranteed for 2019.

Wish we could have seen his practice debut, even if there was no defense. NFL rules prohibit fans from watching practice until training camp in late-July. The media can't observe until organized team activities (OTAs) begin May 22.

Keenum is "the guy" after Broncos general manager John Elway decided against drafting a quarterback over the weekend. And how many readers out there thought the Broncos had given up on Lynch?

The first-round pick in the 2016 draft, Lynch will enter Phase II of his third season as the Broncos' backup quarterback.

"We are not kicking him to the curb," Elway said. "He can still develop. When we drafted him two years ago, as I said, we knew it was going to take some time.

"Paxton is going to compete with Chad for that backup spot. We are not going to bring another one in for OTAs. We will take a peek at that. It will be those two and Case. We are going to OTAs with those guys and go from there."

First-round draft pick Bradley Chubb wasn't around Monday to figure out where to line up with the Denver defense. Keenum, Lynch and Kelly could not share reps with rookie receiver Courtland Sutton, running back Royce Freeman or the rest of the Broncos' new draft class.

Rookies must stay away from their team's facility until the rookie minicamp, which for the Broncos will be held May 10-12.

Rookies will join the veterans in time for OTAs in late-May.

Broncos believe a rise in maturity will raise their game

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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After the Denver Broncos concluded their work in this year's NFL draft, their plan could clearly be seen in the résumés of their 10-player class.

Yes, the Broncos wanted NFL-caliber athletes -- and certainly got one of the draft's best overall at No. 5 in NC State defensive end Bradley Chubb -- but they also wanted some football maturity from their newest additions. That's because if they're really going to dig out from last season's 5-11 finish, they need as many of the new arrivals as possible to be ready and able to do some of the heavy lifting.

The Broncos' 2018 draft class is filled with former team captains and multiyear starters who have game after game and season after season of proven production.

"There are lots of seniors in the group, so we're excited about that maturity level -- all of them are that way," Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway said. "One thing we wanted to do going into this draft was get quality football players but also quality people, and that was an emphasis -- to have that maturity level.

"One thing that we learned last year when we're 5-11, when you're in a losing streak, you need that maturity and that leadership to get things turned around. These players have that ability and they have that maturity level. That's why we decided to go more in that direction, to say that if things got tough for a couple weeks, we've got to get things turned around."

The Broncos leaned a little more toward athleticism in the previous two drafts with players who had flashed potential but may have been one-year starters who had some rough edges in their play. Among the 16 players from those two draft classes, just two -- safety Justin Simmons and tackle Garrett Bolles -- were full-time starters last season. And of those two, only Simmons looked settled with that job.

"In this [draft] class, in my opinion, every guy on this sheet here will have a chance to compete," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "Again, every player develops differently. The guys from last year's class, they have been in the league now for seven or eight months. They have a chance to come back this year and compete again and prove their worth.

"I think as you have your draft classes, some guys can play their first year, second year or even the third year. Just being patient with certain guys, having the coaches who coach those guys up and get them better every year is the key."

Last season, however, many of the Broncos' veteran players, including defensive end Derek Wolfe and former tight end Virgil Green, talked about a growing disconnect between the team's younger players, especially the last two draft classes, and the more experienced players. The word "entitled" was even tossed around.

And during an eight-game losing streak, the team's longest in decades, those issues were evident at times.

Enter this draft class into the reconstruction. Chubb is one of the best players in the draft, but he is also a high-effort player who has been consistently lauded for how he carries himself. His father, Aaron, put it this way: "He was raised to treat people the right way, how he wants to be treated."

But pick after pick through the weekend, it was clear what the Broncos wanted. Linebacker Josey Jewell was a three-time captain at Iowa with three 100-tackle seasons; cornerback Isaac Yiadom won his team's leadership award at Boston College; and running back Royce Freeman had returned to Oregon for his senior season rather than enter the 2017 NFL draft as a player who already had two 1,300-yard rushing seasons. "I felt like it was one of the best decisions of my life," he said.

The proof will be in what happens from here on out. But what the Broncos did this past weekend resembled what Elway did in his first draft class on the job in 2011. With the draft's best pass-rusher on the top of that class in Von Miller, the Broncos chose plenty of proven players who had key leadership roles on their teams in the picks that followed.

To this point, that class may have also been the most productive with the team in the years that followed.

"I think they sensed that's the type of guy I was, and I'm pretty sure I put that out there that that's the guy that they're going to get, a guy that comes in and he's going to work not only on the field, but off the field," said wide receiver Courtland Sutton, the Broncos' second-round pick. "He's going to make himself the best version of his self as possible, and that's what I do day in and day out."

After a couple years of ‘misses,’ John Elway may have just drafted the future of the Broncos’ offense

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

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Weeks before he’d land his next starting quarterback and months before he’d find his rookie class, Broncos general manager John Elway stood at a podium inside the Indiana Convention Center at the NFL combine to field questions about his “misses.”

His 2017 draft class combined for only 53 games played, and three of its members spent the season on injured reserve.

His 2016 draft class featured a first-round quarterback the Broncos traded up to get — only to see him lose two offseason competitions for the starting job.

And of Elway’s five previous draft classes, only seven players remain on the Broncos roster.

“Believe me, I’m not done swinging and missing,” Elway warned a crowd of reporters that day in late February. “Misses don’t bother me. We just have to figure out a way to get it right. That is what we are working on.”

Because the “R” word is not an option.

“I didn’t say it. I’m not going to say it,” Elway said. “Life is too short to rebuild in the NFL.”

Though Elway refused to make any promises then, and only time will tell if his eighth draft class truly is his finest, the Hall of Fame quarterback-turned-GM might have pulled off yet another comeback drive.

His 10-player draft class this year, the Broncos’ largest since 1999, includes a number of hits, a few steals and, most notably, two players who could morph into the future of the Broncos’ offense.

Courtland Sutton, a receiver out of Southern Methodist University whom the Broncos graded as a first-round talent, was taken in the second round by Denver at No. 40. DaeSean Hamilton, Penn State’s all-time leader in receptions, was added two rounds later, at No. 113.

The two were brought in to plug a gaping hole in the receivers room, but they could also be the future No. 1 and No. 2, supplanting a pair of Pro Bowlers in Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

“I think (DaeSean) is more like ‘E-man’ (Sanders). I am more like Demaryius,” Sutton said. “We are going to be able to take from them what they do at a high level and add that to our games so that whenever they need a break or whatever the situation is on the field, we can come on the field and there won’t be any drop off at all.”

With a 6-foot-3, 218-pound frame, Sutton has the build of Thomas, the athleticism of a defensive back (he previously played safety) and the ball skills to play inside or out.

“His skillset translates to being the No. 1 guy. He’s got No. 1 traits as a receiver,” Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. “Obviously he’ll come in and compete for the third spot, but John said it, in the future he can be our No. 1 guy.”

At 6-1, 203 pounds, Hamilton is viewed similarly with his versatility. He played for the Broncos on the North team at the Senior Bowl in Alabama, and could play multiple roles in Denver.

“We have receivers that fit a certain skillset that we wanted,” Joseph said. “We wanted big, fast guys with great ball skills, and he fits in that profile. Being a slot guy doesn’t mean you’re 5-9. That’s all by concept and that’s by design. He can play everywhere. At the Senior Bowl, he was our best receiver. So, having that guy for a full week and to watch his maturity as a player was huge for us.”

The selections of both were lauded for obvious reasons. For years, the Broncos lacked a reliable slot and third receiver. Cody Latimer, a former second-round pick, and Bennie Fowler, failed to become the consistent target the Broncos’ (many) quarterbacks needed and both departed in free agency this offseason.

Carlos Henderson, a third-round pick last year, was drafted to assume that role, but suffered an injury in preseason that landed him on injured reserve. Isaiah McKenzie, a fifth-round selection in 2017, was brought in for his explosiveness and return ability, but his fumbles landed him on the bench.

Not since Wes Welker have the Broncos had a true slot or No. 3 receiver. That was four years ago.

“The third receiver is like a third corner,” Joseph said. “Everyone is in sub and everyone is in three-wide. It’s like being a starter. (Sutton) can play X and he can play in the slot, so that won’t be important where he plays. It’s important to the concept that you call in the huddle, but his skillset is special. He can play all three spots.”

With Sutton and Hamilton on board, Henderson and McKenzie will face steep competition for both playing time and roster spots. But the ceiling for these rookies is even higher.

When the Broncos signed Sanders as a free agent in 2014, he labeled Denver as “receiver heaven” with Peyton Manning starring at quarterback.

But in the years since, he and Thomas have worked with four different starting quarterbacks, three head coaches and four offensive coordinators, making their 1,000-plus years each from 2014-16 all the more remarkable.

Now, Thomas, the most-tenured Bronco on the roster, is 30 years old and entering his ninth season. Sanders turned 31 in March and was limited last season because of an ankle injury. Both have two years remaining on their contracts, including 2018, but their salaries for 2019 are not guaranteed.

Which means with his selections of their possible replacements, Elway got some hits in 2018—and potentially many years to come.

Forget the grades, here are The Athletic's 2018 NFL Draft team-by-team superlatives

By Kevin Fishbain

The Athletic

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In The Athletic war room/Slack channel, we deliberated how to best recap the 2018 NFL Draft and decided we'll leave the grades to everyone else. If GMs wait three seasons until they truly grade a draft, why should we do it before anyone has taken a snap?

We are, however, able to evaluate each team's picks as far as how each player fit that specific team and if anyone "reached" for a player, or found a "steal" in a later round. Below is our post-draft analysis, breaking down each team's best pick, the one that was a little bit questionable, and a sleeper who may surprise us down the road.

AFC East

New England Patriots — Jeff Howe

Best Pick: Isaiah Wynn should instantly improve the offensive line, whichever position he plays, and that's vital for Tom Brady after minor injuries lingered the past two seasons.

Most questionable: I like their draft, but my only real second guess would be not trading up into the late teens to jump on a defensive sweet spot.

Sleeper pick: Christian Sam could be a decent special teamer who finds a way to carve out a limited defensive role if injuries hit the linebackers again.

Buffalo Bills — Joe Goodberry

Best Pick: Trading up in the first round to pick Tremaine Edmunds, the linebacker out of Virginia Tech, was an excellent chaser to wash down the taste of swallowing the Josh Allen trade-up earlier in round one. Edmunds is athletic, big and young. His upside is limitless.

Most questionable: Trading up for Josh Allen as your franchise quarterback has to be one of the most questionable moves in draft history. I get it. You need a franchise quarterback, but taking Allen with such a premium cost is like buying a \$500 lottery ticket to win \$100 — I can't see it paying off at the end.

Sleeper pick: Virginia Tech guard Wyatt Teller could end up starting very early for the Bills as they could use interior offensive line help. Teller had a productive college career and could be seen as a steal in the fifth-round one day.

Miami Dolphins — Kevin Fishbain

Best Pick: The Dolphins haven't had a tight end with more than 400 yards receiving since Charles Clay in 2014. Enter Mike Gesicki, who has great size and dynamic speed for Adam Gase's offense. Cameron Jordan

and Julius Thomas didn't work out, and now the Dolphins have a player in Gesicki to command the middle of the field.

Most questionable: It was a pretty solid draft overall, starting with getting Minkah Fitzpatrick outside the top 10, so to nitpick, we'll go with Durham Smythe. He is a solid blocking tight end and should play that role opposite Gesicki, but two tight ends in the first four rounds?

Sleeper pick: Running back Kalen Ballage was a good find late in the fourth round. He's 6-foot-2 with 4.46 speed, and most importantly for Gase's offense, he's an adept pass catcher. He's got some of the best hands among the running backs and had a strong Senior Bowl week. He should make an impact in Miami's backfield.

New York Jets — Connor Hughes

Best Pick: It's Sam Darnold. This entire offseason for the Jets has been about getting a quarterback. When the Jets missed on Kirk Cousins in free agency, attention turned to the draft. Darnold was arguably the top passer in the class, and the Jets managed to snag him at No. 3.

Most questionable: The Jets' third-rounder is a bit of a head-scratcher. It's not that they didn't need a defensive end, but was Nathan Shepherd in the third round really the best option? He'll turn 25 in October, played college ball at a small school (Division II Fort Hays State), and many scouts believe he's a developmental project. Seems like a bit of a reach.

Sleeper pick: I love the selection of Trenton Cannon in the sixth round. The little-known running back from Virginia State averaged 32.6 yards per kick return and scored three return touchdowns his final two collegiate seasons. The Jets haven't had a weapon in the return game in years. He has a chance to come in and play right away. He fits the Darren Sproles mold.

AFC North

Pittsburgh Steelers — Mark Kaboly

Best Pick: James Washington. In a draft that stressed the future over the present, the Oklahoma State receiver could see significant action his rookie year with the departure of Martavis Bryant. Washington doesn't have the speed or the size associated with the top-end receivers but he could be one of the best long-ball catchers in college that past two years.

Most questionable: Terrell Edmunds. Nobody had Edmunds going in the first round, let alone to a Steelers team that has a young safety like Sean Davis and just signed free-agent Morgan Burnett to a three-year, \$14.5 million contract. Edmunds could be more of a hybrid linebacker, so that could explain the Steelers' interest.

Sleeper pick: Chukwuma Okorafor. The Steelers' offensive line is set for the next two years so it was strange to see them go after Okorafor in the fourth round. However, with Okorafor's raw ability combined with offensive line coach Mike Munchak's track record of developing offensive linemen, he could be a steal — just not this year.

Baltimore Ravens — Mark Kaboly

Best Pick: Lamar Jackson. Not only did the Ravens get one of the top players in the draft, they were able to slide into the first round to get Jackson thus ensuring a fifth-year option potential. Add in the money they can save next year by getting rid of Joe Flacco and it's a home run pick.

Most questionable: Mark Andrews. The Ravens already addressed their tight end needs when they drafted Hayden Hurst but came back in the third round and took Andrews. It's not so much that Andrews isn't worthy but the Ravens could've used the pick on a receiver in the spot instead.

Sleeper pick: Orlando Brown. Brown tested terribly at the combine and that's undoubtedly why he fell to the 83rd overall pick. However, Brown's tape is so good that he will be a starter immediately for a not very good Ravens offensive line.

Cincinnati Bengals — Joe Goodberry

Best Pick: Andrew Brown in the fifth round was the best combination of value, need and upside. The Virginia defensive tackle tested like a top athlete, shows explosion on tape and had a great Senior Bowl week.

Most questionable: Mark Walton in the fourth round was questioned by most fans. The tape is good and Walton looks like a fun runner, but how has Cincinnati continued to add more talent to running back over adding talent to the offensive line?

Sleeper pick: Darius Phillips in the fifth round could be Cincinnati's primary kick returner as a rookie. With six returns for touchdowns in college, Phillips has a chance to be very good in the NFL also.

Cleveland Browns — Zac Jackson

Best Pick: Nick Chubb has the power and the vision to immediately win the starting running back's job for a team that figures to rely on the run game. The Browns have upgraded their skill-position group and feel good about their remade offensive line. Todd Haley says he wants to run the ball, and Chubb gives him the chance to follow through on that.

Most questionable: The Browns have needed a franchise quarterback for 30 years and were on the clock for seven months. They eventually chose Baker Mayfield because they love his leadership skills and football acumen, but it's fair to wonder if he's physically gifted enough to hold up in the AFC North and eventually become a top-tier passer.

Sleeper pick: Because the Browns needed to add athleticism at every level of their defense and badly needed depth at linebacker, fifth-rounder Genard Avery figures to see the field immediately. His pass-rush ability gives him a chance to eventually become a full-time contributor.

AFC South

Jacksonville Jaguars — Patricia Traina

Best Pick: Receiver D.J. Chark, the second-round pick, should give the Jaguars a solid vertical threat in the passing game. If he develops the way former receiver Allen Robinson did, Chark might very well end up the steal of the Jaguars draft.

Most questionable: The Jaguars took a flier on punter Logan Cooke with their final pick (No. 247) in the draft. Maybe he'll turn out to be the next Jeff Feagles, but it's still surprising Tom Coughlin opted for a rookie punter after his experience with Matt Dodge while with the Giants.

Sleeper pick: Offensive tackle Will Richardson is a big, strong kid with good feet who has done particularly well in pass protection. He could end up as the steal of the Jaguars' draft.

Tennessee Titans — Kevin Turner

Best Pick: Harold Landry was the second-best pass rusher in this draft. To get him in the second round at No. 41 is tremendous value.

Most questionable: Luke Falk in the sixth round. Generally taking a quarterback in the sixth isn't a bad idea, considering they are lottery tickets, but the Titans only had four draft picks total in this draft. I thought they could have filled other roster needs instead of taking a quarterback who I think will never make it in the pros.

Sleeper pick: Safety Dane Cruikshank had a third-round grade on my board. He's better as a strong safety where he can run and hit, but he has the speed and the range needed to cover the entire field.

Indianapolis Colts — Ted Nguyen

Best Pick: Quenton Nelson was in the argument for best overall player in this draft. He's one of the best guards that we've seen come out of college in a long time. It was a no-brainer to get Andrew Luck some much needed protection for whenever he does make his return. Additionally, Nelson's mean streak is going to be a perfect fit in Frank Reich's run scheme.

Most questionable: Tyquan Lewis in the second round might not be a huge reach because there seemed to be some interest around the league but there's not much to like about Lewis' game besides his measurables. He doesn't look particularly explosive on film and he isn't very physical.

Sleeper pick: Nyheim Hines in the fourth round is interesting. Not only is he fast (4.38 40-time), he displayed excellent vision and feel as a zone runner. He's also a weapon in the passing game. Reich will have some fun drawing up plays to take advantage of Hines' versatility.

Houston Texans — Bo Wulf

Best Pick: Without a first- or second-round pick, the Texans were still able to add a second-round talent in Stanford safety Justin Reid. If Reid comes along quickly and can replace Tyrann Mathieu, who is only signed to a one-year deal, all the better. And there's a delicious irony in Bob McNair's top pick being the brother of Eric Reid.

Most questionable: Central Florida tight end Jordan Akins is 26 years old. At a position where players take even longer to adjust to the NFL, it's nice that the Texans were willing to dole out a favor to the elderly, but they probably could have waited longer to do so — especially with other worthwhile pass-catching prospects still on the board like Chris Herndon, Ian Thomas and Tyler Conklin.

Sleeper pick: A productive college pass rusher with 24.0 career sacks (17.5 over the last two seasons), sixth-rounder Duke Ejiro fell over concerns about his shoulder. If the Texans' gamble on his health pays off, they'll have a third-round talent on the edge.

AFC West

Kansas City Chiefs — Nate Taylor

Best Pick: Brett Veach took a gamble in the second round when he selected edge rusher Breeland Speaks. If Speaks can provide additional pressure on third down, the Chiefs defense should improve in terms of total sacks and turnover opportunities, areas they struggled in last season.

Most questionable: Derrick Nnadi, a defensive tackle from Florida State, will likely get limited playing time in a crowded defensive line. The Chiefs need to improve in stopping the run, but taking Nnadi in the third round, when plenty of cornerbacks were available, could produce little results in his first couple of seasons.

Sleeper pick: Armani Watts, a safety from Texas A&M, was a four-year starter and made plays because of his intelligence and instincts on the field. With the opportunity to learn from Eric Berry, Watts could be a valuable contributor for the Chiefs.

Los Angeles Chargers — Zac Jackson

Best Pick: For the Chargers to get Derwin James without trading up was a bit of an upset — and could be a coup. James gives the Chargers an immediate starter at a position of need, and his athleticism gives him a chance to become a star once he gets comfortable with the NFL game.

Most questionable: After starting the draft with two players they'd graded highly, the selection of Justin Jones in the third was based on need. Jones has the size and athleticism to eventually become a starting-quality player, but he'll need to be more consistent than he was in college.

Sleeper pick: Kyzir White was a safety in college, but the Chargers plan to turn him into a linebacker. That follows a league-wide trend of needing more speed defensively, and White has the instincts to help on special teams immediately while learning a new position and trying to earn defensive snaps.

Oakland Raiders — Vic Tafur

Best Pick: Mo Hurst is a potential impact defensive tackle. The Raiders passed on him five times because of his heart condition but were excited to get him in the fifth round. They expect to get a season out of him and then see how his heart checks out a year from now.

Most questionable: Kolton Miller at 15. The Raiders reached in a down year in the draft for tackles. A workout guy who didn't have great tape at UCLA. They expect him to compete right away at left tackle, though they then took another left tackle in the third round. Hedging their bet?

Sleeper pick: UDFA Eddy Pineiro has a big leg and the Raiders gave the Florida kicker \$25,000 to compete against Giorgio Tavecchio. Plus, the Raiders drafted Pineiro's holder in college, punter Johnny Townsend.

Denver Broncos — Nicki Jhabvala

Best Pick: Bradley Chubb. The Broncos stayed patient and spurned an offer from the Bills to get the best defensive player in the draft. Chubb's presence should help to free up Von Miller more and the two together has the potential to do damage similar to Miller-DeMarcus Ware tandem.

Most questionable: John Elway might have had himself one of his finest drafts, filling positions of needs with players who have the ability to contribute immediately. The questionable pick is a non-pick. He did not draft a quarterback. Behind Case Keenum are Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly, who will duke it out for the No. 2 job in the offseason. Having either one snap away from taking over seems risky.

Sleeper pick: Phillip Lindsay. The Broncos signed the running back him as an undrafted free agent immediately after the draft and, though he's small (5-foot-8, 190 pounds), he's a workhorse with a proven track record. Lindsay finished his career at Colorado as the program's all-time leader in all-purpose yards and second all-time leading rusher. He ran a 4.39 40 in front of the Broncos brass at his pro day, has the ability to catch passes out of the backfield and return kicks. Lindsay could fill a lot of roles for the Broncos.

NFC East

Philadelphia Eagles — Bo Wulf

Best Pick: He won't make the most immediate impact, but Josh Sweat fits the mold of foresight the Eagles will need to maintain a Super Bowl-caliber roster once Carson Wentz signs a mega-extension. The Eagles may have the league's best defensive line right now, but it's an aging unit, especially on the outside. At 21, Sweat may be inactive through much of his rookie season. But the former top recruit who was miscast as a four-technique with Florida State offers upside down the road as a potential third-down running mate for Derek Barnett.

Most questionable: Dallas Goedert is certainly the best player the Eagles drafted, and they should be applauded for sticking to "best player available," especially with only one pick in the first three rounds. The acquisition of the Ravens' second-round pick in 2019 is a nice bonus, too. But the onus is now on Doug Pederson to get the most out of a second tight end — a relative luxury compared to more premium positions.

Sleeper pick: Jordan Mailata, the former rugby behemoth, will be a fun story to follow throughout the summer, but Jeremy Reaves, an undrafted defensive back out of South Alabama, has a better chance of making an impact as a rookie. The Eagles liked him enough to bring him in for a pre-draft visit, and he'll have an opportunity to earn a job at safety, where the Eagles have little backup behind Malcolm Jenkins and Rodney McLeod.

Dallas Cowboys — Bob Sturm

Best Pick: Connor Williams. The trick for Dallas the last decade has not been to target the proper first-round pick, but rather to make sure you find a capable and dependable starting player in Round 2 to bring your draft together. Williams seems to be a solution to their left guard vacancy and provides overall offensive line depth that cost them dearly in 2017.

Most questionable: Leighton Vander Esch. This is a spot where need and best player available converged and the Cowboys decided to go all in on the player they have loved all along. To hear them describe him, the Cowboys think they took Brian Urlacher 2.0 and if they did, they will get the last laugh. If they didn't, the masses will wonder why they didn't chase a small deal for Derwin James.

Sleeper pick: Mike White. The quarterback in Round 5 from Western Kentucky has a real opportunity in Dallas to be in a very advantageous position in the organization if they require some help at QB1 in the next 12-24 months. It will be very interesting to track his progress through training camp and surely the groundswell of the fan base's support could become apparent.

Washington Redskins — Jeff Cavanaugh

Best Pick: Derrius Guice. Guice is a top-three back in this class at worst, but the very vague swirling rumors about potential off-field concerns somehow landed him at the end of the second round. They got incredible value with Guice.

Most questionable: Troy Apke. Da'Ron Payne in the top half of the first round was early as well but that filled a big need. Apke's tape doesn't match the phenomenal athleticism from the combine and the fourth round seemed a little early for a traits pick.

Sleeper pick: Trey Quinn. The SMU receiver and Mr. Irrelevant 2018 should make the football team and have a long NFL career.

New York Giants — Dan Duggan

Best Pick: It would be easy to go with No. 2 pick Saquon Barkley, but second-rounder Will Hernandez represents the best value. The Giants desperately needed to upgrade their offensive line and the UTEP guard was viewed as a potential first-round pick. The Giants landed Hernandez with the 34th overall pick and he should step into the starting lineup immediately.

Most questionable: Giants general manager Dave Gettleman said Richmond quarterback Kyle Lauletta had too much value to pass on in the fourth round. But taking a quarterback after Gettleman and coach Pat Shurmur spent all offseason vowing that Eli Manning has "years" left was a bit of a head-scratcher, especially with 2017 third-round pick Davis Webb in the fold.

Sleeper pick: Linebacker Lorenzo Carter is 6-foot-5, 250 pounds and ran a 4.5-second 40-yard dash at the combine. Those are first-round measurables, but the Giants landed Carter in the third round. If Carter's production matches his physical tools, he could be a steal for a team in need of pass-rushing help.

NFC North

Minnesota Vikings — Chad Graff

Best Pick: Brian O'Neill. The Vikings survived a run on offensive linemen in the second round and were still able to pick O'Neill when pick No. 62 finally came to them. An offensive line in need of reinforcements as they look to protect new quarterback Kirk Cousins gets a 6-foot-7 offensive tackle with plenty of potential. O'Neill has only played the position for three years after switching from tight end and could become a mainstay at right tackle for Minnesota.

Most questionable: Mike Hughes. There's little doubt that Mike Zimmer and the Vikings wanted another cornerback — and by all accounts they got a pretty good one in Hughes. But he arrives with a bit of baggage after two legal run-ins prompted his transfer from the University of North Carolina to the University of Central Florida. Hughes becomes the third cornerback the Vikings have taken in the first round the last five years. Given that he was picked No. 30 overall, that's a spot that the Vikings could have used to bolster their offensive line.

Sleeper pick: Ade Aruna. The 218th overall pick has only been playing football since his senior year of high school. The Nigeria native is a strong athlete who has shown a good ability to rush the passer as a defensive end. As the Vikings look to rotate more players in on the defensive line next season, Aruna may have an opportunity. And, in just his fifth year of football, he'll be learning from Zimmer, one of the most respected defensive minds in the game.

Detroit Lions — Chris Burke

Best Pick: Frank Ragnow. Bob Quinn has made the offensive line a priority for three offseasons now, so it wouldn't have made any sense to follow the LeGarrette Blount signing by leaving a hole up front. The Lions are saying they won't lock in Ragnow to guard or center yet, but he's going to be their center. He's a beast — big, smart, athletic. Exactly what they needed.

Most questionable: Tracy Walker. This pick actually looked better after the Lions traded into Round 4 for Da'Shawn Hand, because one of the obvious knocks against the Walker move was that it neglected a glaring D-line need. Still, Walker is, at best, the No. 4 safety on the roster and faces an uphill climb to a meaningful role.

Sleeper pick: Are there rules here? Can this also be Walker? Because he actually might be pretty good down the road. For the sake of mixing it up, I'll say Tyrell Crosby instead. He has the physical make-up to be a starting right tackle or guard in this league, and he's probably going to be the Lions' swing option both spots the moment he gets to town.

Green Bay Packers — Dan Durkin

Best Pick: Iowa defensive back Josh Jackson in the second round. His questionable long speed and his one year of production kept Jackson out of the first round, but 27 passes defended and eight interceptions in one season are impressive totals. Scouts covet his length and ball productivity. In the end, coaches may find that his best position is safety. But he's a quality prospect with a high ceiling.

Most questionable: Kendall Donnerson. This is more about the position than the player. The Packers have a glaring need at edge rusher, so waiting until the seventh round to address this position didn't make much sense. Their hope is their secondary can hold up a click longer to let the rush get home.

Sleeper pick: Equanimeous St. Brown in Round 5. Yes, the Notre Dame product is primarily a vertical or "nine" route runner, but he has an intriguing size-to-speed ratio. The Packers are always looking for weapons for Aaron Rodgers and St. Brown brings a unique skill set and some long speed that this group was otherwise lacking.

Chicago Bears — Kevin Fishbain

Best Pick: When is the last time the Bears' first-round pick came with fewer question marks than Roquan Smith? Certainly not in Ryan Pace's tenure as GM. The best linebacker in the country last season fills a need for the Bears, brings speed to the defense and, as a bonus, they love his intangibles. A no-brainer at No. 8 who can be an impact player right away. Runner-up goes to Anthony Miller, who could be very productive in this offense.

Most questionable: In this case, it's a questionable position switch as opposed to the player himself. James Daniels was the best interior offensive lineman on the board, but moving a two-year Iowa starter at center to guard is going to be scrutinized (especially for the Bears), no matter how good he is. Daniels has the size and abilities, and the Bears have the right O-line coach to make this move, but there's a little bit more of a projection here because of the position switch.

Sleeper pick: Ryan Pace waited until Round 6 to grab a high-upside, injury-prone player, but if Kylie Fitts' durability issues are a thing of the past, he has the athleticism and the build to be a factor at edge rusher, a position of need for the Bears. Fitts wreaked havoc in 2015, so the talent is there.

NFC South

New Orleans Saints — Dan Durkin

Best Pick: Third-round wide receiver Tre'Quan Smith. He gives the Saints offense another deep threat. He'll have to work on using his length to his advantage when pressed at the line of scrimmage. But he has a knack for big plays in contested situations.

Most questionable: I picked Marcus Davenport to the Saints in our mock draft, so I knew the fit was there on the edge. However, was it worth next year's first-round pick to trade up to get him? That's a huge payment to make for a raw prospect who will need time to develop. To me, that move signals a team hoping to make one last push for a Super Bowl, but certainly comes with scrutiny.

Sleeper pick: Sixth-round cornerback Kamrin Moore from Boston College. Moore is a technician who can press, but injuries over the course of his college career slid him down draft boards. He'll immediately contribute on special teams, but should compete for time in their sub packages.

Carolina Panthers — Patricia Traina

Best Pick: Maryland receiver DJ Moore earned some high praise from former Panthers wideout Steve Smith, now with the NFL Network, who said that the Panthers haven't been able to replace Smith until they selected Moore. Moore is a dynamic playmaker who can run the entire route tree and should become one of Cam Newton's favorite targets before too long.

Most questionable: The Panthers traded the 147th and 197th picks to the Rams to move up to No. 136 where they grabbed 235-pound edge rusher Marquis Haynes. That's a lot of capital for a defensive end who is likely to play in spot situations.

Sleeper pick: The Panthers plucked Indiana tight end Ian Thomas in the fourth round as a potential heir to Greg Olsen's throne. Thomas has a lot of upside and could end up being a steal.

Atlanta Falcons — Kevin Turner

Best Pick: Calvin Ridley. Adding him to the mix with Julio Jones is just ridiculous. Good luck covering that, NFC South.

Most questionable: I loved their draft, so this one is difficult, but I'll go with Russell Gage the WR from LSU. He was not on my board at all with an undraftable grade. The fact that I'm keying in on a sixth-round WR tells you how much I liked Atlanta's draft.

Sleeper pick: Deadrin Senat. The third-rounder from South Florida was a second-round player on my board and he immediately fills the void that was previously held by Dontari Poe.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Chris Burke

Best Pick: Most of this haul should help, but let's go with Carlton Davis. He was the second of two corners taken by the Bucs in the second round, but plenty of folks will tell you he's better than the Bucs' earlier pick M.J. Stewart. At 6-foot-1, he also projects as a true outside cornerback, of which there aren't a lot of elite options. Don't be surprised if he's playing a huge role early.

Most questionable: Vita Vea. The Bucs traded down before selecting Vea and eventually turned their No. 7 pick into Nos. 12 (Vea), 53 (M.J. Stewart) and 56 (traded for two more picks), so it's hard to be too critical. But did Tampa Bay need Vea here? And over, say, Derwin James?

Sleeper pick: It's Jack Cichy, if he can stay healthy. That's a huge "if" because he didn't come remotely close to doing so at Wisconsin (hence his sixth-round availability), but he's an instinctive linebacker who knows how to find the football.

NFC West

Los Angeles Rams — Vic Tafur

Best Pick: Tackle Joe Noteboom has good technique and the third-round pick gets to live in the classroom and weight room for a season. No pressure for the team's first pick of the draft.

Most questionable: Obo Okoronkwo doesn't have the height, weight, length or bend to be the pass rusher in the NFL that he was at Oklahoma.

Sleeper pick: The team's first two picks' only job will be to get the rest of the offensive linemen donuts. Tennessee RB John Kelly should be the backup to Todd Gurley. Undersized power runner who can catch a little bit.

Seattle Seahawks — Sheil Kapadia

Best Pick: It has to be Shaquem Griffin. Not only is he the feel-good story of the draft, but he can play. The Seahawks need new energy from their younger players as they overhaul the roster. Griffin will give them that immediately on special teams, and eventually, they can carve out a role for him on defense.

Most questionable: Who drafts a punter? Well, I guess four different teams did this year. But still, this seems like a bad use of resources. The Seahawks moved up seven spots in the fifth round to take Michael

Dickson and gave up a seventh-rounder in the process. On a team that has plenty of pressing needs across the board, I'm not sure what they were thinking.

Sleeper pick: Pete Carroll has said often that he runs a 4-3 with 3-4 personnel, and the Seahawks are always looking for pass rush. In the sixth round, they grabbed edge rusher Jake Martin out of Temple. He's undersized, but Martin had eight sacks and 11 tackles for loss last year and could carve out a role on defense with an impressive training camp.

Arizona Cardinals — David Lombardi

Best Pick: Arizona scored with its one-two combination at top of the draft, picking quarterback Josh Rosen in the first round and receiver Christian Kirk in the second. It's easy to see these two forming a dynamic connection for years to come, and it also isn't hard to identify why the Cardinals needed them: Sam Bradford isn't the answer at QB, and Larry Fitzgerald is 35 years old.

Most questionable: Sure, Fordham running back Chase Edmonds racked up loads and loads of college production, but that was against FCS Patriot League competition. On top of that, Edmonds played only seven games as a senior because of ankle and hamstring injuries. In such a deep running back class, Arizona took on a lot of questions with this fourth-round pick.

Sleeper pick: Seventh-round offensive tackle Korey Cunningham has the size (6-foot-6, 305 pounds) and quickness to develop into an NFL starter. Cunningham's skill set is still raw at the moment, and he must develop more upper body strength. But the potential and opportunity is there: Arizona struggled to protect the quarterback last year, and Cunningham can develop into an anchor in front of Rosen if all progresses well.

San Francisco 49ers — David Lombardi

Best Pick: Defensive back Tarvarius Moore is one of the best athletes in this draft, and the 49ers nabbed him in the third round. On top of testing in the 99th percentile of this class in the 40-yard dash, 20-yard split and broad jump, Moore is 6-foot-2, that means he's a prototypical physical fit for both free safety and cornerback in the 49ers' Cover 3 — ideal for a team that needs quality bodies in the secondary.

Most questionable: Yes, Kentavious Street did squat 700 pounds last year, but he's another non edge-rushing defensive lineman, and the 49ers already have a glut of those. Plus, Street tore his ACL a month ago. In a funny way, that may actually be a reason the 49ers picked him: Their crowded D-line room makes a redshirt year practical. But it's still questionable.

Sleeper pick: Seventh-round defensive lineman Jullian Taylor didn't garner much hype coming out of Temple, but he's the epitome of a late bloomer: Taylor didn't play football until his senior year of high school, and he didn't play in more than two college games until his senior year at Temple. His 2017 film, though, is eye-popping: Taylor roughed up Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson (No. 6 overall) in one clip.

NFL Draft grade roundup: How the Broncos' 2018 class stacks up

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

May 1, 2018

Mel Kiper Jr., ESPN: B

Running back was one of the Broncos' biggest needs after C.J. Anderson was released, and there weren't many guys available at 71. Royce Freeman isn't a big factor in the passing game, but he was the best back left on my board. He had 60 rushing touchdowns at Oregon and packs short-yardage punch at 230 pounds. John Elway & Co. took two receivers to help out new quarterback Case Keenum. Courtland Sutton (pick 40) is a big, raw target. McShay called him a "finesse" receiver, and I agree. You want to see him use his frame better to block off cornerbacks. DaeSean Hamilton (pick 113) impressed me at Senior Bowl practices and tested better at the combine than I expected. Possible steal.

Andy Benoit, MMQB: A-

John Elway understands what a perplexingly large number of fans and media do not: Denver's Super Bowl window is still open.

Pete Prisco, CBS Sports: B

They landed the best edge rusher in the draft by taking Bradley Chubb with the fifth pick in the first round. He will be an immediate force off the edge opposite Von Miller. I wasn't as high as some on second-round receiver Courtland Sutton, but I do like the pick of fourth-round receiver DaeSean Hamilton. He runs great routes. I also liked the pick of fourth round of Iowa linebacker Josey Jewell. He will be a special-teams force right away.

Chad Reuter, NFL.com: A

Chubb was the best value on the board for this team. Putting him and Von Miller on the same defense makes them dangerous again, like when DeMarcus Ware and Miller were doing their thing. Case Keenum's two-year deal took QB out of the equation here, and Paxton Lynch still has an opportunity to grow into a starter. Sutton's going to be a playmaker at the next level because of his quick feet and size.

Ian Wharton, Bleacher Report: A

Day 2 brought incredible value to the Broncos. They added a Demaryius Thomas clone in Courtland Sutton, a starting running back in the athletic and productive Royce Freeman and defensive back depth in Isaac Yiadom. It's possible their first five picks will earn starting jobs this year.

Mark Maske, Washington Post: A-

The Broncos, thought to be in the QB market, reacted appropriately when Bradley Chubb fell to them at No. 5 overall. Pairing Chubb with Von Miller as a pass-rushing dynamic duo could move the Denver defense back toward dominant. Second-round WR Courtland Sutton and the two third-rounders, RB Royce Freeman and CB Isaac Yiadom, are capable of being solid contributors. The Broncos are left without a prized rookie QB to take over if Case Keenum falters, but the team around Keenum has been improved.

Dan Kadar, SB Nation: B

Getting Bradley Chubb and to go along with Von Miller sets Denver up with one of the best pass rush pairs in the NFL. It was a surprise that Chubb was still available at fifth overall. He's a player who is just as good against the run as he is rushing the passer. Maybe more importantly, he can keep some double teams off Miller.

Chris Harris Jr. voted No. 86 on NFL Top 100 list

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
May 1, 2018

Another year, another NFL Top 100 selection for Chris Harris Jr.

Harris comes in at No. 86 on the 2018 list, which was voted on by his peers across the NFL.

In his seventh season, Harris recorded two interceptions and seven passes defensed. He was among the least-targeted cornerbacks in the NFL.

For the first time since 2013, though, Harris was not selected to the Pro Bowl. He had accrued three consecutive selections from 2014-17, including a First-Team All-Pro selection in 2016.

Harris earned the No. 52 spot in 2016 and the No. 63 spot in 2017.

Broncos waive K Taylor Bertolet, DL Jhaustin Thomas

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

May 1, 2018

The Broncos have waived kicker Taylor Bertolet and defensive lineman Jhaustin Thomas, the team announced Monday.

The Broncos signed Thomas to their practice squad in December. Bertolet joined the team earlier this offseason.

Denver drafted 10 players during the 2018 NFL Draft and is expected to sign a handful of college free agents.

At this point in the season, a team may have no more than 90 players on its roster.

NFL Draft ratings go through the roof as 2018 marks highest-rated draft ever

By John Breech

CBS Sports

May 1, 2018

The NFL's decision to put the draft on network television for the first time ever paid off in a big way this year.

The league's three-day draft came away with the highest television ratings for any NFL Draft ever. Overall, there was an average of 5.5 million viewers watching the draft at any given time, which led to a 3.57 household rating. The 2018 numbers were a 25 percent increase over last year's rating and a 20 percent increase over the average viewership for 2017.

Overall, the NFL said that a total of 45.8 million people watched at least part of the draft. The draft actually did a bigger number than last year's Stanley Cup Final (2.7 rating, 4.7 million).

The huge numbers are definitely good news for the NFL, especially after the league watched its regular season television ratings fall in each of the past two seasons.

One of the reasons this year's draft was able to put up such huge ratings is because the NFL decided to put the event on network television for the first time ever. After years of only putting the draft on ESPN and the NFL Network, the league decided to let both Fox and ABC televise the draft this year. Fox aired the first three rounds of the draft on Thursday and Friday, and then ABC took over by televising the final four rounds of the draft on Saturday. All seven rounds were televised on both ESPN/ESPN2 and the NFL Network.

The one record this year's draft didn't break was total viewers for Round 1. During Thursday's wild first round that saw a total of five quarterbacks taken, a total of 11.2 million viewers tuned in. Although that was the second highest viewership total of any round in draft history, it didn't top the Johnny Manziel draft. In 2014, a total of 12.4 million viewers tuned in to Round 1 to watch Manziel fall to the back half of the first round.

Which team won the 2018 NFL Draft? Broncos, Bears, Giants lead the pack

By STAFF

NFL.com

May 1, 2018

With all 32 teams selecting a total of 256 players in the 2018 NFL Draft, let's take a look at which teams improved most over the weekend. Simply put:

Which team won the draft?

Adam Rank

Writer | NFL.com

Broncos put themselves back in AFC West title race

The Broncos won the draft, thanks to a need for quarterbacks and this year's once-in-a-generation running back, which allowed Bradley Chubb to fall to them at No. 5. I mean, if you walk away with the best player in the draft in the five-hole, then you have to feel rather fortunate. To put it mildly. And then they brought in Courtland Sutton, who will be a stud receiver for years. And running back Royce Freeman is going to be great for them. I was worried about the Broncos when they brought in Case Keenum, but they did a great job putting themselves back in the AFC West title race.

Gil Brandt

Writer | NFL.com

Giants knocked it out of the park with win-now additions

I thought the Giants had far and away the best draft. Their first two picks -- running back Saquon Barkley, drafted second overall, and guard Will Hernandez, drafted at No. 34 overall -- were among the top-15-ranked players in the Hot 150 list I released before the draft, and they should both be instant starters. With Barkley, Hernandez and guard Nate Solder (who signed as a free agent) added to an offense that already included Odell Beckham, Sterling Shepard and Evan Engram, the Giants' offense looks so good, it should be illegal -- it should be just about unstoppable. Eli Manning -- who played much better in 2017 than New York's 3-13 record suggested -- will have much more success in 2018. This team looks capable of making the playoffs this year. As for the rest of the picks, edge rusher Lorenzo Carter (Round 3, No. 66) and defensive tackle B.J. Hill (Round 3, No. 69) will be starters for a long time to come, possibly beginning as early as 2018. And the Giants nabbed a developmental QB in Kyle Lauletta (Round 4, No. 108). You have to take your hat off to what this team did.

Alex Gelhar

Writer | NFL.com

Packers' new GM Brian Gutekunst adds depth, sets up future with trades

You can call me a homer for saying the Packers, but even an objective analyst would admit new GM Brian Gutekunst crushed his first outing. The Packers reshaped their CB room, added much-needed LB and OL depth and drafted three size-speed wideouts to compete for their Nos. 3 and 4 roles. If they're lucky, one or two of those receivers will turn out to be a diamond in the rough, much like Jamaal Williams and Aaron Jones were at RB last year (when the Packers employed a similar strategy, drafting three young rushers to

compete). Oh, and they fleeced the Saints for a first-round pick next year as well. The Packers helped their championship chances and didn't compromise future draft classes.

Marcas Grant

Writer | NFL.com

Bucs bolster defense along with finding Doug Martin's replacement

I feel like very few people talked about what the Buccaneers did, but their draft was a nice complement to their work in free agency. Adding Vita Vea to a revamped defensive front should pay immediate dividends, while a pair of corners in the second round add depth to their defensive backfield. Throw in Ronald Jones II as a more than adequate replacement for Doug Martin, and Tampa should compete in the NFC South in 2018.

Charley Casserly

Writer | NFL.com

Chicago Bears continued to improve offense for Mitchell Trubisky

There are a number of teams that "won" the draft, but I like what the Bears did. They got who I believe will be the Defensive Rookie of the Year in Roquan Smith. Drafting offensive lineman James Daniels in the second round allows them to move Cody Whitehair to his natural position at guard, thus solidifying the inside of the offensive line. In addition, drafting receiver Anthony Miller gives them another weapon for Mitch Trubisky, which has clearly been one of their primary goals this offseason.

Jeffri Chadiha

Writer | NFL.com

John Elway outdid every other general manager in the league

Denver Broncos general manager John Elway snagged the best pass rusher in the draft in Bradley Chubb, who now gets to line up alongside the best pass rusher in the NFL in Von Miller. The Broncos also picked up one wide receiver who could've gone in the first round (second-round pick Courtland Sutton) and another who runs great routes (fourth-rounder DaeSean Hamilton). Add in a potential starter at running back in Royce Freeman and a couple blue-collar picks (linebacker Josey Jewell and tight end Troy Fumagalli), and Denver fans should be excited. Yes, a quarterback of the future would've been nice. But nobody did better than Denver over the weekend.

Michael Robinson

Writer | NFL.com

GM Ozzie Newsome nails final draft for Ravens

In two trade-downs, the Ravens were able to draft 12 players over the weekend. They started by drafting a tight end in Hayden Hurst and finished the first round by trading back in for quarterback Lamar Jackson. That move was a huge commitment to Jackson's style of play and a clear-cut sign of the Ravens' offensive future. It makes me wonder whether the choice to draft Jackson came from Ozzie Newsome, who is in his final season as the team's GM, or his successor, Eric DeCosta. Either way, Baltimore knocked this draft out of the park, with eight of its 12 picks being offensive players -- an area the team needed to bolster.

2018 undrafted free-agent deals for all 32 NFL teams

By STAFF

NFL.com

May 1, 2018

Now that the 2018 NFL Draft is in the books, teams are scrambling to sign the best undrafted rookie free agents. Here is a list of players who have signed or agreed to terms with teams.

Editor's note: This page will be updated as transactions officially occur, or are reported by news outlets.

Arizona Cardinals

CB Elijah Battle, TE Alec Bloom, LB Dennis Gardeck, LB Frank Ginda, OL Will House, S A.J. Howard, DE Alec James, QB Chad Kanoff, K Matt McCrane, LB Mike Needham, CB Deatrick Nichols, DT Owen Obasuyi, OL Austin Olsen, LB Matt Oplinger, S Jonathan Owens, Wisconsin FB Austin Ramesh, WR Trent Sherfield, CB Tavierre Thomas, WR Jalen Tolliver, WR Jonah Trinnaman, DB Ezekiel Turner, TE Andrew Vollert, OL Brant Weiss, WR Corey Willis

Atlanta Falcons

LB Emmanuel Ellerbe, WR Damoun Patterson, CB Chris Lammons, FB Luke McNitt, RB Demario Richard, LB Emmanuel Smith, RB Malik Williams

Baltimore Ravens

WR Jaelon Acklin, LB James Crawford, OL Randin Crecelius, DT Christian LaCouture, LB Alvin Jones, DT Du'Vonta Lampkin, WR Andre Levrone, LB Mason McKenrick, C Alex Thompson, K/P Kaare Vedvik, LS Trent Sieg

Buffalo Bills

OT Gerhard de Beer, DE Mat Boesen, OL Ike Boettger, CB Ryan Carter, K Tyler Davis, RB Keith Ford, DE Mike Love, CB Levi Wallace

Carolina Panthers

QB Kyle Allen, RB Reggie Bonnafon, OG Kyle Bosch, LB Chris Frey, G Taylor Hearn, OL Brendan Mahon, DL Tracy Sprinkle

Chicago Bears

CB Michael Joseph, FB Ryan Nall, LB Nyles Morgan, DB Nick Orr, CB Kevin Toliver, DE Andrew Trumbetti, DE Cavon Walker

Cincinnati Bengals

WR Dovonte Boyd, QB Quinton Flowers, TE Jordan Franks, DB Trayvon Henderson, LB Junior Joseph, RB Ray Lawry, DE Ja'Von Rolland-Jones, LB Chris Worley

Cleveland Browns

DT Drew Bailey, S/KR Evan Berry, DB Elijah Campbell, FB Garrett Dickerson, OL Christian DiLauro, DT Daniel Ekuale, DB Micah Hannemann, OT Desmond Harrison, WR Darvin Kidsy, DB Montrel Meander, WR Da'Mari Scott, DT Trenton Thompson, WR Derrick Wiles, OT Erick Wren

Dallas Cowboys

OL Jake Campos, RB Jordan Chunn, WR Malik Earl, DE James Hearn, OL Bryce Johnson, DB Kameron Kelly, LB Joel Lanning, DE Austin Larkin, WR Marchie Murdock, CB Donovan Olumba, DT Dequinton Osbourne, S Kyle Queiro, OL Jashon Robertson, S Tyree Robinson, LB Ed Shockley, QB Dalton Sturm, CB Charvarius Ward, TE David Wells

Denver Broncos

WR Jimmy Williams, LB Jeff Holland, OL Leon Johnson, RB Phillip Lindsay, DT Lowell Lotulelei, DB Trey Marshall, OL Austin Schlottman, WR Jimmy Williams

Detroit Lions

LB Al-Rasheed Benton, CB Amari Coleman, DB Antwan Davis, DT Josh Fatu, CB Mike Ford, TE DeAndre Goolsby, DL Michael Hill, DB Chris Jones, OL Brett Kendrick, QB Chad Meredith, OG John Montelus, WR Teo Redding, K/P Ryan Santoso, DB Anthony Sherrills

Green Bay Packers

OG Jacob Alsadek, QB Tim Boyle, C Austin Davis, WR Damon Gibson, DE Naashon Hughes, LB C.J. Johnson, DL Tyler Lancaster, OL Alex Light, OT Kyle Meadows, DT Filipo Mokofisi, CB Chris Seisay

Houston Texans

DB David Bellamy, RB Davin Coleman, OT Anthony Coyle, DE Mason Gentry, WR Steve Ishmael, OT K.J. Malone, DL Kingsley Opara, WR Vyncint Smith, LS Drew Van Maanen

Indianapolis Colts

DB Mike Basile, QB JT Barrett, DB Chris Cooper, WR Steve Ishmael, DB Robert Jackson, LB Skai Moore, DB Henre' Toliver

Jacksonville Jaguars

OG Tony Adams, CB Dee Delaney, CB Tre Herndon, DT Mike Hughes, LB Reggie Hunter, DE Darius Jackson, DT Lyndon Johnson, WR Allen Lazard, OT Kc McDermott, CB Quenton Meeks, WR Dorren Miller, LB Andrew Motuapuaka, S CJ Reavis

Kansas City Chiefs

OL Ryan Hunter, QB Chase Litton, WR Byron Pringle, RB Darrel Williams, CB D'Montre Wade

Los Angeles Chargers

CB Troy Brown, TE Cole Hunt, CB B.J. Clay, OT Zachary Crabtree, OL Chris Durant, CB Marcus Edmond, CB Brandon Facyson, OL Zack Golditch, DE Albert Havili, LB D'Juan Hines, DL Bijhon Jackson, TE Ben Johnson, WR JJ Jones, DL Tevin Lawson, FB/TE Anthony Manzo-Lewis, RB Detrez Newsome, DL Steven Richardson, OT Trent Scott, WR Kent Shelby, QB Nic Shimonek, P Shane Tripucka

Los Angeles Rams

WR LaQuivonte Gonzalez, DL Dalton Keene, WR Steven Mitchell, TE Codey McElroy, S Afolabi Laguda, DT McKay Murphy, DB Steven Parker, DB Chucky Williams

Miami Dolphins

LS Lucas Gravelle, OG Connor Hilland, K Greg Joseph, LB Mike McCray, DT Anthony Moten, OL David Steinmetz

Minnesota Vikings

WR Jeff Badet, RB Mike Boone, DL Curtis Cothran, LB Garret Dooley, WR Armanti Foreman, G Chris Gonzalez, CB Holton Hill, TE Tyler Hoppes, QB Matt Linehan, LB Hercules Mata'afa, CB Trevon Mathis, S Tray Matthews, FB Kamryn Pettway, QB Peter Pujals, WR Korey Robertson, RB Roc Thomas, WR Jake Wieneke, DE Jonathan Wynn

New England Patriots

DT Frank Herron, WR Chris Lacy, FB Shane Wimann

New Orleans Saints

LS A.J. Hantak, OL Cory Helms, WR Keith Kirkwood, DT Taylor Stallworth, CB Linder Stephens, TE Deon Yelder

New York Giants

C Evan Brown, DB Sean Chandler, CB Aaron Davis, LB Tae Davis, WR Jawill Davis, WR Davon Grayson, QB Thomas Sirk

New York Jets

RB Dimitri Flowers, OL Austin Golson, RB Ryan Green, CB Reggie Hall, DT Lord Hyeamang, OL Darius James, OL Dakota Shepley, DL Mychealon Thomas, LB Tre' Williams

Oakland Raiders

TE Marcus Baugh, OG Alex Officer, K Eddy Pineiro

Philadelphia Eagles

RB Josh Adams, WR Ray Bolden, QB Jeremiah Briscoe, OL Aaron Evans, LB Danny Ezechukwu, DB Jeremy Reaves, CB Jordan Thomas

Pittsburgh Steelers

DE Ola Adeniyi, DT Greg Gilmore, C Patrick Morris

San Francisco 49ers

DB Corey Griffin, CB Tarvarus McFadden, CB Emmanuel Moseley

Seattle Seahawks

DB Tanner Carew, DL Albert Havili, FB Marcus Martin, WR Caleb Scott, RB Justin Stockton, OL Viane Talamaivao, WR Taj Williams, QB Troy Williams

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

QB Austin Allen, WR Sergio Bailey, OL Cole Boozer, TE Donnie Ernsberger, DE Demone Harris, TE Tanner Hudson, S Godwin Igwebuike, S Josh Liddell, K Trevor Moore, DE Evan Perrizo, WR Erv Philips, TE Jason Reese, DE Antonio Simmons, RB Shaun Wilson

Tennessee Titans

P Austin Barnard, WR Cameron Batson, WR Deontay Burnett, DL Nick DeLuca, DE Matt Dickerson, OL Nico Falah, CB Elijaah Goins, DB Joshua Kalu, J.Y. Luper, WR Jordan Veasy, RB Akrum Wadley,

Washington Redskins

S Quin Blanding, RB Martez Carter, WR Simmie Cobbs, DL Davon Durant, TE Matt Flanagan, WR Micah Holder, OL Timon Parris, WR De'Mornay Pierson-El, FB Elijah Wellman

Media, expansion fuel leagues

By Ian Thomas

Sports Business Journal

May 1, 2018

The last 20 years has brought a litany of changes to the sports industry, perhaps no better reflected than in the growth of league business itself. Whether it was through bigger and better media rights deals, launching their own networks, forging new pathways into the digital space, expansion, or building out league-run events, the last two decades have seen league revenue figures grow significantly.

Reflecting on the last 20 years of growth, On Location CEO and former NFL and NHL executive John Collins highlighted the evolution of leagues going from “licensing/trade organizations to really dynamic operating units.”

Said Collins, “When I look back at the growth, there’s been a focus on finding ways to really complement the local businesses that the clubs have with a real complimentary driver at the national level.”

The evolution of sports media has played a critical role in league growth, not only in terms of the ever-increasing revenue streams that the deals themselves have brought, but just how the sports themselves were being consumed by fans.

MLS Commissioner Don Garber was running NFL International in 1998 before being named to his current position the following year. He recalled trying to evaluate how new technology and the internet would transform the way leagues do business.

“All of us in the industry were thinking about how the web was developing — how it would impact our lives; how would it affect the way we interact with fans; or even back then, how it would transform the way we manage our various commercial assets,” he said.

Garber said the “dramatic change in the media landscape, from how fans consume sports to how content is distributed,” strengthened the league business to what it is today.

Over the last 20 years, leagues saw great success in building out their content and carving up new rights and opportunities. The NBA was the first league to launch its own network in 1999, and the NHL, NFL and MLB quickly followed. The establishment of MLB Advanced Media transformed the way leagues approached the digital landscape, and propelled the live streaming business in sports and beyond.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman reflected on the state of sports media in 1998 and how digital platforms have since given the league more ways to increase its fan base.

“The landscape of opportunities and what leagues could do then was light years behind where it is now,” Bettman said. “It was really the infancy of digital platforms, and we were looking to establish for hockey a greater presence and to have a greater prominence on the national landscape, whether that was with our broadcast partners or expansion. The ability to reach out not only to our fans in new and better ways, but also gain more exposure with a casual sports fan, has never been greater.”

On the expansion front, the past two decades saw the NHL establish successful franchises in Nashville, Columbus, Minnesota and Las Vegas. That expansion and soaring growth in media rights deals have helped the league increase its national revenue by more than five times since 1998, aiming to eclipse \$5 billion this year.

Expansion has played an especially major role in MLS, which has seen the biggest transformation over the past 20 years. The league has gone from losing tens of millions of dollars annually and being forced to contract two teams, to now having expansion fees that top \$150 million with a long list of suitors for a franchise. Existing team valuations top \$500 million, giving the league a seat at the table alongside the other “big four” North American leagues.

The past two decades have also witnessed a major push into league-run events. The NHL’s Winter Classic and subsequent annual Stadium Series outdoor games have raised the profile of regular-season games, galvanized local markets and attracted new sponsors. MLB has seen success with its World Baseball Classic tournament, as well as in recent years hosting games at compelling neutral sites, such as North Carolina’s Fort Bragg in 2016 and the 2017 MLB Little League Classic in Williamsport, Pa. Leagues also have done well hosting games overseas, from the NFL’s efforts in London and Mexico City, to the NBA’s Global Games.

And, finally, while Bettman has held his post since 1993 and Garber since 1999, MLB, the NBA and NFL have all transitioned to new commissioners during the past 20 years, looking to build upon the accomplishments of their predecessors.

What’s next?

Collins said he’s interested to see how the league media rights model evolves, and if the next wave of deals proves to be the end of the current cycle of enormous growth.

Bettman said the demand for content — even beyond the games — has never been higher, keeping him and the league on the lookout for new ways to serve its fans.

Garber pointed to technology as not only being a driver to evolving how the leagues do business, but also evolving the player side of the business, resulting in better scouting and evaluation, and improving the health and safety of players.

While it’s perhaps impossible to predict changes to come, Collins offered one thing that is here to stay: “Leagues are no longer just a once-a-week business; it’s 24/7/365 and that’s not changing.”

Sports provide voice for change

By Bill King
Sports Business Journal
May 1, 2018

When college professor and longtime activist Richard Lapchick wrote his first book exploring racism in U.S. sports in 1984, he challenged the widely accepted premise that sports stood as a beacon for the broader society.

At the time, the accepted narrative pointed to moments such as Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier and Billie Jean King championing gender equity as evidence that the nation took its cues from the events that played out on the sports pages.

While Lapchick agreed that those were seminal moments in sports, he questioned whether the resulting advances had come at a sufficient pace — not only in the broader society, but in sports. Though Robinson ushered the way for men of color on the field, front offices in sports remained overwhelmingly white. King shone a bright light on issues of gender inequity, yet purses in women's tennis events still were dwarfed by those of the men.

Perhaps sports had squandered its broader promise. Perhaps it reflected society far more often than it led it.

"That was how I saw things at that time, and for some time after that," said Lapchick, chair of the DeVos sports business program at the University of Central Florida and a 20-year contributor to SBJ's editorial pages. "We didn't get a lot of change in those early years. But I look around today, and I've become more optimistic. We're seeing indications of a complete reversal of that.

"Sport is now helping to move society in certain directions."

For the better part of the last 20 years, you could have crafted a compelling argument that sports were moved by society more than they moved it; that athletes were a microcosm of the broader culture, sometimes magnifying its failings but rarely championing change, at least beyond the actions of a handful who were particularly engaged but rarely joined by their peers.

There were Robinson and King. Bill Russell. Jim Brown, mostly after he had retired from playing. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. And, of course, Muhammad Ali. Here and there, athletes have spoken up since then. But, for the most part, the sports landscape has been thin on, if not devoid of, athletes willing to dive into controversial social issues.

Ron Shapiro, a former sports agent who now works mostly in conflict resolution and negotiation training, said he often was struck by the criticism of athletes for not taking stronger public stances when he saw so few examples of others in positions of leadership standing up.

"I've always been mystified by the whole thing of athletes as role models, as if they're the only ones who should be held to that standard," Shapiro said. "We put them on this pedestal and we have expectations of them. Should we expect CEOs to be role models? Should we expect movie stars to be role models? I would like to expect everyone to be a role model and do what I consider to be the right thing. I advise

athletes, but I also advise business leaders and entertainment leaders and others. People say the athletes have their platform. Well, so do the others. And they don't do it in the context of their platforms.

"I think that athletes are so taken with their professional endeavors that unless there is a lightning bolt like what's happened in our communities between law enforcement and African-Americans, you're not going to see athletes as change agents. They are human beings. Some will be engaged and some won't be, like in any other walk of life."

Interestingly, it is that "lightning bolt" that Lapchick points to as an indicator that we're in the midst of a shift. He traces it back to a three-month span in the summer of 2016. Most identify the turning point as the ESPYs, when LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul and Dwyane Wade opened the show with a promise to be more socially conscious and vocal, and a call for their fellow athletes to do the same. But Lapchick took it back one month further, to the death of Ali.

"I think all that was written and said about [Ali] in that next 24 hours awakened something in many of these athletes," he said. "They certainly knew about Ali. But I don't think they fully appreciated not only what he did, and sacrificed, with regard to Vietnam, but the way he continued to stand up for what he believed in throughout his life."

The words of those four at the ESPYs lit a fire for some athletes. A month later, Colin Kaepernick remained seated during the national anthem before a preseason game. A week later, he knelt, joined by a teammate. Across the NFL, other players followed suit.

When Lapchick sees athletes take a stand, he often asks himself a question. Is it a moment? Or a movement?

"I think that this is, at this point, an irreversible movement that has been reinforced by a shift in whatever an athlete's tenuous nature might have been in terms of — what's going to happen to me if I stand up?" Lapchick said. "I think athletes see that the ones that have taken stands so far on social justice issues have been supported by the people they care about. They don't have to care about the general public at large. They're getting the support that matters to them."

So does all this mean that athletes have shifted from mirroring society to leading it? Lapchick thinks it may. Shapiro suspects that it's more a reflection of the rise of the rare issue that is dear to a large percentage of them. Both concede it could be a little of each.

Not to be lost here is the fact that nearly all active pro and college athletes fit into the millennial category, the first generation to grow up as digital natives, with an inherent feel for social media. The social activism and social media savvy that many athletes have exhibited of late mirrors their contemporaries outside of sports.

"I speak a ton on college campuses throughout the country," Lapchick said. "And I've seen a tremendous rise in the desire of young people to get engaged in social justice issues. The length of time they want to spend talking about that after I speak, and how they can do it, has definitely expanded in the last three or four years. And that includes student athletes on campus."

"I think we're dealing with a different mind-set here on matters of social justice and a willingness to do something about it. I'm very encouraged by that."

Broncos not ready to give up on Paxton Lynch

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

May 1, 2018

Many expected the Broncos to use their first-round pick on a quarterback, with Denver even contemplating a move to No. 2 overall. But the Broncos didn't draft a quarterback in any round during the three days.

Part of the reason, General Manager John Elway said, is because the Broncos aren't ready to give up on Paxton Lynch.

"We are not kicking him to the curb," Elway said, via Mike Klis of Denver's 9News. "He can still develop. When we drafted him two years ago, as I said, we knew it was going to take some time.

"Paxton is going to compete with Chad [Kelly] for that backup spot. We are not going to bring another one in for OTAs. We will take a peek at that. It will be those two and Case [Keenum]. We are going to OTAs with those guys and go from there."

Lynch and Kelly will compete for the backup job behind Keenum, who signed a two-year, \$36 million contract last month. Lynch, the 26th overall choice in 2016, has gone 1-3 in four starts with four touchdowns and four interceptions.

NFL begins two days of safety meetings Tuesday

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

May 1, 2018

The league begins two days of safety meetings at NFL headquarters in New York on Tuesday. Troy Vincent, the league's executive vice president of football operations, tweeted that the meeting will include coaches, owners, officials and former NFL players.

They will discuss ways to protect players from unnecessary risk.

The future of the kickoff is among items on the agenda and several players, including Lorenzo Alexander, Matthew Slater and Michael Thomas, have taken to social media on the heels of the meeting. Alexander encouraged the NFL to maintain "the integrity of special teams."

The league saw a record 291 diagnosed concussions last season, according to Kevin Seifert of ESPN, and Steelers linebacker Ryan Shazier seriously injured his spine.

The NFL already announced a new rule outlawing lowering the head to initiate contact with the helmet, and in conjunction with the NFLPA, it has banned the use of 10 helmet models.

Land rush for undrafted free agents started earlier than usual

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
May 1, 2018

Nearly every year, we hear complaints about the land rush for undrafted free agents, which reaches a fever pitch when the draft ends. Teams push for quick decisions, and players and agents don't always have time to think things through before teams move on to the next option.

This year, the complaints have subsided, for one very good reason. Teams have started the process of talking to potential UDFAs earlier than usual.

Technically, no discussions are supposed to occur before the draft ends. As a practical matter, discussions always start before the draft ends. As one source explained it to PFT, the discussions this year began during the sixth round.

This gave teams and agents several hours to lay the foundation for the the deals that eventually were done. And many of the deals were done before the draft ended, subject of course to the player actually being drafted.

Broncos waive kicker Taylor Bertolet, defensive end Jhaustin Thomas

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
May 1, 2018

As rosters churn in the wake of the NFL Draft, the Denver Broncos trimmed a pair of players from their roster on Monday.

The Broncos waived kicker Taylor Bertolet and defensive end Jhaustin Thomas.

Bertolet was signed by the Broncos after the start of free agency in March. Thomas joined the team last December as a practice squad addition.

Bertolet spent the 2016 offseason with the Rams after going undrafted out of Texas A&M. He converted all four extra points he attempted with the Rams in the preseason.

Thomas was an undrafted free agent signing out of Iowa State by the Indianapolis Colts last year. He appeared in four preseason games and recorded three tackles before being released at the end of training camp. He also spent time with the Oakland Raiders and Cleveland Browns on their practice squads last season.