

# Will the Broncos' selection of Sam Jones help stabilize the offensive line? The beefed-up Arizona State product believes he can help.

By Kyle Newman  
The Denver Post  
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The revolving door that was the Broncos' offensive line last season, when the team was constantly shuffling starters, was a likely impetus for the team's selection of Sam Jones in the sixth round last Saturday.

Now, the question becomes whether picking Jones, a ThunderRidge graduate who started 13 games at left guard for Arizona State last fall, can at some point ease some of the unsteadiness for Denver up front. As a sixth-round pick, he won't be looked at to come in and start, but if he can fill a backup role this season, that would be welcome.

Jones showed well at the NFL combine in February, putting up 28 reps at 225 pounds on the bench press to rank sixth among all offensive linemen. That addressed some concerns about his upper-body strength, especially considering the 6-foot-5 Jones weighed in at 305 — up 15 pounds from this past fall, when he didn't yield any quarterback sacks and also spearheaded the Sun Devils' run game.

"He was the bell cow for the offense — not only for the unit last year, but he was voted as a captain by his peers," said Rob Sale, ASU's offensive line coach last season. "He has unbelievable leadership skills, and he's mature beyond his years — he didn't act like a college junior. He's like an old, gray-haired veteran."

Garett Bolles (left tackle) and Matt Paradis (center) were the consistent pieces to the Broncos' offensive line last year, as both the rookie and the veteran started every game. Beyond those two returnees, head coach Vance Joseph has said he expects to see Ron Leary at left guard, Connor McGovern at right guard and Jared Veldheer at right tackle. Jones will be battling for a backup spot on a unit that needs depth as much as it does production.

And Jones, a Highlands Ranch native and lifelong Broncos fan, is intent on making the most of his opportunity after taking a calculated risk to leave ASU early.

"After I got down to college and started playing well, (playing for Denver) started becoming more of a possibility," Jones said. "My parents and I kind of joked about it, like what if I ended up back in Denver one day. I was like, 'Man, that would be too good to be true.' But here we are."

Had Jones stayed for his senior season — which would have required an adjustment to ASU's new head coach, Herm Edwards, as well as playing the program's third offensive line coach in four seasons following Sale's departure to Louisiana-Lafayette — he likely would have been a higher draft pick.

But both Jones and those who advised him were confident he could make the leap to the pros, especially considering his reputation as a versatile blocker with a steady film study habit.

“He’s one of the higher football I.Q.’s I’ve been around,” Sale said. “He’s a very smart football player who, mentally and in a pinch, can play all five positions for you for sure because he’s communicative and he understands what you’re trying to do as an offense when it comes to concepts.”

# Undrafted signing bonuses for Lindsay, Holland, Lotulelei among top 3 in Elway era

By Mike Klis

9 News

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Had there been an eighth round, Colorado running back Phillip Lindsay, Auburn outside linebacker Jeff Holland and Utah nose tackle Lowell Lotulelei probably would have been drafted.

Lindsay, Holland and Lotulelei each received relatively lofty \$15,000 signing bonuses to lead the Broncos' undrafted rookie class of 2018.

Only safety Jamal Carter, who received \$20,000 in signing bonus and salary guarantee last year, and linebacker Larentee McCray, who got a \$17,000 signing bonus in 2013, received greater incentive as undrafted players since John Elway became the Broncos' general manager in 2011.

A look at the signing bonuses for the Broncos' 2018 class of eight undrafted players:

2018

Phillip Lindsay, RB, \$15,000

Jeff Holland, OLB, \$15,000

Lowell Lotulelei, NT, \$15,000

Leon Johnson, OT, \$10,000

Jimmy Williams, WR, \$10,000

John Diarse, WR, \$8,000

Trey Marshall, S, \$5,000

Austin Schlottmann, G, \$5,000

Ordinarily, the higher the signing bonus, the more likely an undrafted player has of making the Broncos' 53-man roster when it's set in September.

There are exceptions. Most famously, cornerback Chris Harris Jr. – the second-best undrafted player in Broncos' history to receiver Rod Smith – only got a \$2,000 signing bonus in 2011. Harris and running back C.J. Anderson are unquestionably the two best undrafted players of the past seven years.

A look at the top undrafted signing bonuses in the Elway era and what some of the others who stuck around for a while received:

2017

1. Jamaal Carter, S, \$20,000 (\$10,000 in guaranteed salary)

2. Orion Stewart, S, \$12,500

3. Tyrique Jarrett, DT, \$10,000

Others: Jerrol Garcia-Williams, LB, \$8,000; Dymonte Thomas, S, \$4,000; Marcus Rios, \$3,000.

2016

1. Kyle Peko, DT, \$11,000

2. Henry Krieger Coble, TE, \$10,000

Others: Kalif Raymond, Returner, \$2,000; Vontarrius Dora, DE-OLB, \$2,000.

2015

1. Dillon Day, C, \$8,000

2. Jordan Taylor, WR, \$7,500

3. Zaire Anderson, \$5,000

2014

1. Isaiah Burse, Returner, \$12,500

2. Shaquil Barrett, OLB, \$10,000

# Why experience can hurt running backs in the draft

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Usually experience matters in the NFL draft because a full resume is easier for talent evaluators to break down for strengths and weaknesses.

Unless you're a running back. Then experience, carries and workload can be strikes against you.

Just ask Royce Freeman, the Oregon running back whom the Broncos selected in the third round of last week's draft. Freeman was productive at Oregon (three 1,300-yard rushing seasons), he's fast (a 4.5-second clocking in the 40-yard dash) and he's powerful (229 pounds).

But Freeman was the eighth running back selected, and more than one personnel evaluator cited his 947 carries in four seasons with the Ducks as the reason.

"I feel like all of that durability and all of those carries just reflected my productivity throughout my four years at Oregon," Freeman said. "It is not often you get backs playing as many games or taking as many carries. I feel like the fact that I was able to do so proves I am a durable running back."

Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway said: "Royce has obviously carried the ball a lot at Oregon -- he had tremendous production there. He's a big banger that we haven't had for a while ... what it shows to us is he's durable. He played a lot so therefore he can take that. At the end of his career, who knows how much that will shorten it, but it wasn't a concern when we took him."

Freeman is part of a select group of collegiate backs who topped 900 carries and moved on into the NFL. Mike Hart topped 1,000 carries at Michigan before an NFL career with just 71 carries. Ron Dayne finished his career at Wisconsin with a Heisman Trophy and with 1,220 carries -- believed to be the most in major college football history -- before seven years in the NFL (he never rushed for more than 773 yards in a season).

In his one season with the Broncos, Dayne said he had been asked about the effect of all those carries before he was a pro: "Hundreds of times, like the ball was a hundred pounds."

Steve Bartalo is second on the career carries list with 1,215 during his time at Colorado State in the 1980s. He now works for Raymond James and has coached high school football in Tampa for the past 25 years.

"I thought at the time it would benefit me because it meant there wasn't too many situations I wasn't familiar with and it proved I could take hits," said Bartalo, who topped 40 carries in his first college game. "It was a benefit to have all of that experience, those carries. I don't think it impacted me moving forward -- I just wasn't good enough."

Bartalo played in nine games in the NFL, for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in a strike-shortened season. He said he believes most running backs simply want the ball.

"You want to play all of the time; you don't ever want to come off the field," Bartalo said. "I don't think it enters into your mind if somebody is going to say later that isn't a good thing. But it is interesting as time goes by, it seems to be happening with running backs."

Freeman, who played in 51 games at Oregon and closed out his career with 1,475 rushing yards as a senior, has the most college carries for a Broncos draft pick since the team selected Montee Ball in the second round of the 2013 draft. Ball finished his career at Wisconsin with 924 career carries.

Ball lasted just two seasons with the Broncos, including 559 yards rushing as a rookie, but has publicly said his career was far more affected by his off-the-field struggles with substance abuse.

Elway said workload is a consideration in the draft evaluation of running backs but that the Broncos also try to gauge a player's health coming into the draft as well as his body type and strength.

"[Freeman] was a guy we felt has a lot of football in him left to play," Elway said. "We liked he had done so much."

"I just feel like durability for a running back is very important, especially when you get to this level, and I have proven my durability," Freeman said. "... Maybe if I played another position, in the offensive line or linebacker or something, people would say all those games were good for me, but I think it was good for me. Going back for my senior year was the best decision of my life for me as a person, and I'm going to prove it was the best decision for me as a player, too."

# Broncos decline fifth-year option on Shane Ray

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

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The Denver Broncos declined to exercise outside linebacker Shane Ray's \$9.23 million fifth-year option for 2019 on Thursday, a week after selecting North Carolina State pass rusher Bradley Chubb in the NFL draft.

Ray, the team's top pick in 2015, promised a big bounce-back season after the Broncos selected Chubb with the fifth overall draft pick, something he'll need if he's going to cash in as an unrestricted free agent next March.

Ray's fifth-year option would have been worth more than his four-year, \$9,118,894 rookie contract he signed after the Broncos selected him with the 23rd overall pick in 2015 after his outstanding final season at Missouri in which he won SEC Defensive Player of the Year honors.

Ray, who turns 25 in two weeks, has started just 15 games in three NFL seasons, collecting 84 tackles, 13 sacks and two fumble recoveries.

That production is similar to that of Shaq Barrett, an undrafted free agent from Colorado State who has 108 tackles, 11 sacks and seven forced fumbles over the past three seasons in Denver, where he started out as a practice squad player in 2014.

Barrett will make \$2.914 million this season after the Broncos placed a second-round tender on him this offseason. By contrast, Ray's 2018 salary is \$1.678 million.

Playing behind DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller, Ray had a solid rookie season, one that culminated in a pair of tackles and a forced fumble in the Broncos' win over Carolina in Super Bowl 50.

In 2016, he posted eight sacks and 48 tackles and became the first player since Jacksonville's John Henderson in 2002 to collect three sacks in his first career start.

He looked primed for a breakout season last year following Ware's retirement, but he broke his left wrist in July, which required a series of surgeries and forced him to miss half the season. Unable to hit the weights, he dropped 17 pounds to 225 and essentially played with just one arm before electing for another surgery with two weeks left in the season. He finished with just one sack and 15 tackles.

Ray took to social media during the draft, promising to rebound from his injury-marred season. After a series of exchanges with his Twitter followers over the weekend, he posted, "No more social media. I'm going dark" with a peace sign emoji.

# NFL, union to host symposium on mental health on May 14

By CIGNA Corp  
Associated Press  
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The NFL and the players' union will host a symposium on mental health on May 14.

Entitled "Beyond The Physical: A Symposium on Mental Health in Sports," the forum will feature a series of panels with current and former NFL players as well as mental health organizations, caregivers, medical providers and media personalities. The aim is to raise awareness of mental health and promote a culture in which people, including athletes, are encouraged to seek help and support to achieve overall wellness.

Confirmed panelists include NFL wide receiver and co-founder of Project 375 Brandon Marshall; former NFL cornerback Asher Allen; former Pro Bowl running back Warrick Dunn; Atlanta Falcons senior director of player affairs Kevin Winston; and representatives from Active Minds, Mental Health America (MHA) of Georgia, the American Psychological Association, and Campaign to Change Direction.

"May is Mental Health Awareness Month and the NFL is pleased to partner with the NFLPA and Cigna to increase awareness and decrease the stigma around mental health ..." said Dwight Hollier, the NFL's vice president of wellness and clinical services. "This effort is especially important in light of the messages young athletes receive about toughness and the need to be strong all the time. Through our discussions with caregivers, athletes, professionals and others, we will shine a light on mental health in sports and discuss ways to support athletes and others on the journey toward total wellness."

# From Vance Joseph to Case Keenum to Shane Ray, the 2018 Broncos are on the 'Prove It' plan

By Paul Klee  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
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If the Broncos are going to make their football team great again, there's an easy catchphrase to screenprint on their next batch of motivational T-shirts, right next to "Iron Sharpens Iron" and "Truth."

Prove it.

Start with Vance Joseph, who so far has done nothing to show John Elway made a smart decision to hire him as coach. Year 2 of the "VJ" era is ground zero for the Prove It era. It doesn't end there. You must look no further than the bottom line to see the new proving ground is Dove Valley.

Case No. 1: The Broncos reportedly won't select the fifth-year option on Shane Ray's rookie contract. Oof. That has to tickle. But look at it this way: now the former first-round pick can prove he's worth more than the \$9.2 million he would've received from the Broncos. Who in the American workforce wouldn't jump at the chance to name their price on the open market?

Case No. 2: The Broncos drafted two wide receivers — one huge (Courtland Sutton), one swift (DaeSean Hamilton) — just a year after they drafted two other wide receivers. Hey, Demaryius Thomas (huge) and Emmanuel Sanders (swift) didn't become gazillionaires by the ages of 30 and 31, respectively, without recognizing the profession they chose is a business.

"I thought I was going to be gone," Sanders said Wednesday with a laugh, and he wasn't joking.

Starting with head honcho John Elway, the Broncos have made it crystal clear what remains of the Super Bowl 50 champs must prove themselves all over again. Produce, and there's a juicy reward at the end of the rainbow: star cornerback Chris Harris Jr., possibly the most competitive dude I've covered in Denver sports, scored a sweet payday simply by kicking butt and taking names. Even though Harris was already under team control through the 2019 season, the Broncos dangled \$3 million in incentives in front of his nose. That's sending a message to the rest of the roster if I've ever seen one.

Once you get past the old guard, there's a whole lotta provin' goin' on.

One of the more endearing qualities of the Peyton Manning era was how the neck-fused quarterback trained, practiced and performed like a guy who had just been fired. Come to think of it, one of those snazzy Super Bowl rings should've gone to the Colts. Manning wrote the Prove It plan.

Which brings us to Case (No. 4): With a new orange jersey, Keenum has all the makings of a sweet story. You don't throw 3,500 passing yards, 22 touchdowns and only seven picks by chance, or score a 98.3 QB rating that exceeds Russell Wilson, Philip Rivers and, ahem, Kirk Cousins, just because. Toss in the added motivation of a two-year contract, and the new quarterback of the Broncos seems plenty equipped to prove it. Shoot, his old team chose a more expensive guy with zero playoff wins over Keenum, who led the Minnesota Vikings to the NFC title game in January.

“He’s one of those guys that when he steps into the huddle, he’s that leader,” said Sanders, who is halfway through his first week of 11-on-11 workouts with Colorado's newest quarterback. “You don’t have to second-guess what his thought process is: We’re going to complete this ball. We’re going to keep the ball moving. I’m liking what I’m seeing from him so far.”

Any time I write something nice about the Broncos, my inbox is filled with haters and doubters who say they'll believe what the Broncos say when they see it with their own eyes. And you know what? The Broncos went 5-11. You guys are right on.

To his credit, Sanders is self-aware enough to know wide receivers on rookie contracts come cheap, and his next big payday is totally up to him. Still, the 31-year-old pledged to teach Sutton and Hamilton "everything I know," even as he explained that times have changed in the NFL and athletes play longer.

"Now, 30 is the new 27," Sanders said.

Wish I'd known that a few years ago. Could've helped on the dating scene. Oh, well. After seeing the Broncos last season, we can all agree 2017 wasn't the new 2015.

At the center of the Prove It revolution is the proud-and-loud "No Fly Zone." Or does the "No Fly Zone" even exist anymore?

"Quick question," ex-Bronco Aqib Talib wrote on Twitter. "If Quavo and Takeoff leave the Migos, are they still the Migos?"

Here's a handy translation, since millions of young Americans have been deprived of MTV music videos and "TRL" is no longer a thing: if Talib and T.J. Ward are no longer in Colorado, is it still the "No Fly Zone?"

"It's still a 'No Fly Zone,'" starting cornerback Bradley Roby said earlier.

Notice he said "a," not "the."

"No more Talib questions!" Roby hollered as he left the media room Wednesday.

There's only one way — two words — to make sure of it.

# Roger Goodell must act to stop NFL's pollution of cheerleading

By David Ramsey  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
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Leave it to the NFL to pollute cheerleading.

The Washington Redskins forced cheerleaders to serve as escorts and to pose and be body painted topless while wealthy supporters of the team leered. The Redskins until recently featured a "hot or not" feature on the team's website, which allowed fans to grade cheerleaders on looks.

In a better world, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell would act swiftly and strongly in the same way he delivered justice to Tom Brady for deflating footballs. Alas, Goodell appears more interested in protecting pigskins than protecting young women.

The NFL issued a statement to The New York Times after crusading columnist Juliet Macur exposed outrageous practices by the Redskins. The league office, the statement said, "has no role in how the clubs which have cheerleaders utilize them."

Find a role, Roger G. Today would be a great time to start.

In high schools and colleges all over America, cheerleading is thriving and evolving. Yes, there's the traditional cheerleading of yesteryear, with yelling in support of the home team. President Dwight D. Eisenhower played linebacker at Army. He also led cheers for other Army teams. Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were cheerleaders, too.

But there's much more going on today than the traditional approach. Cheerleading teams compete, and we're talking serious competition with serious athletes.

Just ask former Air Academy High and Colorado College soccer star Sarah Schweiss.

During her junior year at Air Academy, Schweiss stopped playing basketball. This decision left her with free time before spring soccer.

"I had always wanted to be a cheerleader," Schweiss says.

So she gave cheerleading, both traditional and competitive, a shot. She was surprised and thrilled by what she found.

Schweiss was a superb soccer player, one of the best in local history. She scored 17 goals as a senior at Air Academy, including a 35-yard rocket to win the 4A title. She scored 27 goals at CC and was named the Mountain West's top offensive player. She ran without ceasing, and without getting weary, on the soccer field.

But even she was not prepared for the rigors of cheerleading.

"I'd never been more tired," Schweiss says of cheerleading practice. "It was so tough. There were times when I thought I couldn't physically go any more. It's definitely a lot harder than you would think, for sure."

She had a blast and made friends. She enjoyed watching all the action going on around her. Not on the field. In the cheer section.

"It was awesome," she says. "Everyone doing flips and back springs all while yelling at the top of their lungs. It was really cool."

Schweiss is similar to most of us. The revelations about Redskins cheerleaders sadden her.

"Cheerleading is a sport," she says. "I learned that because I was a part of it. I know what cheerleading is. It's unfortunate to see this. It's sad to see this. It's a slipping away from the true heart of cheerleading."

NFL owners can be wise and righteous, always a strong combination, and turn toward that true heart. In 1975, Cowboys general manager Tex Schramm started the flood of modern NFL cheerleaders, and his intentions were clear from the start. He wanted Cowboy cheerleaders to look more like Vegas showgirls than the cheerleaders you watched in high school.

Natalie Adams is a former cheerleader who teaches at the University of Alabama. She's the author of "Cheerleader: An American Icon."

The NFL, Adams writes, took "the wholesome All-American good girl and dressed her very provocatively, put her in tight pants and tops that showed a lot of cleavage." The NFL started a canyon between high school cheerleading and professional cheerleading, a canyon that grows wider every season.

The canyon now resembles that Grand one in Arizona. The Redskins scandal is a siren call for Goodell to act. He should use his power to stop the pollution.

# Patriots' tensions, Chargers karma, 49ers expectations and more fatal flaws for NFL teams

By Will Brinson

CBS Sports

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Every single NFL team has finished its offseason makeover, having gone through free agency and now the draft -- we have a decent, albeit early, idea of what each team's identity is going to be for the 2018 NFL season. The picture is far from perfect, because injuries happen, players develop and four months is an eternity in the NFL.

But you can look at the depth charts for these various teams and quickly come to some conclusions. You might even be able to identify a significant flaw in each team. Or, if you prefer your NFL content sprinkled with "Star Wars" analogies, perhaps you could identify the, uh -- \*furiously Googles "flaw in the Death Star"\* -- the thermal exhaust port for each of these teams. Yes, that.

No NFL team is perfectly constructed, of course. Flaws are going to exist. But what flaw could potentially derail each team's season? That's the goal for today's very lengthy exercise. Without further ado, let's try and figure out what the biggest FATAL FLAW for each NFL team is going into 2018. Love, hate or just want to complain about your team? Holler at me on Twitter @WillBrinson.

## NFC East

### New York Giants

#### Fatal Flaw: Offensive line

The Giants addressed their biggest weakness significantly in both free agency and in the draft, adding Nate Solder to a massive contract and picking guard Will Hernandez with the second pick of the second round. That gives the Giants a very nice combo on the left side of the line and drastically improves the protection Eli Manning should have in 2018. But to suggest that the offensive line issues for the Giants are fixed would be to give the duo a little more credit than they're worth -- Solder's not an elite tackle and Hernandez is a rookie. Brett Jones at center, Patrick Omameh or John Jerry at right guard and Ereck Flowers at right tackle is not going to be classified as elite. (Assuming Flowers is still on the roster.) This is still a problematic unit for the Giants.

### Dallas Cowboys

#### Fatal Flaw: Pass catchers

Ultimately the departure of Dez Bryant and Jason Witten might be classified as a positive: this offense needs to move in a new direction with new weapons and new quarterback. But making the offense "friendly" for Dak Prescott shouldn't involve simply rolling into the 2018 season with Allen Hurns at the top of the depth chart. None of the Cowboys wideouts are true No. 1 receivers (not that Dez was the last few years), with Hurns, Terrance Williams and Cole Beasley all serving as guys who are plenty talented but who should be secondary receivers on NFL offenses. Michael Gallup is a high draft pick (third round) with high expectations, but recent history tells us not to expect much from rookie wide receivers.

### Washington Redskins

#### Fatal Flaw: Tight end

There are a couple different spots where the Redskins could blow up, but what Grant Paulsen of 106.7 the Fan in D.C. said on the Pick Six Podcast Thursday really stood out to me: if Jordan Reed isn't healthy and on the field, the rest of the offense struggles to really get going. Reed is just that good and dynamic and gamechanging, but he's never a guarantee to stay healthy. The interior of the offensive line could also be a problem, with Alex Smith adjusting to a new offense, but Reed might be the guy who can take this team from an NFC East bottom dweller to a division contender.

#### Philadelphia Eagles

##### Fatal Flaw: Carson Wentz's ACL

Look at this freaking roster and try to find somewhere that the Eagles don't have a ton of talent. It's just not there. The defending Super Bowl champions added Michael Bennett and Haloti Ngata to the most dangerous defensive line in the league, re-signed Nigel Bradham to an underrated linebacking corps that also gets Jordan Hicks back, will have Jason Peters back on an already stout offensive line, have a bunch of weapons in the passing game and will be Super Bowl contenders assuming that Carson Wentz is healthy. He should be! There's nothing to make us believe he's not. But ACLs, despite medical advances, are still no sure thing and sometimes take closer to 18 months before a full recovery is achieved. Nick Foles is the reigning Super Bowl MVP and a very nice backup, but if Wentz' ACL has any sort of set back, it could put a major damper on the Eagles' title defense.

#### NFC South

#### Carolina Panthers

##### Fatal Flaw: Offensive line

The Panthers used the draft to aggressively pursue solutions to most of their weaknesses. Most is key here because the Panthers, for reasons unknown, did not draft an offensive lineman. For a team starting Matt Kalil at left tackle, coming off a free agency period where it lost Pro Bowl guard Andrew Norwell to more money elsewhere and facing the loss of long-time center Ryan Kalil following the 2018 season, it's a bold move to stand pat on an already questionable unit that struggled to run the ball or protect Cam Newton last year. The latter Kalil and Trai Turner give the unit two quality players (although Turner had a slightly down year last year relatively speaking); if Daryl Williams can take another step at the right tackle position and the former Kalil can live up to his contract this is a strong unit. If not, it could cause the Panthers offense to go south.

#### Atlanta Falcons

##### Fatal Flaw: Defensive tackle depth

This is a very good, well-rounded club, especially after drafting Calvin Ridley to shore up the WR2 spot. It's not hard to imagine Dan Quinn's young defense finally making a massive leap to becoming an elite unit. The defensive line could hold it back with Dontari Poe leaving for the Panthers in free agency and Adrian Clayborn to the Patriots. Grady Jarrett is excellent and an underrated player who has developed well since being drafted in the fifth round. Takkarist McKinley is a second-year player to watch as a possible breakout. But the only assistance provided to Jarrett on the interior was Deadrin Senat (described by Pete Prisco as a "baby" version of Jarrett, by the way). Vita Vea and Da'Ron Payne were long gone by the time the Falcons picked, but they decided to pass on Taven Bryan for Ridley. We'll see if it costs them in 2018.

## Tampa Bay Buccaneers

### Fatal Flaw: Jameis Winston

The Buccaneers should be a good football team. They are stacked at the skill positions, with Ronald Jones joining Mike Evans, DeSean Jackson, Cameron Brate and O.J. Howard. The defense wasn't good but credit GM Jason Licht for addressing the line by trading for Jason Pierre-Paul, signing Vinny Curry and drafting Vita Vea. Those guys with Gerald McCoy could be nasty and would allow Lavonte David and Kwon Alexander to roam the field more easily while boosting the secondary play. Their season falls on Winston, though, after a highly disappointing third-year campaign in 2017. Winston actually finished strong -- over his final five games he completed 67 percent of his passes and averaged 317 yards per game -- but up through November he was having a bad year: 62 percent of his passes completed, 240 yards per game, 10 touchdowns and six picks in eight starts is not what you want from a young franchise quarterback. If a healthy Winston plays to his potential in 2018, the Bucs can contend for the playoffs. If not ...

## New Orleans Saints

### Fatal Flaw: Defensive Expectations

This is a copout, but look at the Saints depth chart and tell me what's missing. They have Drew Brees under center and Mark Ingram/Alvin Kamara running out of the backfield behind one of the best offensive lines in football (even after losing Zach Strief to retirement). Their secondary pass catchers aren't great with Ted Ginn and Cameron Meredith, but Brees will probably make do. If anything you could even make the case there might be a hangover from last year's brutal playoff loss to the Vikings, but we'll go with everyone assuming the defense will be just as good. It might be! They added Marcus Davenport in an expensive draft-day trade, and he'll join Cameron Jordan and Sheldon Rankins on a talented defensive line. Demario Davis could be a nice free agency pickup at linebacker. If Marshon Lattimore, Ken Crawley, Marcus Williams and Vonn Bell repeat last year the Saints are just loaded. People are going to be drafting this team in fantasy leagues as a Week 1 defense, though, which still feels weird.

## NFC North

### Detroit Lions

#### Fatal Flaw: Pass rush

The more I look at the Lions roster and factor in a coaching upgrade with Matt Patricia, the more I like this Detroit team. I tend to give Patricia the benefit of the doubt when it comes to getting the most out of his defensive line, even if they're short on star talent. A'Shawn Robinson (second round pick in 2016) and Jeremiah Ledbetter (sixth round pick last year) man the middle with Sylvester Williams there for depth. But Ziggy Ansah is the only pure rusher they've got, and it's fair to question what kind of season he'll have given how up and down he's been so far in his career. If Patricia coaches him up and Ansah can get after quarterbacks or they find another edge rusher, Detroit could be dangerous.

### Green Bay Packers

#### Fatal Flaw: Pass catchers

This is a weird thing to say, because this team has Aaron Rodgers and he inherently makes everyone better. But this is a vastly different group of guys for Rodgers. Davante Adams is now the true No. 1 now that his long-time pal Jordy Nelson is gone to Oakland. Randall Cobb remains as the slot/do-it-all option and he might be underrated at this point of his career, but you'd prefer to have a true WR2 and Cobb out of the slot. Jimmy Graham was a big-ticket free agent, but it remains to be seen if he's anything more than a red-zone weapon at his age. The Packers have been prone to slow starts and have a new

quarterbacks coach and their star quarterback apparently a little miffed while working on timing with his new-ish set of receivers. If they come out of the gates slow, there will be questions asked.

#### Chicago Bears

##### Fatal Flaw: Secondary

Much ado was made about the Bears secondary this offseason thanks to the bizarre way they ended up signing Kyle Fuller to a longer deal. After not picking up his fifth-year option, they declined to franchise tag him, instead using the transition tag on the 2017 breakout. The Packers signed him to an offer sheet and the Bears matched. It's a good move to keep him around, but a weird way to handle it. Fuller tops the depth chart, followed by Prince Amukamara, Bryce Callahan and Marcus Cooper. That's a fine group if they're playing to their potential, the front seven is getting after the quarterback and everyone stays healthy. If one of Fuller or Amukamara goes down early, however, this is a secondary that could get exposed.

#### Minnesota Vikings

##### Fatal Flaw: Offensive line

It's easy to be blinded by any blemishes on this roster thanks to the glow coming from shiny new acquisition Kirk Cousins. But the offensive line has to be an issue after the Vikings declined to address it this offseason. Case Keenum never got enough credit for his subtle pocket movement and ability to escape pressure/create plays out of structure for Minnesota when the offensive line didn't do its job. Cousins more than held his own in 2017 when the Redskins dealt with an injury-riddled offensive line, so it's fine to believe he can do it again this year, but if this offense goes off the rails it's going to be because Cousins gets excessively pressured.

#### NFC West

##### Arizona Cardinals

##### Fatal Flaw: QB health

Offensive line would work well here, since both veteran Sam Bradford and rookie Josh Rosen are prone to taking too many shots. Along with Mike Glennon, the Cardinals have three quarterbacks who are similar, and no one who is scampering away from heavy defensive pressure. They also have a pair of quarterbacks in Bradford and Rosen who missed significant time last year (Bradford with a knee for the Vikings, Rosen with concussion for UCLA). Vegas set the Cardinals over/under at 5.5 wins and they will flirt with the under if their quarterbacks can't stay on the field.

##### Seattle Seahawks

##### Fatal Flaw: Offensive line

Now and forever, it feels like. Russell Wilson has been tremendous at avoiding pressure over the course of his career and for large parts of his tenure in Seattle, he's managed to mitigate bad offensive line work by spinning around a bunch and pulling a rabbit out of his hat. At some point it won't work. This was going to be the year Seattle went to work upgrading the unit, but they didn't invest during free agency or the draft. Duane Brown is still there after a trade last season and the team is high on German Ifedi. Justin Britt has flashed before. Maybe getting Tom Cable out of town will magically transform this line and Rashaad Penny's tackle-breaking ways will result in Brian Schottenheimer's offense going nuclear. Or maybe that won't happen.

##### San Francisco 49ers

##### Fatal Flaw: Expectations

The over/under for the Niners in Year 2 of Kyle Shanahan's tenure is nine games. That's wild, man. You can talk yourself into loving this team, especially after they added Weston Richburg and Mike McGlinchey in the offseason to protect Jimmy Garoppolo. I have a hard time seeing this offense being bad. Defensively the personnel is there too: Richard Sherman, if healthy, can still ball out. They have talent on the defensive line with Arik Armstead, DeForest Buckner and Solomon Thomas. Reuben Foster needs his legal issues sorted out, but he flashed last season. People are just penciling this team in for the Rams chief competition in this division and it feels premature.

#### Los Angeles Rams

##### Fatal Flaw: Edge rushers

There are not many flaws on this team. The offense has an ascending young quarterback in Jared Goff, an MVP-caliber running back in Todd Gurley and just added Brandin Cooks to a wideout group with Robert Woods and Cooper Kupp already on it. The defensive line is Michael Brockers, Ndamukong Suh and Aaron Donald. Most weeks it will look like someone is taking dynamite to an old stadium they way they cave in offensive lines. But if we're going to nitpick -- and that's what we're doing! -- there are no guaranteed edge rushers here. Someone out of Matt Longacre, Samson Ebukam, Carlos Thompson, Garrett Sickels and the just-drafted duo of Ogbonnia Okoronkwo/Trevon Young might find their way to double-digit sacks because there are going to be some free ones out there. But it's not an elite aspect of this team heading into the offseason.

#### AFC East

##### Buffalo Bills

##### Fatal Flaw: Quarterbacks

Adding Josh Allen in the draft sets up Buffalo well for the long haul if they're right on him -- his laser rocket arm, chiseled from the sinew of Paul Bunyan's corpse, may very well whip footballs through the famous Buffalo weather for years to come. But in 2018 it is difficult to imagine Allen, who struggles with short-yardage accuracy, stepping in and dominating. If he can't, then it's on AJ McCarron and Nathan Peterman to get the Bills back to the playoffs.

##### Miami Dolphins

##### Fatal Flaw: Ryan Tannehill's knee

Look, I really hope Tannehill is healthy. He was becoming fun to watch in Adam Gase's offense and started to get things going a little bit under his new coach before tearing his ACL. The decision not to repair it cost him 2017 and now it's been roughly 16 months since he was on the field in a competitive game of football. That's a long time. We assume he's going to be healthy but we just don't know. And if something were to happen to him, the next man up is Brock Osweiler. There are other problems on this roster, but that would be a submarine situation.

##### New York Jets

##### Fatal Flaw: Receivers

I kind of like the Jets a little bit more than I should, but with the news that Robby Anderson could be in more trouble, it's fair to question who will be catching passes for Josh McCown and/or Sam Darnold. Austin Sefarian-Jenkins left in free agency, Anderson can't keep it between the lines and that could ultimately mean the top of the depth chart being Jermaine Kearse, Terrelle Pryor, Quincy Enunwa and ArDarius Stewart. I can talk myself into that group having upside, but there isn't some A-list option on there where you feel comfortable thrusting a 20-year old, would-be franchise quarterback under center and telling him best of luck.

## New England Patriots

### Fatal Flaw: Tensions, Father Time

If you're picking something that will burn the Patriots on the field, don't bother picking an issue with the personnel. The Patriots had a historically bad defense for an early stretch of 2017 and still made it to the Super Bowl where ... oh crap. But, still, if they're going to totally self destruct or combust it's going to be a result of Bill Belichick and Tom Brady having tensions continue to bubble to the surface. Or, more likely, because Brady is a freaking 40-year-old who is getting beat up in a young man's game. Brady got dinged up late last year and struggled a little bit down the stretch before eventually securing an MVP at 40. The cliff is steep for NFL quarterbacks.

## AFC South

### Indianapolis Colts

#### Fatal Flaw: Regular-sized footballs

This is not a Super Bowl contending team regardless, even if GM Chris Ballard is doing a very nice job constructing pieces to bring the Colts back to respectability. But if Andrew Luck can't play to start the season, this could be a bad football team (and I'm a Jacoby Brissett fan). Luck still has not thrown a regular-sized football and if he is not playing early in 2018, there are going to be a lot of questions asked by a lot of people about the plan for the franchise quarterback in Indy.

### Houston Texans

#### Fatal Flaw: Offensive line

It's very easy to get caught up in the hype around Houston with Deshaun Watson and J.J. Watt returning from injury. There's superstar potential on both sides of the ball with those guys, plus DeAndre Hopkins, Whitney Mercilus and Jadeveon Clowney. Having said that, who is blocking for Watson when he comes back from his knee surgery? Julie'n Davenport is currently slotted to start at left tackle, with Seantrel Henderson at right tackle. Zach Fulton and Jeff Allen are the guards and Nick Martin, if healthy, would be the center. Watson was the second most-pressured quarterback in the NFL last year (46.7 percent of his dropbacks), behind only ... Tom Savage. I trust Bill O'Brien to keep his guy safe, but you can't have a young franchise QB coming back from knee surgery under siege 24/7.

### Tennessee Titans

#### Fatal Flaw: Edge rush

Someone is going to need to talk me out of loving the Titans this year. Maybe the one concern would be the health and age of their pass rushers. Brian Orakpo battled injuries for years with the Redskins, but he's now played three-straight years of 16 games or more with Tennessee. He'll turn 32 this summer and it's going to be interesting how Dean Pees uses him. Harold Landry fell to the second round of the draft because of medical concerns, but he's an instant impact speed guy if he's healthy. How is Derrick Morgan only 29?? He's been steady but never dominant for Tennessee in terms of rushing. If Peas can cook up a pass rush, this team could be fun.

### Jacksonville Jaguars

#### Fatal Flaw: Blake Bortles

This is not an insult or indictment of Bortles, who played some pretty good football in 2017 for various stretches. It's just that the iteration of Bortles we have seen the last two years caps the Jaguars ceiling, which should be through the roof with that defense. They only got better this offseason, somehow

adding more defensive linemen and a hard-hitting, old-school safety in Ronnie Harrison in the draft. They also signed Andrew Norwell to a big-money deal in free agency and should run the ball even more aggressively. Bortles will determine how far they can go.

## AFC North

### Cleveland Browns

#### Fatal Flaw: Hue Jackson

The man has never won a football game on a Sunday for the Browns. It's an incredible stat. Jackson finally acquiesced to pressure and brought in an offensive coordinator, signing Todd Haley, while also adding Ken Zampese as Cleveland's quarterbacks coach. Those hires should go a long way towards making the offense better in 2018. But the Browns have some pretty high expectations (relatively speaking): starting 0-4 out of the gate because of egregious coaching decisions probably won't be tolerated. Jackson hasn't proven he can avoid those in his first two years in Cleveland.

### Cincinnati Bengals

#### Fatal Flaw: Offensive line

It killed the Bengals last year and they took drastic steps to fix it this offseason, first by trading for Cordy Glenn (and moving from No. 12 to No. 21 in the draft with Buffalo) and then by drafting Billy Price in the first round. Glenn's no sure-fire lock to hold down the left tackle position, but he should be an upgrade over Cedric Ogbuehi. Price is an upgrade if he's able to play from a pec injury that knocked him down a bit in the draft process. Give Dalton some time, get John Ross involved, pray Tyler Eifert stays healthy and the Bengals can make some noise in a up-and-down division. Another bad year from the offensive line might finally be what gets Marvin Lewis canned.

### Baltimore Ravens

#### Fatal Flaw: Receiver

I'm not entirely worried about this because of how the Ravens have operated in years past: they manage to cobble together a below-average passing attack regardless of who's on the roster! But if Baltimore wants to really attack Ozzie Newsome's final year, they need to get better performances from their pass catchers. Michael Crabtree, Willie Snead and John Brown are all new additions this offseason, and they were available for a reason. It could be the year Joe Flacco finally gets some weapons or it could be another year in Baltimore.

### Pittsburgh Steelers

#### Fatal Flaw: Stopping the run

The Steelers' 2017 season was quietly propped up by the defense in the early-going; with Ben Roethlisberger and Co. struggling to find consistency, it was Ryan Shazier and the guys on the other side of the ball helping them to win games. When Shazier went down with his horrifying neck injury late in the year, Roethlisberger grabbed the baton and the offense helped carry the Steelers to the No. 2 seed in the AFC. Shazier is walking now, thankfully, but he won't be playing in 2018 clearly. The Steelers, CBS Sports Ryan Wilson pointed out on the Pick Six Podcast, are going to try and replace Shazier's dominance in the middle by committee. If that goes poorly, the offense better be clicking on all cylinders.

## AFC West

### Oakland Raiders

#### Fatal Flaw: Tom Cable

The Raiders went heavy on offensive line in the draft and there are rumors about Cable being the guy whispering in Jon Gruden's ear as to who he should take on the offensive line. Not to pick on Cable here, but that might not be what Raiders fans want to hear. The Raiders offensive line took a step back last year, but it was still a pretty good unit. It feels weird to invest heavily in new players to replace the other good players instead of drafting for defense. Messing with happy and having Cable get too cute with this offensive line could lead to disaster.

#### Denver Broncos

##### Fatal Flaw: Case Keenum

This is not me attempting to dog on Keenum here, because he had a tremendous season in 2017 and he deserves every bit of praise that comes his way. But there is absolutely a chance we see some regression from him in a new setting, even if he is a good fit in a Gary Kubiak-style offense (which we presume the Broncos will run), getting out on the edge and taking smart shots down the field. The offensive line was a below average unit last year (Garrett Bolles could take a step here as a second player though) and Keenum not getting on the same page as his receivers or putting up 2017 stats might lead to another high pick for the Broncos.

#### Los Angeles Chargers

##### Fatal Flaw: Whatever Chargers fans call the curse that haunts their team

There is probably another flaw on the Chargers, but they've got a really good roster. The expectations are concerning: they're the FAVORITE TO WIN THE DIVISION. And Vegas has them pegged for 9 wins, which is just absurd. This might be the year where other idiots jump on board the "Chargers win the Super Bowl" bandwagon (hello, I'm Will Brinson, your captain, please take your seats and grab a double bourbon, it's going to be a very bump ride). If the Bolts can avoid shooting themselves in the foot -- which is a real things they have done for roughly 10 years now -- they can make some noise. You could also argue the linebackers aren't a perfect unit and Philip Rivers needs another wide receiver to emerge alongside Keenan Allen if you're looking for actual football reasons they won't be great.

#### Kansas City Chiefs

##### Fatal Flaw: Stopping the run

The Chiefs ranked dead last in the NFL against the run last year according to Football Outsiders DVOA and they responded by adding multiple players this offseason -- Xavier Williams in free agency plus Breeland Speaks and Derrick Nnadi in the draft -- who they hope will help at different levels. Eric Berry getting healthy would be a huge plus for the run defense as well; him getting hurt early didn't draw nearly enough attention as an injury to a contender. They also picked up Reggie Ragland, so there's reason to believe the defense has enough pieces to turn it around. But being unable to stop the run lingers after that brutal Titans playoff loss.

# America's most daring high school coach has thoughts on kickoff ban talk: 'They are doing it all wrong in the NFL'

By Dan Wetzel  
Yahoo! Sports  
May 4, 2018

Kevin Kelley is the head football coach at Pulaski Academy in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he has won seven state championships in the past 15 seasons, including the past four.

Part of how he accomplished that is by always kicking onside when the score is within three touchdowns.

"We attempt onside kicks 100 percent of the time," Kelley said.

Kelley believes, and has data to back it up, that the "opportunity to create a turnover" via an onside kick is greater than the loss of field position from a failed kick. There's more. His teams also never (or almost never) punt because the chance to run four downs worth of plays is seen as more valuable than field position (especially with high school punters). Pulaski also receives kicks with unusual formations, creating space and limiting penalties and injuries. It blitzes often because "sacks change the game" more than allowing a first down.

It goes on and on. Kelley is a famed outlier in a game known for its aversion to risk. It's enough that Bill Belichick once brought Kelley to Foxborough for a week to talk football.

So, what does the most innovative coach in football think of the NFL discussing the idea of eliminating kickoffs altogether, as was revealed this week after a competition committee meeting in New York?

The debate is an effort to remove from the game what the NFL categorizes as football's most dangerous play – men sprinting at full speed and crashing into each other. Doing so would represent the most significant rule change to the game in many years and almost certainly filter down through the college, prep and youth ranks.

"I have a lot of thoughts on it," Kelley said.

First, Kelley understands the safety elements and concerns with the play, although he doesn't think it necessarily needs to, or will be, eliminated from football (more on that later). Selfishly, he doesn't want to see it happen because he says kickoffs are an advantage Pulaski has over other teams. He views the kickoff as an opportunity for creativity in a sport where, perhaps especially at the NFL level, there isn't enough of it because conformity limits criticism even if it's based in primitive or wrongheaded assumptions.

The most common outcry at the thought of eliminating kickoffs is that the game will be robbed of the occasional return for a touchdown. For Kelley that is too rare to matter – just seven in 256 regular-season NFL games last year.

Far more common, and troubling, would be the lost opportunity for imaginative strategy at each kickoff.

In Pulaski's case, it's attempting an onside kick every time the score is remotely close. Kelley's reasoning is that turnover margin is among the most predictive stats when it comes to determining a game's outcome. While winning an onside kick isn't officially considered a turnover, he says it's the same thing.

"If I kick it down the field and we force the return man to fumble, then that's a turnover," Kelley said. "Either way, we get the ball."

The downside of failing to recover is the opponent is given better field position, but Kelley's numbers show field position is an overrated variable, especially when considering most failed onside kicks wind up in the mid-field area.

"You win games by winning the turnover value, not field position," Kelley said.

Kelley deploys a slew of different onside kicks and believes the pros are mistaken in how they try to pop the ball in the air rather than force a frontline defender to choose whether to field or block.

"They are doing it all wrong in the NFL," he said.

He also believes that games are not necessarily just 60-minute contests, but the culmination of a week of preparation and practice. By attempting so many onside kicks, opponents are forced to spend valuable time during the week practicing on how to defend Pulaski on that single play.

"The amount of time a team spends on that is less time they spend on other things," Kelley said.

Creativity, however, comes in different forms on the kickoff. While he'd like to see more onside kicks, he appreciated how when in past seasons the NFL moved the kickoff spot up, in an effort to make touchbacks more likely, New England, among others, began kicking the ball high and short, pinning teams inside their own 20.

If there are no kickoffs, all of that is gone.

To every action though, there is a reaction and Kelley acknowledges that if kickoffs are eliminated so too are desperation, end-of-game onside kicks. If so, it might improve NFL in-game strategy and play-calling. The last-minute onside kick is like a security blanket for the unimaginative coach. Right now, it is acceptable for a head coach who is trailing by two scores to play for the low probability onside kick. If it doesn't work, he isn't blamed for defeat based on that call – fear, Kelley believes, is a prime reason the game is so staid and conservative.

With no onside kick, however, play-calling by teams trailing in the fourth, and even the third quarter, would likely become more aggressive. More teams would go for it on fourth down (another Kelley staple) because possessions would be treasured. Even better, more coaches might call plays with four downs in mind, not just when third down fails to advance past the sticks.

It's the difference philosophically between seeing it as having two second downs to call plays rather than two third downs. It radically changes the way the game is carried out.

“The butterfly effect,” Kelley said. “Right now, because of the onside kick, you have coaches down two scores punting the ball with 2:30 left. And they are praised for it.”

All of that assaults the sensibilities of Kelley, who admits that people still see him as a bit of a “kook” for approaching football differently. His legions are growing though, with more coaches, players and fans questioning the game’s bedrock strategies, which have been hammered home for decades via old school broadcasters and coaches.

The elimination of the kickoff, therefore, would be a mixed bag Kelley believes. There’d be no more attempting onside kicks across the game, but it would force stuck-in-the-mud coaches to properly value possession of the ball.

Is that trade-off worth it – especially with the benefits of player safety? Kelley doesn’t think it will come to that, in part because Kelley says suggestions this week by the NFL’s competition committee, if implemented, will be enough.

The competition committee has proposed banning players on the kicking team from getting a running start prior to the kick, bans any kind of “wedge blocking” by the receiving team and requires eight members of the receiving team to line up within 15 yards of the kickoff.

Kelley said this speaks to the way Pulaski already returns kicks.

By placing so many blockers by the kick, opposing players can’t get a head of steam up that makes them difficult to block (it should also cut down on concussions, which the NFL says occur at five times the rate on kickoffs as plays from scrimmage). Instead Pulaski players mostly just get in the way and try to slow kicking team players down.

By moving the point of action up the field, Pulaski’s kick returners have additional room to field and return the ball (or employ reverses, laterals and other gimmicks). Even then, Kelley usually encourages them to run on an angle out of bounds.

“I’ll take anything [yard wise] as long as we get the ball,” he said.

The lack of wedge blocking also means there is no need to have big, slow linemen on the field. Instead the team is made up of quick skill players. The entire play is different. It’s more exciting.

Pulaski, according to Kelley, rarely has any injury on a kickoffs, and turnovers and holding penalties have been almost completely eliminated.

If the competition committee’s recommendations cause the NFL to innovate on kickoffs the way the best high school coach in America does, it may not need to eliminate the play.

The safety will happen. And back in Little Rock, Kevin Kelley will still watch in frustration as someone punts on fourth-and-inches.

# Broncos' Sanders relieved there's no QB competition

By Kevin Patra

NFL.com

May 4, 2018

For the last few years, the Denver Broncos' offseasons have been embroiled in quarterback competitions. Case Keenum's signing ends that string of uncertainty.

"I appreciate it, for sure," receiver Emmanuel Sanders said, via the team's official website. "This is the first time in two or three years that I'm not standing up here talking about a quarterback debate."

Since Peyton Manning retired in 2016, the Broncos have harbored a QB quandary. The first year it was Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch and Mark Sanchez splitting offseason snaps. In 2017, the question was whether Siemian or Lynch would win the starting job.

With the addition of Keenum, and the Broncos passing on quarterbacks in the draft, the situation is settled for 2018.

"I remember when I got out here, I went out to the team store and I saw Case Keenum's jerseys. I was like, 'Thank God I don't have to deal with that again,'" Sanders said. "Case is our guy. We can go from there. We can work our butts off, try to gain chemistry and try to put up points."

Sanders is coming off his worst season in Denver, catching just 47 passes for 555 yards and two touchdowns. While he didn't throw any of his quarterbacks under the bus, it's clear that the QB merry-go-round the Broncos dealt with influenced his production. Without a clear-cut starter, the chemistry was limited.

"You can sit back and say we're all professional football players and you've got to deal with that situation, but at the same time, obviously you can't gain the same chemistry. You don't have the same mindset. You have to talk to two different quarterbacks," Sanders said.

"When you're going into individual routes, you have to go to one guy and then go with the next guy. You don't really gain that chemistry. You're not maximizing the opportunity. Now we're maximizing the opportunity, and hopefully it pays off."

Sanders now has a full offseason to focus on building a rapport with Keenum as the Broncos attempt to get back to the playoffs for the first time since the QB mess started.

# Colin Kaepernick: ‘Love Is at the Root of Our Resistance’

By The Editors

The New York Times

May 4, 2018

In the video op-ed above, the football quarterback Colin Kaepernick opens up about the reasons behind his protesting during the national anthem.

“I’ve realized that our love, that sometimes manifests itself as black rage, is a beautiful form of defiance against a system that seeks to suppress our humanity,” Mr. Kaepernick told an audience in Amsterdam last month in a rare public statement.

Mr. Kaepernick was presented with the Ambassador of Conscience Award from Amnesty International by Eric Reid, a fellow activist and former teammate on the San Francisco 49ers.

The video is excerpted from Mr. Kaepernick’s acceptance speech.

# Virginia Tech Gives VICIS ZERO1 Helmet Top Ranking

By Logan Bradley  
Sports Techie  
May 4, 2018

For the second time in 15 days, the VICIS ZERO1 football helmet is being lauded as the safest around. On May 1, the Virginia Tech Helmet Lab awarded five stars for VICIS' 2018 ZERO1. The helmet beat out sixteen other competitors.

The goal of VT's research, which has been ongoing since 2011, is to identify which helmets reduce the risk of head injuries most effectively. The testing process involves hitting helmets with a weight swung on a pendulum arm and attempts to copy the trajectory and severity of an in-game impact. Sensors placed on dummies' heads record linear and rotational impacts to produce an overall 'star' rating.

"Virginia Tech provides objective, scientifically rigorous ratings that help parents, coaches, schools and players select the best performing football helmets for high school and collegiate athletes," said VICIS CEO and co-founder, Dave Marver, in a statement. "We are proud our ZERO1 helmet is now top-ranked in both Virginia Tech Helmet Lab and NFL/NFLPA testing."

Here's what else you need to know:

- The NFL/NFLPA testing that Marver alludes to is another annual ranking of the safest helmets on the market. Just last month, VICIS was awarded the top NFL/NFLPA ranking for a second-straight year. The only difference between the two rankings is that the NFL focuses strictly on helmets used at the professional level. Virginia Tech, on the other hand, includes those used in high school and collegiate play as well.
- What makes VICIS' ZERO1 helmet unique? It has a deformable outer shell that slows impacts just as a car bumper would. For a complete explanation of the science behind the design, check out this video.
- ZERO1 was frequently used at the NFL and NCAA level in 2017. You may have recognized former Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Alex Smith as a frequent wearer of the helmet. VICIS has been able to lower the cost of production, making the helmet available to more athletes at the high school level. However, it still retails for \$950, more than four times that of some lower ranked competitors.

## SportTechie Takeaway

Helmet testing hasn't just identified the best. For the first time in league history, the NFL banned the use of a handful of helmets. Based off the NFL/NFLPA's testing, helmets from manufacturers like Rawlings, Schutt, SG Helmets and Riddell have been deemed ineligible. The majority of those were used by NFL players last season.

Future helmets might also be position-specific. NFL researchers have suggested a move away from universal helmets and toward ones that might provide counter-measures for the rigors of each individual position.

# The Redskins of Daniel Snyder and Bruce Allen exhibit the worst qualities of privilege

By Jerry Brewer  
The Washington Post  
May 4, 2018

We tend to use the wrong D-word when referring to the Washington Redskins. They incite controversy, and we call them dysfunctional.

They're dysfunctional when they can't sign Kirk Cousins to a long-term contract; when they help wreck Robert Griffin III's career; when they bad-mouth players who leave the organization to save face; when they use alcoholism as reason to fire former general manager Scot McCloughan for cause after shunning the issue when they hired him; when they disregard concern about the racial insensitivity of the team's name; and now, when they are accused of allowing shady things to be done to their cheerleaders for the enjoyment of male sponsors and suite holders. Same ol' dysfunctional franchise, huh?

No. That's bailout language. "Dysfunctional" is too vague, and when used too often, it can start to sound like people are picking on the team. It's far more accurate to use another D-word to describe the franchise's leaders, their ineptitude and their propensity for exhibiting the worst behavior of privileged people: deplorable.

This is not merely a dysfunctional organization burdened by some mystical inability to get right. This is a dysfunctional organization that can't get right because it is owned and operated by a few deplorable human beings. At the top of the food chain, owner Daniel Snyder and team President Bruce Allen continue to lead one of the NFL's most important franchises deeper into the sewer. The latest example is exposed in a New York Times report on troubling claims of the franchise's poor treatment of its cheerleaders. The story includes five women accusing the organization of indecent and shady acts five years ago.

The most egregious alleged behavior occurred during a Costa Rica trip for a calendar photo shoot in which the team allegedly allowed deep-pocketed male sponsors and FedEx Field suite holders access to see the cheerleaders topless or wearing only body paint. And one night in Costa Rica, the Times story says, nine of the cheerleaders were assigned to escort some of the men to a nightclub. The piece also details a 2012 boat party with local businessman William Teel Jr. that included charges of men giving cash prizes to cheerleaders during a twerking contest.

Regardless of what we think about the existence of cheerleaders and dance teams in professional sports — where the women are underdressed and sex appeal rules — these are serious claims that should not be minimized by a broad, existential debate about the value of those jobs. They should be taken seriously in any era, but amid this #MeToo reckoning, there can be no overlooking any questionable, inappropriate or oppressive sins against women.

Part of the movement is to eliminate all barriers, including shaming (which is easy to do to cheerleaders), that obstruct the pursuit of truth and equality. Society has let boys be boys for long enough. It's not just about punishing Harvey Weinstein or Bill Cosby or Larry Nassar. It's about accountability for all. It's about female empowerment. And for men in particular, it's about learning to

be more compassionate and reaching a higher level of understanding to help women pursue fairness. In that spirit, Snyder, Allen and the entire Washington franchise should be, above all, concerned about the allegations and willing to do an honest, thorough and transparent investigation into the matter.

But, of course, they didn't get off to a proactive start. That matters because it tells you that their instincts are all wrong. Instead of choosing to be humane, they reacted first with a deplorable brushoff. It's infuriating, though not surprising, that the franchise's leadership chose to deliver a vanilla statement to the Times that didn't address anything specifically. Then it went into either no-comment mode or made only select cheerleaders who have been vetted and have no beef with the organization available to defend the team anonymously.

On Thursday afternoon, Allen finally chimed in with an appropriate statement, alluding to interviews the franchise already has conducted and contradictory information it has (the Times story presented counterclaims, too) and promising further scrutiny and "significant repercussions" if the team could prove the allegations are true. It was late and a little defensive, but it was progress.

Until the Allen statement, Stephanie Jojokian, the cheerleading director and choreographer, was left to answer the most difficult questions. While I was moved by the vehemence of her denials and her emotions in the Times story, Jojokian's explanations don't nullify multiple claims to the contrary. And even with some reassuring words from Allen that actually reference the allegations, it's impossible to trust the organization when it didn't respond appropriately until after it felt the first wave of criticism. It hoped to sweep another issue under the rug. It would have been better, not to mention classier, to deliver an immediate strong and personal message raging against this type of behavior. Instead, for almost a full day, it looked like the team was hiding or, worse, ignoring.

The reaction is consistent with what the organization has become under Snyder. On just about every social issue, from the team name to player protests, Washington comes across as smug, self-serving or frighteningly unconcerned. Many times, it is all three. The initial response to this potential scandal is another reminder that its leaders consistently act in a deplorable and privileged manner that makes them ill-suited to represent a community as diverse and influential as this one.

If the organization doesn't care to think more deeply about whether it is offending Native Americans, if it doesn't care about African American concerns involving police brutality and inequality, if it doesn't instinctually care about the rights of women and respecting them, then what does it stand for? It doesn't win many games. It gets caught telling lies to the public regularly. It just makes money off claiming to be a civic asset without being asked to provide proof. If football weren't an American obsession, the team would have been thrown in the recycling bin long ago.

But the franchise continues to stay upright, intimating it will do better but pompously believing it can do no wrong. Then, when another bad thing happens, you realize how deplorable its leaders can be. It would be much more tolerable if this franchise was merely dysfunctional. It isn't.

Good people can cure dysfunction. Smug men who show only cursory concern for humanity cannot rinse off their deplorable stench.

# Royce Freeman not concerned about college workload, believes it proves his durability

By Curtis Crabtree

Pro Football Talk

May 4, 2018

Running backs have almost always been viewed as a diminishing property in the NFL. It became commonplace to expect running backs to fall off a cliff from a production standpoint once they reached 30 years old. Even more recently, the amount of investment in running backs has lessened as productive options seem to be relatively cheap and plentiful.

But newly drafted Denver Broncos running back Royce Freeman isn't concerned that the extensive workload he received while in college at Oregon will have a significant impact on his NFL productivity.

According to Jeff Legwold of ESPN.com, Freeman believes that his experience – over 900 carries with the Ducks in four seasons – speaks to his durability and shouldn't be a knock against him moving forward.

"I feel like all of that durability and all of those carries just reflected my productivity throughout my four years at Oregon," Freeman said. "It is not often you get backs playing as many games or taking as many carries. I feel like the fact that I was able to do so proves I am a durable running back."

The Broncos were able to get Freeman in the third round of last weekend's draft, picking him with the 71st overall selection. He had 947 carries for 5,621 total yards and scored 60 rushing touchdowns during his four-year stay in Eugene.