

# The Broncos are a hot mess. But they won't quit, because John Elway won't allow it.

By Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
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The Broncos are a hot mess.

After plunking down \$25 million guaranteed to acquire free agent Case Keenum, the team still might have the fourth-best quarterback in the AFC West, behind Philip Rivers of Los Angeles, Derek Carr of Oakland and Patrick Mahomes of Kansas City.

In Vance Joseph, Denver has a coach that's more suspect after one season than he was as an unproven newcomer to the job.

The No Fly Zone is dead, with Aqib Talib and T.J. Ward long gone from town. And the band isn't getting back together.

The Broncos play in a stadium without a name, and there's no clear heir to ailing Pat Bowlen, the owner that not only expected, but demanded this franchise be among the NFL elite.

Despite all the legitimate reasons for the Broncos to feel beaten down, none more stark and real than the 5-11 record next to their name in the 2017 NFL standings, there's a we're-not-going-to-take-it defiance to this team. The Broncos are spitting mad, itching for a fight.

Accept a last-place finish as part of the cycle of life in the NFL? Not around here. It's not how the Broncos do business. "That's not what's acceptable for this organization," executive vice president of football operations John Elway says.

The championship defense ain't what it used to be? "I don't really care what other people say," responds cornerback Bradley Roby. "I'm getting tired of hearing about it."

The Denver era of dominance is over? "We don't like having the Chiefs, the Raiders and the Chargers ahead of us in the division. We don't like that," says Chris Harris Jr. "We used to have mind control over them. We have to bring that back."

Only two seasons removed from a victory in Super Bowl 50, there's one big reason to believe the Broncos are closer to getting back to championship contention than the 30-1 longshots they are pegged by Las Vegas bookmakers.

His name is Elway. He refuses to cede the AFC West to the Raiders, Chiefs or Chargers. Fact is: Those teams aren't very good. Find a way to win 10 times in 2018, and the Broncos could win the division.

After earning two rings as a player and adding another championship as a front-office executive, Elway has built the trust and love in Broncos Country to allow him to tear this team down and oversee a slow rebuild.

Elway, however, feels an urgency to win now.

“If you don’t feel pressure at all times in this job,” Elway said, “something’s wrong.”

If Elway did not believe the Broncos were capable of returning to the top of a division they won five straight times after he took over as roster architect in 2011, then instead of selecting edge rusher Bradley Chubb with the fifth overall selection in the NFL draft, he would have traded down and begun the stockpiling of young talent, with an eye toward being competitive in the playoffs two or three years down the road. Keenum is the quarterback in Denver instead of a rookie named Josh Allen or Josh Rosen because Elway has faith linebacker Von Miller and his defensive teammates have another championship run in them.

Yes, one man is responsible for making all those empty draft picks in recent seasons and hiring Joseph, who will be on the hot seat from opening day of the regular season. But the man responsible for the current mess at Dove Valley also made his name as king of the comeback, leading the Broncos to nearly four dozen game-winning or game-saving drives as a quarterback.

Does Elway feel pressure? Of course he does.

But there are leaders that get swallowed by the anxiety and quit. Talk is cheapest in the words of a quitter’s lament about how good times never last.

Take his ball and go home? That’s not in Elway’s DNA. For Elway, the expectation to win, even if the odds appear overwhelming, is a shot of pure adrenaline.

Pressure?

“We feel it every time we work in this business,” Elway said. “We do it because we’ve got to win.”

# Hey, Broncos. Are you certain third-round pick Royce Freeman is better than CU's Phillip Lindsay?

By Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
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I wouldn't be surprised in the slightest if Phillip Lindsay, the CU running back signed by the Broncos as a free agent, is better than the guys (receiver Courtland Sutton, running back Royce Freeman, cornerback Isaac Yiadom) that Denver took on Day 2 of the NFL draft.

Kiz: Let's do a blind comparison of the stats compiled by two Pac-12 Conference running backs in 2017. Player A: 1,475 rushing yards, 14 receptions, 16 touchdowns. Player B: 1,474 rushing yards, 23 receptions, 15 touchdowns. Player A is Freeman. Player B is Lindsay. Here's my prediction: It won't be an upset when Lindsay makes the Broncos roster and earns enough touches to score a touchdown as a rookie.

Draft picks Bradley Chubb and Sutton are good enough to eliminate excuses for the Broncos. We have a fairly strong team on paper. Let's see if we play great, not just practice great.

Kiz: I have no doubt Chubb is a great prospect. But, as a coach, Vance Joseph remains suspect.

I loved your column taking Ian Desmond to task. Unfortunately, management is rarely willing to acknowledge an expensive mistake by changing strategy. As for getting a new man at first base, I would pull the Rockies bandwagon if they grab Cincinnati's Joey Votto.

Kiz: It would be a hoot to watch Votto blast a baseball into the jet stream at Coors Field. But here are two concerns: No. 1: Do the Rockies really need another left-handed bat? No. 2: Would Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich trade a valuable prospect for a 34-year-old first baseman?

Where did Mark Reynolds go? I would love to have him back at first base for the Rockies.

Kiz: Where have you gone Mr. Reynolds? The Rockpile turns its lonely eyes to you. Boo, hoo, hoo. (If you think that's bad, our singing is worse. Nobody can clear out a karaoke bar faster than the Kickin' It Headquarters staff.) But to answer your question: Reynolds was unable to find work until April, when he signed a minor-league deal with the Washington Nationals.

If Desmond is overpaid for his April production, imagine how much Kiz-boy has been overpaid for his poison pen throughout the 21st century! When was the last time that Desmond or manager Bud Black critiqued your writing? Oh wait, they aren't qualified. The corollary may also be true.

Kiz: Corollary? Plato might well applaud your argument as valid, based on an inspection of my W-2s from the past decade. But, when it comes to the great philosophers, I'm more a disciple of Chance the Rapper: "Sometimes the truth don't rhyme, sometimes the lies get millions of views."

And today's parting shot is a response to a confession made while covering the NFL draft. During 35 years of living in Denver, I've never walked through the doors of Casa Bonita. Is that a bad thing? Shameful. If you have lived in Colorado that long, you are obligated to that torture.



# Troy Fumagalli brings cerebral approach to Denver Broncos

By Gina Mizell  
The Denver Post  
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When many college athletes would pick up a video-game controller, Troy Fumagalli would open a book or hit “play” on a podcast.

The topics could range from a meditation technique called “body scanning” to a stretch that could improve his hip flexibility. Fumagalli would then often relay what he learned to his position coach, Mickey Turner, during conversations that would often veer away from football.

That cerebral approach helped Fumagalli put together a decorated Wisconsin career, one capped by being named a finalist for the John Mackey Award given to college football’s top tight end. Next, he’ll aim to apply that mentality in Denver after the Broncos drafted Fumagalli in the fifth round.

“He’ll kind of get on these tangents of ideas,” Turner said of Fumagalli. “But it’s always impressed me, as an adult, to see a young man like that — that challenges himself mentally in such a way.”

Fumagalli also had the physical tools necessary to lead the Badgers in both catches (46) and receiving yards (547) in 2017, haul in four touchdowns and serve as a key blocker for a run-heavy offensive system that ranked second in the Big Ten with 222.9 rushing yards per game. His frame is ideal for a tight at 6-foot-6, 250 pounds. Each season, Turner said Fumagalli would begin fall camp with an improved skill set such as using a better pad level while blocking or sharper route-running.

And the fact that Fumagalli is missing his left index finger? That’s an afterthought, not a detriment, as Turner praised Fumagalli’s reliable pass-catching. Those hands are all Fumagalli has ever known, as a rare condition that cut off circulation in the womb forced doctors to amputate his finger days after he was born.

“If you ask him about it, it’s almost like you surprise him with the question,” Turner said. “... The fact that he takes it so nonchalantly and just treats it as commonplace, I think it makes everybody around him just fall in line.”

But the mind, Turner said, is what helps Fumagalli gain an edge. He understands how to leverage his body or take the perfect angle to get in proper position for a catch. He likes being the guy with the answers in the huddle, who can help an unsure freshman line up for a complex play. He earned a reputation as a “gamer,” with two of his best collegiate performances coming in national-spotlight games against LSU (seven catches, 100 yards) and in the Cotton Bowl against Western Michigan (six catches, 83 yards, one touchdown).

“He wants to make the big catch, the tough catch on third down,” Turner said. “He kind of relishes those moments, and a lot of that’s really tough to coach into a player if they don’t have that naturally ... When certain guys would have an opportunity to shrink, you never really saw that in Troy.”

Fumagalli first caught the Broncos' attention while being coached by their staff at the Senior Bowl. And after years of sub-par production at tight end — A.J. Derby led the position group with 19 catches for 224 yards and two touchdowns in 2017 before being placed on injured reserve and claimed off waivers by Miami — Denver now has two intriguing young players at that spot. Jake Butt, a 2017 fifth-round pick, missed all of last season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament but was a two-time All-American and the 2016 Mackey Award winner at Michigan.

“(The Broncos) do a lot of the same things that we did at Wisconsin,” Fumagalli said. “All the things we do at the tight end position, both blocking and catching, I think things like that will translate to the next level.”

So will Fumagalli's mentality, Turner believes. As a college athlete, Fumagalli's deep thinking led him to explore topics such as meditation and unconventional stretching. Next, he'll need to display that toughness and confidence while battling NFL veterans.

“That's what he's preparing his mind for,” Turner said.

# Von Miller attends the 144th running of the Kentucky Derby, and doing it in style

By Jeff Bailey  
The Denver Post  
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The Denver Broncos' Von Miller decided to take in Saturday's 144th running of the Kentucky Derby in Louisville, Ky. And, as one might expect from the Broncos' all-everything linebacker, he did it in style.

Miller wore a coral, pink and light blue plaid suit with a skinny blue tie. To top off his outfit, Miller decided to go with a classy straw hat with a red rose to match the outfit.

Justify was the winning horse on a track with muddy conditions. Jockey Mike Smith rode Justify to victory on the wettest Derby day on record.

# Having overcome difficult life challenges, Keishawn Bierria sets out to make Broncos roster

By Mike Klis

9 News

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When Keishawn Bierria was 8, his hero and devoted father passed away on Christmas Day after a long, determined battle with cancer.

When Bierria was 18 and a week into college at the University of Washington, he learned his mom, Simonne, was diagnosed with leukemia.

So when you say Bierria is facing long odds to make the Broncos' 53-man roster as a late, sixth-round drafted rookie, please. What else you got?

"Expectations?" Bierria said. "Go out there and ball. Play the best football I ever have."

An inside Will linebacker at 6-foot, 230 pounds, Bierria figures to first have a great chance to make the Broncos' roster as a special teams contributor. Even as a 3 ½-year starter for the Washington Huskies, Bierria played on all four special teams units – punt, punt return, kickoff, kickoff return – all four years.

"Special teams is what I do," Bierria said.

He also has a good chance to make the Broncos' roster through the resourcefulness and determination he developed independently while growing up in Carson, Calif. See, dad was everything to Bierria and his three brothers – two older (Marques and Dominique), one younger (Trevon). When he died, mom was battling drug use.

Mom's parents, James and Michelle Whitmore, gained custody of the Bierria boys and Keishawn grew up at his grandparents' home. He's lived and the Whitmores since he was 9.

"Still do when I go home," he said.

Mom has since beat leukemia and drugs, and Keishawn is an admitted mama's boy. Yet, there were times while growing up that he had to grow up faster than his buddies.

Asked if he would be a different person today if he hadn't gone through so much parental adversity, Bierria paused a while to consider, then gave a thoughtful response.

"I don't know if I'd be different," he said. "I think the journey I've been through, the trials and tribulations my brothers and I had to go through, has shaped the way we are now. My brothers and I are free thinkers. We all had to grow up fast and they're all great men. We all learned to take care of ourselves regardless of what people think of us.

"It was the same thing my father was doing before he passed away. A lot of people didn't agree with the way he was living. But the big thing for him was to take care of his boys and make sure everyone was

successful. He loved his wife more than anything. Every day I remember he was trying to help her with her drug addiction and it didn't matter what anybody said to him, that was his wife. Even now I would remember those days when my father would set aside whatever he was doing to take care of his wife.

"The journey would have been different if I my father was here. Maybe, I wouldn't have been a football player. Maybe, I would have played a different sport like my older brothers. I think growing up without a father that was difficult to overcome because you don't have – I don't want to say structure but that protection, that leadership that you need. We had to find it within ourselves. We had to develop earlier into young men.

"I had to make decisions coming out of high school that was a little heavy for a teenager. That was put on my shoulders. I made a decision that was best for me and my little brother."

Bierria said he was offered the Washington Huskies' final football scholarship in 2013. After leading the nation with five fumble recoveries as a redshirt junior in 2016, he graduated – before playing his redshirt senior season in 2017 – with his major in sociology, American ethnic studies and minor in anthropology.

This is a young man with resolve.

"Everything just made us grow up a little faster, made us understand the world a little more, a little quicker," he said. "That's where we're at now."

Bierria is now a Bronco after he was watching the NFL Draft last Saturday. Bierria's best friend is Azeem Victor. They were both starting linebackers and roommates at Washington. Both are 22. Victor grew up in Compton, the nearby town to Bierria's Carson. Bierria and Victor both have the same agent, Jack Scharf.

Victor was selected No. 216 to the Raiders; Bierria No. 217 to the Broncos.

Those who follow the draft closely know the networks are often a good 5 minutes behind the actual pick. The delay nearly numbed Bierria's moment.

"At first it was kind of surreal because when I got the phone call on TV I saw the Raiders pop up," Bierria said. "When the Raiders popped up I saw my teammate and the other guy that Jack represents, Azeem Victor, who is my boy, he got picked up by the Raiders, and then I picked up the phone and it was John Elway.

"I was like, wow. I was confused at first. The Broncos had not been calling before the draft so I was kind of surprised. But that was the only trip I took. Teams were calling me saying I needed to sign (as an undrafted free agent) before the draft was over. I was surprised man. I was surprised."

Bierria visited the Broncos on April 4.

"I remember ... the energy," Bierria said. "When I talked to the head coach (Vance Joseph) we talked about stepping into a grown man's world. I remember leaving there thinking, I need to prepare myself to take care of my family."

Based on the NFL draft's financial slot system, Bierria can expect a four-year contract worth \$2.58 million that includes a \$118,408 signing bonus. An agreement is expected before he reports Thursday to the Broncos' rookie orientation.

The deal won't make Bierria rich, but it's a nice start and it will help. His younger brother, Trevon, is a starting safety for San Jose State. His older brother Dominique is a tight end for New Mexico Highlands.

Bierria will do what he can to help his mom and grandparents. And he will carry on his father's ways.

"During the time he was living, he definitely left an impact on me and my (younger) brother. He laid the foundation for us. After that, we lived our own way based on what he taught us.

"He was our coach in just about everything. My dad played multiple sports. Even at a young age we understood the way things were and the way things were supposed to be. He was always there every step of the way."

# Fifth-year options: Why 20 were picked up and 12 weren't

By STAFF

ESPN

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Picking up the fifth-year option on 2015 first-round draft picks is a big decision for NFL teams. Do you guarantee millions of dollars toward the 2019 season or do you let a first-round pick, in whom you've invested time and money, hit free agency? Here's a closer look at those decisions and what that player has to do to earn a second contract with his current team.

## AFC East

### Buffalo Bills

The Bills had no first-round pick in 2015, trading it to Cleveland in 2014 to move up to draft Sammy Watkins.

### Miami Dolphins

#### WR DeVante Parker

Why his contract was picked up: Parker has not met expectations since being selected 14th overall, but there is still hope that he can blossom into a No. 1 receiver after the trade of Jarvis Landry this offseason. Parker's \$9.4 million salary in 2019 is guaranteed only for injury until the start of the next league year, so the Dolphins can still decide not to pick up Parker's option -- as long as he is healthy -- if he does not improve in 2018.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Take advantage of a jumbled Dolphins depth chart at receiver and take the lead in replacing the production of Landry -- 112 catches for 987 yards and nine touchdowns last season. At 6-foot-3, Parker has a chance to stand out over a group of smaller receivers in Danny Amendola, Albert Wilson and Jakeem Grant. He also can benefit with the return of quarterback Ryan Tannehill from an injury last season.

## LB Stephone Anthony

Why his contract wasn't picked up: Anthony showed promise as a rookie after being selected 31st overall by the Saints in 2015, leading all rookies in tackles with 112. However, he has made just 30 tackles since then, and New Orleans dealt him to Miami for a fifth-rounder last year. He played in eight games last season with Miami, with much of his time coming on special teams and on obvious passing downs. His production didn't show he's worth the \$9.6 million that he would have received with the option.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: With Lawrence Timmons gone, there is an opportunity to earn playing time at outside linebacker in 2018, but Anthony also will have to beat out rookie Jerome Baker, a third-round pick. If Anthony can bounce back to the form he showed as a rookie, he could boost his value significantly. -- Mike Rodak

## New England Patriots

DT Danny Shelton

Why his contract wasn't picked up: The fifth-year option was worth \$7.1 million, and nose tackles who come off the field in passing situations generally don't make that type of money.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Shelton should get a second contract, it just might not be at that financial level. If he shows he can be a valuable pocket pusher in passing situations, the value of his contract will rise.

WR Phillip Dorsett

Why his contract wasn't picked up: Dorsett was acquired in a trade with the Colts for Jacoby Brissett and while his smarts and speed give him a chance to possibly carve out a larger role in 2018, the Patriots weren't going to commit a fifth-year option north of \$9 million for him.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Dorsett has value on a team's roster as a depth option, so he should get a second contract; but at this point, it would be at a much lower financial level than \$9 million.

DT Malcom Brown

Why his contract wasn't picked up: This is similar to the Patriots' thinking with Danny Shelton, as the fifth-year option was worth \$7.1 million and nose tackles who come off the field in passing situations generally don't make that type of money.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Brown has shown a knack to penetrate and rush the passer at times, and expanding that part of his game would help him land his next contract at a nice salary. -- Mike Reiss

New York Jets

DE Leonard Williams

Why his contract was picked up: Quite simply, he's one of the best players on the team. Even though his sack total dropped to two last season, Williams -- drafted sixth overall in 2015 -- is part of the team's foundation. He has plenty of talent, and he does everything the right way, on and off the field.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Play like he did in 2016, when he had seven sacks and made the Pro Bowl as an injury replacement. The Jets have every intention of signing him to a long-term deal, but they probably will wait until after the season. One concern: The defensive line is rebuilding with young players, which means Williams could see an inordinate amount of double-teams. That could affect his stats, which in turn, will have an effect at the bargaining table. -- Rich Cimini

AFC North

Baltimore Ravens

WR Breshad Perriman

Why his contract wasn't picked up: Perriman ranks as one of the biggest busts in the franchise's 23-year history. He struggles catching the ball, can't stay healthy and doesn't play as fast as his 4.24 speed in the 40-yard dash. In 27 games, Perriman has managed 43 catches for 576 yards and three touchdowns.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Perriman might not even make it to the preseason, much less get a second contract. He is due a \$649,485 bonus on the third day of Baltimore's training camp, and the Ravens could decide to cut him before paying him that. It seems like Baltimore already has prepared to move forward without Perriman, after signing three wide receivers in free agency: Michael Crabtree, John Brown and Willie Snead. -- Jamison Hensley

Cincinnati Bengals  
OT Cedric Ogbuehi

Why his contract wasn't picked up: Ogbuehi was supposed to be the heir apparent to left tackle Andrew Whitworth, but he barely even saw the field until his second season, when he struggled at right tackle. Ogbuehi said left tackle was his natural position, but he struggled there too, and the writing was on the wall when the Bengals traded for Bills left tackle Cordy Glenn this spring. Ogbuehi will now go into OTAs as a backup.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Ogbuehi would have to either find a way to move inside or beat out Jake Fisher as starting right tackle and make a significant improvement. If he doesn't, he'll likely be a free agent in 2019. -- Katherine Terrell

Cleveland Browns  
FS Damarious Randall

Why his contract was picked up: The Browns needed a safety to roam the middle of the field and allow Jabrill Peppers to play in his more natural spot closer to the line. They made Randall that player when they acquired him from Green Bay in March. Randall needed a fresh start and will get one roaming the deep middle for defensive coordinator Gregg Williams. (Note: Neither of the Browns' two first-round picks from 2015 are with the team; Cam Erving is in Kansas City, Danny Shelton in New England.)

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Play the position that he says is his natural one with savvy and smarts. Williams asks his free safety to roam the deep middle; if Randall protects against balls going over his head and comes up with some turnovers, the Browns will be happy to give him a new deal after 2019. -- Pat McManamon

Pittsburgh Steelers  
OLB Bud Dupree

Why his contract was picked up: The Steelers believe Dupree is an ascending player despite totaling 14.5 sacks over three years. He has played through various injuries. And he was explosive when utilizing his high-level size and speed. General manager Kevin Colbert tipped his hand in March by saying that Dupree was "just scratching the surface" of his potential.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Put together a complete season. Dupree can look dominant one game and simply blend in the next. Staying healthy and contending for a season of double-digit sacks

would quell any concerns about Pittsburgh investing long term. Creating a few more turnovers wouldn't hurt, either. Dupree has one forced fumble and zero interceptions. -- Jeremy Fowler

#### AFC South

Houston Texans  
CB Kevin Johnson

Why his contract was picked up: The Texans are hoping Johnson's struggles over the past two seasons have been because of injuries and that he can turn it around with a healthy 2018. The Texans had inconsistency at cornerback last season, and they hope Johnson's \$9.06 million fifth-year option provides them some depth at the position.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Johnson has to stay healthy and have a much better season than he did in 2017. The Texans' top three corners are Johnathan Joseph, Aaron Colvin and Kareem Jackson. Jackson is in the final year of a four-year deal, and Joseph has one more year after next season, so the Texans could bring Johnson back on a team-friendly deal if they do not re-sign Jackson and they see enough from Johnson that they believe he's worth investing in. -- Sarah Barshop

Indianapolis Colts

The Colts traded 2015 first-round pick Phillip Dorsett to the Patriots in 2017.

Jacksonville Jaguars  
DE Dante Fowler Jr.

Why his contract wasn't picked up: Fowler isn't a dynamic pass-rusher and has started just one game in the past two seasons. He missed his rookie season with a torn ACL and since then has been behind 2016 third-round pick Yannick Ngakoue on the depth chart. Fowler has 12 sacks and 21 quarterback hits in his two seasons, as compared to Ngakoue's 20 and 37. That doesn't warrant a \$14.2 million salary.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: The Jaguars do view Fowler as an ascending player, but he's going to have to put up double-digit sacks and get more consistent pressure on the quarterback in 2018. To do that, he needs to add another pass-rush move, because he's limited in what he does. His two sacks in the AFC title game show he can make big plays when it counts, but he can't disappear for long stretches. -- Michael DiRocco

Tennessee Titans  
QB Marcus Mariota

Why his contract was picked up: This was an easy decision for Titans general manager Jon Robinson, who believes that Mariota is a franchise QB and one who can eventually lead them to a Super Bowl. Mariota's numbers were bad last season under an inflexible offense, but he still led the Titans to their first playoff win since 2003. Mariota still has plenty to prove, but there wasn't much of a consideration of declining the option.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: First, play better than last season and make sure the Titans don't take a step back as a team. If Mariota has a successful Year 4 (say, 3,500-plus total yards, 25-plus

total TDs and 12 or fewer interceptions) under new Titans offensive coordinator Matt LaFleur, the 24-year-old signal-caller will likely receive a nine-figure contract extension next offseason. -- Cameron Wolfe

#### AFC West

Denver Broncos  
OLB Shane Ray

Why his contract wasn't picked up: The biggest reason stands 6-foot-4¼ and weighs about 268 pounds. When the Broncos used the No. 5 pick of this year's draft on Bradley Chubb, the dynamic changed in the Broncos' defense. Chubb, unless things don't go as expected, will start at outside linebacker; and the Broncos will simply want to see more production from Ray.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Get to the quarterback. After a frustrating 2017 that featured three wrist surgeries and just one sack, Ray can now essentially bet on himself and put up the numbers as he goes into free agency next March poised for a payday. And if the Broncos like what they see, they can still write the check. -- Jeff Legwold

Kansas City Chiefs  
OT Cam Erving

Why his contract wasn't picked up: With Eric Fisher and Mitchell Schwartz solid as the starters, Erving will be the Chiefs' third tackle this year. Picking up his fifth-year option at more than \$9 million wouldn't make sense for a backup. Erving was acquired in a trade with the Browns shortly before the start of last season.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: It's not out of the question that the Chiefs will try to re-sign Erving. They like his skills and potential, and he won't turn 26 until August. But it won't be at a steep cost, unless an injury to Fisher or Schwartz provides an opening for Erving and he proves deserving. -- Adam Teicher

Los Angeles Chargers  
RB Melvin Gordon

Why his contract was picked up: After a rough start, the Wisconsin product proved his worth, totaling 1,581 yards from scrimmage (No. 5 in the NFL) and 12 total touchdowns in 2017. Only Todd Gurley and Ezekiel Elliott (25) have more touchdowns than Gordon's 24 total touchdowns in the past two seasons, as Gordon emerged as a focal part of the Chargers' offense.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Gordon still has two years left on his rookie contract. If he puts together a season in 2018 similar to last year's production, the Chargers could look to sign him to a multiyear deal that keeps him with the organization during the offseason in 2019. -- Eric D. Williams

Oakland Raiders  
WR Amari Cooper

Why his contract was picked up: Simple, as coach Jon Gruden said: Cooper will "be the focal point of our pass offense" in 2018. "He's got tremendous quickness," Gruden said. "I think he's smart, he's versatile, he's a gamer, he likes the bright lights and he'll be the headliner in our offense." The No. 4 overall pick of

the 2015 draft is just the third player in league history with at least 70 catches and at least 1,000 receiving yards in each of his first two seasons in the NFL.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Prove that last season's regression to 48 catches for 680 yards was a fluke and improve on his drop rate. Still, Cooper did have a career-best seven TD catches in 2017, and the Raiders expect the arrival of veteran Jordy Nelson to have a calming influence on him. "He had a lot of injuries last year, and that impacted him," Gruden said. -- Paul Gutierrez

NFC East

Dallas Cowboys  
DB Byron Jones

Why his contract was picked up: There wasn't a reason to not pick it up. It's guaranteed only for injury, and Jones has not missed a game in his career. He has started 43 of 48 games in his first three seasons, and he spent the past two seasons as a starting safety. The Cowboys want more takeaways, but he is a dependable player.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: He has two interceptions and two forced fumbles in his career. He has to make more plays on the ball. The move to cornerback under new defensive backs coach/passing game coordinator Kris Richard should give him that chance. If he can make the big plays for the defense, then the Cowboys would want to make him a cornerstone piece to the defense for the long term. -- Todd Archer

New York Giants  
OT Ereck Flowers

Why his contract wasn't picked up: He simply did not play well his first three years. The Giants paid Nate Solder \$65 million just to make sure Flowers wasn't their left tackle this season. Flowers also isn't especially popular in the offensive line room and within the building, especially after deciding not to attend this season's voluntary offseason workouts.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Mend some fences and play significantly better. The Giants are trying to clean up the locker room, and Flowers has to prove he's on board with the new regime. Then he needs to show he can be a competent right tackle, where he is expected to compete for a starting job, rather than a liability to quarterback Eli Manning's well-being. -- Jordan Raanan

Philadelphia Eagles  
WR Nelson Agholor

Why his contract was picked up: He found his footing this past season after a slow start to his career, catching 62 balls for 768 yards with eight touchdowns for the Super Bowl champion Eagles. The former Southern California star took over as the team's slot receiver when Jordan Matthews was traded to the Bills. The role proved to be a perfect fit for his skill set, and he took off.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Agholor fought past the confidence issues that held him back in 2016 and took a big step toward reaching his potential. As long as the arrow continues to point up, he'll get paid. -- Tim McManus

Washington Redskins  
RG Brandon Scherff

Why his contract was picked up: Because he has lived up to being the fifth overall pick, having made two Pro Bowls already. He has established himself as one of the best guards after only three seasons, with his ability to block in space yet play with power.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Stay healthy and just do what he has been doing. It's really that simple. One reason the Redskins didn't want to pay Kirk Cousins more than \$22 million to \$23 million a year is to allow them to extend the contracts of players such as Scherff. He'll be a mainstay in Washington for a long time. -- John Keim

NFC North

Chicago Bears  
WR Kevin White

Why his contract wasn't picked up: White has appeared in just five career regular-season games because of multiple leg and shoulder injuries. Even when healthy, White -- the seventh overall pick of the 2015 draft -- hasn't looked overly impressive. The 25-year-old wideout only has 21 career receptions for 193 yards and zero touchdowns.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Play a full, 16-game schedule. White's main problem -- aside from always being on injured reserve -- is that he never learned how to run professional routes in college. White's primary responsibility at West Virginia was to beat the defender in front of him by any means necessary. That really doesn't work in the NFL. White's limited route tree has been compounded by the fact that he's rarely on the field. How can he learn to run routes the proper way if he's not physically able to run routes? For White, the key to a possible comeback is to stay healthy. -- Jeff Dickerson

Detroit Lions

The Lions' first-round pick in 2015, offensive lineman Laken Tomlinson, was traded to San Francisco in August for a fifth-round pick in 2019.

Green Bay Packers

The Packers traded their 2015 first-round pick, Damarious Randall, to the Browns in the DeShone Kizer deal in March.

Minnesota Vikings  
CB Trae Waynes

Why his contract was picked up: Waynes played a big role in the league's second-best pass defense, which allowed 192.4 yards per game last season, and he has only gotten better as he has continued to develop under coach Mike Zimmer's tutelage. When teams decided not to throw toward Xavier Rhodes, that meant Waynes was going to be put to the test often. According to Pro Football Focus, opposing quarterbacks threw 102 times in Waynes' direction, and he allowed only three touchdowns and made 11 pass deflections and two interceptions. The Vikings' secondary is loaded from top to bottom, and along

the lines of Zimmer's philosophy on cornerbacks, a team can never have too many. Picking up Waynes' fifth-year option keeps that group intact through at least 2019.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: The type of improvement Waynes showed in Year 3 might foreshadow another level he's about to take his game to in 2018. He has earned his reputation as one of the best run-stopping corners in the league. If he can become a better coverage corner, like Rhodes, there's a chance Waynes could command big money in free agency in two years and choose to sign with a team other than the Vikings. -- Courtney Cronin

## NFC South

### Atlanta Falcons

#### DE Vic Beasley

Why his contract was picked up: The Falcons obviously have a lot of faith in Beasley, the former eighth overall pick out of Clemson. He led the league with 15.5 sacks in 2016 and showed the knack for the sack-fumble. Beasley's speed and overall athleticism can overwhelm those trying to block him.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Beasley wasn't nearly as dominant last season, for several reasons. First, he had a nagging hamstring injury that led to some missed time. Then he was asked to take on more responsibilities, playing strongside linebacker and dropping in coverage. But Beasley will line up strictly at defensive end moving forward. So to secure a lucrative, long-term deal, he simply needs to get after quarterbacks in the same manner he did during his Pro Bowl season. And Beasley needs to turn sacks into turnovers with those sack-fumbles. -- Vaughn McClure

### Carolina Panthers

#### LB Shaq Thompson

Why his contract was picked up: This was a no-brainer. Thompson is the heir apparent to Thomas Davis at outside linebacker. He'll replace Davis in the first four games this season while Davis serves a four-game suspension. But Thompson has proved to have the speed and versatility to rush the quarterback, be effective against the run and drop into coverage.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Just progress as he has the past two seasons and this also will be a no-brainer. -- David Newton

### New Orleans Saints

#### G Andrus Peat

Why his contract was picked up: The former Stanford left tackle has developed into a Pro Bowl-caliber left guard for one of the NFL's best offensive lines. His career got off to a slow start when he struggled with his conditioning as a rookie, and the Saints tried him out at several different positions. But the massive 6-foot-7, 316-pounder has steadily improved each year, and he gives the team added value as a backup left tackle when needed.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: More of the same. The Saints have a ton invested in their offensive line, so in theory, they might not be able to keep re-signing everyone. But they made those

investments by design, which led to them leading the NFL in both yards per rush and yards per pass attempt in 2017. And the 24-year-old Peat is first in line for the next contract extension. -- Mike Triplett

Tampa Bay Buccaneers  
QB Jameis Winston

Why his contract was picked up: This was fully expected, and he will be getting a second contract that will top more than \$20 million annually. It's simply par for the course for a quarterback picked first overall who, two seasons ago, led the Bucs to a 9-7 finish.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: He took a few steps back last year when he suffered a shoulder injury that had an impact throughout the 2017 season, and he'll want to cut down on turnovers -- he has 59 in 45 games -- to evoke more confidence from fans that the Bucs are making the right move. -- Jenna Laine

NFC West

Arizona Cardinals  
LT D.J. Humphries

Why his contract was picked up: Aside from quarterback, Humphries plays the most valuable position in football: left tackle. He might have durability concerns, but he's still a living, breathing, healthy (for now) and talented left tackle, and teams would have to be out of their minds to not keep those around for as long as possible -- especially on a rookie contract.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Stay healthy. If Humphries stays healthy, he's all but guaranteed to get a second deal from Arizona because of the reasons listed above. He's athletic and quick, and he likes to talk about how he loves to block the run. But the biggest difference in Humphries getting a second deal is how he focused himself and shed the reputation for being immature. He grew up, and it's paying dividends. -- Josh Weinfuss

Los Angeles Rams  
RB Todd Gurley

Why his contract was picked up: Aside from star defensive tackle Aaron Donald, Gurley is the best player on the team. He struggled behind a bad offensive line and an anemic passing attack in 2016, but he bounced back brilliantly in 2017, leading the NFL in scrimmage yards (2,093) and touchdowns (19) while on his way to winning the NFL Offensive Player of the Year Award. Gurley has emerged as one of the most complete running backs in the league.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Be patient. The Rams have other, more pressing business to handle with Donald and wide receiver Brandin Cooks on track to be unrestricted free agents next offseason. They also need to get a better sense for the running back market, which won't happen until Le'Veon Bell gets a deal. Gurley is worthy of a big extension on talent alone, but are the Rams willing to commit so much long-term cap space to a running back? Most of this is out of Gurley's control.

CB Marcus Peters

Why his contract was picked up: Peters leads the NFL with 19 interceptions in the past three seasons. The Rams gave up a future second-round pick to acquire him from the Chiefs this offseason because they see him as more than a one-year rental.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Behave. Peters has a history of being a problem in the locker room, from getting dismissed by the University of Washington to being handed a one-game suspension by Chiefs coach Andy Reid this past season. But if he stays in line and plays the way he is capable, the Rams would certainly be interested in a long-term commitment. -- Alden Gonzalez

San Francisco 49ers  
DL Arik Armstead

Why his contract was picked up: Given Armstead's injury history and lack of production, it was a bit of a surprise that the Niners picked up his option. They also know they could find themselves in a worse spot next offseason, when they'd have to use a tag on him to ensure he doesn't hit the open market if he plays well in 2018.

What he needs to do get a second contract: Armstead is moving to the "big end" spot, which would seem to be a better fit for his skill set than his previous positions. If he can stay healthy and stop the run while offering occasional pass-rush help, he could be in the long-term plans.

G Laken Tomlinson

Why his option wasn't picked up: Simply put, the cost of the fifth-year option outweighs his production. The fifth-year formula doesn't separate positions on the offensive line, meaning Tomlinson is lumped in with tackles and centers, as well, which means his fifth-year option price tag would approach \$10 million.

What he needs to do to get a second contract: Tomlinson didn't join the Niners until just before last season, and he struggled adjusting to their scheme early before a strong finish. With a full offseason at his disposal, the 49ers believe he can improve, and general manager John Lynch already has said discussions have begun to retain Tomlinson at a more palatable price tag. -- Nick Wagoner

Seattle Seahawks

The Seahawks didn't have a first-round pick in 2015 after trading it to New Orleans for tight end Jimmy Graham.

# Vance Joseph needs to coach better, and beat the 49ers, if he wants to stay with Denver Broncos

By Woody Paige  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
May 6, 2018

Vance Joseph is not the worst NFL head coach.

However, he's next to last among 25 survivors from 2017 after leading the Broncos to disintegration.

The Broncos are eternally grateful to the Cleveland Browns. Coach Hue Jackson promised publicly after his first season (2016) that if the Browns repeated a 1-15 record, he would jump into Lake Erie. He was correct, they didn't go 1-15. The Browns eerily finished 0-16.

Hue still has a job, as does Vance, who, as a rookie coach, produced the Broncos' most abominable season since the McHoodie Reign of Terrible in 2010 and tied for the franchise's second-fewest victories in 46 seasons.

Will Joseph outlast Josh McDaniels, fired after 28 games with an 11-17 record, or Frank Filchok (7-20-1) or Mac Speedie (6-19-1)?

Game No. 29 will be Joseph's most critical. On Dec. 9, the Broncos play in Levi Stadium the 49ers and coach Kyle Shanahan, the other Broncos' coaching finalist.

Joseph will confront other teams - the Rams, the Ravens, the Cardinals, the Chiefs, the Chargers and the Giants - with Broncos coaching connections. Wade Phillips is the Rams' defensive coordinator, and Mike McCoy has taken over as the Cardinals' offensive coordinator. Dave Toub and Anthony Lynn, passed over by the Broncos, are with the Chiefs and the Chargers. Rick Dennison is the Ravens' offensive line coach and running game coordinator. Tyke Tolbert joined the Giants as wide receivers assistant. Lots of people want revenge.

Joseph was one of six new coaches last year.

He inherited the bunch's "best" team, the only one with a winning record the previous season. Vance said the Broncos were a "retool, not a rebuild."

Joseph turned the Broncos into the "worst" of the half dozen. Coaches in Jacksonville, Buffalo and Los Angeles made the playoffs; the Chargers improved to 9-7, and Shanahan won his last five with a new quarterback to end up 6-10.

John Elway, who chose to hire Joseph, intended to fire him at season's conclusion, but was persuaded, at the final moment, to bring him back for one more season "to fix it."

Mr. Fixit has a short shelf life.

When he was retained, Joseph said he learned in 2017, but being one of 32 NFL coaches is not an internship or about on-the-job training. Before, the Broncos selected coaches who served as successful head coaches and veteran coordinators elsewhere, not a one-hit wonder defensive coordinator who was as a defensive backs coach for 11 seasons, and seven of those finishes were not above .500.

Joseph sounded totally out of place in his first press conference, was virtually the same all season, and looked lost on the sideline in every game - with arms folded and eyes staring. He was outcoached in eight consecutive defeats and 10 of the last 12. Vance was hired because, supposedly, he was a leader of the locker room and men. The Broncos' locker room became chaotic as rookies acted entitled and older players revolted. Meanwhile, Joseph et al couldn't solve the quarterback quandary, and changed starters four times. The coach also stuck with, and up for, the most ineffective special teams coordinator and a returner who repeatedly fumbled.

So, the Broncos blamed OC McCoy, and Joseph fired him Nov. 20. The team was 2-4 the rest of the season, beating two teams that were just as awful as the Broncos. In an interview with ESPN after joining Arizona in the same capacity, McCoy said he learned to stay one series ahead of Joseph last season, asking Joseph about his mindset in certain situations. McCoy said he'd bounce ideas off Joseph, such as whether Joseph wanted to go with the Broncos' four-minute drill or whether he wanted McCoy to keep calling pass plays when the defense was playing well.

The draft was an "A-," and the acquisitions of Case Keenum and four other veterans will be critical.

But can Joseph professionally coach up the Broncos?

None of the road games will be stress-free (especially after a 1-7 mark as a visiting team in '17), and at least five of the home games will be difficult.

The Broncos could be 4-9 after a loss to the 49ers.

If so, the season would be over, and Joseph's short stay in Denver would be, too.

# Ex-Broncos OL Orlando Franklin retires after 7 seasons

By Jeremy Bergman

NFL.com

May 6, 2018

Orlando Franklin is calling it quits.

The former Broncos and Chargers offensive lineman announced Saturday that he is retiring after seven seasons in the NFL.

After one campaign in Washington, Franklin was released by the Redskins this week. The 30-year-old cited family and health as reasons for his early retirement.

[View image on Instagram](#)

A second-round pick in 2011, Franklin was an instrumental tackle for one of the game's greatest offenses -- the Peyton Manning-led Broncos from 2012 through 2014. Franklin began as a right tackle, but switched to left guard in 2014. He started 70 of the 71 games he played in Denver, including seven postseason appearances. Franklin started Denver's Super Bowl XLVIII loss to the Seahawks.

Franklin signed a lucrative five-year deal with the Chargers in 2015, but was released after just two seasons. He played in one game for the Redskins last year.

# GM Beane breaks down trading up twice in first round of NFL Draft

By Jay Skurski  
Buffalo News  
May 6, 2018

Brandon Beane thought he had prepared for every possible scenario in last week's NFL Draft.

The Buffalo Bills' general manager ran through situations where the team made both its first-round draft picks. He mapped out what it would look like to trade away one of those picks. He ran through hypotheticals that saw the Bills trade both second-round picks, keep them both or just keep one.

The one scenario Beane didn't envision, however, is the one that played out. Seeing Virginia Tech linebacker Tremaine Edmunds slip down the board meant all of Beane's planning went out the window.

"I can't lie. I'd love to tell you that I planned that out, and I'm that good, but I didn't," Beane said. "I thought I had every scenario, but I didn't have that one."

In a wide-ranging interview with The Buffalo News, Beane methodically detailed the team's approach to the draft, from working the phones in an effort to trade up to the nervous moments when he thought his quarterback might be getting away from him and then the jubilation in the war room after landing Edmunds.

When it was all over, the Bills had potential franchise cornerstones for their offense and defense.

Here's how it happened.

## The buildup

The Bills learned what they were up against in the race for a quarterback on March 17. That's the day the New York Jets traded the No. 6 overall draft pick and three second-rounders to the Indianapolis Colts for the third overall selection.

"You always know things can happen whenever, so nothing shocks me," Beane said. "You're like, 'Oh, OK.'"

When the Jets made their trade, Beane had spent only 15 minutes in a group setting with two of the draft's top quarterbacks. The Jets-Colts deal came only five days after the Bills had moved from No. 21 to No. 12 in a trade with the Cincinnati Bengals involving tackle Cordy Glenn.

"I didn't really know them," he said. "We had just gotten to 12 a couple days before that. But still don't know, are we going to stay at 12? How aggressive are we going to be? Do we like one? Do we like two? I didn't know. I couldn't tell you on that day I liked three, to go up to three. If I'm going to give up the assets to do that, I had to know I liked three. If I'm going to do it before the draft, you have to. I'm not doing it on 15 minutes, you know what I'm saying? That's a major risk that I wasn't willing to do."

The trade ended up working out for New York, which was able to select Southern California's Sam Darnold at No. 3. At worst, he was New York's second-ranked quarterback, and was available to them after the Giants passed on a quarterback at No. 2.

Beane inquired about moving up to the second overall pick.

"Had conversations with everybody," he said. "(Picks) two, four and five were the main people that I talked to before the draft, just feeling them out. You know, the only move I would have made before the draft is to two, because I had to see how it unfolded."

The Bills finalized their quarterback rankings April 13 after holding a private workout with Darnold in California. While some took that workout so close to the draft as a sign the Bills had late interest in Darnold, the reality is they had intended to have a workout with him all along. The date of Darnold's pro day prevented the Bills from having a workout with him at that time so it was rescheduled.

"On the plane ride back, I said I know my order now," Beane said. "I didn't know at that point what the Giants were doing. I knew one and three were going to be quarterbacks. That's all I could answer at that point."

Trade talks were quiet in the two weeks leading up to the draft.

"Because nobody was really going to move at that point without me giving up the farm," Beane said. "And think about it: If I got to five, who am I left with? Even if I got to four, who am I left with? I didn't know what the Giants were doing at the time. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't see what it would cost to go to two, pre-draft. In my mind, that was really the only spot I would go to before the clock started."

Two days before the draft started, Beane realized getting to No. 2 wasn't going to be an option.

"It was based on my knowledge – that I felt like they weren't taking a quarterback – and also what it was going to take to get there," he said. "Now, listen, they can call me right before the draft and say, 'Hey, you know what? We want to do this. We're willing to move back for this price.' If it made sense, I would have reconsidered it."

That call never came, and the Giants stayed put to take Penn State running back Saquon Barkley. On the day of the draft, Beane informed his staff what he expected to happen with the first three picks, all of which he had right. That meant Cleveland's No. 4 pick was in play.

"I probably talked to John Dorsey more than anybody through the process, but we could not come to an agreement on what was fair," Beane said.

A deal is in place

With the No. 4 pick not an option, Beane turned his attention to No. 5. He spoke three times on draft day with Broncos boss John Elway.

"I felt like, what I shared with (team owners) Terry and Kim (Pegula), is Denver's our best landing spot," Beane said. "We were closing in on what it would cost. I was good with that."

The Bills would trade No. 12 and No. 22 in the first round to the Broncos, along with one of their second-round picks, and get the No. 5 selection along with one of Denver's third rounders.

"Literally about 8 o'clock, John calls me and says all right, here's what we'll do," Beane said. "We finalized the deal, but it's contingent on his guy not being there."

Beane had a suspicion the guy whom Elway wanted was North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb.

"But I didn't know. You never know," he said. "Some people had said they really liked a corner, which I assume would have been (Ohio State's Denzel) Ward if it was that, but it was Chubb."

The Bills' entire draft changed when the Browns selected Ward with the No. 4 pick. At first, Beane thought that was a bad thing.

"I was really nervous when Cleveland got on the clock. You've got your channels where you're getting information outside of the draft room. Somebody told me, it's down to Ward or Chubb," he said. "Earlier in the day, people felt like they were probably going to go Chubb. That was my first four. I did say it was going to be Chubb, and we'll go to Denver. I was wrong."

"Not until they were on the clock did I get the text from somebody that said, 'Hey, Ward may go here.' I said (expletive)."

With Chubb still on the board, the trade with Denver fell through.

"I was a little bummed when Elway told me, 'Hey, this is our guy,' " Beane said. "I felt like what I had to offer John was better than anybody else could offer. I felt like I was bidding against myself, basically."

Beane was convinced he needed to move ahead of Miami, which picked at No. 11, but was running out of options.

"I had already been told by Indianapolis that they're not moving. Tampa had said they really liked a guy, and they didn't think they were going to move. Chicago had told us they're probably not moving. Now we're down to San Francisco, then Oakland."

"I thought at 7, I'm getting in that gray zone. Miami can get there, Arizona now can get there. I don't want to lose him here."

While the Broncos and then Colts were on the clock, Beane and assistant GM Joe Schoen were burning up the phone lines.

"Joe would say, '(the Buccaneers) want this and this,' and it included 22, and I said no," Beane said. "It was just too much. I would have done 22 at five. I wasn't doing it there. Because I knew nobody could be offering that."

Beane was adamant that any trade would not involve Buffalo's first-round pick in 2019.

“That was the biggest obstacle I faced during the whole thing,” he said. “Everybody wanted next year's one leading up to the draft, and I wasn't doing it.”

With the Buccaneers still insisting on getting pick No. 22 while Indianapolis was on the clock, Beane's attention turned to San Francisco's pick at No. 9.

“I had just talked to John Lynch with San Francisco. He said, ‘We've got a guy, Brandon. I don't know, it would have to be pretty good to talk us out of that, unless he's gone,’ ” Beane said. “So I'm like, ‘Let me see what this pick is. I was going to call him back as soon as Tampa put their pick in.’ ”

Instead, the Bills' phone rang 30 seconds after the Bucs went on the clock. Tampa General Manager Jason Licht was on the line.

“He said, ‘I'll do it for the twos, but we've got to do it right now,’ ” Beane said. “I said alright, I need another pick, though. I need a player. I don't care what it is, just give me your last pick, whatever it is. He said, ‘Alright, done.’ ”

The last pick ended up being No. 255, the penultimate selection in the entire draft.

The Bills had their guy, drafting Wyoming's Josh Allen with the seventh pick. The team also kept No. 22, all because the Browns selected Ward.

“That was a blessing in disguise,” Beane said. “I was tight after Denver's pick. I was trying not to show it to the room, but I was tight. Joe and I, we were very tight. I basically told everybody, ‘Just stay tuned, stay right here, and as soon as I get something, we'll act.’ We just kept working it back and forth between the two of us, ‘OK, you call them now, I'm calling them.’ ”

Past experiences had taught Beane that the unexpected could happen at any time.

“Just like last year. Nobody saw Kansas City coming up. Nobody was talking about that until about two hours before the draft,” he said. “We were at eight in Carolina last year and they were calling us. We said no, but I'm like, ‘Who the heck are they trying to get?’ We weren't in the quarterback market down there, so I didn't know where people had Patrick Mahomes. I mean, we had our grade on him, but we didn't do enough research on him.

“You don't know who's out there laying in the weeds that's going to make a big jump. You've got to be wary of that, because if they jump you, you lose out.”

As it turned out, the Chiefs traded with the Bills for the 10th pick, with the deal including the Chiefs' first-round pick this year.

Worth the price

The one thing Beane is hesitant to talk about is how he had the quarterbacks ranked. Asked where Allen was on that list, the GM smiles widely and says simply, “I really like him.”

That's why he was fine with overpaying when weighed against commonly referenced draft pick trade value charts.

“Can I ask you a question? What did Philly pay for Carson Wentz,” Beane asked. “The point is, if you get your guy, then nobody will ever care. It's about getting the guy. You can't worry about that stuff.”

That's particularly true, Beane says, when it comes to a first-round quarterback.

The charts are “a starting point. There's so many variables. Every team has variations of their own chart,” Beane said. “Nowadays, there's so many websites out there, footballjunkie.com – and I'm just making that up – but there could be just some guy who really doesn't know anything, who's writing it. What did they put into that chart that says it's legit value?”

“I'm obviously biased because I made the move, but for us to get a quarterback in Round One, move up, and still save 22 – I didn't see that scenario happening with all the teams that were hungry for a quarterback. I thought it was a good win for us. Would I have liked to keep my twos? Hell yeah, but you don't want to outsmart yourself. If teams had bid up and jumped me, and you don't get one, I probably wouldn't have slept from that night until now.”

The selection of Allen was the culmination of a year's worth of work.

“We put in a lot of time, energy, effort, sleepless nights,” Beane said. “I can't tell you how many times I've watched these guys. You see their highlights, and I go, ‘I know what's happening here. It doesn't matter, what team, what the score was, whatever, I've seen it over and over and over.’ There's a lot of emotion invested in that. So we thought that was the right move for our team.”

That's why Beane doesn't concern himself with the negative reaction among some of the team's fans to Allen's selection.

# Orlando Franklin retires, wants to be a full-time dad

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

May 6, 2018

Veteran offensive tackle Orlando Franklin was cut by Washington this week, and he's decided not to seek employment elsewhere.

Franklin wrote on Instagram today that he has decided to retire and be a full-time dad.

"Hey everyone it's been a rough few days for me and more importantly a rough three weeks of me not being able to see my family every day once I got off work, over the last few days I've realized that FaceTiming my son is just not enough," Franklin wrote. "I've always looked forward to being a father and right now I'm not at my best because I cannot be a good father here in DC while my wife and son have to be in Denver. And for this reason I have talked it over with God, my family, and my agent, and have decided to retire after seven years of playing in the NFL."

The 30-year-old Franklin was a second-round pick of the Broncos in 2011 and also played for the Chargers.

# How safe will the kickoff have to become to save it?

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
May 6, 2018

After years of simply trying to reduce the number of kickoffs, changes finally are being made to the kickoff play in an effort to make it safer. So how safe does the “most dangerous play in the game” have to become before the NFL will choose permanently to keep it?

In a new online question-and-answer session with fans, Packers CEO Mark Murphy offers a summary regarding the current status of the kickoff.

“As we’ve discussed here before, the kickoff is by far the most dangerous play in the game,” Murphy writes. “You are five times more likely to suffer a concussion on a kickoff than a play from scrimmage. The kickoff is so dangerous because the collisions are often at full speed. I was part of the meeting this week in New York. The discussions were very productive. The special teams coaches came forward with a number of recommendations that should make the play safer. The recommendations included eliminating the two-man wedge, eliminating the running start for the kickoff coverage team, and requiring eight players on the return team to be within 15 yards of their restraining line. The changes should make the play more like the punt, where blockers are running alongside the players on the coverage unit. We’re very hopeful that these changes will result in fewer injuries on a kickoff, but we will continue to monitor this closely. We’re hopeful that these change will allow us to keep the kickoff in the game.”

Murphy, who previously has made it clear that the kickoff play remains on a “short leash” and that it could still go away, doesn’t elaborate on how safe the kickoff must become in order to save it. But if the concussion rate during kickoffs remains five times greater than in normal scrimmage plays, there’s surely an ideal ratio that the NFL hopes to achieve.

Is it 1:1? Or is 2:1 good enough? No one has provided that information, yet.

That said, there’s a good chance that this is less about reducing concussions and more about removing from the game a play that carries with it the greatest risk of a catastrophic — and possibly fatal — injury.

Nearly nine years ago, then-Bengals quarterback Carson Palmer created a stir with a matter-of-fact assessment of the risk of playing NFL football: “The truth of the matter is . . . somebody is going to die here in the NFL. It’s going to happen.” The “most dangerous play in the game” presents the greatest risk of that, since players who are moving in opposite directions at full speed and who dip their helmets at impact risk the kind of upper spinal cord injury that will induce paralysis and, even worse, end life.

Think of the consequences to the NFL if a player pays the ultimate price. Congress instantly would convene hearings and commence drafting legislation. Debates would emerge about the morality of watching football (those debates already have popped up from time to time regarding chronic the health risks of the game). Eventually, a federal commission with the power to oversee and regulate football could emerge, which likely is the we-know-what’s-best-for-us NFL’s worst-case business scenario.

So even if avoiding a fatality isn’t the impetus for the ongoing examination of the kickoff, it should be. And it’s no surprise that the NFL won’t say “we don’t want someone to die on the field” when addressing its

concerns about the play. The fact that people in the league routinely call it “the most dangerous play in the game” has to give the league’s lawyers nearly as many chest pains as an FBI raid on their offices, apartments, and/or hotel rooms. If people like Murphy were to admit that the league fears a fatality — and if a fatality were to happen — it could be game over, literally.