

# Buyer's remorse wonders if Bills' No. 12 and 22 would have outweighed Chubb

By Mike Klis

9 News

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I'm having second thoughts about drafting Bradley Chubb rather than trading down with the Bills.

Having another 1st round pick with a move up from the 3rd round to the second round would've been nice.

If the Broncos would've moved back do you have an idea what Elway would've drafted? I know I would've liked Tremain Edmunds/LB Virginia Tech, then drafting Will Hernandez or even trading that #22 pick for more picks. Edmunds can play the middle, but he can rush the passer on passing situations. I think Edmunds is going to be one of the best players coming out of this draft.

--Todd Poirot

Todd – Shortly after death and taxes, buyer's remorse is a natural, certain event.

As 9NEWS reported last week, the Broncos top three choices with their No. 5 overall pick were Saquon Barkley, Bradley Chubb and Sam Darnold. Barkley and Darnold were gone with the No. 2 and 3 picks. When the Cleveland Browns surprisingly took cornerback Denzel Ward, and not Chubb, at No. 4, the Broncos had their player and called off their trade with the Bills.

Had the Browns taken Chubb, Broncos general manager John Elway would have traded back to the Bills at No. 12 and 22.

With the No. 12 pick, I think Elway would have hoped one from this list -- linebacker Roquan Smith, safety Derwin James, guard Quenton Nelson, offensive tackle Mike McGlinchey or defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick -- would have been there. All but James were gone before No. 12.

Elway might have been James' choice at No. 12, although safety is not a need after the Broncos acquired Su'a Cravens in a trade from Washington.

Kolton Miller, an offensive tackle from UCLA who went No. 15 to Oakland, might have been the choice. I don't know where the Broncos came down on Edmunds.

With the No. 22 pick, the Broncos might have taken a running back. Maybe a corner.

As for the player they would have got at No. 22, he might not have been better than who the Broncos got at No. 40, receiver Courtland Sutton,

Know this: Elway didn't come away with buyer's remorse. Chubb and Barkley were the two most impactful, non-QBs in the draft. And the Broncos got one.

Mike...we've been debating/ arguing this at the barber shop all day. Please be the voice of reason. Do the BRONCOS pick up Cliff Avril?

--Chris Lawler

Chris – I don't think so. He was released by the Seattle Seahawks because of a neck injury that forced him to miss all but the first four games of last season. He's 32. And I think the Broncos are good with 4-3 defensive end pass rushers (Chubb and DeMarcus Walker) who are trying to fit into their 3-4.

Which rookies will be starting by the end of the year?

--Lance Vialpando

Lance — Chubb may start game 1. Running back Royce Freeman has a chance to start by year's end. And one of the two drafted receivers – Sutton or DaeSean Hamilton – will have a chance to start, depending on who adjusts to the NFL game quicker.

Sutton or Hamilton could start in a three-receiver set, or in the event one of the top two receivers, Demaryius Thomas or Emmanuel Sanders, twists an ankle and has to miss a game or two.

But Chubb might be the only rookie who consistently starts.

What are the 2018 chances we see Jamaal Charles in a Broncos uniform?

Mike Geer, Grand Junction

Mike – Not likely. The Broncos now have five running backs with a combined 260 NFL carries, 253 of which were by Devontae Booker.

While adding a veteran back might make sense at the start of training camp, the Charles' experiment didn't work out for him or the Broncos last year.

After drawing \$2.34 million last year for minimum use, Charles, 32, would probably have to play for close to the \$1.015 million minimum this year.

I've enjoyed all your comments since joining 9NEWS and the recent article about Riley Odoms was excellent. I agree that he should be in both the NFL HOF as well as in the Broncos ROF. As a season ticket holder back then, I had the pleasure of watching him play and I would marvel at his ability to "fall" for 5 yards and make truly amazing catches. Nice job summarizing the stats that should be enough to get him selected to both.

As a side story, in November of 1981, I worked a Bronco charter flight to Tampa and the entire crew was given tickets to the game. Odoms caught a touchdown pass from Craig Morton for the first score and the Broncos went on to win. On the return flight home, a flight attendant was concerned that one of the players had a small battery-operated TV and voiced her fear that it could interfere with the navigation instruments and wanted me to ask him to put it away. Looking down the aisle, I saw it was Odoms and laughed at the thought of me telling him to put the TV away. Needless to say, I told her it would be just fine and we landed safely. What a great trip it was.

--Capt. Steve Jacques (Retired)

Centennial CO

Capt. Jacques – The Broncos have had two, No. 5 overall draft picks in their history. Chubb would do well to match the career of “The Judge.”

Odoms is the most overlooked player for the Broncos’ Ring of Fame.

Two scenarios: 1- Courtland Sutton or DaeSean Hamilton hit as draft picks and immediately contribute as slot weapons. Jake Butt is adequate but still not 100% because of his injury, used more of a decoy than real threat.

2- Reverse the first scenario with the rookie WRs contributing like Bennie Fowler. However, Butt is immediately a weapon reminding fans of a young Zach Ertz.

In an either/or context which is more likely? If one of these scenarios do occur, how much better will the offense be? Obviously, there’s much more to offensive success than skill players, but the Broncos haven’t had three downfield threats at once since 2014.

--Tom Morris, Broomfield

Tom – Some well-thought-out hypotheticals. But like John Fox used to say, ‘I don’t comment on hypotheticals.’

I’ll give you a third scenario: Sutton and Hamilton struggle like all receivers do as rookies and Butt still needs time to work his way back into playing form.

That’s a worst-case scenario.

A fourth scenario: Sutton and Hamilton hit immediately and Butt is the pleasant surprise of 2018.

That’s a best-case scenario.

For the most part, I would expect Sutton, Hamilton and Butt to all be better players in 2019 than 2018.

How concerned should we be about the offensive line? Is the new right tackle look fit and ready to go?

--Larry Pesek

Larry – I think every person following the NFL is concerned about their team’s offensive line. I have media friends in Arizona who haven’t given rave reviews to new Broncos’ right tackle Jared Veldheer. But he should be a better pass protector than Menelik Watson was last year.

Watson is now the team’s swing or backup tackle. Garrett Bolles should have a nice second season at left tackle.

How do I get a job working with the Denver Broncos?

--Dusty Cook

Dusty – One, lead the team to five Super Bowl appearances through 16 seasons at quarterback.

Or, two, call the Broncos at 303-649-9000 and tell the receptionist you want to work for the team. And then, you know, see what happens.

# Broncos bank on draftees to build up thin wide receiver corps

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

May 7, 2018

In his first six years as general manager, John Elway used two draft picks on wide receivers.

In the past two drafts combined, the Denver Broncos have used four picks on wide receivers, including two last weekend on Courtland Sutton (second round) and DaeSean Hamilton (fourth round).

"We needed some help at the wide receiver position and," Elway said, "... the third wide receiver [position] was important to us."

Because of the durability and production of Demaryius Thomas, who was chosen in the 2010 draft, the Broncos hadn't been compelled to use picks on wide receivers. Then Emmanuel Sanders arrived in free agency in 2014 as Eric Decker left. Having Peyton Manning, who made most everything work, also helped.

But Elway and coach Vance Joseph have each said in recent weeks Thomas and Sanders are among the veteran players who need "to be better" in the coming season than they were in 2017.

Last season's woes included: no reliable third option in the passing game, a lack of stability at quarterback, and Sanders missing four games with an ankle injury.

As a result, the Broncos scored more than 20 points just four times in their last 14 games. Thomas had his lowest output (83 catches, 949 yards) since 2011 and Sanders (47 catches, 555 yards) since 2012. Sanders also did not have a touchdown reception after Week 2.

Last season's draft picks -- Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie -- did not pan out as hoped. Henderson spent his rookie year on injured reserve (thumb), while McKenzie was benched multiple times for special-teams fumbles and had just four receptions.

The result was diving back in for another pair of receivers.

"We have receivers that fit a certain skill set that we wanted," Joseph said of the two most recent draft picks. "We wanted big, fast guys with great ball skills."

Elway went as far as to say that Sutton "is a guy that can really develop and eventually maybe become a No. 1."

Sutton and Hamilton will be counted on to break the cycle. Henderson is an unknown because of his injury, but he had been struggling in the offense before he was hurt in the preseason opener.

But Elway's other three draft picks at the position before this year's draft have not produced as the Broncos had hoped. Tavarres King (fifth round in 2013) didn't make it out of his first training camp, as he was released by a team that eventually went to the Super Bowl.

Cody Latimer (second round in 2014) did become a core special-teams player, but he never had more than 19 receptions in any of his four seasons before departing for free agency in March. The jury is still out on Henderson and McKenzie, but Thomas will turn 31 on Christmas and Sanders just turned 31 in March, and unless the Broncos find some additional threats in the passing game, those two will find nothing but double coverage, and the Broncos won't have much of a plan for the future.

The Broncos' inability to move the ball consistently last season was a testament to the turnover at quarterback and the fact opposing defenses schemed to cover the only threats -- Thomas and Sanders.

That's why when the 40th pick rolled around, the Broncos were quick to grab Sutton, a big-bodied target with plenty of athleticism. The Broncos also believed Hamilton, who the Broncos' staff coached at the Senior Bowl, was among the best route runners on the board.

"With Hamilton, he's a lot like Courtland -- they're big guys that have played all three positions," Joseph said. "We didn't narrow these guys down just being a slot guy."

The Broncos also were looking for grit up and down the draft board and believe they found it.

"I'm going to come in, I'm going to find out what [Sanders] does, what Demaryius does," Sutton said. "What do they do to make them All-Pro and to make them dominant people at their position? I'm going to follow them and figure out what it is that's going to get me to that level so I can be able to perform day in and day out at a very high level."

# NFL Insiders predict the best rookie class of 2018

By NFL Insiders

ESPN

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Which team's rookie class will be the most impactful in 2018?

Matt Bowen, NFL writer: Chicago Bears. It starts with linebacker Roquan Smith. He's a blue-chip talent with the speed and natural instincts to find the ball. Great fit for Vic Fangio's defense. Up front, Iowa center/offensive guard James Daniels has the athleticism and pro-ready technique to compete for a starting job. And wide receiver Anthony Miller should find a role as a slot target for quarterback Mitchell Trubisky. The quicks are there and so is the playmaking ability.

Dan Graziano, national NFL writer: Cleveland Browns. Is there any team that needs an impact from its rookie class more than the one that's 1-31 over the last two seasons? We don't know when No. 1 overall pick Baker Mayfield will take over as the starter, but it's a safe bet it'll happen at some point this season. They'll give No. 4 pick Denzel Ward significant opportunity right away as a starting cornerback. And second-rounders Nick Chubb and Austin Corbett should help the run game. Opportunities abound in Cleveland, for rookies and everyone else.

Mina Kimes, senior writer: Denver Broncos. I'm a big fan of the Cowboys' draft class as well, but I think Denver's first three picks -- defensive end Bradley Chubb, wide receiver Courtland Sutton, and running back Royce Freeman -- could all become immediate contributors. Sutton, a big-bodied receiver from SMU, stands out as a potential red-zone threat for Case Keenum.

Mike Sando, senior NFL writer: New England Patriots. Other teams' rookies will play more snaps and earn greater honors. As for impact? New England could emerge with a starting left tackle (Isaiah Wynn), a rotational running back (Sony Michel) and perhaps a Danny Amendola-replacement (Braxton Berrios) on a championship-caliber team.

Aaron Schatz, editor-in-chief of Football Outsiders: Tampa Bay Buccaneers. There's opportunity on the depth chart. Vita Vea slides right into the starting defensive line next to Gerald McCoy. Ronald Jones II should slide right into the starting running back spot. And given the weakness at cornerback and the age of their No. 1 CB Brent Grimes, who turns 35 in July, second-rounders M.J. Stewart and Carlton Davis could play a larger role than expected early.

Kevin Seifert, national NFL writer: Indianapolis Colts. It won't be as flashy as some other classes, but the addition of two guards and two defensive linemen among the first 64 picks will significantly enhance the Colts' long-standing trench weakness. Guard Quenton Nelson, especially, will give the Colts a much better chance of keeping their most prized asset -- quarterback Andrew Luck -- upright.

Field Yates, NFL Insider: New York Giants. Here's the bottom line: a single player can dramatically impact the perception of a team's collective draft class. Along those lines, no player is better equipped to contribute immediately -- factored in his own ability plus the opportunity ahead -- than Saquon Barkley. Beyond that, second-rounder Will Hernandez projects as a Day 1 starter. Should Barkley produce (and I expect a massive rookie season), it will be a positive reflection on the offensive line, as well.

# Stacking up positions after the draft

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
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What's your take on Su'a Cravens? In my opinion I think he's going to be a superstar. Thoughts?

-- Richard Hurst

To say he will be a "superstar" is a bold statement and not an expectation I would put on any player, whether he is a top-five pick or a second-rounder who has not played a game since the 2016 season. The current plan for Cravens is to have him work as a sub-package linebacker -- similar to how T.J. Ward was used in the box during the 2015 and 2016 seasons. This has been the most commonly used sub package in the last three seasons, and if Cravens can cover running backs and tight ends as well as the Broncos hope, he should flourish in that role. Good work there could lead to an every-down role in due time, but for now, that gives him a chance to gain his footing and establish himself.

With Phillip Lindsay a great special-teams guy, including punt returning and two WR draft choices, is Isaiah McKenzie looking over both shoulders?

-- Jeff D

Not exactly, considering that McKenzie was already off the top line, leaving him in pursuit mode. Head Coach Vance Joseph said at the NFL Annual Meeting in Orlando that Jordan Taylor was the first-team punt returner, not McKenzie. Taylor filled in for McKenzie late last season and averaged 9.4 yards per return while fumbling just once in 25 opportunities (11 returns and 14 fair catches). McKenzie had a lower per-return average last season (8.7 yards) and fumbled once every 4.7 opportunities.

Lindsay and DaeSean Hamilton (who fielded punts during Senior Bowl practice) will be among those likely to get chances to field punts in practice over the next few months. But Hamilton did not have a single punt return in a college game and Lindsay only handled kickoffs, with 82 percent of his 44 college kickoff returns coming in his freshman season.

I love the Bradley Chubb pick and am excited to see him play. My question is regarding getting pressure on the QB up the middle. To me it is vital no matter how good Chubb and Von Miller are. I feel like Malik Jackson was the biggest loss to the D because of that reason. Who is the pressure going to come from?

-- Russell Dillard

You're counting on at least one of a few things happening:

- 1) DeMarcus Walker finding his form as he returns to the interior in his second season.
- 2) Derek Wolfe, Adam Gotsis and Shelby Harris capitalizing off the attention given the edge rushers to generate more pressure up the middle.

3) Chubb being able to rotate to the inside, allowing the Broncos to use a speed-rush package that would incorporate at least three of the Broncos' edge rushers: Chubb, Von Miller, Shaquil Barrett and Shane Ray.

Do you think Josey Jewell could win the second ILB spot? I think he is Denver's biggest sleeper in this draft.

-- Aidan Mann

Given that Brandon Marshall has three 100-tackle seasons in the last four years and that Todd Davis just signed a contract extension in March, the best likely outcome heading into this year -- barring injury -- is to be the top backup. But in time, he has the potential to develop into a starter if he can show the same instincts and ability to read plays as they develop as he did at Iowa.

DeMarcus Walker and Bradley Chubb are close to the same size and weight. What makes Chubb better suited for linebacker/edge rusher and Walker better suited for defensive end?

-- Steve Swendler

For starters, the 269-pound Chubb is 11 pounds lighter than Walker was when he was drafted; this is not an insignificant difference. Then there is the fact that Chubb has operated as a stand-up linebacker at North Carolina State, something that Walker did not do at Florida State, as he was focused on the defensive line, usually at an interior spot.

Then there is the difference in their timed speed; Walker ran a 4.88-second 40-yard dash time at his Pro Day in March 2017, while Chubb clocked a 4.65-second 40 at the 2018 Scouting Combine. Chubb's speed allows him to track down elusive quarterbacks in space, as he showed against Ravens first-round pick Lamar Jackson.

Does trading away a talented player like Aqib Talib create added pressure either from or for John Elway for the player drafted with the acquired pick (5th round) to make the team, and could that have had anything to do with the decision to trade that pick back to the Rams, thus muddling the return for Talib to the point a straight-up evaluation probably can't be made?

-- Sean Mahanna

No, and no. These ideas make for interesting sports-talk discussion, but they are not relevant notions in the draft room.

# Ranking the best rookie matchups on the NFL schedule

By John Breech

CBS Sports

May 7, 2018

We won't even have to wait long to see the best rookie matchups, and that's because the fun starts in Week 1 when the Browns host the Steelers in a game that will pit two electrifying rookies against each other. We'll find out pretty quickly if the Browns drafted another first-round bust, and that's because No. 4 overall pick Denzel Ward is going to have his hands full with a Steelers receiving corps that includes fellow rookie, former Oklahoma State receiver James Washington.

Sure, that matchup will be fun to watch, but it didn't even crack our top five for most exciting rookie matchups of 2018. What did? Let's get to the list of the seven most exciting rookie matchups of 2018, starting with Sam Darnold and Josh Allen.

## 1. Sam Darnold vs. Josh Allen

Best QB vs. QB rookie matchup

N.Y. Jets at Buffalo

Date: Dec. 9 (Week 14)

Although these two teams will be playing each other twice in 2018, we're only listing the second game here, and that's because there's a good chance that both quarterbacks will have earned the starting job by the time this game rolls around.

This will be a December game in Buffalo, which means it will be a good time for Allen to prove that he's the perfect quarterback for the blizzard conditions in western New York. Since the end of the draft, you may have noticed that if there's one thing people haven't stopped talking about in regards to Allen, it's the fact that he was the one quarterback in the draft who was best suited for Buffalo's weather.

I mean, if Hoth had a football team, it definitely would have drafted Allen. In this game, there's going to be a lot of pressure on Allen and that's mainly because the first rule of being a cold-weather quarterback is that you better not lose to a guy who was raised in Southern California, which Darnold was.

Although Allen is the one joining a team that went to the playoffs last season, you could certainly argue that Darnold has been drafted into a better situation. For one, Darnold will be competing for the starting job in New York with a quarterback (Josh McCown) who seemingly wants to help him more than compete with him.

"The best thing I can do is look back in five years and Sam Darnold is in the Pro Bowl," McCown told the New York Daily News.

On the other hand, Allen is going to be in a free-for-all against AJ McCarron for the Bills' starting job. After spending four years as a backup in Cincinnati, there's a zero percent chance that McCarron is going to want to emulate the mentor role that McCown is playing for the Jets.

Even if McCarron fizzles out and Allen wins the starting job, he's not going to have much help. The Bills have lost two offensive linemen to retirement this offseason (Eric Wood, Richie Incognito), their starting

running back will be 30 by the time the regular season starts and their top two receivers. well, they might have some trouble catching passes from Allen.

So what does this all mean? It means that you should circle December 9 on your calendar, because we'll likely be getting the first taste of a quarterback rivalry in the AFC East that could last into the next decade.

## 2. Josh Rosen vs. Derwin James

Best QB vs. DB rookie matchup

Arizona at L.A. Chargers

Date: Nov. 25 (Week 12)

Another rookie quarterback who could end up starting this year is Josh Rosen in Arizona. To win the Cardinals job, all Rosen has to do is beat out a quarterback who can't stay healthy (Sam Bradford) and beat out another quarterback who lost his job to a rookie last year (Mike Glennon). Basically, it seems like a lock that Rosen is going to be the starter at some point this season.

If Rosen does win the starting job, he'll be facing multiple rookie defensive backs during his first season as quarterback -- including the Jaire Alexander/Josh Jackson combo in Green Bay and Mike Hughes in Minnesota. However, we're giving the nod to Rosen vs. Derwin James for our top matchup ranking, because there's a good chance James will be playing more snaps than any other rookie defensive back who was selected in this year's draft.

James is almost certainly going to be the starting strong safety for the Chargers, and by Week 12, he should be pretty comfortable in his role. Rosen's not really going to get to enjoy Thanksgiving weekend, because in this game, which is being played three days after Turkey Day, Rosen will be going up against a Chargers defense that ranked third overall in the NFL against the pass last season, and that was before they added James. You could make a strong argument that the Chargers have the best secondary in the NFL heading into 2018, which means this could turn into an ugly game for Rosen.

The Cardinals actually have a pretty brutal schedule for a team that might be starting a rookie quarterback. Of the top-five passing defenses in the NFL last season, Rosen might have to face three of them -- Minnesota, Denver and the Chargers -- over a seven-week period, if he wins the starting job by Week 6.

## 3. Kolton Miller vs. Bradley Chubb

Best OT vs. DE rookie matchup

Oakland vs. Denver

Dates: Week 2 (Sept. 16 at Denver) and Week 16 (Dec. 24 at Oakland)

Although there's no guarantee Miller will be a starter by the time the regular season rolls around, we're ranking this matchup No. 3, because we're going to assume that he ends up winning the right tackle job in Oakland. If he does win the job, the Raiders are going to find out pretty quickly whether or not taking Miller with the 15th overall pick was a good idea.

Not only does Miller have to go up against the Rams in Week 1 -- hello, Aaron Donald and Ndamukong Suh -- but if he survives that, then he has to deal with fellow rookie Bradley Chubb and the Broncos in Week 2. It's a brutal opening schedule for a right tackle that Raiders fans don't seem too excited about. The Raiders had some gaping holes on defense and could have selected either Derwin James or Tremaine Edmunds, but instead, they went with Miller.

Of course, if Miller completely shuts down the pass rush of both the Rams and the Broncos during his first two regular season games as an NFL player, then Jon Gruden is going to look like a genius and he'll have earned every penny of his \$100 million contract in just two weeks. Oh, and just in case you're scoring at home, that's 10 billion pennies.

On the other hand, Chubb could make a name for himself in this game if he can rack up a few sacks on Derek Carr. The Raiders only surrendered 24 sacks in 2017, which was tied for the third fewest in the NFL.

#### 4. Roquan Smith vs. Sony Michel/Isaiah Wynn

Best matchup of former teammates

New England at Chicago

Date: Oct. 21 (Week 7)

Roquan Smith probably didn't get to hit his offensive teammates too often during practice in college, but that's going to change in October, when the Bears host the Patriots for a Week 7 showdown that University of Georgia fans will probably want to make sure they watch.

The school had three first-round picks this year, and there's a good chance that they will all be playing in this game. For the Bears, there's a good chance Smith will be a starting inside linebacker from Day 1. If that happens, you can fully expect Smith to bump heads with both Michel and Wynn at Soldier Field.

As a matter of fact, if Michel is getting steady playing time in New England's backfield, then Smith is probably going to spend all four quarters of the game chasing his former teammate from sideline to sideline. If Michel's college playing style translates to the NFL, then it's probably going to be a long day of chasing him for Smith. Michel averaged an absurd 7.9 yards per carry during his senior season at Georgia last year.

One person Smith won't have to chase is Wynn, and that's because the two will likely be butting heads directly in the trenches, if the offensive lineman is on the field for New England. Although it's not clear where the Patriots will have Wynn, the versatile lineman can play both guard and tackle. Over the past two years at UGA, Wynn started 15 games at left tackle and 12 at left guard. Wherever the Patriots decide to put him, you can rest assured that Smith will find him.

#### 5. Jaire Alexander/Josh Jackson vs. Calvin Ridley

Best WR vs. DB rookie matchup

Atlanta at Green Bay

Date: Dec. 9 (Week 14)

It's a good thing that Alexander and Jackson are going to have 12 games to get their feet wet before facing the Falcons, because they're definitely going to need it. In what should be one of the best rookie matchups of the year, Week 14 is going to give us the 26th overall pick (Ridley) trying to get open against the Packers' top two picks in the 2018 draft.

This game is going to be a huge test for Alexander and Jackson, and not just because they'll be going up against Ridley. They'll also have to face an explosive Falcons offense that includes Julio Jones, Mohamed Sanu, Devonta Freeman and Tevin Coleman. You throw Ridley in there and it's almost like someone gave the Falcons a Madden cheat code. If Ridley proved one thing in college, it's that it's nearly impossible to slow him down.

As for Jackson and Alexander, if they do struggle against the Falcons offense, the good news for them is that the rest of their December should be slightly easier. From Weeks 13 thru 16, the Packers will potentially be facing Josh Rosen, Sam Darnold and Mitchell Trubisky, which seems arguably easier than trying to stop Matt Ryan.

#### 6. James Washington vs. Denzel Ward

Another great WR vs. DB rookie matchup

Cleveland vs. Pittsburgh

Dates: Week 1 (Sept. 9 at Cleveland) and Week 8 (Oct. 28 at Pittsburgh)

Although we ranked the Packers-Falcons rookie matchup higher, you could have made a strong argument to put Ward vs. Washington there, and that's because these two rookies are going to be meeting twice a year for the foreseeable future. If the Browns can turn their rivalry with the Steelers into an actual rivalry, then this matchup could turn into must-see TV. However, if you've watched any Browns-Steelers game over the past 15 years, then you've probably noticed that it's usually the opposite of must-see TV. Since 2004, the Browns have gone 3-25 against the Steelers, which is such an ugly record that not even a potentially awesome rookie matchup will be able to save it.

Basically, let's hope that the Browns are actually good this year -- or at least close to good -- so we can fully appreciate Washington going up against Ward two times in the first eight weeks of the season.

#### 7. Lamar Jackson vs. Baker Mayfield?

Best wild-card matchup

Cleveland at Baltimore

Date: Dec. 30 (Week 17)

You can't write a story about rookie matchups without mentioning the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, so I created a wild card slot, just so I could mention that draft's two most intriguing quarterbacks: Mayfield and Jackson. Now, the thought of these guys starting against each other this year might sound crazy -- which is why I'm listing this as a wild card -- but there is a not-so-crazy scenario that could give us this Heisman showdown.

Although the Browns and Ravens play twice in 2018, I'm only listing the second game, because that's where this might happen. The second game is being played in Week 17, which is a week where anything usually goes in the NFL. If the Ravens have clinched a playoff spot or if the Ravens have given up on Joe Flacco at this point, both of which are possible, then there's a good chance that Ravens would let Jackson start the final game of the season.

The same reasoning applies to Cleveland. If the Browns are horrible in 2018, then you can almost guarantee that Mayfield will be given the starting quarterback job at some point. On the other hand, if Tyrod Taylor somehow leads the Browns to the playoffs -- stop laughing, it's possible -- then the Browns could let Mayfield start in Week 17, if there's nothing on the line (see: Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs last year).

Although I hate watching games when there's nothing on the line, there is a one million percent chance that I would watch a meaningless Week 17 game between Lamar Jackson and Baker Maryfield, especially if one or both of them was making their first career start. Heisman winner vs. Heisman winner? Who's not going to watch that?

You know what, I'd even make an entire production out of it. I'd put the thing in primetime, have Nissan set up the Heisman house and let Tim Tebow handle the coin toss in an effort to involve as many former Heisman winners as possible. I'm now rooting for this matchup to happen.

# On Draft Fallout, Matt Ryan and MMQB Turning the Page

By Peter King

MMQB

May 7, 2018

An emotional week for me: I told my staff at The MMQB and my bosses at Sports Illustrated that I'll be leaving June 1—my 29-year anniversary of being hired by SI—and beginning a new job with NBC Sports in July.

This is an NFL column, and I'll get to the news of the moment in a few paragraphs. But for the past 21 years, this has been a personal column too. You've gotten to know way too much about the softball and field hockey exploits of Laura and Mary Beth King. You've been with me through the deaths of one mother, two brothers and two dogs. You've been with me through the joy of Laura's wedding to her wife, Kim, and now through ridiculously cute photos of their son, Freddy. You've been with me through some opinions you hate, through over-Favring and excessive Bradying, through some bad poetry, through a Westin-lobby-near-fistfight, and even through a little bit of football thrown in there. I'll have some career thoughts in my last column here in the coming weeks. But I did want to take a moment to explain to you how I came to this decision, and what my future is, and about the exceedingly bright future of The MMQB.

First: I am not retiring. My column will continue in the digital space at NBC Sports, very likely with a new name, beginning in July. So I'll continue to write a Monday column; it's my first love. In addition, I'll be doing what I've done for NBC the past couple of years: four to six feature stories for the "Football Night in America" pregame show. I'll be appearing with Mike Florio one morning per week on his "Pro Football Talk Live" radio show. I may be doing a few other things at NBC in the Olympic sphere or other places. My plan is for the Monday column to still be long and filled with football plus the strange detours of this strange brain. I'm not going to be writing a lot more than that. Some, but not a lot.

Second: This is not about any dissatisfaction with SI, or any worry about the future of a great franchise. I love the place. Always will. Sometimes it's just time. I am 60. My dad died at 64. I had one brother die at 55, the other die at 64 just months into his retirement. I don't want to continue the family trend. A few weeks ago my wife, Ann, and I were on the train from New York to have dinner with friends in New Jersey. A few minutes from Montclair, I saw on my phone that Saints owner Tom Benson died. I was the only one on our staff who knew Benson even a little, so I knew it was up to me to write the deadline obit. I sat outside the restaurant thumb-typing the obit on my phone. No complaints. That's the life. The 24/7-ness of the job, though, has worn on me, as has some of the silly and invented stuff that populates the football media (e.g., 2019 mock drafts 360 days before the 2019 draft). The monster must be fed daily. Enough.

Now, SI boss Chris Stone offered me a chance to stay and just write "Monday Morning Quarterback" with no other responsibilities. It was a great offer. I was tempted. But there was something else at play.

At The MMQB, we've got a group of writers who are blossoming and ready to do more—Jenny Vrentas, Robert Klemko, Andy Benoit (three originals from when we started the site in 2013), Albert Breer, Tim Rohan, Jonathan Jones, Conor Orr, Jacob Feldman, Kalyn Kahler. Average age: 30. I got hired at the magazine a week shy of my 32nd birthday. I think of the good things they've done already, the imaginative things, the smart things, and I know they're so far ahead of where I was when I started. If I stay, their development gets stunted because I'm the 225-pound gorilla. It's time for them too, and for a new

generation of football writers. They deserve the spotlight I've been hogging. They're ready. I'm really excited for them.

I've been an NBC part-timer since 2006. The network has treated me very well, and I like the football team (led by Sam Flood) and the digital team (led by Rick Cordella) there. I think it's going to be a great fit. Look for me there—with a new Twitter handle I'll figure out; I'll miss @SI\_PeterKing—in a couple of months.

There's a lot of emotion coursing through me as I write this, early Sunday morning. I almost made it all the way through my talk to the staff Thursday afternoon without breaking, but when I got to our youngest staffer, 24-year-old Kalyn Kahler, it got tough. She came on staff three years ago, straight out of Northwestern, as my editorial assistant/office manager/fledgling writer, and she's grown into a promising young multimedia presence. She oversaw our Football in America series last fall, handles much of our social media, and has written some strong pieces for us. She never has a bad day. She never says, I'm too busy. When I got to Kalyn, it sort of all hit me. All these young people, all of these young women too, so many of these young people different from my generation, all ready. It's just cool to see. So I choked up a bit.

I'll have time to reflect on this wonderful life in my final column, but for now, I wanted you to know why I did what I did. I wanted you know what great hands you'll be in, with such imaginative and vibrant young writers and an editing group led by Mark Mravic. This plunge into the unknown, while entirely different, is going to be energizing.

For now: Thanks for letting me be a part of your lives for so long. Onward.

#### DRAFT TRIBUTARIES

When I made my round of calls Friday and Saturday, I wanted to get a few questions answered on what actually happened on some of the mystery picks, trades, action and inaction that still hung out there. Quick answers to a few draft issues:

- The Dolphins do not have quarterback buyer's remorse. Miami guaranteed \$16.7 million of quarterback Ryan Tannehill's team-friendly deal in March, which meant the Dolphins were locked into him for 2018. That didn't mean if somehow Baker Mayfield fell down the board that they wouldn't have tried to nab him. But I can tell you they're happy with the most versatile player in the draft—safety/corner/nickel/box linebacker Minkah Fitzpatrick of Alabama. This is Tannehill's prove-it year. After missing 19 straight games due to injury, he's got to play well and be sturdy to have a future in Miami, which is the way it should be.
- The Saints need Marcus Davenport to produce close to Bradley Chubb. The second-best pass-rusher in the draft cost New Orleans the 27th pick this year and a first-rounder next year. But say the Saints are a playoff team again, and pick in the 20s next year. I would ask: If you think a pass-rush prospect in a weak class for them is legit, wouldn't he be worth two ones in the bottom third of the round? After Davenport, the next guy for the Saints might have been Boston College's Harold Landry, and there wasn't much excitement for him at 27.
- The Bills moved from 12 to seven in the first round to get Josh Allen, and they tried to move from 12 to 6. The Colts, at six, did a great job disguising their intentions, because the league thought GM Chris Ballard wanted Roquan Smith there. But the Colts' research showed their quarterbacks being hit more than any other quarterbacks in football since 2012. So sure-fire guard starter Quenton Nelson had been locked in for a while at six, and Ballard got the last prospective early interior-line starter on their board at 37, Auburn

guard Braden Smith. Interesting that in his pre-draft press conference Ballard said the offensive and defensive lines are how they'll build this team, and in the first two rounds, he took two guards and two defensive ends. Maybe those useless press conferences are worth something after all. Anyway, when the Bills called Ballard, he didn't have much interest, because he wanted Nelson so bad as a shield for beaten Andrew Luck.

- Joe Flacco's gotten the message. That's what I hear. And he's too smart not to have gotten it. Flacco, 33, understands the trade-up pick of Louisville quarterback Lamar Jackson means the Ravens have noticed his sub-.500 record and 82.4 passer rating in the past three years, regardless how much is his fault. The quarterback always takes major blame when an offense is lousy, and Baltimore's has been bad—29th, 12th and 29th in passing yards in the past three seasons. What's more, the Ravens are a boring offense. They excite no one. They're inefficient—and you can't blame only Flacco, because the receiving group has been consistently disappointing too. When I saw this pick, I said I bet this is about more than dissatisfaction with Flacco. It's about making the team exciting again in a market that has grown blasé, and throwing some change-ups with an electric quarterback. Flacco will get the first shot, and he may well play well enough to beat back Jackson. We'll see.

- You know what amazed some teams in the league? Where the tackles were picked. Notre Dame's Mike McGlinchey at nine to San Francisco, UCLA's Kolton Miller at 15 to the Raiders. Said one GM: "The biggest gap of our grades between any two picks in the first round was Roquan Smith at eight and Mike McGlinchey at nine. That's a premier player followed by a need pick of a good player." Interesting. Those two tackles, in another year, could have gone 29 and 35 instead of nine and 15. But it's a vital position, and there weren't many tackles in the draft this year—and maybe none who can plug-and-play.

- The Niners were trying to trade right tackle Trent Brown all spring. New England got it done on draft weekend, acquiring a potential starter at a need position. The Niners just didn't think Brown, a big masher, was a system fit for them in a zone-rushing offense. But until the Patriots stepped up, they couldn't find a trading partner.

- Here's what it come down to between Baker Mayfield and Sam Darnold: 2 3/8 inches. "Baker's obviously an outlier at 6 feet and 5/8 inches tall," Browns assistant GM Eliot Wolf said. "But would we be doing the right thing if we changed our board and picked a lesser player because he's two inches taller?" I asked another draft-decider with a definite quarterback interest two questions: How many teams in the league would he guess graded Darnold higher than Mayfield. ("Twenty.") And who did he have number one among the passers? ("Mayfield. His tape was so good, there was no comparison to the others.") Now all we need is two years, maybe more, to see if the Browns were right.

- Kentavius Street was a hot name on day three. Street, a North Carolina State defensive end prospect (lesser prospect than Bradley Chubb, obviously), is rehabbing from a torn ACL suffered in a private workout for the Giants a month ago. Amazing little story. The Falcons, Saints and Niners all liked him a lot. His college line coach until last season, Ryan Nielsen, took the Saints' D-line job last year, and he told the Saints that ACL or no, Street would be a great pro player. In the fourth round Atlanta had pick 126, New Orleans 127 and San Francisco 128. Atlanta considered him but took a running back, Ito Smith. The Saints considered him and took a tackle, Rick Leonard. The Niners picked Street, a gutsy move by GM John Lynch for a 2018 redshirt player. The Saints and Falcons could both have picked Street with their next choices. Those are the things that make GMs win.

- The Titans jumped over New England for Rashaan Evans, but the Patriots weren't going to take him at 23. New England's not sure if Evans is a three-down linebacker. Tennessee thinks he is. So the Patriots likely wouldn't have taken a player at 23 if they didn't think he could be a full-time player. Now, New England did like Arkansas guard-center Frank Ragnow a lot, and he would have been a candidate at 23. But Georgia tackle Isaiah Wynn fills a hole at tackle, and gives the Patriots (with Trent Brown) legitimate competition at a position of need.

- Just my opinion, but ... I do think if the Panthers passed on Maryland receiver D.J. Moore at 24, there's a good chance Baltimore would have taken the local hero, Moore, over tight end Hayden Hurst at 25. As it was, Baltimore took tight ends at 25 and 89 (Hurst, Mark Andrews) and wideouts at 132 and 162 (Jaleel Scott, Jordan Lasley).

#### LET'S PUT TO BED THE PATRIOTS' TRADEUP FOR BAKER MAYFIELD

This deal, thrown out as a possibility by Mayfield's agent to Andrew Brandt after the draft, was certainly not possible if the Browns picked him, which happened, and almost certainly not if Mayfield fell to the Giants at number two. Cleveland never was going to trade the first pick. Let's say Mayfield was there when the Giants picked. The Patriots would have had to deal with Giants GM Dave Gettleman, who, in five previous drafts, had never traded a first-round pick—and now he was going to trade from two to 23, which was the Patriots' first pick? And let's say he would have. What would the compensation have been? I'd maintain it would have had to be all four New England picks in the first two round this year, plus next year's first-round pick. Here's how that would have looked on the draft-trade value chart, which some teams and use and other do not:

- Giants pick: number 2 overall. Value of Giants' pick—2,600 points.
- Patriots picks: number 23 (760 points), 31 (600 points), 43 (470 points) and 63 (276 points), with a projected number one pick next year. Let's say you gamble the Patriots are picking 30th next year. That's 620 points, devalued by about 20 percent because it's a year down the road. Give next year's first-round pick a value of 496 points. Total value of the five New England picks—2,602 points.

So it's close. But would it have made any sense for the Giants to get a slew of picks but not the player of their draft dreams, Saquon Barkley? And would it have made sense for the Patriots, needy at so many positions with an MVP quarterback apparently intending to play multiple seasons, to go without a pick after Mayfield until day three, and then to likely go without a pick next year in the top 50? Seems totally nonsensical.

#### THE MATT RYAN CONTRACT

Three thoughts on Ryan's five-year, \$150 million deal (\$100 million guaranteed), making him the first \$30-million-a-year player in NFL history:

- No one should care about guaranteed money for a star 33-year-old quarterback who's always been healthy. As with the debate over how much guaranteed money Aaron Rodgers should get, it's nonsensical. What real chance is there that Ryan will be cut anytime in the next four years? Name the last proven good quarterback who got big guaranteed money and later, because of injury, a team was dying to dump. Sam Bradford doesn't count, because you couldn't call him great during his rookie contract, and because the Rams didn't want to dump him till after the guaranteed money ran out after year five. In year three of his mega-deal, Andrew Luck is still very much wanted by the Colts despite a nagging shoulder injury. Point is, there's maybe a 3 percent chance Ryan will suffer some kind of career-altering injury in the next three

years that will render the guarantee a waste. Now, gigantic guarantees for other, less valuable positions ... I see why teams recoil at those. But I'd fight for every guaranteed dollar if I had the leverage.

- The per-year cap numbers are not killer to the Falcons. Mike Greenberg campaigned with me—on his “Get Up” ESPN show the other day—for a cap exemption for one player per team, because he said contracts like Ryan’s make it exceedingly hard to build championship teams. Let’s look at the cap over the next three years, using the increases of the past two years (a \$12 million bump from 2016 to 2017, and a \$10 million boost from 2017 to 2018) to judge how much Ryan’s deal will eat up for the Falcons:

Hard to summon much energy for the one-superstar exemption. In 2018, Atlanta will have \$159.5 million to spend on the rest of the roster, minus Ryan. In 2016, Atlanta had \$155.3 million to spend on the entire roster.

- In the end, it’s all monopoly money. Teams have been paying huge money to quarterbacks since the beginning of time. It’s all relative. Of course it’s better to have your young quarterback get very good very fast in his fixed-salary first contract. But it’s a fallacy to think you can’t build a great team around him if he’s making Ryan money.

#### THE NFL HAS TO STEP IN AND ACT ON THIS CHEERLEADER ISSUE

You remember something like what’s happening with the NFL and cheerleaders right now. Maybe you saw a car crash about to happen in an intersection and you couldn’t stop it, or a friend was about to make a terrible mistake taking the wrong job and you couldn’t stop it. That’s the story with cheerleaders right now. The Washington Post reported an attorney representing the NFL is willing to meet with a lawyer threatening to sue the league on behalf of former New Orleans and Miami cheerleaders who claim discrimination in employment and pay. The New York Times also reported last week that five Washington cheerleaders charged the team with having them pose topless for a photo session at which male sponsors and luxury seat ticket holders were present. The Washington cheerleaders also claimed they had to go to a nightclub as personal escorts for some of the male team guests. On the Today show Friday, two former team cheerleaders countered the Times report, saying they weren’t forced to do anything that was not voluntary.

The MMQB’s Kalyn Kahler, a former Northwestern cheerleader, is working on a story about cheerleaders—particularly the difference between those in college and pro football—and believes the women who are considered athletes in college are “male fantasies” in pro football. We’ll run Kahler’s story this week. Her recommendation: “It’s time to rebrand these women as athletes, not sex symbols, so they can be treated with the respect they deserve. No more swimsuit calendars, online voting for your favorite cheerleader, or marketing the teams with creepy slogans like, ‘Football’s Fabulous Females.’ NFL cheerleaders should be full-time employees or at the very least, better-paid part-time employees. They should receive proper medical treatment for their injuries. They should have security guards to protect them when they mingle with fans at events and tailgates before the game. They should be allowed to use their last names, and use this job to build their own dance and entertainment careers.”

#### NICE LIFE, CHRIS MARA

The Giants’ veteran senior vice president of player personnel has had a pretty good month. His son Conor was married April 14, his Giants drafted Saquon Barkley on April 26, and his Starlight Racing syndicate—part owners of Justify—were on hand to watch the three-year-old horse win the Kentucky Derby on Saturday. Mara is also the father of noted actors Kate Mara and Rooney Mara, and has walked the red

carpet at the Academy Awards; Rooney was nominated as Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*. So he's on a pretty good run this decade.

I believe Mara now becomes the first NFL executive to have a hand in winning a Super Bowl and a Kentucky Derby. Starlight is a 10-person syndicate that buys several thoroughbreds every year, and also buys significant stakes in higher-profile racehorses. This year, Starlight bought pieces of both Justify and Audible, and they finished first and third in the Derby. I asked him how winning the Super Bowl compared to being part of the ownership group that won the Derby. "The Derby happens so fast, and the instant gratification of winning something in two minutes is so amazing," he said Sunday. "But I'll tell you this, as someone who'd been hooked on horse racing: You can own a percentage of a horse, or you can own 100 percent of a horse, and when that horse crosses the finish line first at the Kentucky Derby, it just doesn't matter."

'YOU KNOW THE KICKOFF IS GOING TO DISAPPEAR.'

Interesting story by Jenny Vrentas on the future of the kickoff, and the contributions of nine NFL special-teams coaches, from inside the NFL office the other day.

It sounds very much like, in the NFL's attempt to make players running down on kickoffs and players blocking for kick returns more concussion-averse, it could ramp up the chance for more long returns. Writes Vrentas: "The overall idea is to make the kickoff more like the punt, creating a play in which the players will be running with each other down the field, rather than running at each other full steam ahead. The new formation and alignment in this play could also discourage use of bigger linemen, which can often result in dangerous, mismatched collisions with smaller players ... At one point during Wednesday's meeting, an injury reel of injuries sustained on kickoffs was played for the room. Some were of the run-of-the-mill, unavoidable variety, such as a returner breaking his foot. But others were difficult to watch: free runners racing downfield and lighting up opponents who never saw them coming; bigger players mauling smaller ones; and one defensive back down on the turf, concussed, on a touchback."

That's where the disappearing-kickoff sentiment (expressed by the league's Troy Vincent to Chiefs special-teams coach Dave Toub) comes into play. The NFL is desperate to make a dangerous game slightly less dangerous. I still believe that, some season soon, the NFL will just eliminate the play unless concussions are reduced drastically.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

I

"I got to the edge of the cliff numerous times in the last 72 hours, really longer than that, and couldn't really jump."

—Dallas tight end Jason Witten, one of the best at his position in NFL history, talking about the difficulty in announcing his retirement last week. He missed one game in a 15-year career.

II

"I want to keep playing. I've said for a long time I want to play to my mid-forties. I feel like I can do it. I can keep doing it because: A) I love to do it and I'm willing to make the commitment to doing it, and B) I have a great plan. I have a great system in place that works well for me in order to keep me performing at my highest level."

—Tom Brady, who will turn 41 this season, to Jim Gray at the Milken Institute Global Conference in California, dispelling thoughts he may be entering his last season with the Patriots in 2018.

III

“I plead the fifth.”

—Tom Brady, to Jim Gray, who asked him if the Patriots have the “appropriate gratitude” for what he has accomplished.

A couple of thoughts here. Something’s bugging Brady; it’s come to the fore in the last few months. He and Bill Belichick won’t be close friends when they retire. They have a business relationship, and it’s a very good one. Brett Favre and Mike Holmgren don’t hang out, or see each other regularly. Troy Aikman and Jimmy Johnson, same thing. Joe Montana and Bill Walsh, before Walsh died, weren’t close. Obviously Terry Bradshaw and Chuck Noll—you know how ugly that was. So there’s that.

But there’s more. Brady takes hard coaching. He likes hard coaching. But after going to eight Super Bowls—if it were me—I know my attitude would be, Can we please ease up on ripping me? My point is: Brady will be in camp this summer, and probably be at some portion of the off-season program, and he’ll work harder than anyone else and be as driven as he ever was, and he’ll once again give the Patriots the best chance to win than any quarterback will give his team in 2018. That’s how he’s wired. But that doesn’t mean he likes every minute he’s in the building either.

IV

“It’s my job in the fourth quarter to close it.”

—LeBron James, after he banked in a running shot from a difficult angle at the buzzer to beat Toronto 105-103 Saturday night.

We are not worthy.

#### STAT OF THE WEEK

When Jason Witten retired Thursday to join the ESPN booth, he left the game as one of 12 tight ends in history to have 500 catches or more. Witten actually caught 652 balls more than 500, and he leaves the game as the fourth-leading receiver in NFL history. You can see the way the game has changed. Only two of the men on the list played in the first 75 years of NFL history; the other 10 all played at least parts of their career in this century.

The leading tight ends in NFL history, and there they rank on the all-time receptions list:

#### FACTOID THAT MAY INTEREST ONLY ME

Starting with Week 6 in his rookie year, 2003, Jason Witten played every Dallas Cowboys game till he retired last week. That’s 243 straight games.

Hall of Famers Mike Ditka and Kellen Winslow, two of the toughest tight ends to play the game, played a total of 21 seasons.

Witten missed one game in 15 years.

Ditka and Winslow missed 37 games in 21 years.

#### PHOTO OP

Last November, I did a TV story for NBC on how Jason Witten could play 14 straight years and never miss a game (which, at the time, was his streak). The thrust of the story was that Witten would spend six to 10 hours on most Mondays rehabbing and getting treatment. I met him at 7 a.m. at his home, the day after the Cowboys played in Atlanta, and followed him till about 3 p.m., when he finished a long massage that included a therapy known as cupping.

In between, I was at the Cowboys' facility in Frisco, Texas, witnessing Witten do pool therapy with a jet spray, dry needling with acupuncture needles, pressure sleeves on both sore legs, and a few other rehab-ish things. Walking down the hall to one of his sessions, I saw one of the biggest and most foreboding murals in this practice facility known as The Star. It's Witten, from the time he lost his helmet on a play and kept running. Pretty impressive.

#### TEN THINGS I THINK I THINK

1. I think I don't know if Eric Reid has a collusion case. I really don't care. I just know if he's not signed and in an NFL training camp in July, as an above-average, healthy 26-year-old safety, the NFL deserves what it gets if and when Reid can one day haul them into court.

2. I think there obviously is no easy solution to the anthem dilemma the NFL faces when the league's owners meet later this month to discuss how to address what players should do when the national anthem is played before games. But my solution is a bit of a split of the baby. As much as I think it's a player's right to do what he wants during the anthem, the way to make this go away is to tell players who don't want to stand to stay in the locker room until after the anthem is played. It's not perfect, but it's a better solution than making this an endlessly politicized issue.

3. I think I'd make this postscript to the Matt Ryan deal: Ten years ago this spring, he arrived in Atlanta under extreme pressure, the franchise moving on from Mike Vick in a clearly divided city. The day before the draft, owner Arthur Blank told me: "We're not starting a new chapter. We're starting a new book." I went to mall on the north side of the city the day before the draft and much to my surprise after the Vick dogfight scandal scarred the team and the city, there were several young people wearing VICK jerseys. "These people won't forget him," said local sports anchor Gil Tyree. "He's a messiah here." And Tyree told me he didn't think Ryan would ever be accepted. I remember some on the team hankering for Glenn Dorsey, a defensive tackle, with the third pick, not Ryan. Talk about a tough spot to walk into. And Ryan still has work to do and a Super Bowl title to deliver, but I'd say Ryan certainly has been accepted and is well-respected, well-liked and greater Atlanta is glad he's the quarterback.

4. I think I still cannot figure out for the life of me why Jerry Richardson doesn't put a clause in his contract of sale for the Panthers to ensure the team remains in Charlotte. Maybe he will. Maybe we just haven't been told everything about the negotiations. But even if it meant sacrificing 10 or 15 percent of the sale, who on God's green earth would care if one of the richest men in the Carolinas, who is in his eighties and can properly provide for the next 20 generations of Richardsons with the money he'll pass down, earns a couple of hundred million dollars more out of this sale? His reputation is already badly sullied because of

the sexual harassment scandal that forced him to sell the team; what would his everlasting legacy be if eight years from now the Panthers move?

5. I think for the first couple of weeks in the 2018 season, I'll be sure to find the third-team CBS game. I want to hear Bruce Arians with Greg Gumbel and Trent Green. Arians is witty and smart and not afraid to criticize—at least that's the way he's been with me since the day I met him. I truly hope the homogenization of TV analysts doesn't get to Arians. If he stays real, he can be really good.

6. I think the smartest thing for the Seahawks to do with Shaquem Griffin right now is being done. It's football only. At his rookie minicamp, Griffin did his mandatory media interview and nothing else. He's (justifiably) one of the most famous third-day draft picks in NFL history because of how he excelled playing with one hand at Central Florida. But for him to have a chance to be an NFL player now, he's got to be an NFL player. "It's extremely important for that turn [to football] to occur," Pete Carroll said. "It's been a great story and it will always be a great story. But right now he's got work to do." Seattle's got Griffin working behind K.J. Wright at weakside linebacker, and of course he'll be a star of special teams.

7. I think for 36-year-old quarterback Ben Roethlisberger to question the wisdom of drafting a quarterback in the third round when the quarterback of the future is certainly not on the roster already is ... well, there are lots of words for it, but I think I'd pick "unintelligent."

8. I think I already feel for Sam Darnold. It's so hard anyway to walk onto a team as a high-first-round rookie quarterback anyway, but I watched over the weekend as his every throw and move were micro-analyzed. It's the kind of microscope that helped mess up Christian Hackenberg, but he was the 51st pick in the draft. Darnold's the sure thing, the quarterback for the next 15 years. My advice to him: Read nothing, other than stuff provided by your coaches. Listen to nothing, other than Todd Bowles, Jeremy Bates, John McCown and Teddy Bridgewater.

9. I think I love the "next step is the Super Bowl" confidence of Pat Mahomes with the Chiefs. There's a reason why a year ago Andy Reid and John Dorsey fell in love with Mahomes and had to have him (they weren't alone), and it's not just his arm. It's everything.

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

a. Series of the Week: by Pete Thamel of Yahoo Sports, on how the Miami Dolphins prep for a draft, the 2018 draft specifically. Totally fascinating. Thamel gets into the weeds so well as a reporter—and I say that with the highest respect—and in a 10-part series (I'm only six parts done right now) gives such an insightful look into how an NFL team picks players. I love the stat about veteran director of college scouting Adam Engroff. He's got more than 7 million Marriott Points! He's stayed in Marriotts for 3,778 nights in his life! You will like this a lot.

b. That's some reporting right there.

c. Story of the Week: by Jonathan Martin of the New York Times, a touching piece about old friends and colleagues journeying to Arizona to share some final stories with the seriously ill American hero and longtime senator, John McCain.

d. Sometimes I wish I loved basketball and made time for it in my life. I mean, the drama of Saturday, when I watched a bunch of it, was just awesome.

e. That LeBron James game-winner against Toronto ... I mean, how can an athlete playing any game be better than LeBron James? It is an absolutely treat to watch that man play basketball, and to carry his team as far as he's carrying it.

f. And the Celtics, missing their two best players (that might be up for debate after this season), and having a wave of shooters and effort guys, and getting some incredible coaching calls like that Al Horford game-winner at Philly on Saturday night ... That is a fun team to watch.

g. Everyone says Cleveland or Boston won't beat the best in the West, and I do not doubt people who know the game. But I'll be watching.

h. The Vegas Golden Knights. In the immortal words of Dan Patrick, "You can't stop 'em ..." You know the rest. An expansion team winning the Cup?

i. Congrats, Albert Pujols, on your 3,000th hit.

j. Three men, not tainted by association with steroids, in baseball history, have exceeded 600 homers and 3,000 hits: Hank Aaron (755 and 3,771), Willie Mays (660 and 3,283), and Albert Pujols (620 and 3,002 as of Sunday morning).

k. My most fun young baseball player to watch (and I'm admittedly prejudiced): Mookie Betts.

l. Memo for next year, with the Bruins out of the playoffs: Stop being bush-league, Brad Marchand. Licking opponents in the Stanley Cup playoffs? Gordie Howe's rolling over in his grave.

m. Matt Harvey, 29, in the last three seasons: 9-19, 5.93 ERA. And he refused to go the minor league to try to get himself straightened out. He did the Mets the biggest favor he could do, forcing them to get rid of him.

n. He's been an entitled oaf from day one, a near-daily soap opera. Whoever signs him, man, buyer beware.

o. Great graf from Tom Verducci on SI.com, about how maybe we could have seen this coming, when Harvey had a disappointing senior season in Connecticut in high school: "A touted high school pitcher, Harvey dropped to the third round of the draft, picked by the Angels, after not flashing elite velocity as a senior. The Angels offered him a million dollars. Harvey said he wouldn't sign unless they gave him \$2 million, and not a penny less. He wanted enough money so that after taxes, commissions and a brand new car, he could put \$1 million in the bank. Ed [his father] was pacing in the backyard as the midnight deadline neared. The Angels didn't call back."

p. Harvey stayed bitter over that. Buyer beware.

q. Coffeenerdness: Italian Roast, 5:20 a.m., quiet offseason Sunday, writing. That's the good life.

r. Beernerdness: A few of you asked why the Great Lakes Brewing (Cleveland, Ohio) Holy Moses White Ale was the beer of choice post-draft for Browns GM John Dorsey. Well, because I bought it, knowing that post-draft I'd certainly want a couple and having no idea he might. But he did, and he liked the White Ale.

s. We'll miss you, Bud Shaw. Heck of a career in Cleveland writing about some fascinating people.

t. I know I won't have the chance to thank all of you the way a decent person should, but I've read quite a few of your well-wishes, and I just want to say I'll always be indebted to you for reading me and giving me such a rewarding life. Thank you.

THE ADIEU HAIKU

SI. It's my home.

I've been a little morose.

Give me a minute.

# Five things you might not know about Sam Jones

By Henry Chisholm

BSN Denver

May 7, 2018

The Broncos drafted Arizona State's Sam Jones in the sixth round of this year's draft. He's a 6-foot-5, 305-pound guard who turned 22 two months ago.

The competition for Denver's starting right guard job is wide open, though Jones is far from the favorite to enter the season with it. Connor McGovern and Max Garcia are the top candidates at this point, leaving Jones to fight for a backup spot with Billy Winn and Jeremiah Poutasi.

Here are five things you might not know about Sam Jones:

## HE TOOK THE PODIUM AFTER A WIN OVER TEXAS TECH

Jones led a dominant offensive line at ThunderRidge, but the eye-popping rushing numbers didn't stop in high school.

When Kalen Ballage, a Senior Bowl invitee and speculated draft target of the Broncos, ran for an NCAA record eight touchdowns in a win over Texas Tech, he made sure to give credit to the big men up front.

According to ESPN, Ballage made his way to the media room a few minutes early to move chairs around so his offensive line could join him at the podium.

"To be honest with you, I had no idea they even did press conferences after games," Jones said. "Because I always just get changed and leave."

The linemen initially didn't think stepping into the interview room was appropriate, but Ballage convinced them and appreciated the gesture.

"Now that's the type of running back that makes an offensive line play and block as hard as they can for him," Jones said. "When you have a guy that wants to give you credit—and offensive linemen don't play the game for credit—it's just really cool."

## HE'S A LEADER

Before last season kicked off, the Arizona Republic surveyed the Sun Devils about the team's superlatives, like funniest teammate, most likely to succeed after football and biggest trash talker.

Jones was named the team's best leader.

The Republic cites one practice this summer when a player wasn't running his conditioning and full-speed, prompting the coaching staff to make the team repeat the exercise. Jones made sure it didn't happen again.

"He's one of the better leaders we've had here in the last five years because he's got some courage," head coach Todd Graham told the Republic, in reference to the incident. "He's not afraid to say something. ... It's just sometimes we got to get the PG version."

### HE'S A LOCAL PRODUCT

Jones attended ThunderRidge High School in Highlands Ranch, where he led a dominant rushing game as a 6-foot-5, 275-pound tackle. During his junior and senior seasons, the Grizzlies had four games with at least 400 rushing yards—a high of 521—and five games with at least six rushing touchdowns—a high of nine, per MaxPreps.

ESPN gave Jones a four-star rating and named him the 23rd-best tackle in his class.

Jones said that it's a "dream come true" to be drafted by the Broncos, but moving back to his hometown will come with some tough decisions.

### HE RAN INTO ELWAY THE DAY BEFORE THE DRAFT

The night before the NFL Draft, Jones grabbed a steak from Shanahan's, according to 9News.

A few tables away sat John Elway.

Jones texted his trainer, asking whether he should introduce himself. The answer was yes.

"It was kind of awkward; I didn't know exactly what to say," Jones said. "I just introduced myself and told him, 'Good luck on a big weekend and I'd love to be a Bronco.' And he said, 'we'll see if we can make it happen.'"

And, obviously, it did.

### HE SMASHED THE ROCK

Before every season, the Sun Devils stack a pile of rocks in the team's facilities, each with the logo of one of their opponents that season. After each win, one player is chosen—generally based on their performance in the game—to smash that week's rock with a sledgehammer. The idea is that to break down a mountain, you have to get rid of one rock at a time.

Last offseason, Jones was chosen to break the first rock, which symbolizes the team's completion of summer workouts.

# Tim Tebow turning it around in Double-A ball

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
May 7, 2018

He started with a first-pitch home run. Then he slumped, with one hit in 14 at-bats. Now, Tim Tebow is tearing up Double-A baseball, relatively speaking.

Tebow, a first-round pick in 2010 and a quarterback who won a playoff game the next year, hit a home run on Friday and another on Saturday for the Binghamton Rumble Ponies as part of a surge that has lifted his batting average from .133 to .241.

For the season, he now has 19 hits in 79 at bats. With five doubles, a triple, and three home runs, that gives Tebow a slugging percentage of .443.

Of course, Tebow also has struck out 38 times — exactly two K's for every hit. But an out is an out, regardless of how it happens. The other side of the strikeout numbers is that Tebow gets a hit 46.3 percent of the time he puts the ball in play.

These numbers matter because, with the Mets determined to eventually promote a potential cash cow to the major-league club, he needs to pass the smell test at all lower levels. After previously stinking in Double-A, Tebow is now doing well enough to justify an eventual push to Triple-A ball. And then the question will become whether he can do just enough there to make it something other than an obvious money grab (which it would be) to move him to the place where many will flock to meet him and to greet him.

# NFL may delegate anthem policy to individual teams

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
May 7, 2018

The NFL has said that players may protest during the anthem. Some teams have, as a practical matter, applied a different approach, discouraging and/or flat-out stating that players will not kneel. Soon, it could be for the teams to formally craft their own policies regarding whether players will be required to stand during the anthem.

Mark Maske of the Washington Post reports that the NFL may give teams the ability to create their own anthem policies.

Dubbed a “compromise” in the report, the NFL Players Association may not see it that way. As explained last month, the NFL gave players the right to protest during the national anthem. The league confirmed that right after Colin Kaepernick began his protests in 2016, and the NFL reiterated that right when the issue hit the fan with a flourish in 2017. Thus, as a matter of labor law, it may be impossible at this point for the NFL to unilaterally change the anthem policy by letting teams decide whether to rescind the players’ league-given right to protest.

Of course, the NFL can change the policy, if it wants. The question would then become whether the NFLPA would fight any change to the policy via the available legal channels, arguing that the issue has morphed into a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.

So it’s hardly a compromise to give the teams the power to tell players not to kneel. It could end up instead being a powderkeg, at a time when the issue has largely subsided, but for the pending Kaepernick and Eric Reid collusion grievances.

# NFL may delegate anthem policy to individual teams

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
May 7, 2018

Eric Wood has lost a lot of weight since announcing his retirement from the Bills.

How will the Dolphins' late-round additions fare?

The new kickoff rule could benefit Patriots KR Cordarrelle Patterson.

Jets rookie TE Chris Herndon's recovery from a knee injury is going well.

Highlights from Ravens QB Lamar Jackson's minicamp practices.

The Bengals passed on chances to make trades during the draft.

A recap of the Browns' rookie minicamp.

The Steelers may have gotten a steal in OL Chukwuma Okorafor.

It's a big week on and off the field for the Texans.

Former Colts LB Edwin Jackson was honored with a posthumous degree by Georgia State University.

WR Allen Lazard thinks he can help the Jaguars.

Said former Titans S Michael Griffin, who will officially retire on Monday, "It was a blessing to play 10 years in this league. It wasn't always easy, but it was always a good time."

Assessing the pressure on Broncos G.M. John Elway.

WR Byron Pringle is trying to make the most of his opportunity with the Chiefs.

Chargers cornerbacks played the run well last year.

The Raiders hope DE Arden Key boosts their pass rush.

Who will start at tight end for the Cowboys?

A breakdown of Giants rookie DL B.J. Hill from his college coaches.

Five potential position battles for the Eagles.

Ranking Washington's 2018 draft choices.

LB Joel Iyegbuniwe was surprised the Bears drafted him in the fourth round.

The Lions are deep at wide receiver.

The Packers have had some success transitioning tackles to guards.

RB Mike Boone didn't go to the combine, but he landed with the Vikings as an undrafted free agent.

The Falcons hope this year's draft helps their special teams units.

Where will the Panthers turn for a defensive backs coach?

Former Saints T Zach Strief broke down the team's rookie DE Marcus Davenport.

Were the Buccaneers too soft last season?

Taking stock of the Cardinals' quarterback situation.

The Rams' 2018 draft class by the numbers.

49ers rookie T Mike McGlinchey called it an "unbelievable opportunity" to play with Joe Staley.

A look at how new offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer is fitting in with the Seahawks.