

Is there any reason to believe Paxton Lynch is a keeper for the Broncos?

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
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The Denver Post's sports columnist Mark Kiszla is answering your questions in a live chat beginning at noon.

Elway seems serious in his belief Paxton Lynch could actually be the QB of the Broncos. We've all seen Lynch play, and as bad as it's been, it appears he's actually regressed in his first two NFL seasons. What have you seen in practice or anywhere else that would give you any reason to believe this guy is actually a keeper?

Kiz: I applauded when John Elway drafted Paxton Lynch. So blame me (I'm OK with it). I had almost immediate concerns after Lynch reported to the Broncos as a rookie, and it was my observation he had almost zero clue how much it took to be a pro quarterback. This does not make him a bad person. It seemed obvious to me that Gary Kubiak and Elway clashed about the development of Lynch throughout 2016. I saw both sides of the argument. Kubiak didn't think he could put an adolescent in charge of the offense for the defending Super Bowl champs. And I also believe that the Broncos never tailored their offense to the strengths Lynch did bring to the table. We could go round and round in circles discussing this, but the bottom line is: Lynch is still here because Elway is the boss round these parts. And most folks in Broncos Country trust in Elway more than just about any other person in life.

One more QB question and I'll get off of it. Is Chad Kelly any good? Because John is boss and he says Paxton is No. 2 right now, but the reality is if Case Keenum gets hurt who do we trot out? Lynch? (I have a cryptic look on my face, can't put an emoji here to depict that.)

Kiz: This would not officially be a chat unless the name of Chad Kelly was mentioned. Could Kelly beat out Lynch for the back-up QB job? Certainly. Mr. Elway said as much himself at the conclusion of the draft proceedings at Dove Valley HQ.

Hello Mr. Kiszla, I've been reading the Denver Post for 60 years and I'm a big fan of your work. Why do you think the Broncos selected Bradley Chubb over Quenton Nelson, since Nelson is the best guard to come out of the draft in 30 years and it would have filled a need. Is Chubb really that good to pass on Nelson?

Kiz: God bless you. And thanks for reading. Humble thanks. I have been duly impressed with guard Quenton Nelson for a long time, and was an advocate of the Broncos drafting him at No. 5, despite the fact that NFL general managers do not generally view guard as one of the more essential positions on the field. But the edge rusher is highly valued throughout the league, and Bradley Chubb was too good to pass up for John Elway. In fact, as Elway suggested on opening night of the draft, the Broncos were apparently prepared to deal the fifth pick to Buffalo had Chubb not fallen in Denver's lap. I think Pro Bowlers win championships, and Chubb certainly has that potential. Trading back would have indicated to me that Elway believes this team is not ready to compete seriously for a deep playoff run in 2018.

Talking to you from a sidewalk bar in sunny Seville, Spain!!! I'm loving this Rockies team. It's different from any team in the past. Great pitching, road wins, lots of home run power. Really like the cast, especially Ottavino, Rusin, Bettis, Nazty, Nolan. Tell me, if DJ continues on a tear this year, will he force the Rox to reconsider their obvious disinterest in a new contract?

Kiz: We started this chat with cheesy pop goodness. So let me add: Oh, I've never been to Spain. But I kinda like the Beatles. Did I quote those lyrics correctly? And to be clear, I have been to Spain, thanks to The Denver Post.. The paper sent me to Barcelona on assignment, to cover a Broncos preseason game, way back in the day. But you're in Seville, and it's a Rockies town today (because you're there, waving the colors of your favorite baseball team.) I predicted the Rockies would win — gulp — 92 games this season. And for much of April, it made me appear to be a bigger knucklehead than usual. But your point on this team tearing it up on the road is not only well taken, it's the best sign that Colorado is a legit playoff contender. DJ LaMahieu is a righteous good dude and will be essential to any chance that the Rox have of winning 90-plus times in 2018. But would team success cause Jeff Bridich to sign DJ to a longterm deal? Outlook not so bright.

Hey Mark, did you see that hockey player lick the guy's face? What's up with that? Is that allowed?

Kiz: Finally! This is not only a burning question, but one that captures the spirit of the thing I attempt to do with this chat. Aren't hockey players supposed to drop the gloves rather than give dog kisses? I have a dog named Fred. He does sometimes lick my face. I'm OK with it, though I can certainly understand why some observers might find it unsavory. But if a hockey player licked my face? I might bite his tongue. Or drop the gloves. Because that's part of the code, isn't it? (Only kid the ones I love ... and I love playoff hockey, which is the best playoff sport in North America, even with LeBron James making up some new Houdini act every night for the Cavs.)

Talking to you from sunny Heilbronn, Germany. It seems that college linemen take a year or two (or more) to develop into serviceable pros — so it is important to keep lots of young depth and great coaches. Like a farm team in baseball. This eats up a lot of practice squad space. When you miss a couple years (Michael Schofield, Ty Sambrailo) it's tough to fill in the gap. This might explain the new split coaching duties in Denver, explain the fact that they are OK with McGovern replacing Garcia now..what do you think?

Kiz: I was in Germany just last summer, and appreciated the way beers consumed were tallied in a tavern, with the bar staff making ticks on my mug coaster to keep score. It can certainly take time for college linemen to develop tricks of the NFL trade, and think that your keen observation highlights one of the underrated challenges of developing a winning team. The rub? It's easier to for an NFL general manager to keep around a developing linebacker or wide receiver than a hog molly, because the faster guys are easier to use on special teams. If Connor McGovern is able to step up in his third year after being drafted, it certainly would support your theory.

Chubb fell to us at No. 5, but who did John Elway really covet? (There was a rumor the Broncos tried to trade into the No. 2 spot.)

Kiz: John Elway denied he talked to the Giants on draft day about trading up to No 2, if I remember correctly. But, as I wrote in Sunday editions of the The Post several days prior to the draft, I do believe Elway coveted USC's Sam Darnold as a franchise quarterback. Could I be wrong? Certainly. But I haven't heard anything to this date that would make me feel otherwise.

Love playoff hockey too. Not fair that the 'lanche aren't in it and the Las Vegas Golden Knights are. What kind of name is that "Golden Knights" in Vegas...yuck. Better name would be the "Rat Pack". My question — is the penalty for hooking modified when you play in Vegas?

Kiz: Not fair? Easy there. As somebody far wiser than me (and that somebody is not hard to find) pointed out just today, was there anybody crying foul when the Golden Knights' roster was assembled? I don't recall it. And what's more, if memory serves, I was standing in a hockey dressing room in South Florida on a June night in 1996, long after midnight, as Mike Keene sat atop a locker and smoked a cigar, in celebration of the Avs winning the Stanley Cup at the conclusion of their first year playing in Colorado. It was awesome. But fair to everyone else in the hockey world? Prolly not, although not my problem.

I think the two biggest bargains in the draft were Jewell and Hamilton. Your thoughts?

Kiz: Please forgive the pause in answering your fine question. I am working very hard on spelling DaeSean Hamilton without looking it up. I am not a good speller. But I do believe Hamilton has a shot of catching a number of passes from Case Keenum in 2018. And that would qualify Hamilton as a draft steal, to be certain.

What we wouldn't give to have Mark Reynolds back at 1B.

Kiz: I admit to thinking it was time for the Rockies to move on from Mark Reynolds at the conclusion of 2017. But I hear you clucking. I kinda miss Reynolds now, as well. Speaking of which ...

Mark, did you see *first baseman* Ian Desmond hit two homers yesterday? That's right... First baseman.... Two homers.... Maybe he read your column?

Kiz: Not so certain Mr. Desmond read my column in Friday's editions of The Post, as he has probably had to go hit and was too busy to give my words a quick scan. But, knowing the dynamics of a major-league clubhouse, where grown men sometimes are known to act like middle-schoolers, there might be some slim chance that a Colorado teammate let Desmond know that some ink-stained wretch back in Denver was on his case. This much I know is true: I have never helped any player draw a walk, much less hit two dingers, in a major-league game. But thanks for mentioning it, and if Mr. Desmond would like to give thanks by donating \$135,802 (or roughly the equivalent of what he gets paid for each of 162 regular-season games) to my favorite charity, I wouldn't say no.

Chubb's first NFL contract should include \$17.9 million signing bonus

By Mike Klis

9 News

May 8, 2018

It pays to be first.

It pays big-time to be first.

Based on the formula the NFL has devised for each of its draft picks, here is what the Broncos' top three draft picks can expect with their first NFL contracts:

Bradley Chubb, No. 5 overall pick, first round: 4 years, \$27.271 million total value, including a \$17.914 million signing bonus.

Courtland Sutton, No. 40 overall pick, second round: 4 years, \$6.842 million total, including a \$3.056 million signing bonus.

Royce Freeman, No. 71 overall pick, third round: 4 years, \$4.011 million, including a \$997,020 signing bonus.

So Chubb, a 4-3 defensive end at North Carolina State who will be converted to outside linebacker in the Broncos' 3-4 defense, will draw a \$14.86 million greater signing bonus as the Broncos' first pick than second-pick Sutton and \$16.92 million more than third-pick Freeman.

No doubt, it pays to be first.

The Broncos hope to have most, if not all, of their draft picks signed by the time rookies report Thursday for their minicamp.

C.J. Anderson signs one-year deal with Carolina

By Mike Klis

9 News

May 8, 2018

Christian McCaffrey has a new but familiar running mate.

The Carolina Panthers just signed former Broncos' running back C.J. Anderson to a one-year contract worth around \$2 million. There are incentives in the deal that would allow Anderson to earn close to another \$1 million. The signing was first reported on twitter by Pro Football Talk.

"I'm super excited for a new opportunity," Anderson said. "It's a championship-caliber team. I get a chance to win another one. I think their style of play fits my game well."

It's not the kind of deal you'd expect for a running back coming off a 1,000-yard rushing season, as Anderson did in 2017 for the Broncos. But Anderson didn't hit the opening of the free agent market in early-March. He was released by the Broncos five weeks after the free agency period opened.

Several teams – most notably Green Bay, Baltimore and Carolina – expressed interest in Anderson.

But once teams are done spending in free agency, money gets tight.

With the Panthers, Anderson figures to replace Jonathan Stewart's power back role while McCaffrey, the former Valor Christian and Stanford great who was Carolina's No. 8 overall draft pick last year, serves as an outside runner and pass catcher.

McCaffrey had 117 rushes last year (for 435 yards) and 80 catches (for 651 yards).

"I'm looking forward to working with him," Anderson said. "He can do some special things. I'll get to know him and we'll work well together."

Anderson rushed for 90 yards and a touchdown against Carolina in the Broncos' Super Bowl 50 title. Undrafted out of California when he signed with the Broncos in 2013, Anderson made the Pro Bowl in 2014 thanks to a strong second half of that season, and he had his first 1,000-yard season last year.

Anderson made \$6 million in 2016 and \$3 million last year. He was released by the Broncos last month in lieu of a \$4.5 million salary he was scheduled to make in 2018. The Broncos' running back room will now be led by third-year player Devontae Booker and rookie Royce Freeman with De'Angelo Henderson trying to fight off seventh-round rookie David Williams and undrafted, seventh-round rookie David Williams for the No. 3 back role.

"I wish them good luck," Anderson said. "Simple as that, good luck."

Broncos depth chart: Case Keenum brings clarity to the offense

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

May 8, 2018

With free agency and the draft completed, and OTAs and minicamps scheduled for the next month and a half, here's a closer look at the depth chart for the Denver Broncos (starters in bold):

OFFENSE

Quarterback (3): Case Keenum, Paxton Lynch, Chad Kelly

Keenum was the centerpiece of the Broncos' work in free agency and is the unquestioned starter. Lynch is a 2016 first-round pick who the Broncos hope can find his way. As the draft closed, president of football operations/general manager John Elway said the Broncos would not sign another quarterback during the offseason program, so Lynch and Kelly will compete for the No. 2 job.

Running back (5): Devontae Booker, Royce Freeman, De'Angelo Henderson, David Williams, Phillip Lindsay

Booker will go into OTAs and likely minicamp as the starter, but Freeman has the size, speed and overall game to compete to be the early-down back. Williams and Lindsay should push Henderson for the No. 3 spot.

Fullback (1): Andy Janovich

He's solo at the position, but he's a core special-teams player, and offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave is expected to have some two-back looks in the run game. Coach Vance Joseph has said he wants a power run game.

Wide receiver (13): Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders, Jordan Taylor, Courtland Sutton, DaeSean Hamilton, Carlos Henderson, Isaiah McKenzie, Tim Patrick, Kenny Bell, River Cracraft, Jordan Leslie, John Diarse, Jimmy Williams

The rookie draft picks -- Sutton and Hamilton -- are physically ready, with the route-running ability to push for roster spots. Last year's draft picks at the position -- Henderson and McKenzie -- are going to find it a more difficult climb this time around.

Tight end (6): Jake Butt, Jeff Heuerman, Austin Traylor, Troy Fumagalli, Matt LaCosse, Brian Parker

After Butt spent his rookie season on injured reserve in 2017, the Broncos believe he's ready for a significant role in the offense. Heuerman and Traylor have experience in the scheme, but the Broncos have high hopes for Fumagalli.

Tackle (7): Garrett Bolles, Jared Veldheer, Menelik Watson, Cyrus Kouandjio, Elijah Wilkinson, Andreas Knappe, Leon Johnson

Bolles will start at left tackle, with Veldheer at right tackle as the Broncos hope Watson, who has never played more than 12 games in a season, can stay healthy enough to be the swing tackle. Kouandjio and Wilkinson got limited looks as developmental prospects last season.

Guard (7): Ron Leary, Connor McGovern, Billy Turner, Max Garcia, Sam Jones, Jeremiah Poutasi, Austin Schlottmann

Leary is expected to move back to left guard -- he was moved to right last season -- and the Broncos believe McGovern is ready to move into the starting lineup. Turner, Garcia and Jones (a rookie) will likely battle for the backup spots.

Center (2): Matt Paradis, J.J. Dielman

Paradis has played every snap over the past three seasons, including 2016 when he didn't practice much because of injuries to both hips. McGovern can also play center and Dielman is expected to get a long look as a guard/center option.

DEFENSE

Cornerback (8): Chris Harris Jr., Bradley Roby, Tramaine Brock, Isaac Yiadom, Marcus Rios, Brendan Langley, Michael Hunter, C.J. Smith

Harris is a lock to be in the starting lineup to go with any and all specialty packages. The Broncos believe Roby will be the other starter in the base defense, but Brock will get a chance to push him as the rookie Yiadom should get some snaps.

Safety (8): Justin Simmons, Darian Stewart, Su'a Cravens, Will Parks, Jamal Carter, Dymonte Thomas, Jordan Moore, Trey Marshall

Simmons has the look of a longtime starter and a future team captain, and it remains to be seen how the Broncos plan to use Cravens and Parks. They liked what they saw from Carter and Thomas as prospects last season.

Inside linebacker (6): Brandon Marshall, Todd Davis, Josey Jewell, Zaire Anderson, Joseph Jones, Jerrol Garcia-Williams

The Broncos re-signed Davis in free agency to keep him in the defense alongside Marshall. Jewell has the instincts and savvy to compete early to find a role on special teams with Anderson.

Outside linebacker (8): Von Miller, Bradley Chubb, Shane Ray, Shaquil Barrett, Stansly Maponga, Deiontrez Mount, Marcus Rush, Jeff Holland

If Chubb is as prepared to move into the lineup as the Broncos believe he is, it shouldn't be long until he is paired with Miller. Ray is healthy after multiple wrist surgeries in '17 and has promised a breakout season.

Defensive line (11): Derek Wolfe (DE), Domata Peko (NT), Clinton McDonald (DE), DeMarcus Walker (DE), Zach Kerr (DE), Adam Gotsis (DE), Shelby Harris (DE), Kyle Peko (NT), DeShawn Williams (DE), Paul Boyette Jr. (DE), Lowell Lotulelei (NT)

The Broncos say Wolfe has recovered from offseason neck surgery and is ready to participate fully in the team's offseason work. McDonald, a team captain with the Buccaneers, will play plenty in the rotation as will Walker.

Punter (1): Marquette King

The Broncos used a draft pick on Riley Dixon in 2016, but traded him to the Giants shortly after they signed King in free agency. The Broncos hope King can repair some of the field-position issues they had on special teams last season.

Kicker (1): Brandon McManus

After making 85.7 and 85.3 percent of his field-goal attempts in 2015 and 2016, respectively, McManus dipped to 75 percent last season with misses in four of the first five games.

Long-snapper (2): Casey Kreiter, Christian Kuntz

Kreiter has been the long-snapper for the past two seasons -- he finished 2016 on injured reserve after 10 games. The Broncos added Kuntz this offseason to get a look at the rookie.

Kick returner (4): Devontae Booker, Carlos Henderson, Isaiah McKenzie, Brendan Langley

Booker will continue to be the "safe" option for the job, until somebody else shows he can handle the ball without incident. When the Broncos selected Henderson in the 2017 draft, he was expected to be the kickoff returner early on.

Punt returner (3): Jordan Taylor, Emmanuel Sanders, Isaiah McKenzie

Coach Vance Joseph liked how Taylor handled the job last season after McKenzie was benched due to fumbles. Sanders will be the fail-safe option if injuries happen.

There finally won't be a competition for the starting QB job during the Broncos' offseason. And that's a very good thing.

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
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The Broncos' 2017 season was nearing an end, but they had yet to figure out who would be their starting quarterback going forward.

Again.

It was Week 16, the Broncos had finally won a couple games, but it cost Trevor Siemian another shoulder injury and set into motion the latest quarterback quandary. Would Brock Osweiler start again after turning in his best outing yet? Or would Paxton Lynch get another shot?

"We're not there yet," coach Vance Joseph said at the time. "It's complicated."

The same questions and answer became automated each week as the Broncos — the team who believed that having two young quarterbacks on the rise and a veteran in reserve was a luxury — spent the last two years in a tailspin. Since 2016, via trade, free agency and the draft, Denver has acquired quarterbacks of different sizes, strengths and experience, and rotated starters multiple times over only to end with nothing.

No true starter. No clear future. Just constant change. And it started from the very beginning, with offseason competitions for the No. 1 job.

"I don't think it will ever get easy," said receiver Demaryius Thomas, who has played with six different starting quarterbacks in his eight seasons with the Broncos. "Chemistry is something that you have to continuously work on and it's hard when you have to go with three different quarterbacks each and every other week."

But this year will be different, the Broncos say. This year they have Case Keenum, their definite starter for 2018 whom they believe will right a ship that's been wildly off course since Peyton Manning's retirement.

The Broncos remain adamant that competition is wanted at nearly every position to bring out the best in each player. "The more competition we get, the better," general manager John Elway said during the draft.

And although Lynch and seventh-round pick Chad Kelly will duke it out for the No. 2 job, the Broncos will not have a battle to determine their starter this offseason for the first time in three years. The leader of the offense is known, and that alone is monumental for a team that has operated blindly in recent summers.

“That’s good for everyone involved,” Joseph said. “That’s good for the players and that’s good for the coaches who are building a scheme around a player. Obviously, the last two years here it’s been a competition in training camp, and that takes away from what you want to do. If you have to do it, you do it, but if you don’t have to you don’t want to. It’s a good thing having Case going into OTAs and training camp as our starting quarterback.”

Over the last two years, Broncos players were peppered almost daily with questions about the quarterback race. Most played it safe, lauding each candidate before turning the focus back to team-wide improvement. But the difficulties in trying to build cohesion were noticeable, and mounted as the weeks went on.

Last year, miscommunication led to the wrong routes and poor timing on throws. Drives stalled, mistakes were made — then made again and again. The losses piled up (11!), along with the dubious records (first shutout in 25 years!) and the turnovers (34!), and by season’s end all three quarterbacks had been the starter, backup and inactive player TWICE.

Perhaps the biggest red flag of the offense’s disarray: There were times when not even Thomas, who has seen it all in Denver, could get lined up ahead of the snap.

“You can sit back and say we’re all professional football players and you’ve got to deal with that situation, but at the same time, obviously you can’t gain the same chemistry,” receiver Emmanuel Sanders said. “You don’t have the same mindset. You have to talk to two different quarterbacks. When you’re going into individual routes, you have to go to one guy and then go with the next guy. You don’t really gain that chemistry. You’re not maximizing the opportunity. Now we’re maximizing the opportunity, and hopefully it pays off.”

The Broncos quarterbacks and the rotation of starters can’t be blamed for all of their issues last season. But the uncertainty from the outset, before the real practices and games even began, set the tone.

In the years prior, offseasons were invaluable for the Broncos and their quarterback.

During Manning’s four years in Denver, his annual passing camp at Duke with his brother Eli and their receivers was a staple of the offseason. Collective-bargaining rules prohibited Manning from working with his receivers on the Broncos’ campus (much to his chagrin), so they traveled for work. Those early installments were vital, Manning insisted.

When the Broncos traded for Mark Sanchez in 2016, he continued the trend by hosting Sanders and Thomas and some of the Broncos’ running backs for workouts in California. The chemistry built was for naught, however, as Sanchez never made the final roster.

There was no passing camp last year in part because there was no starter or frontrunner. For Siemian and Lynch, both of whom were uncertain if they’d be the main guy, hosting an informal camp was not only awkward but expensive.

Although Keenum hasn’t had off-campus throwing sessions with his receivers yet, he said earlier this month that, “I’m sure we’ll get something going.” In the meantime, his focus has been on building chemistry through OTAs and off-field outings like the Rockies game he and some of his teammates attended recently.

“Try to build the relationship there and start there,” Keenum said. “I think on the field stuff comes more from actions than words. What you do out there, the kind of leader you are, leading from the front, I think that’s more important.”

But his title alone, as starter, may help the most this offseason.

“This is the first time in two or three years that I’m not standing up here talking about a quarterback debate,” Sanders said. “I remember when I got out here, I went out to the team store and I saw Case Keenum jerseys. I was like, ‘Thank God, I don’t have to deal with that again.’ Case is our guy. We can go from there. We can work our butts off, try to gain chemistry and try to put up points.”

C.J. Anderson signs one-year deal with Carolina Panthers

By Troy Renck
KMGH
May 8, 2018

In remaking their offense, the Broncos took a notable risk.

They released running back C.J. Anderson, a stabilizing force last year as he rushed for a career-high 1,007 yards. It was, at its root, a cost-cutting measure. Anderson was due \$4.5 million this season, but could be cut without any dead cap money. It left Anderson vulnerable as the Broncos looked to go younger and create playing time for Devontae Booker and recently-drafted Royce Freeman.

Anderson promised Denver he would land on his feet. After fielding interest from multiple suitors, Anderson signed a one-year deal with the Carolina Panthers on Monday.

He gives the Panthers a between-the-tackles brute to replace Jonathan Stewart, who was cut in February. He will serve as a complement to the slippery Christian McCaffrey, who emerged as a dependable receiving threat as a rookie, catching 80 passes for 651 yards and five touchdowns.

The Panthers know Anderson well. He played one of his best games in Denver's Super Bowl 50 victory, rushing for 90 yards on 23 carries with a touchdown.

Anderson's departure leaves a void. He was a leader in the locker room, and respected for his effort on game day. He also brought an encyclopedic knowledge of defenses, leaving him valuable in pass protection.

His exit places onus on Devontae Booker to improve. The Broncos thought highly enough of Booker this time a year ago they believed he could beat out Anderson. However, a wrist injury left Booker a spectator during training camp. Booker has rushed 253 times for 911 yards in his career. It brings hope, but also concern -- 3.6 yards per carry does not scare anyone. Booker must prove he can break tackles at the line of scrimmage to take the next step forward. Booker, though, has shown proficiency as a receiver, hauling in 61 passes for 540 yards.

The addition of Freeman remains curious, with the idea of him starting at some point this season hardly far-fetched. Freeman logged 5,621 yards at Oregon on 947 attempts. He scored 60 touchdowns. General manager John Elway said he views Freeman as a potential faster version of Anderson. Freeman brings a physical style. He is a propane tank with legs, listed at 6-foot, 229 pounds.

Ron Leary, who is expected to move back to left guard, told Denver last week the Broncos are using a more physical blocking scheme following coaching changes. Of course, there will be outside zone reads - every team uses them -- but this is a team that wants to impose its will at the line of scrimmage. The Broncos produced 4.05 yards per carry last season, ranking 18th, and 115.3 yards per game, good enough for 12th overall.

The ability to run when they want to, not when they have to, would open up a myriad of possibilities for new Broncos quarterback Case Keenum. Keenum excelled in Minnesota last season, a team that leaned heavily on its ground attack. The Vikings averaged 122.3 yards per game, seventh overall, and rushed 31 times per week, second only to the Jacksonville Jaguars. It provides hint of how the Broncos believe they can maximize Keenum. Run well, run often, and let Keenum produce big plays with mobility and less obvious passing situations.

Justin Simmons has long set standard for CB Isaac Yiadom

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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During Isaac Yiadom's career at Boston College, Broncos safety Justin Simmons was held up as the standard for the rest of the group.

Among the Eagles' defensive backs, Simmons served as the example for what each player in the B.C. locker room could achieve.

And after years of striving to be like the third-year NFL player, Yiadom now finds himself in a familiar situation: in the same locker room as his collegiate role model.

"In our [Boston College] locker room, Justin is really highly praised and honored," Yiadom said during his introductory press conference with the Broncos. "We hear about it all the time if we do something bad at practice because Justin set such a high standard that we have to hold up. We always say that Justin set the bar up here for us, and after that it was John Johnson with the Rams now, and it's me, [former Boston College DB] Kamrin [Moore] and Gabe (former Boston College DB Gabriel McClary) right now and so on."

Even after Simmons left for the NFL in 2016, he remained in touch with Yiadom and the rest of his former teammates. He remains in a group chat with the defensive backs, and he's served as someone who Yiadom can go to about both faith and football.

As Yiadom looks to transition to the NFL, that relationship should pay dividends.

In the immediate moments after Yiadom was selected with the 99th-overall pick in the draft, Simmons made sure the young player felt welcomed to his new team.

"He was hyped," Yiadom said. "He texted me and he gave a couple of the other guys like Chris [Harris Jr.] and Von [Miller] my number. They texted me too to welcome me to the family. Justin put out a post and stuff like that. Yeah, he was happy and I was excited, too. Everyone was happy that we both are going to get together, and they know that it's going to be something special."

Once Yiadom arrives in Denver and gets on the field, Simmons' advice will likely be even more valuable.

"I think it's going to help me a lot," Yiadom said. "Justin is like my big brother. When I first went to college, he's the one that hosted me on my official visit and here, I know if I have any questions I can ask the coaches or Justin. He'll help me on and off the field. I know he's got high expectations for me, so I could never let myself go underneath the bar because I know he's looking at me and everybody else."

Simmons, who was also selected in the third round, has raised those expectations during his first two seasons. He has recorded four interceptions and a touchdown during that time, and he earned the starting job ahead of his second year.

He'll aim to help Yiadom accomplish the same.

The B.C. standard may have been met, but the Broncos' is even higher.

The Squeeze: Derby Days

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

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A concentrated look at the recent juice on the Denver Broncos.

1. Derby days

Current Broncos star Von Miller and Hall of Famer Floyd Little met up Saturday at the 144th running of the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky.

Meanwhile, linebacker Brandon Marshall was in Denver to watch Justify win the first leg of the Triple Crown.

2. Courtland's corner

Second-round pick Courtland Sutton joined NFL Network over the weekend, and he explained his path to Denver. The crew also took an in-depth look at where Denver's depth chart stands after the 2018 NFL Draft.

3. On the road

The Houston Rockets defeated the Utah Jazz on Sunday night to take a 3-1 lead in their second-round playoff series. Houston also won Friday, and Emmanuel Sanders was on the road in Salt Lake City to support his hometown Rockets.

4. Calling it a career

Former Broncos offensive lineman Orlando Franklin announced his retirement following a seven-year career. Congrats, Orlando!

Why stop at NFL allowing teams to decide national anthem protocol?

By Nancy Armour

USA Today

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Word is that NFL owners, unable to come to an agreement on a league policy for the national anthem, are considering letting each team create its own rules.

According to The Washington Post, the idea would take the thorny issue out of the league's hands and allow each owner to decide what is proper protocol during the anthem. Why stop there, though? Since owners like Jerry Jones and Bob McNair are determined to make a show of who's for 'Merica and who's not, the NFL ought to realign the league so there can be no confusion about anyone's position.

Instead of the NFC and the AFC, let's call the NFL's new conferences the CSC and the KNC.

The CSC would be the Constitution Supporters Conference, made up of teams whose owners recognize that the protests during the anthem are neither anti-police nor anti-military, but meant to draw attention to police brutality in communities of color and economic inequality. These owners know the right to free speech that's protected by the First Amendment refers to censorship by the government, not employers, but they're also smart enough to know that stifling political dissent in a country founded on protest is the very definition of unAmerican.

The San Francisco 49ers, Philadelphia Eagles, Oakland Raiders, New England Patriots, Miami Dolphins and Kansas City Chiefs would all go in this division. Maybe the Jacksonville Jaguars, Atlanta Falcons and Seattle Seahawks, too.

The KNC would be the Know Nothing Conference. For those who've forgotten what they learned in eighth-grade social studies – and it's clear there are plenty in this country who could use a refresher course – the Know Nothings were a political party in the mid-1800s that cloaked discrimination in the defense of traditional religious and political values. These ideologues wanted to preserve what they saw as their rightful place in the social, economic and political hierarchies, and were horrified that some people were actually taking that “all men being created equal” idea seriously.

McNair's Houston Texans and Jones' Dallas Cowboys would be the charter teams in the KNC, of course, and the Carolina Panthers are with them at least until they're sold. The Cincinnati Bengals deserve a spot in the KNC, too, after Mike Brown reportedly asked free agent Eric Reid if his protests would continue this season, signaling that a contract offer was more dependent on the safety's answer than his actual skills.

If you don't like those ideas for conferences, then I'd suggest the Hypocrites and the Non-Hypocrites.

Remember what NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said last fall, as he tried to calm the furor ignited by President Donald Trump calling protesting players “SOBs” and saying they should be fired?

“What we are trying to stay out of is politics,” Goodell said in October.

Did you see an asterisk by that “we,” meant to clarify Goodell was only referring to the players? Neither did I.

And yet, Edward Glazer of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers hosted a Trump fundraiser in March that cost attendees between \$35,000 and \$250,000. Robert Kraft donated the New England Patriots’ team plane so Parkland survivors and their families could attend the “March for Our Lives” rally.

So it’s actually not politics or political statements NFL owners want to avoid, just those with which they don’t agree.

It's admirable that NFL owners want to identify those who wish to undermine our most cherished ideals, whose actions are an affront to our democracy. But it doesn't take a change in the league's anthem protocol.

A look in the mirror will do.

Here's the draft-day trade the Bills and Broncos had in place before Bradley Chubb fell

By Will Brinson

CBS Sports

May 8, 2018

The expectation for the early part of the 2018 NFL Draft was trades galore. But it ended up being fairly slow, with all six of the first teams selecting standing pat at their position from the start of the draft (obviously the Colts and Jets flipped picks prior to the draft).

We nearly saw a big move from the Denver Broncos and Buffalo Bills, but a draft-day drop by Bradley Chubb to No. 5 caused it to get tossed aside.

In a wide-ranging interview with the Buffalo News' Jay Skurski, GM Brandon Beane explained how the draft-day process shook out for the Bills and broke down a trade the Broncos and Bills agreed to the day of the draft.

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

Unfortunately for Beane (it seemed), the Browns drafting Denzel Ward at No. 4 and allowing the Broncos to take Chubb at No. 5 meant that the deal was off.

The swap in question, per Beane, would have netted the Broncos No. 12 overall, No. 22 overall and one of the Bills' second-round picks. Let's call it No. 53 overall (their first of two along with No. 56). The Bills would have gotten No. 5 overall and one of the Broncos third-round picks. Let's call it No. 71 (their first of two along with No. 99).

It's hard to pass up on a blue-chip player, but that would have been an absurd haul for Denver. Let's compare it on the various trade value charts (Jimmy Johnson's old school one, Chase Stuart's Football Perspective chart and the Pats Pulpit post CBA chart).

Yikes. That would have been a massive win for the Broncos, in terms of acquiring draft capital. If you want a more realistic example of what could have been, how about just compare the players chosen.

The Broncos got Chubb at No. 5 and Oregon running back Royce Freeman at No. 71 overall.

With the 12th overall pick, the Buccaneers took defensive tackle Vita Vea, the Titans selected Rashaan Evans at No. 22 overall and the Buccaneers took M.J. Stewart with the 53rd overall pick.

Time will tell how those guys play out, but if we're just swapping the players involved, I'll take the group of two headlined by the blue-chip player in Chubb. It's really bizarre how that looks more appealing, despite what the Bills offered Denver looking like a clear win in terms of the value of the draft.

From an analytical approach, it's easy to see why the Broncos could get killed here. You need to have as many shots as you can shoot and they had Buffalo in a bad spot with that offer.

On the other hand, Beane knew it. He said he was basically bidding against himself, and he also started to panic after Elway bailed on No. 5 and the Colts declined to move out of No. 6 (both Peter King of TheMMQB.com and Stephen Holder of the Indy Star have reported Chris Ballard was locked into Quenton Nelson and not moving off his spot).

"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," Beane explained, noting his concern over the Dolphins and Cardinals both potentially moving up for a quarterback as well.

Beane's whole goal in the draft was to not give up a) his other first-round pick (No. 22) or b) his 2019 first-round pick. Ultimately he was able to swing a deal with the Bucs, giving GM Jason Licht a haul of No. 12, No. 53 and No. 56, in order to move up to No. 7 and snag Josh Allen.

The Bills GM, in his first draft, would jump back up to grab linebacker Tremaine Edmunds, closing the deal on a very nice haul in the first day of the draft, even if it's one that was expensive for them to move around.

It actually ended up being cheaper, though, and as it turned out, Chubb falling was probably the best thing that could have happened to the Bills. Without him there at No. 5, they give up their other first-round pick and don't walk out of the draft with Edmunds as well.

Union Files Grievance Against N.F.L. Supporting Eric Reid

By Victor Mather
New York Times
May 8, 2018

The N.F.L. Players Association filed a grievance against the league on behalf of Eric Reid on Monday.

Reid, a former San Francisco 49ers safety who has knelt during the national anthem at games for the past two seasons, had filed a grievance of his own last week against the N.F.L., saying the league had blackballed him because of his actions. After becoming a free agent following the 2017 season, he has yet to find a new team.

The former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who led a wave of sideline demonstrations against social injustice and police brutality against African-Americans, filed a similar grievance last season. It is still being adjudicated.

The players association said in a statement that the collective bargaining agreement had been violated in Reid's case. It contended that "A club appears to have based its decision not to sign a player based on the player's statement that he would challenge the implementation of a club's policy prohibiting demonstration."

It also claimed that "at least one club owner has asked pre-employment interview questions about a player's intent to demonstrate. We believe these questions are improper, given league policy."

The union did not identify the teams involved. Reid is known to have met with the Bengals.

The N.F.L. did not immediately reply to a request for comment. It had declined to comment after Reid filed his grievance last week.

NFL Players Association Fights Back Against NFL Over Anthem Protests

By Andrew Beaton
Wall Street Journal
May 8, 2018

The NFL Players Association filed a grievance on behalf of free agent safety Eric Reid, saying at least one owner has asked him about his intentions to protest during the national anthem, which the NFLPA said is improper and part of a broader issue that violates league policy.

The action escalates an already tense situation between the players and the league over the controversial anthem protests that have upended the league. This move is the NFLPA's first legal rebuke of the league over the national anthem policy and a direct challenge over how teams are handling the issue.

The NFLPA contends that because there is no league rule prohibiting player demonstrations during the anthem, and that the collective bargaining agreement says league rules supersede team rules, it violates the CBA for a team to not sign Reid based on a team rule that is "contrary" to league policy.

The NFLPA filed two cases in this matter. The first, a "non-injury grievance," challenges the actions of one team that the NFLPA says asked Reid about his intent to protest during the anthem and did not sign him because of that. That team is the Cincinnati Bengals, according to a person familiar with the matter. A spokesperson for the Bengals declined to comment.

The second, a "system arbitrator case" involves all 32 clubs and is on behalf of all players and is a broader legal skewer of how the league has handled the protests. While the NFL and commissioner Roger Goodell have said they respect the players' right to demonstrate, this challenges the actions of teams who may have policies that don't align with league rules or may have factored this into their decisions when it comes to free agents.

All of this comes after Reid filed a grievance last week against the league and all 32 teams alleging they have colluded to keep him unsigned because of his outspoken political views, following his former San Francisco 49ers teammate Colin Kaepernick, who did the same last season.

While Kaepernick was the most public face of the national anthem protests that began in 2016 to call attention to racial inequality and social injustices, Reid was right there with him continued to take a knee this last year while Kaepernick remained unsigned.

Kaepernick's grievance is ongoing and has been for months, in a case that has already involved depositions from notable figures such as Goodell, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones and Texans owner Bob McNair.

In a statement, the lawyers for Kaepernick and Reid said they support the NFLPA's filings and the fight against the NFL's "conspiracy and illegal acts."

“Colin and Eric have taken courageous action at the expense of their professional careers and personal lives,” Mark Geragos and Ben Meiselas, the attorneys for Reid and Kaepernick, said. “We stand shoulder to shoulder with the NFLPA in our fight for justice, equality and inalienable rights of all Americans.”

Previously, the NFL has declined to comment on Reid and Kaepernick’s grievances, citing the confidentiality of the process.

The NFLPA’s filing differs from the Kaepernick and Reid’s individual filings because to win, the NFLPA does not have to prove that teams colluded to keep players unsigned because of their political views. Instead, it argues that teams have violated league rules by asking improper questions and taking action that contradicts league policy.

NFL policy says that players “should” stand during the national anthem but does not say they “must”—a key point in this debate that faced heightened scrutiny this season when President Donald Trump, among others, assailed the continued protests as unpatriotic. NFL owners considered amending the rule during the season to mandate that players stand, but that never came to fruition and could still be addressed at coming meetings this off-season.

Leiweke defends Goodell's value to NFL

By Daniel Kaplan
Sports Business Journal
May 8, 2018

During his three-year stint as the No. 2 executive at the NFL, Tod Leiweke said very little publicly as the league careened from one crisis to another, from Deflategate to kneeling-gate.

One month after leaving to help bring an NHL team to Seattle, he's ready to open up, and he has some sharp words for those who attack the league, and in particular his old boss, Commissioner Roger Goodell.

"Complete, ridiculous malarkey," he said of the criticism levied at the commissioner. In fact, while many have taken shots at Goodell's \$30 million to \$40 million annual compensation in the past, Leiweke contended Goodell earns every penny if not more.

"I don't mean to make light of executive compensation — because I know these dollars, as a kid who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks if you will, one could make the case that many executives are paid so much more than school teachers, firemen, police officers — but I think Roger has added extraordinary value to the NFL," Leiweke said. "I am one guy who says, without really knowing the details of his contract, I don't think Roger Goodell is overpaid."

Leiweke came to the NFL from a long career in team sports, having served as the top executive on teams ranging from the NFL's Seattle Seahawks to the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning. When hired at the NFL, his role was to bring some of his team insight to a league office that was often criticized for being tone deaf and isolated from the clubs.

Asked why he is speaking out now, Leiweke replied that Goodell didn't like to hit back at detractors.

"There were times that I wanted to speak out, but that's not Roger's way. ... He doesn't parade around and say, 'Look how good I am.' Sometimes I wish we did a lot more of that for him."

"People just love taking shots and so be it, that's part of life, he accepts that," Leiweke said. "I guess I found it a little bit harder, I grit my teeth a little bit more, but you follow his lead."

That was the style during a pair of controversies last fall, President Donald Trump's broadside against the league over players protesting during the national anthem and the campaign by Cowboys owner Jerry Jones to restrict Goodell's new employment contract.

Asked about the recent New York Times story that detailed a meeting last October between players and owners in the aftermath of the Trump attack, Leiweke had harsh words for whomever released the audio recording of that discussion.

"Sometimes people do things that I think are dumb and unwise and go against the very being of the NFL, being a team sport and trust and all those things," he said. "It happens, it is unfortunate, and there were a couple of times it happened, and I wish I had known who had done it because you would have loved to confront that person."

Leiweke comes back often to a fact about the commissioner that he finds telling: Goodell keeps a Polaroid of himself as a young boy sleeping with a football. The point to Leiweke is that the old photo shows how much Goodell loves the game and does what he thinks is right.

“The NFL vital signs are very strong,” he said. “It’s not to say there are not challenges, but I think a little bit of the frustration for me were people ... seeing the challenges and not the good stuff.”

For Leiweke, that is what pains him when he sees Goodell being attacked.

“There were times that I wanted to speak out, but that’s not Roger’s way,” he said. “He is on the other hand a very humble guy and he doesn’t beat his chest. He doesn’t parade around and say, ‘Look how good I am.’ Sometimes I wish we did a lot more of that for him. Now I can say these words.”

Big leagues still have most leverage in media rights deals

By John Ourand
Sports Business Journal
May 8, 2018

As Fox Sports President and COO, Eric Shanks runs a traditional linear TV business that has bet on live sports rights as the best way to grow its business.

As Hulu's CEO, Randy Freer runs a disruptive digital business that has identified live sports as the best way for his company to entice subscribers.

During separate one-on-one interviews at last month's CAA World Congress of Sports in Los Angeles, both executives spoke of the power of sports in ways that should ease league fears that their cash cow — sports rights revenue — could be about to take a hit.

Many of the country's biggest sports leagues, including the NFL, NHL, MLB and NASCAR, will negotiate new media rights deals over the next two to five years. These leagues saw wild rights fees increases the last time their media rights were up for bid, fueled mainly by the growth of pay-TV networks like ESPN, FS1 and NBCSN, in addition to higher retransmission consent fees commanded by broadcast networks.

That red-hot market has slowed considerably, especially for those pay-TV networks that have dealt with dwindling subscriber bases combined with increasing rights fees payments. Worried that these networks may not fund more big rights fee increases, sports leagues have been courting deep-pocketed digital companies — Amazon, Facebook and Google — to sample their programming in the hopes that they will step in and become bidders for these packages.

Those digital companies have shown some interest — all have done smaller sports deals. So far, however, they have not made a big investment in sports, and several league executives are skeptical that they will be ready to replace the linear TV players during the next round of rights negotiations.

The sports-focused strategies outlined by Shanks and Freer last month show that the bigger leagues shopping live sports rights still have most of the leverage.

"As we evolve, we will look for ways to acquire more subscribers," said Freer, who used to be a top executive at Fox Sports. "Certainly, I have a long history in sports. I believe it's valuable. I believe it will help us acquire subscribers along the way. I think it has to be the right package or has to be the right components of it."

Right now, when Freer talks about Hulu's commitment to sports, he is talking about partnering with existing networks, which Hulu did with ESPN (around the College Football Playoff) and NBC (around the Olympics). During his on-stage interview, Freer did not rule out cutting rights deals directly with leagues. Those deals, though, would look a lot different from the linear packages leagues currently sell to TV channels.

“In today’s world, it’s bundled, it’s packaged, it’s a linear channel that ultimately gets a per sub fee and away you go,” he said. “Tomorrow, you’re going to see much more dynamic pricing.”

It’s a variation on what some executives have called the iTunes of sports. That means selling one Saturday of college football games to a Hulu subscriber who doesn’t want to pay for an entire season’s worth of games. It also could mean selling individual games — Freer brought up a Yankees-Red Sox game — for a specific price that still has not been determined.

“One of the bedrocks for why I think sports is important to direct-to-consumer businesses is because it has great value and you can offer it in a different way, reprice things, recreate value and give people the opportunity to come in and come out across the board,” Freer said. “Ultimately over time, sports rights will continue to prove their value. The challenge we all have is to innovate on how we distribute those rights to customers.”

While Fox is taking a more traditional route when it comes to sports, it sees the same value in sports programming. Fox is in the middle of selling its entertainment assets to Disney, which will put the focus of a new, smaller network on sports. Shanks did not talk about the underlying strategy behind what’s being called New Fox. But he did say that sports will be a big part of its programming strategy.

“Even before you think about New Fox or Current Fox, our desire to be the leader in sports started 25 years ago,” Shanks said. “Sports is watched live. The top of the sports pyramid is the events themselves. We see that they are consumed much more.”

That’s a situation Freer has noticed at Hulu, too. Video has divided up into two groups: on-demand, which is filled with entertainment programming; and live, which is dominated by sports and news. Up to 80 percent of Hulu’s live customers watched big sports events, like the Olympics or March Madness, when they were on, Freer said.

“We find that news and sports are heavily watched live on this service. Entertainment, as you would imagine, is flipped the other way,” Freer said. “Live sports is hugely important to us.”

Fox’s recent deal to pick up “Thursday Night Football” is a good example of how the network views live sports rights. The previous “Thursday Night Football” rights holders — CBS and NBC — said they lost money on the package and put forward tepid bids to renew it. Fox came in with a bid that would pay the NFL more money for a longer period of time.

How does Fox believe it can make money where other broadcasters couldn’t?

“It starts with the strategic goal of being the leader in live,” Shanks said. “We’re big believers in football and big believers in the NFL. The thing that was unique about the opportunity of Thursday night was that this really was a different opportunity than they had presented in the past. It was a longer term, which was unique and lets you have predictability in your investment. It also allows you to not only have a conversation around advertising but also around retrans and building your broadcast stations and broadcast network over a longer period of time. The length of the term combined with the fact that you’re able to have consistency during the season — all 11 games are on Fox with weeks one and two and the later games being on NFL Network. It really made sense to us.”

Former SMU receiver Courtland Sutton talks pairing up with Emmanuel Sanders in Denver

By Adam Grosbard

Dallas News

May 8, 2018

With 17 former SMU football players in the NFL, it's to be expected that a few of them would overlap and play with each other. But former Mustang Courtland Sutton hit it big when he was drafted by the Denver Broncos.

Sutton joins another former SMU receiver, Emmanuel Sanders, in the Mile High City. As Sutton noted in an interview with NFL Network recently, he's been chasing Sanders' name in Dallas for a long time.

"It's awesome. I chased all of his records while I was here at SMU. Basically every record at SMU is his. Well, was his," Sutton said. "My job at SMU was to get as many as I could while I could. I got a lot of them, he got to keep a few just because he had some unbelievable records there. So for me to be able to get some of those was awesome."

Sutton finished his SMU career sixth all-time in receptions (189), third in receiving yards (3,152) and second in receiving touchdowns (31). While Sanders still holds all those records, he did so in four years. Sutton only played in three at SMU and was in striking distance of both the receiving yards and receiving touchdowns marks had he stayed for his senior season.

In the NFL Network interview, Sutton reflected on joining forces with Sanders.

"For me to have the opportunity to play along side of him is something crazy," Sutton said. "We actually were talking a little bit earlier about coming from small towns and then going to a smaller college and then being able to play with each other in the NFL, you couldn't write a better story than that."

Panthers signing running back C.J. Anderson

By Darin Gantt
Pro Football Talk
May 8, 2018

The Panthers had a vacancy for a traditional running back after not finding one in the draft, so they found a 1,000-yard rusher.

A league source tells PFT that the Panthers have signed veteran running back C.J. Anderson.

Anderson was released by the Broncos, despite rushing for 1,007 yards last season. A number of teams were interested, but the Panthers might have had the greatest need.

In Carolina, he provides a solid complement to Christian McCaffrey, who has varied skills but may not ever be an every-down back. Otherwise, they had Cameron Artis-Payne and Fozzy Whittaker, a thin group after they released Jonathan Stewart.

C.J. Anderson expects “great complementary” relationship with Christian McCaffrey

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
May 8, 2018

Running back C.J. Anderson signed a one-year contract with the Panthers on Monday and told the media a short time later that he’s in Carolina because he believes the team’s approach “definitely fits my style and my game.”

As you’d expect, that includes their approach to offensive football but it extends to the team’s slogan and their decision to feature Christian McCaffrey in the backfield.

“As far as ground and pound, the “Keep Pounding” slogan that Carolina likes to [use], the ground and pound game I think fits [me] well,” Anderson said, via the Charlotte Observer. “Breaking tackles and finding ways to use that to make long runs and bigger plays, also catching the ball out of the backfield, too. But having a guy like McCaffrey, who’s super shifty and also can do some of the same things, it can be a great complementary [relationship] with each other.”

Jonathan Stewart played 403 snaps and carried the ball 198 times last season, which would mark a downtick from Anderson’s workload in Denver last year while still allowing him a chance to have a big impact on the Panthers offense. Making the most of that chance would help the Panthers and set Anderson up to hit the market on a higher note than his release from Denver this offseason.

NFLPA pursuing two challenges to NFL's anthem policy and practices

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
May 8, 2018

Many have wondered why the NFL Players Association hasn't taken an aggressive stand against the league in connection with the application (i.e., misapplication) of its anthem policy by multiple teams. That's about to change.

Per a source with knowledge of the situation, the NFL will be pursuing a pair of grievances arising from the anthem issue.

The first grievance, technically a "non-injury grievance" under the labor deal, comes on behalf of safety Eric Reid against the Bengals and all clubs he may have spoken with. This grievance arises from questions posed to Reid by Bengals owner Mike Brown regarding whether he intends to continue to demonstrate during the anthem.

The second grievance seeks a "system arbitration" against the NFL and all teams regarding the league's failure to enforce the absence of a policy that mandates standing. By allowing, for example, teams to ask players whether they intend to demonstrate as part of pre-employment communications, the NFL is permitting teams to disregard the fact that no league rule prohibits demonstrations. Indeed, the only rule on the books preserves the right of players to demonstrate during the national anthem — and that right was confirmed by the NFL in 2016 and reiterated by the league in 2017.

"Colin and Eric have taken courageous action at the expense of their professional careers and personal lives," attorney Mark Geragos, who represents both players in a separate collusion grievance, said in a statement. "They did these selfless acts because they wanted to shine light on inequity and oppression. Today they welcome all NFL Players who have joined in the prosecution of the NFL for their conspiracy and illegal acts. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the NFLPA in our fight for justice, equality and inalienable rights of all Americans."

The NFL is now defending four separate actions arising from its approach to the anthem issue. More could be coming.

NFL finds itself in middle of unprosecuted sexual assault case from 2005

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
May 8, 2018

The NFL finds itself caught in the middle of a situation that cries out for the justice that it never received when it happened more than a decade ago.

Via the New York Post, the lawyer currently representing Luisa Esposito has asked Commissioner Roger Goodell to encourage Lisa Friel, the league's special counsel for investigations to take action in a case that fell under her jurisdiction when the situation arose in 2005.

Esposito contends that attorney Allen Isaac groped her and demanded sexual favors from her in connection with representation stemming from an automobile accident. Esposito managed to capture one of her meetings with Isaac on tape, and it was enough to get him kicked out of the Wall Street law firm he founded. However, Isaac never was prosecuted.

So why Friel? At the time, she led the Manhattan District Attorney's Sex-Crimes Unit, and she didn't prosecute Isaac. So Esposito's new lawyer, Peter Gleason, wants Goodell to tell Friel to tell the DA to move on the case.

On the surface, the approach seems nonsensical. Why would the DA's office listen to Friel, years after she left the job? (Besides, the DA's office seems to indeed be acting on the case.) At a deeper level, the strategy makes plenty of sense, because Gleason has managed to use the NFL connection as a way to bring attention to the story — and possibly to achieve justice for his client, 13 years after the fact.