

Broncos report to rookie mini-camp with large corps of former college team captains

By Kyle Frederickson

The Denver Post

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Phillip Lindsay broke down the vibe on Day 1 of Broncos rookie mini-camp in terms easily understood.

“We’re babies right now,” he said.

Denver’s crop of 10 NFL draftees and eight undrafted free agent signings gathered Friday morning at Dove Valley for several player seminars with wide-ranging topics as an introduction to life in the NFL. While the newcomers lack pro playing experience, they feature no lack of experience in leadership. Nine of the Broncos’ 10 draft picks were team captains at least one season in college, and the odd man out, Boston College CB Isaac Yiadom, was given the 2017 Jay McGillis Award for the BC defensive back that best displays “team dedication and leadership by example.”

And Lindsay, a three-time Colorado Buffaloes team captain at tailback, spearheads a group of undrafted free agents with well-documented leadership qualities.

“A ton of great players and a ton of talent that, honestly, is surprising that we could get all of us on the same team,” said former Penn State wide receiver DaeSean Hamilton, a fourth-round pick. “A lot of these guys are just 21 or 22 years old, but they’re really mature above their age. Like you said, team captains in college and really leaders of their team. ... I can tell they have a great work ethic and are really excited to get started.”

Sam Jones, a former ThunderRidge High School/Arizona State offensive lineman selected in the sixth round, added: “I’m impressed just sitting in all of these administrative meetings. It’s a good group of guys for sure.”

However, the overwhelming confidence and outspoken leadership qualities that made many of these rookies NFL prospects will likely be dialed back in the early going this offseason. Broncos’ coach Vance Joseph told reporters following the draft he believes every pick “will have a chance to compete.” That requires time to adjust.

“I have to get in where I fit in, and right now that’s learning, listening and being quiet,” Lindsay said. “My place is to listen to the veterans and listen to the coaches and take what they want and establish it on the football field.” The decision to bring on so many prominent leaders from the college game is no coincidence as Denver hopes to end a two-season playoff drought.

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

Broncos' Brandon McManus seeks repeat captain title for bounce-back special teams play

By Kyle Frederickson

The Denver Post

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If the role of an NFL team captain is to lead by words and actions to inspire teammates, then the task ahead for Brandon McManus might look daunting. You can only do so much as a kicker.

"It's tough to be a completely vocal leader at a kicking position," McManus said. Now, more than ever, though, it's time to speak up.

Among the more criticized shortcomings of Denver's 5-11 season last fall was abysmal special teams play. Riley Dixon had two punts blocked. Return man Isaiah McKenzie muffed six punts and lost two. The Broncos had three special teams penalties in a loss at Buffalo. They gave up a kick return touchdown against the Patriots and a punt return touchdown to the Chargers. And, in a pair of games, Denver featured two special teams penalties on the same play.

Even McManus, a 2017 special teams captain, wasn't immune. He missed five field goals in the first five games, including having a kick blocked against the Giants and another blocked by the Bengals in November. McManus blamed his early miscues on a kink in his form, when he too often hit the ground before connecting his foot with the ball. He refined his footwork and finished the season strong, making 16 of his last 19 field goals.

If Denver's special teams has any chance for a rebound season, the Broncos need McManus to be more consistent. He's one of just 17 players left on the roster from Denver's 2015 Super Bowl season.

"I've been here five years now, so even though it's still a young team, I'm one of the older guys here now," McManus said. "I know that they respect me. They see me working hard in the weight room, running and competing with these guys. I'll be able to speak up a little more this year than I have in the past."

The Broncos' special teams will be under the direction of first-year coordinator Tom McMahon, who replaces the fired Brock Olivo. McManus said he had contact with McMahon while exploring the free agent market in 2014 after being undrafted out of Temple. McManus called McMahon a "great motivator, leader and he's not afraid to let you hear it on the field. So you guys will hear it during training camp."

McManus will also transition to a third different holder in three seasons with the addition of punter Marquette King, formerly with the Raiders.

"The biggest challenge we'll have this year is that Marquette is used to holding for a lefty," McManus said. "Now he has to transfer over to a righty."

McManus was proud to wear the white "C" emblem on his jersey last fall — and he aims to wear it again when team captains for offense, defense and special teams are announced in September. "I'll do everything I can to prove during training camp and OTAs that I do deserve to be that (captain)," McManus said.

Ryan O'Halloran hired as The Denver Post's lead Denver Broncos reporter

By Scott Monserud

The Denver Post

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The last time Ryan O'Halloran covered a football game in Denver, the Broncos were a 27-point favorite against the Jacksonville Jaguars in October 2013.

Now, the Jaguars are winning and the Broncos are trying to return to their past glory. And O'Halloran will be there every step of the way to cover the Broncos for The Denver Post. O'Halloran comes to Denver from the Florida Times-Union, where he covered the Jaguars as the lead beat reporter for the paper since 2012.

He has won national Associated Press Sports Editor's awards for his beat coverage two of the past three years.

This will be O'Halloran's 15th season covering the NFL, including eight years on the Washington Redskins' beat, most of that time with The Washington Times.

"What an opportunity the Post has offered me," he said. "For as long as I have covered the NFL, its Broncos coverage has been one of the standards to follow."

O'Halloran will be returning closer to his roots. He is a native of West Fargo, North Dakota and graduated from Kansas State University. Upon graduation, he worked for the Glens Falls Post-Star and Newport News Daily Press before joining the Washington Times staff.

"Sure, we'll be on top of the news, but we'll tell great stories and provide insight on a daily basis, too" O'Halloran said. "Some of my most well received stories included breaking down one play from the view of a half-dozen sources or telling about the life of a player who previously was unknown to readers and fans."

As for the Broncos, he knows they have some work to do. "My first bold prediction? We won't see that kind of point spread this year," he said. (The Broncos won that 2013 game against Jacksonville, 35-19, by the way.)

His first day on the beat will be May 16. Follow him on Twitter at @ryanohalloran.

9NEWS reporter addresses Broncos' rookie during media seminar

By Mike Klis

9 News

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The problem was Patrick Smyth got to the kids before I did.

Broncos rookies have so much to learn, including how to deal with the media. This is where Smyth, the Rozelle Award-winning public relations boss, invited me to offer the media's perspective on covering the team as part of the Broncos' rookie minicamp.

And not just any team. The biggest beat in town, no matter how the folks at the Avalanche, Nuggets, Rockies or city hall think they're doing.

My presentation included mock interviews with outside linebacker Bradley Chubb, inside linebacker Josey Jewell and running back Phillip Lindsay.

I asked Chubb, the Broncos' first-round and No. 5 overall draft choice, if had a sack total goal for his rookie season.

"Yeah, I have goals but I want to keep that personal," Chubb said. "I don't want to say one thing and have everybody be disappointed if I don't reach that goal. I just want to come in and be the best player I can be."

I know Smyth. And I know he talked to the rookies a good hour before I was allowed into the makeshift press room at the Pat Bowlen Fieldhouse. Clearly, Smyth warned the rooks about the dangers of proclaiming goals.

Jewell, a three-time captain at Iowa, answered questions about his playing time and imposing his leadership will on the team by always deferring to whatever the coaches decide.

Lindsay, one of the eight undrafted rookies in the media class, was asked if he would be disappointed if he started the season on the practice squad.

"I'm here to compete and just enjoy what I'm doing right now," said the former University of Colorado star. "I have great teammates, a great rookie class, and I just want to learn from the veterans."

OK, guys. Those were great answers for Channels 2, 4, 7, 31 and websites. Now let's break out the headline-grabbing answers for 9NEWS.

Seriously, this was the fourth consecutive year I had the privilege of addressing the team's rookie class on behalf of the media.

They are not in Kansas anymore, where even the lowly Jayhawk players primarily receive positive stories.

This is the pros, where the reviews are balanced. You get the good and the bad.

"I guess we consider ourselves critics," I told the group. "You guys go to the movies. You never acted.

But you know what a good movie is when you see one. You know a bad movie when you see one.

"Even though most of us, me included, never played anywhere close to the level you did, we think we know how you're supposed to play."

A couple of points I wanted to convey: Respect us, and you'll get respect back. And be available whether you're the hero or the goat.

I used Rahim Moore as an example. Even though Moore's final-second stumble was the pivotal play in the Broncos losing a second-round home playoff game against underdog Baltimore to finish the 2012 season, he stood in front of his locker afterwards and answered all questions, took all blame, and generally received as much sympathy and respect as he did blame.

"There's going to be times when you don't necessarily like us because of our critiques," I said in front of the room. "But if you stand there in good times and in bad -- and especially the bad times is where you gain the respect of the media and the press."

After my 7-minute talk and before the mock interviews, Smyth stepped in to review some ways the media can position a question that can lead a player into saying something regrettable.

One of his points was on, "off the record." Every journalist goes off the record in hopes of attaining information without the source worrying about attribution.

"Your name won't be used, but what you say may be," I told the Broncos rookies. "You can trust me with 'off record' but nobody else."

What? The rookies might as well learn it can be just as competitive in the press box as the game we cover.

Rookies crowd Broncos' running back room

By Mike Klis

9 News

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If you're good enough, you don't get recruited to an NFL team. You get drafted.

But with 1,000-yard rusher C.J. Anderson released last month, David Williams was glad he got drafted in the seventh round by the Denver Broncos two weeks ago.

"If it was me in college, I would go to this school if this was a school because the situation is good," he said Friday during the Broncos' rookie orientation.

The Broncos' running back room was uniquely put together. Anderson's departure made room for Devontae Booker, the Broncos' fourth-round pick in 2016. De'Angelo Henderson was a sixth-round selection in 2017. Royce Freeman (third round), Williams (seventh round) and Phillip Lindsay (premium undrafted free agent) were brought in as rookies for 2018.

That's a room crowded with youth.

"You need competition," Lindsay said. "It's healthy. First, I want to say that my teammates in that room are great running backs and I'm learning from all of them. From Royce to David Williams, to soon the veterans like Devontae Booker and Henderson, I'm excited for it. That's all I can ask for is an opportunity."

Booker figures to be the lead back through the offseason and into training camp with Freeman getting a chance to eventually become a 1B back.

Why aren't teams signing safeties?

By Jeremy Fowler

ESPN

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Morgan Burnett spent the first week of free agency hanging with his wife and kids instead of scrolling Twitter for free-agency updates. He'd already been briefed by his agent, Kevin Conner, in his Atlanta offices, poring over every possibility: available players, comps to previous years, teams that might fulfill safety needs in the draft.

The Pittsburgh Steelers, traditionally not huge spenders, were attractive because they support veteran players.

"I'm confident in my skill set and [knew] that one day I would get a call," Burnett said from the Steelers facility on March 20, the day he signed a \$14.35 million contract over three years.

While Burnett was calm and content, the rest of the safety market was shaken. That's no fault of Burnett, who's a quality player on his third NFL contract after eight years with the Green Bay Packers.

But this was a nice deal at a not-so-nice time for the position. That same day, one representative of a free-agent safety texted "ugh" because reality had set in: The money was drying up.

The first two months of free agency left an obvious question for the league: What is going on with the NFL safety?

A position known for its helmeted hulks, center-field-like range and Ronnie Lott highlights has become an afterthought in team spending.

The numbers from this year's free agency tell the story:

Every offensive or defensive position saw at least one player score a contract worth \$30 million or more ... except safety, with Kurt Coleman getting \$16.5 million from the New Orleans Saints before free agency.

Four different positions had at least five players earn \$20 million or more.

On average, the seven highest-paid cornerbacks can earn up to \$38.9 million, while the safeties average \$8.62 million under the same setup.

Even kickers (\$34 million!) are worth nearly as much as strong safeties (\$34.4 million).

"It tells you it's just a position where maybe safety is the new running back, a position that's not very valued, particularly in light of the free-agent talent," said J.I. Halsell, a former salary-cap analyst with the Washington Redskins.

Eric Reid's collusion case against the NFL doesn't wholly account for this disparity: Seven of Rotoworld's top 10 safeties remain on the market, while no other position has less than four.

Trying to get a sensible explanation elicits a wide range of responses. Some blame a temporary lull similar to what running backs experienced in recent years. Good safety depth in the draft didn't help. One NFL executive floated a theory that safeties are easy to hide if a team would rather spend big on corners and pass-rushers in today's speed game.

But Conner's notes tell him four safeties -- Tony Jefferson, Micah Hyde, Barry Church, Johnathan Cyprien -- signed deals worth between \$25 to \$34 million just last year.

"The caveat is you can never predict what happens until it happens," Conner said. "It was unpredictably slow and extremely surprising it was slow [this year] based on what happened in previous years."

A really good safety can still erase tons of problems for a defense while essentially playing three positions: safety, inside corner against tight ends, and linebacker in subpackages.

And not many dispute that Reid, Tre Boston and Kenny Vaccaro -- widely considered the top three safeties left -- can still play. They might not do everything well, but they add value.

Reid is a former Pro Bowler, Boston had five interceptions for the Los Angeles Chargers last season and Vaccaro is a former first-round pick.

"I'm still kind of confused as to why some of those players aren't signed," said Matt Bowen, a seven-year NFL safety who's now an ESPN football analyst. "If I'm a coach, I can use them. Those guys we're talking about are really good football players."

Bowen isn't sure what those players' agents feel is appropriate value, but as far as positional value, Bowen believes it's higher than ever because of today's pass-happy game. Safeties must have ball skills, cover freakish tight ends and clean up in the running game.

"If you don't have safeties against Julio Jones, good luck," Bowen said.

This year's NFL draft validated Bowen's words as eight safeties went in the top 100, tied with defensive ends.

But that's good and bad for the position, and the Steelers glorified both sides by signing Burnett to a good but not massive deal, then doubling down with Terrell Edmunds in the first round and Marcus Allen in the fifth. This sets the stage to run three safeties on the field on third downs to help offset the loss of linebacker Ryan Shazier.

As Steelers coach Mike Tomlin pointed out on draft day, versatility is "probably something indicative of the safety position in today's NFL. Not only are they capable safeties but in subpackage defense when you start putting DBs down in the box."

Only high-level versatility gets paid.

As one NFL safety who recently retired points out, Kansas City's Eric Berry and Minnesota's Harrison Smith have deals worth a combined max of \$129 million because they are the rare prototypes who can cover Rob Gronkowski one down and knock a running back the next.

Most safeties can't do both, so why pay? Defenses are being built outside-in, the safety said, accentuating the need for good corners.

Tyrann Mathieu was an intriguing option as the classic 25-year-old hybrid who can play corner or safety and loves to fly around the field. But past injuries and a so-so 2017 season left him with a one-year, \$7 million deal with the Houston Texans.

What's surprising to Halsell is first-round picks (Reid, Vaccaro) not getting second chances. Most high picks get at least one.

But offensive linemen will continue to get paid because linemen in the draft aren't great. They are more of a free-agent commodity as a result.

Maybe 2019 free-agent-to-be safeties Ha Ha Clinton-Dix and LaMarcus Joyner, fresh off a franchise tag, can change things, just like Le'Veon Bell and Todd Gurley surely will for running backs.

"It's in part about getting those deals at the right time," Halsell said.

The Broncos no longer have a full-fledged rookie minicamp. Here's what Vance Joseph's team is doing instead.

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
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It happened on Day 2 of the Broncos' 2015 rookie minicamp, on a non-contact special-teams drill, no less. Jeff Heurman, the team's prized third-round pick who was supposed to be the team's answer to the loss of Julius Thomas, suffered an ACL tear that would end his rookie season before it ever began.

That same weekend, Jacksonville's No. 3 overall selection, defensive end Dante Fowler, tore his ACL in Day 1 of their rookie minicamp. His first time on the field as a Jaguar — over.

The injuries not only delayed the pro careers of Heurman and Fowler, but also hindered their production the last two seasons; they've started nine games combined over the last two years.

"It sucked. There's no other way to put it," Heurman said last summer. "Everything — not being on the field, being in a new city, having a blown-out knee and not being able to do a lot of things you want to do, the rehab, trying to feel like you fit in but you haven't done anything. It was a physical and mental battle going through something like that, especially at that time."

Heurman and Fowler, unfortunately, are not alone.

Last year, the Browns' fourth-round pick they traded up to select, cornerback Howard Wilson, fractured his patella during rookie camp. This year, the Browns' No. 4 overall selection, cornerback Denzel Ward, suffered a hamstring injury in minicamp. Ward, remember, is the reason the Broncos landed Bradley Chubb at No. 5 in the draft.

The injuries suffered by rookies during teams' brief window to introduce them to the league has prompted many teams to scale back the on-field work. The Broncos are one of them.

The year after Heurman suffered his injury, former coach Gary Kubiak said he adjusted rookie minicamp to reduce the amount of 11-on-11 work and contract drills.

When Vance Joseph was hired a year later, he brought with him a philosophy that had recently been implemented in Miami by coach Adam Gase: Eliminate the full minicamp practices. Cut out the risk and instead focus on the adjustment rookies face as the newcomers so they're ready to go when the vets return.

"We're actually learning how to be pros, and that's what it's about," undrafted running back Phillip Lindsay said. "We're not in college anymore and we have to take it to another level. They're teaching us how to be a pro from different standpoints. It's exciting, but you have to be learning and listening at all times."

Thursday, the Broncos' 10 drafted rookies and eight college free agents reported to the team's Dove Valley facility and, by Friday, were immediately thrown into hours of meetings and introductions.

They received their iPads and learned how to navigate their digital playbooks and film cut-ups.

"Actually I just asked the video guys here with the Broncos to put a lot of Emmanuel Sanders' tape on my iPad specifically so that I can just watch and learn," receiver DaeSean Hamilton said. "By the time I get on the field with him and a lot of other vets like Demaryius Thomas and a lot of the other guys, I can really just go in and have questions and learn as much as I possibly can from them."

They heard from team trainers on the various programs they offer and the expectations for reporting injuries.

They had a social media lesson, and met with equipment managers for helmet fittings and run-down of locker-room etiquette.

They heard from the team's nutritionists about customized plans, and they heard from their head coach on the expectations in team meetings and on the field.

"I will say it's a lot more educational," linebacker Keishawn Bierria said. "It's just another step in the process for us. They're giving us a lot of information that we have to pick up, a lot of things we should've probably learned in college or high school, but it's all useful. It's pretty much informational and education for us."

Included in their three-day orientation is light on-field work that is essentially a walkthrough. But with no minicamp, there are no minicamp tryouts.

"I think the evaluation is over. We've drafted and signed these guys," Joseph explained last summer. "The evaluation process is behind us. It's more now about getting guys ready to play NFL football. In my opinion, to have a tryout and evaluate our guys that we drafted, it's too late. We've drafted and we've signed for agents. So that part is over. It's time to help these guys become NFL players."

For much of the previous four months, rookies trained almost daily for track events at the combine and their pro days. Although they're physically well-conditioned, they're not in football shape, increasing the risk of injury. And safety, the Broncos say, is paramount to anything gained in three days of spring practice before the playbook is fully implemented.

They learned that first-hand three years ago.

Broncos Phillip Lindsay, Sam Jones, DaeSean Hamilton, Josey Jewell discuss first day

By Troy Renck

KMGH

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Dreams collided with reality on Friday.

Phillip Lindsay and Sam Jones had to pinch themselves as local kids wearing Broncos team-issued gear for the first time. DaeSean Hamilton and Josey Jewell had to adjust to the altitude, recognizing they were not at sea level anymore.

The Broncos rookies arrived on Thursday and went through orientation on Friday morning and a workout in the afternoon. The first practice available for media viewing arrives Saturday.

The new kids received a blizzard of information on how to be pros at Dove Valley.

"It's surreal," said Lindsay, an undrafted free agent, who will wear No. 2. "It's about being accountable to your teammates, to your coaches, to yourself. I have to get in where I fit in, and right now that's learning and listening and being quiet. My place is to listen to the veterans and listen to the coaches, take what they want and establish it on the football field."

Lindsay and Jones not only share a lifelong affinity for the Broncos -- Jones admired All-Pro guard Mark Schlereth growing up -- but a similar path to the roster. Versatility remains critical. Lindsay will return punts, kicks and work as a slot receiver, if possible. Jones can play multiple positions along the offense line. He hopes working out with the likes of Ron Leary before the draft will accelerate his progress.

"Those guys are where I want to be. They are obviously a couple years ahead of me on the journey. Just anything that I can soak up from the vets is obviously super valuable to me. They are all great guys. They've all been helping me out," Jones said. "I feel like I fit in well. I'm excited to get to work."

Hamilton, who will don No. 17, brings a reputation as a precise route runner, with the Broncos hopeful he will challenge for snaps as a slot receiver. George Coghill, a former Bronco, served as his position coach in high school. As such, Hamilton arrived with insight to Denver and the Broncos. One thing Hamilton brings is an edge. He was not thrilled with how long it took for his name to get called during the draft.

"Absolutely, but that is my mentality. I could have been a first-round pick or undrafted, I could have been anywhere into the late rounds, and I would've had a chip on my shoulder, regardless," said Hamilton, who impressed the Broncos with his work at the Senior Bowl. "I just have high expectations for myself. I'm just willing to work hard no matter where I could have been or where I would've gotten drafted at. I'm just going to work hard and make the most out of every opportunity I get."

Jewell brings a nickname -- The Outlaw -- and a reputation as sound tackler. He paid attention to the fine print in college, learning and mastering his technique on hits. Will that translate to the pro level? Speed will be a question, but not football IQ or a willingness to play multiple roles.

"This defense is crazy. They've got a lot of playmakers on the defense already. Bringing in the other draft picks up on the front end. They're just good all-around and it's an exciting thing to be part of," said Jewell, who will wear No. 47. "Hopefully I can come into special teams and help the coaches, help the players as much as possible there. Then if my role extends, that'd be awesome. Whatever the coaches see fit."

Lindsay willing to play any role to latch on with Broncos

By Pat Graham
Associated Press
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The fieriness of undrafted rookie running back Phillip Lindsay will be put on the backburner.

Not for long, just for now.

The former Colorado standout known as the "Tasmanian Devil " for his relentless motor is all ears these days in the Denver Broncos' meeting room.

"I have to get in where I fit in. Right now, that's learning and listening and being quiet," Lindsay said on the first day of rookie orientation Friday. "My place is to listen to the veterans and coaches and take what they want and establish it on the football field."

That also means lining up wherever the Broncos want him to line up. He's willing to return kickoffs and punts, play special teams, become a situational running back, even line up as a slot receiver.

Anything to make this roster. He's got a solid chance especially given this: At least one rookie college free agent has made the Broncos' active roster out of training camp in 13 of the last 14 years, including Pro Bowl cornerback Chris Harris in 2011.

"I'm just going to showcase everything," Lindsay said.

Being from Denver, Lindsay gets asked all the time by his fellow rookies about his city. He's sort of Denver's first ambassador, along with rookie offensive lineman Sam Jones, who's a sixth-round pick out of Arizona State and also hails from the Mile High City.

"A lot of times they think (Denver) is just cold," Lindsay said. "Now, they get to see it's dry, it's hot. It's beautiful."

It didn't take long for Lindsay to have his first welcome-to-pro-football moment by simply walking into the locker room.

"It's like, 'Dang, it's really here,'" Lindsay said. "Now it's time for me to go and seize the moment."

While with the Buffaloes, Lindsay was an integral piece of the offense as he recorded back-to-back 1,000-yard rushing seasons. The 5-foot-8, 190-pound running back brought an edge and intensity to the backfield, but didn't get selected in the recent draft.

Still, he feels like he landed in a good situation with his hometown team. Lindsay joins a backfield that counts Devontae Booker as its veteran after severing ties with C.J. Anderson. Royce Freeman was drafted in the third round out of Oregon to play a big role as well.

Lindsay and Freeman — two Pac-12 tailbacks Jones saw plenty of while at Arizona State.

"I'm excited to wear the same jersey as him and Phil now, instead of having them run all over our defense," Jones said. "We can run all over somebody else."

Lindsay impressed the Broncos brass and coaching staff at his pro day by turning in a time of 4.39 seconds in his 40-yard dash. He also shined at the Shrine Game, where he drew some comparisons to New England running back James White.

"But I don't want to be like anybody else," Lindsay said. "I want to be like Phillip Lindsay, establishing myself with special teams and getting into the playbook as a running back. ... I'm happy to be a part of the team and I'm ready to get things going."

NOTES: Jones said he's been learning the playbook under the tutelage of Broncos OL Connor McGovern. "Definitely a leg up going into camp," Jones said. ... WR DaeSean Hamilton of Penn State was wearing big glasses that would've made LB Von Miller proud. "I took notice of the type of glasses that he wears," said Hamilton, a fourth-round selection. "I like really fancy glasses, big glasses." ... David Williams, a seventh-round pick out of Arkansas, said of the wide-open running back competition: "It's actually a great situation. If it was me in college, I'd go to this school — if it was a school — because the situation is so good." ... LB Keishawn Bierria, a sixth-round pick from Washington, on learning the playbook: "It's a lot. But that's why we have the vets. We have the vets to lean on. They'll also serve as teachers for us, too. The more time we spend with them and get knowledge from them, it will be a lot easier." ... ILB Josey Jewell, a fourth-round pick out of Iowa, is fond of his nickname The Outlaw. "It happened in college and hopefully it keeps going," Jewell said.

Josey Jewell finds Iowa-esque vibe in Denver

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

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When Josey Jewell journeyed to Denver for an in-person visit ahead of the 2018 NFL Draft, he felt a familiar connection.

After four years in Iowa City, Iowa playing for the Hawkeyes, Jewell had grown accustomed to the close-knit, familial feel often attributed to Midwestern towns.

He sensed the same sort of attitude in the altitude.

“It was my favorite place out of the three that I visited,” Jewell said. “It’s a special place, and I can’t wait to keep on working here.”

Asked what about Denver helped earn that distinction, Jewell pointed to the culture he sensed from the players and coaches.

“It feels like what I grew up with, going to Iowa and then coming here,” Jewell said. “It’s just an amazing culture and a winning culture.”

The Broncos used a fourth-round draft pick to guarantee Jewell would wind up in Denver for the foreseeable future. In doing so, President of Football Ops./General Manager John Elway secured an intriguing talent.

Jewell, who was named the 2017 Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year and a consensus All-American, may have been the best tackler in the nation.

He finished the 2017 season with 132 tackles — which led the conference — and he ranks second in tackles in Big Ten history.

What’s his secret to a skill that’s become a lost art around the NFL?

“It’s a lot of fundamental stuff that we worked on,” Jewell said. “I think the coaches back in college really helped me out with that. Just being able to focus on that — and it’s all about small details. Being able to wrap up and roll, just depending on what kind of tackle you’re supposed to make. That’s all the coaches.”

Jewell hopes to first display his technique on special teams. And if his role extends from there to share snaps with Todd Davis and Brandon Marshall, he’d welcome that opportunity, as well.

For the moment, Jewell will focus on the stiff competition that will come from a “crazy” defense that has plenty of playmakers.

“I’m just ready for this opportunity,” Jewell said. “[I’m] ready to get out on the field and play with other guys.”

'Now this is your job' -- How rookie orientation prepares players for what is to come

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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The rookies' first weekend with the Broncos isn't what it used to be -- but that doesn't mean it's less beneficial than the days with more extensive on-field work.

Above all, this weekend is about getting the Broncos' rookie class ready for the rigors of the NFL that await them over the coming weeks, months -- and, hopefully, years. The expectations and demands in pro football are beyond what any of these players have experienced. Friday, they began learning about what awaits them.

"It's just the mental aspect. Everything's just different," running back Phillip Lindsay said. "You're coming from college, where you had classes and you had time off. Now this is your job." It's a job, and like any full-time position in the workforce, it will be a defining aspect of the rookies' lives.

"You're really doing a lot of introduction work, for how the NFLPA and things of that sort go," fourth-round wide receiver DaeSean Hamilton said. "Basically, the dos and don'ts of the NFL, how to have a long, successful career, and what to do after your career is over, and those types of meetings."

Beyond that information, the rookies received another message -- one about accountability, a word stamped on the workout T-shirts some of them wore as they met the media Friday.

"They've got us focused on understanding what we have to do while we're here ... just how to carry ourselves and how to be ready," sixth-round inside linebacker Keishawn Bierria said. "They're teaching us why it's important to be accountable and just [how to] compete."

After focusing on off-field issues, Hamilton said the tone of the meetings shifted from preparing for life in the NFL to more football-centric matters. Those meetings provide the coaches a chance to hammer home a message that sticks with players.

"I think the biggest [message] is, 'Win championships,' and that's the biggest thing," fourth-round inside linebacker Josey Jewell said. "You come in here, it's not to [just] get to the playoffs, it's to be able to get to that championship at the end of the year."

"And the other thing for us -- especially as rookies -- is to do more than expected. It was another big thing that we all wrote down in our notes."

Doing more means putting in time beyond the mandated hours in practice and meetings, especially since the rookies have plenty of ground to cover. "You start at six o'clock in the morning to whenever the job is done for you," Lindsay said. "It's never going to be done for me, because I'm playing catch-up."

"I'm a rookie. I'm coming in and veterans are all ahead of us, so we need to get caught up with them so that we can be a part of the team."

How did Lions miss Matt Patricia's arrest? Former NFL executive admits it wouldn't be hard

By Dave Birkett

Detroit Free Press, USA Today

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Joe Banner ran two coaching searches as president of the Philadelphia Eagles, and two more as CEO of the Cleveland Browns.

And while most people can't fathom how the Detroit Lions failed to uncover Matt Patricia's 1996 arrest during their month long coaching search, Banner had an entirely different response when he stumbled across the news Thursday morning on Twitter.

"My reaction when I saw it was, 'Oh my God, this could have happened to me,' " Banner said. "This could have happened to almost anybody."

Patricia has vehemently denied any wrongdoing in the 22-year-old case, saying Thursday, "I was innocent then and I am innocent now."

He and a friend were charged with one count of aggravated sexual assault during a spring break trip to South Padre Island, Texas. The two were indicted by a grand jury in August of 1996, and the case was dismissed in January of 1997 when the accuser declined to testify.

While the facts of the case remain unclear — Patricia wouldn't provide details of the night in question on Thursday, and attempts by the Detroit Free Press to reach the woman involved have been unsuccessful — the Lions have found themselves in a minefield made more dangerous by a vetting process apparently hamstrung by state law.

"In our instances, we're kind of depending on the depth to which the security guy went to feel comfortable that there was nothing that we needed to know," Banner said. "And if either it was really hidden or he wasn't super thorough, I could see how this could happen."

The Lions use an employment background screening company that conducts background checks on all hires, and that firm produced a report on Patricia during the hiring process that did not include any reference to his Texas arrest.

It's unclear what, if any, information the firm uncovered about the case while vetting Patricia, but when the Lions went back to examine why they only recently learned about the incident, they discovered that Massachusetts employment law prevents the screening company from providing, or them from using as part of their employment decision, information about an arrest, indictment or conviction more than seven years old.

Because Patricia was a resident of Massachusetts at the time of his hiring, the Lions were subject to those laws as well as other local and federal regulations.

“(We) always (do) the right thing in our employment practices, including background checks, interview questions, employment practices at all levels, whether it’s a player, coach or executive,” Lions president Rod Wood said Friday. “I understand why people might be frustrated that we didn’t know this and maybe didn’t do the wrong thing to learn about it. But I’d rather be on the side of always doing the right thing and if there’s an arrow to be taken for doing the right thing, I’ll take it 100 times over doing the wrong thing and getting criticized for doing the wrong thing.”

Wood said the Lions have received information from background checks that led them to rescind other job offers as recently as the last few weeks.

"So it's not as if we receive something that we don't like, we ignore it," Wood said. "We act on it."

'No surprises'

NFL teams can use the league’s security arm to perform background checks on coaching and other hires, though a sampling of former team executives shows that’s rarely the case.

Banner said his teams would rely on in-house security personnel to vet a small group of candidates once their coaching searches were underway. Former Houston Texans general manager Charlie Casserly said he used team security to run background checks, too, though NFL security handled the vetting process when he consulted on the New York Jets coaching hire in 2015.

The Lions, meanwhile, have employed a mix of local law enforcement officials, in-house personnel and outside firms to run background checks on everyone from head coaches to general managers to draft prospects and even summer interns going back the past three decades.

Greg Suhajda, a former special agent for both the Secret Service and FBI who’s consulted with professional teams and colleges on past high-level hires, said situations like what the Lions encountered with Patricia are exactly what most are trying to avoid.

“They wanted just additional stuff just to make sure something like this wouldn’t come out,” said Suhajda, now the senior managing director of the business intelligence division at Mackinac Partners. “It goes to reputation of the organization, certainly. ... This is kind of the exact thing that a lot of these teams fear.”

Suhajda said the background checks that he’s run for professional teams have been all-encompassing searches that sometimes take weeks to complete.

Typically, job candidates authorize teams “to delve into any financial issues, any criminal issues, any social issues or litigation matters, so you’re not worried about what legalities there are,” Suhajda said.

His firm uses legal research sites like LexisNexis, where Patricia’s arrest is easy to find, and TLO, plus more personal legwork that can include visiting a perspective hire’s former places of residence and even providing a team’s anonymous tip hotline to friends or colleagues who may be reluctant to spill potentially damaging information about someone they know.

“Certainly, fiscally, you’re worried about a lot of financial aspects that may go to the person’s character, or honesty or integrity as to what he said on some of the applications,” Suhajda said. “And determining

the veracity of all that is critical from an integrity standpoint. And surely one of the questions (for Patricia) had to be, have you ever been convicted of a crime or charged with a crime?

"And in this case, he certainly wasn't convicted, he was charged, so it would go to his character that he failed to even bring this up, in my opinion. Cause certainly if you're indicted there had to have been something there, something was filed, and it was serious enough where somebody thought, or a group of people thought, the evidence was significant enough to go forward."

Patricia, in his news conference Thursday, stressed that "there was never any situation in the Lions interview where I did not disclose the truth." But neither he nor the Lions would reveal what questions were asked in his two January interviews.

Banner said most head-coaching interviews that he was a part of often included a broadly-worded question like, "Is there anything else that we should know from your background if we consider you?"

While it's understandable why Patricia would not disclose his arrest, Suhajda said "it would have behooved him, I think, to admit it with explanation."

"Most stuff, if you have an explanation for it, fine," Suhajda said. "But we don't want surprises. No surprises is kind of the mantra when you're digging deep into someone from a reputational standpoint or whatever might impact not just the person but the organization and its employees. So this certainly counts as a surprise."

Facts, not headlines, matter

Whether early revelations about Patricia's arrest would have disqualified him as a candidate with the Lions is another story.

Patricia never was convicted of a crime. The Lions focused their attention on him as a replacement for Jim Caldwell from the start of their search, if not before. Wood said earlier this year that general manager Bob Quinn had been touting Patricia's merits as coach for two years; Quinn and Patricia spent 12 seasons working together with the New England Patriots.

And the Lions, in a statement released jointly by Wood, Quinn and owner Martha Firestone Ford when news of Patricia's arrest first surfaced Wednesday night, seemed to provide mitigating factors for whatever did happen back in 1996.

"Matt was 21 at the time and on spring break in Texas," the statement said.

Banner said there's a "big difference" between the charges coming to light now, three months after Patricia was hired, and during the search process.

"We don't know if it would have changed the outcome, but certainly they would have had a very serious, extensive conversation of, 'Do we care? Should this (impact) our decision? If we are going to go forward anyway, do we put this out publicly now or run the risk that somebody finds out later?'" Banner said. "Totally different if they had known then versus now. It may or may not have changed the hire, but certainly totally different in terms of the thought process, the discussion, the debate. Frankly, even the PR strategy."

The Lions, though they left enough wiggle room in their statement to change course should more facts come to light, gave Patricia a strong show of support Thursday when Quinn, Wood and the 92-year-old Ford attended Patricia's seven-minute news conference.

"Based upon everything we have learned, we believe and have accepted Coach Patricia's explanation and we will continue to support him," the statement read. "We will continue to work with our players and the NFL to further awareness of and protections for those individuals who are the victims of sexual assault or violence."

The Lions, of course, were not the only ones who did not know about Patricia's past.

The Patriots, where Patricia worked for 14 seasons, said in a statement Thursday that they did not know about the charge until this week. One of Patricia's old coaches and colleagues from his college days at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute — when the incident occurred — said no one in that program was aware of the arrest, either. And Banner said he doesn't believe the Browns, who interviewed Patricia and hoped to hire him for their head-coaching job in January of 2016, ever came across the information in their background checks of Patricia.

"I spoke to them after the fact and they were nothing but glowing about him and how serious and real their interest was," said Banner, whose time with the Browns predated their interview with Patricia. "I spoke to people involved in the interviewing process there and they had nothing but very positive things to say about him. I think if they knew this, that wouldn't have been the case."

Of course, in the #MeToo era, the focus on these type of allegations is heightened, and no matter when news of his arrest came out, that's something Patricia and the Lions couldn't avoid.

"Nothing should eliminate a candidate because of a headline," said Casserly, now an analyst with NFL Network. "The research should eliminate a candidate. I think we jump on headlines too much. Go back to the Duke lacrosse (case), OK? At the end of the day, the Duke lacrosse, as I understood it, proved that those players were not guilty of what they were charged for. And the coach was not guilty of anything. So we've got to be careful we don't fall into Duke lacrosse anytime there's a headline. But anything that comes up needs to be vetted, needs to be taken seriously. I mean, that's the common sense approach to the thing."

Seven NFL trades that make sense after the draft, including Emmanuel Sanders to Cowboys

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

May 12, 2018

Welcome to the true NFL offseason. The first part -- February to May -- didn't really count, not with free agency and the draft occupying so much of our time. The real offseason -- the actually boring portion -- begins immediately when the draft ends, which it did on April 28, and concludes when the preseason begins, which will happen on Aug. 2.

But maybe this offseason will be different. To this point, it's certainly been different.

Since the 2017 NFL season ended with the Eagles' win over the Patriots in the Super Bowl, the following high-profile trades have been completed (not to mention the trade of Alex Smith, which was agreed to before the Super Bowl):

Patriots trade receiver Brandin Cooks to the Rams

Rams trade defensive end Robert Quinn to Dolphins

Seahawks trade defensive end Michael Bennett to the Eagles

Giants trade defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul to the Buccaneers

Bills trade quarterback Tyrod Taylor to the Browns

Dolphins trade receiver Jarvis Landry to the Browns

Browns trade quarterback DeShone Kizer to Packers / Packers trade defensive back Damarious Randall to Browns

Steelers trade receiver Martavis Bryant to the Raiders

Bills trade left tackle Cordy Glenn to the Bengals

Browns trade defensive tackle Danny Shelton to the Patriots

Broncos trade cornerback Aqib Talib to the Rams

Chiefs trade cornerback Marcus Peters to the Rams

Forgive me if I missed one or two. It's been a trade-happy offseason to this point. Hopefully, the trades continue throughout the long summer -- the NFL's version of the Long Night -- to keep us awake from now until the preseason begins.

With that in mind, and with free agency and the draft already gone, which means most rosters around the league are set, let's take a look at some potential trades that would actually make sense. Of course, just because they make sense doesn't mean they'll actually happen. So, you should consider them trades that could -- but probably won't -- happen before the season starts.

We begin with Shane Ray.

1. Broncos pass rusher Shane Ray to the Bears or Lions

Regardless of what happened this offseason, 2018 was always going to be pivotal season for Ray. A first-round pick in 2015, Ray has at times flashed his potential (eight sacks in 2016), but for far too much of his career, he's been sidetracked by injuries and unproductive play (13 sacks in 38 career games). Then, the

Broncos went out and took the top-rated pass rusher in the draft in Bradley Chubb. Not long after, they declined to pick up Ray's option, which means 2018 is the final season he's under contract in Denver.

Suddenly, Ray is expendable, which means he's tradable if the right offer comes along. Otherwise, the Broncos risk losing him for nothing after the season. From the perspective of pass-rushing needy teams, they might look at Ray as a buy-low, high-reward option. In 2016, when he played in a full season for the only time in his career, he ranked 12th at his position group in terms of pass-rushing productivity, racking up 45 total pressures, according to Pro Football Focus.

So, who might be in the market for someone like Ray? Two teams from the NFC North immediately come to mind: the Chicago Bears and the Detroit Lions, both of which are in need of another pass rusher.

As part of a mass exodus of older oft-injured players, the Bears parted ways with Pernell McPhee and Willie Young this offseason, leaving them with a significant void on the edge. The Bears did well to fix other areas in the offseason, but pass rusher still remains an area of need. Leonard Floyd and Akiem Hicks need some help out there. At the very least, the Bears could use Ray as a situational pass rusher. Who better to bring out the best in Ray than Vic Fangio?

The answer to the question above might be Matt Patricia, the new coach of the Lions. Like the Bears, the Lions are in need of some additional pass rushers. Though Ezekiel Ansah will be back under the franchise tag, the Lions need more. Last year, Ansah collected 12 sacks. The rest of the Lions' roster combined for 23 sacks. As a team, the Lions ranked 20th in sacks. That's why Ray could be used in Detroit. One quick tangent: To draft Ray in 2015, the Broncos traded up with the Lions. So, this would be an especially fitting destination for the next stage of his career.

In terms of a return, the Broncos are looking at no more than a mid-to-late round pick, which is why they might prefer to keep Ray in hopes he finally blossoms during the beginning portion of 2018, at which point they can try to trade him to a contender for a higher pick or consider keeping him around for the long-term.

2. Jaguars pass rusher Dante Fowler to the Bears or Lions

Let's stay with pass rushers and the Bears and Lions. Another player from the 2015 draft who didn't get his fifth-year option picked up last week could make sense for both teams: Dante Fowler.

The Jaguars drafted Fowler No. 3 overall, but he's yet to look like a player worthy of that selection. He missed his entire rookie season due to a torn ACL. In 2016, he notched four sacks and five passes defended as a rotation player. His sack total doubled in 2017. Then, during the Jaguars' loss to the Patriots in the AFC Championship Game, he sacked Tom Brady twice. So, he's an ascending talent.

It's just that, the Jaguars might not really have room for him -- not with both Calais Campbell and Yannick Ngakoue slotted in as the starting defensive ends in their stacked defense. So, if they're looking to move him before he likely leaves in free agency after the season, they could send him to a team that needs pass-rushing help, like the Bears and Lions.

On the other hand, the Jaguars are in the middle of their Super Bowl window and a situational pass rusher like Fowler could come in handy during the playoffs. Depth matters, and they could do way worse than Fowler as their third exterior pass rusher.

3. Browns receiver Corey Coleman to the Patriots

Corey Coleman, to this point, has been a disappointment. Since getting drafted 15th overall in 2016, he's caught 56 of 131 targets (42.7 catch rate) for 718 yards and five touchdowns. Giving up on him now might be foolish considering most young receivers experience a rough go of it during their adjustment period and the fact that Coleman's played with some horrible quarterbacks, but the Browns did just draft Antonio Callaway -- a first-round talent in terms of football alone, though his off-field history doesn't inspire much confidence -- and Cleveland.com's Mary Kay Cabot, who covers the team, recently wrote that "if someone makes the Browns a decent offer, I believe they'd trade him."

Let's say the Browns did want to shop Coleman to a team that could use another playmaker and thinks that a change in scenery plus a partnership with a better quarterback could bring out the best in the former first-round pick. Let's say that team is the New England Patriots.

For one, the Patriots and Browns have had a pretty strong trade partnership for a while now. Second, the Patriots just lost Brandin Cooks and Danny Amendola this offseason, so they could benefit by adding another receiver. Third, the Patriots certainly love a reclamation project. Fourth, the Patriots have acquired a bonanza of future draft picks, which means they could give the Browns a decent offer.

This trade seems the most unlikely of the bunch, but the idea of the Patriots developing Coleman is an intriguing one.

4. Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders to the Cowboys

Even before they released Dez Bryant, the Cowboys needed to bolster their receiving crew. The additions of Deonte Thompson, Allen Hurns, and rookies Michael Gallup and Cedrick Wilson shouldn't change that. If the Cowboys are serious about contending in 2018, they'll need to provide quarterback Dak Prescott with a better supporting cast.

Meanwhile, the Broncos just drafted Courtland Sutton in the second round and DaeSean Hamilton in the fourth round. It already appeared to be unlikely that both Emmanuel Sanders and Demaryius Thomas would return in 2019, but those two draft picks cemented Sanders and Thomas' short-term status with a team that is trying to remake their offense. Instead of cutting Sanders after the season, when his dead cap shrinks to \$2.7 million, the Broncos should try to trade him to a receiver-needy team.

Sanders might not be as good as he was at his peak, but his diminishing numbers have more to do with the Broncos' quarterback situation than his own abilities. He'd be a good fit in Dallas, immediately becoming the Cowboys' top receiver. The Broncos shouldn't expect more than a Day 3 pick in return, but they could use all the picks they can get their hands on.

5. Seahawks safety Earl Thomas to the Cowboys

Earl Thomas and the Cowboys have been linked for what seems like forever -- ever since he ran up to Cowboys coach Jason Garrett after a December game between them and told him to "come get me." Thomas clarified that he didn't mean for the Cowboys to get him in the immediate future, but that doesn't mean it can't or won't happen.

During the draft, it was reported that the Cowboys made an offer for him. Meanwhile, back in Seattle, Thomas has yet to show up for offseason activities because he wants a new contract, and Pete Carroll isn't sure when he'll get his safety back.

"We'll find out. We've got to communicate," Carroll said Sunday, per ESPN. "Phase 2 doesn't look like it's suiting him right now, so we'll see, we'll see what's happening. Phase 3 is around the corner for us, so we'll see. We've got one more week of Phase 2."

Personally, I subscribe to the belief that the Seahawks should just keep Thomas and pay him. There aren't many -- if any -- safeties like him, safeties who can play center field in Carroll's defensive scheme quite like him. The Seahawks can't keep cutting weight and expect Russell Wilson alone to carry them back to the playoffs. But if the Seahawks aren't going to pay him, they should try to get something in return.

The Cowboys look like a team that is more than willing to pay for him. They're moving Byron Jones from safety to cornerback and they didn't take a safety in this year's draft, which means Xavier Woods might be starting at free safety ... unless they add one of the game's best safeties, who also happens to want to come to Dallas.

6. Jets quarterback Teddy Bridgewater to the Jaguars
What is Teddy Bridgewater's purpose in New York?

The Jets signed him to a one-year, prove-it type of contract, but all signs point toward Bridgewater not really getting much of a chance to prove it. Josh McCown is slated to begin the summer as the starter. No. 3 overall pick Sam Darnold will be competing for the starting job. Christian Hackenberg is ... irrelevant. That's an awfully crowded quarterback room, which doesn't bode well for Bridgewater.

What would've made sense for Bridgewater, a former first-round pick, is if he'd landed with a team like the Jaguars in free agency. The Jaguars have a starter in Blake Bortles, but they still would've benefited by bringing in someone to push Bortles. That's the role Bridgewater can serve in Jacksonville. Before suffering his devastating knee injury on the eve of the 2016 season, Bridgewater was considered an ascending talent, having taken the Vikings to the playoffs in 2015. Bortles, on the other hand, has slogged his way through his career to this point. The Jaguars aren't quite yet ready to move on from him, but they shouldn't commit to him as their long-term franchise quarterback.

Bridgewater, assuming he can get fully healthy, wouldn't just push Bortles. He'd also give the Jaguars a capable backup in the event Bortles struggles during the season and/or gets hurt.

To be traded, Bridgewater will likely have to prove he's healthy during the preseason. Before Bridgewater got hurt, he was a top-32 quarterback in the NFL. Provided he's healthy, he deserves a chance to start somewhere. In Jacksonville, he'd at least be able to challenge Bortles.

Again, though, this all comes down to Bridgewater being able to prove he's fully functional again.

7. Giants tackle Ereck Flowers to the Colts

Flowers, another first-round pick from 2015 who didn't have his fifth-year option picked up, has been disgruntled for a while now. The Giants signed Nate Solder to be their new left tackle, which means Flowers will now slide on over to right tackle. Except to do that, Flowers will need to actually rejoin the team at some point this offseason. So far, that hasn't happened.

According to ESPN's Jordan Raanan, Giants safety Landon Collins said that Flowers hasn't reported to the team because he's upset about losing his job at left tackle. Before the draft, the Giants were reportedly

shopping Flowers, but to no avail. So, he's disgruntled, not that good of a player anyway, and the Giants have already tried trading him -- not to mention all of the turmoil from last season, which Raanan explains:

Flowers already had his troubles in the past. His relationship with the rest of the offensive line (minus the already exiled Bobby Hart) was rocky at best. He wouldn't heed the veterans' advice and wasn't part of any of their team-building activities -- not even Secret Santa.

Then came the final week of the season. Flowers said he was injured and couldn't play. More than a few people in the organization thought he threw in the towel early, regardless of his eventual denial.

There is so much wrong with this Flowers story that it seems almost impossible to make it right in New York. The Giants are likely better served without him on the roster.

There's a very real chance the Giants just decide to cut him, but there's also a chance another team looks at him and sees a 24-year-old player with potential who's in need of a change in scenery. Speaking of which, the Colts are in need of an improved offensive line. Last year, they ranked dead last in pass protection, according to Football Outsiders. Right tackle is probably their biggest weakness.

The Colts need to make protecting Andrew Luck a priority. There's no guarantee Flowers ends up blossoming with a new team, but for the cost of a late-round pick, he could be a worthwhile gamble.

Appreciating Adam Vinatieri's Career as He Approaches NFL History

By Peter King

MMQB

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There have not been many more remarkable careers in NFL history than Adam Vinatieri's. The Patriot-turned-Colt placekicker needs 58 points to set the all-time NFL scoring record, which he'll easily do in 2018 if he stays healthy at age 45. Consider this: He has been a more efficient kicker from 50 yards and beyond (.826) over the past four seasons than he was attempting all field goals in his 10-year New England tenure (.819). And he seemed well on his way to Canton after his New England decade—that's how amazing the twilight of his second act has been.

I'm not sure we appreciate Vinatieri as much as we should. Thus a story on him in May, as he approaches history this fall.

But as great as he's been, it's possible the story of the first month of his career is better.

"Early on," Vinatieri said, "I thought I was one bad game away, maybe one kick away, from the end of my football career. I was very close to going home to South Dakota, and probably going to medical school."

"He's probably not wrong," said Bill Parcells, his coach with the Patriots in 1996. "You can't live with his results at the time. You just can't."

After New England's 1995 season, Parcells told his special-teams coach, Mike Sweatman, to find him a kicker. The Pats' incumbent kicker, 39-year-old Matt Bahr, was coming off a poor year, and Parcells wanted a new guy. Sweatman found three, one of whom was Vinatieri—an unknown, undrafted kid from South Dakota State. Vinatieri was efficient in his season kicking for Amsterdam in the World League of American Football (now known as NFL Europe), where he was coached by Al Tanara, an old coaching pal of Parcells's. Sweatman came away impressed after working Vinatieri out in South Dakota, and he came highly recommended by Tanara, so New England signed him to compete against Bahr in training camp.

Parcells always treated young kickers the way Marine drill instructors treated recruits. "I tried to create pressure situations in practice with my kickers," Parcells, 76, recalled. "What do you think they're going to face in games?"

"I felt the hot breath of Parcells from the first day of training camp," Vinatieri said. "Training camp went well, but if I missed a kick, oh my goodness, I'd hear [from Parcells]. He'd say things like, 'He's day to day, he's week to week.' A couple of times at the end of practice, he'd put this kind of pressure on me: If I made the field goal, no conditioning for the entire team. If I missed the kick, we'd all get twice as much conditioning. Sometimes, he'd cast a shadow over where I was kicking, or he'd get the guys to heckle me. I remember a couple of times, he'd get so close to me or the line of my kick that I almost had to change my motion."

Vinatieri did enough in camp to make Parcells comfortable with starting a rookie over his trusted vet Bahr, and his first game, in Miami, was without incident—the rookie made his only try, a 25-yard chippy shot.

The trouble started in game two, at Buffalo. It was a raw September afternoon—rainy, with winds gusting up to 35 miles per hour. Vinatieri kicked a 42-yard field goal in the first quarter, but the wind blew his second try, from 45 yards, wide right. Just before halftime, Vinatieri lined up for a 25-yarder, a virtual extra point.

Wide right.

“Can you f----- CONCENTRATE?!” Parcels yelled as Vinatieri jogged off the field.

The hot breath of Parcels.

With 8:15 left in the fourth quarter, game tied at 10, wind still blowing. Vinatieri lined up for a 47-yarder.

Shtoin! The kick bounced off the left upright. No good.

The Cardinals were in Foxboro the next week, and the weather was 70 degrees with a light breeze. Vinatieri doinked a PAT off the right upright and missed a 47-yard try.

Now, entering week four, Vinatieri knew he was on borrowed time. He was three for seven in field goals, with a missed extra point.

“We were starting to consider alternatives,” Parcels said. “You know, in football, it’s not like you have a backup kicker, and you can take out the guy who’s struggling and put in somebody else. You got one guy. You just don’t know what’s gonna happen with kickers. In practice, he was really good, but you can’t keep a kicker who makes half his kicks.”

“I knew,” said Vinatieri. “I understood. It’s a results business. He wasn’t happy with me at the time, but I wasn’t happy with me at the time either. We played Jacksonville in week four, and I know what was on the line. One more miss, and you never know.”

But, he was asked, what about other teams? Kickers are itinerant employees. Get fired in New England, get hired in Green Bay or Tampa Bay. “I didn’t have much interest in me, really, after college,” Vinatieri said. “I got a shot in Amsterdam, and that turned into a shot in New England. But it wasn’t like I went on a bunch of tryouts. If I get cut in New England, I’m probably going home.”

On a warm and breezy Sunday afternoon, a day Vinatieri thought could be his last as an NFL kicker, the first kick of the day—a first-quarter PAT—was blocked.

Uh-oh.

But then Vinatieri hit 23-, 30- and 29-yard field-goal tries, and the rookie went into the locker room at halftime feeling confident. In the second half, he pushed a 44-yarder wide right, then hit a 41-yarder. The game went into overtime, tied at 25, and New England won the toss. Drew Bledsoe drove the Patriots to the Jaguars’ 22, and on fourth down, on trotted Vinatieri.

The rookie kicked it right down the middle. Vinatieri’s first NFL game-winner was also potentially a career-saver.

“But that’s not what really solidified him in New England,” Parcels said. “I’d say Adam was a little more of an all-around football player than some of those kickers are. And where he really won the team over was in Dallas later that year. Herschel Walker was running back a kickoff that day, and he gets through our first line of defense, and it looks like he’s going to go all the way. But Adam tackled him way downfield. He tackled him hard. And after that, we all looked at him a little different. It was like, ‘This guy can play on our team any time.’ He was in concrete after that.”

Concrete?

“Solid,” Parcels said.

Ten seasons in New England. Twelve in Indianapolis. With Vinatieri’s history of clutch kicks (dating back to the 45-yard snow-globe field goal to send the 2002 playoff game against Oakland into overtime the year New England won its first Super Bowl), it’s hard to imagine the modern-day NFL without Adam Vinatieri in it. One day, he’ll likely be standing on a stage in Canton with a gold jacket on.

But what would have happened had Vinatieri had a bad day in his fourth NFL game? What would have happened had he not gone five-of-six that Indian summer day in Foxboro against the Jaguars, drilling the game-winner right down the middle in overtime?

“I think I’d have gone to medical school,” Vinatieri said. “Let me tell you about the internship I had when I went to South Dakota State.

“It was an internship in cardiac rehab. Twice a week I would drive about 50 minutes to a hospital in Sioux Falls, S.D. I witnessed a quadruple-bypass surgery there. After seeing it, I thought the cardiothoracic surgeon was a superstar. This guy was the coolest dude. Amazing to see it. First, he cracked open the guy’s chest on the operating table. They sawed through the chest bone, then they put the heart into kind of icy slush to shrink it down and slow the beating heart from about 80 beats per minute to 10. A machine sucks out the majority of the blood. Then they cut into the veins of the heart that were clogged. What a scene it was, what an operation. Then when it was over, they warm the heart back and they literally bring him back to life. It was six, seven, eight hours long. It was the most unbelievable thing I ever saw.

“I saw the guy on the table a few months later. I said to him, ‘Dude! I basically saw you dead on the table!’”

In an ideal world, post-football, had it been a short career for Vinatieri, he’d have gone to medical school. His dream would have been to be that surgeon. “If I’d only played two, three years, or I’d have been cut that first year, I’d have tried to do it,” Vinatieri said. “But once it got to be seven, eight, nine years, I wasn’t leaving pro football.”

“Any regrets about never doing open-heart surgery?” I asked.

“Regrets, no,” he said. “I don’t know if I’d say ‘regret.’ It would have been cool. But I’ve had too much fun playing.”

NFL Takes Step to Address Helmet-to-Helmet Collisions

By Joe Lemire
Sport Techie
May 12, 2018

The 2017 NFL season saw a “statistically significant” increase in the proportion of head injuries caused by helmet-to-helmet collisions. Richard Kent, an engineer who consults to the NFL Health and Safety Committee, shared that preliminary finding from the NFL’s forensic concussion research.

Kent, the deputy director of the University of Virginia’s Center for Applied Biomechanics, shared those early results during a call on Wednesday with engineers and equipment designers. As part of its Engineering Roadmap, the NFL has released sophisticated digital models of four popular helmet types to crowdsource and stimulate innovation in order to enhance athlete safety.

Virginia’s biomechanics department—led by Kent and director Jeff Crandall, who chairs the NFL’s engineering committee—has spearheaded the effort to identify the cause of concussive blows. For every documented concussion, researchers catalog 150 observations and data points. This was the second straight season, Kent said, that concussions from helmet-to-helmet contact increased.

“One of the consequences of this finding is that helmet-to-helmet impacts remain the highest priority for concussion-prevention efforts whether they be in style of play, rules of the game or equipment design,” he said. “This finding also further motivates the Engineering Roadmap’s mission to create incentives for developing and commercializing new and improved helmets.”

Kent also broke down the most common types of events that cause concussions. For the past three years, the leading incident predictably was tackles, both tackling and being tackled. Blocking was consistently the next most common. “The take-home message for today is that we’re not seeing a dramatic change from past years,” Kent said of the involved on-field actions.

The NFL pledged \$60 million toward the Engineering Roadmap in September 2016 as part of its Play Smart, Play Safe initiative. That money is intended to help research produce safer helmets and other equipment. Last fall, Crandall discussed an interest in pursuing position-specific helmets to protect athletes from the impacts each were most likely to endure.

This week marked the distribution of finite element computer models of four helmets that are both popular in the NFL and distinct in how they mitigate the force of impact. Each model was constructed by a different research university: the VICIS ZERO1 by Virginia, the Schutt Air XP Pro by Wake Forest University School of Medicine, the Riddell Revolution Speed Classic by KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, and the Xenith X2E by the University of Waterloo in Ontario. The models are publicly available so that others can perform computational research on the different designs.

The NFL’s VP of health and safety initiatives, Jennifer Langton, addressed the engineering community that would be using this toolkit, saying the intention is “to help you develop effective, novel helmet design to enhance athletes’ health and safety. By investing in this toolkit, our goal is to give you all the resources you need to develop better technologies and also provide a platform you can use and refine computationally before you build and/or test your prototype.”

3 Broncos Veterans Facing A Make-Or-Break Summer

By Chad Jensen

CBS Denver

May 12, 2018

The NFL Draft is in the books and the Denver Broncos have already begun their offseason training program. This coming weekend, the Broncos will hold their rookie mini-camp.

It might be the offseason but things are happening. The rubber will soon meet the road and for certain players, that term comes with an immediacy that might create some discomfort.

GM John Elway and the Broncos scouting department hit the 2018 Draft out of the park, but looking back over the previous three Draft classes, many of the selections have yet to turn the proverbial corner and provide the team with a return on its investment.

As I see it, there are three Broncos who are facing a “make or break” summer. Between OTAs and training camp, these veterans have to prove that they’ve overcome whatever obstacles have held them back in the past and are ready to contribute.

This issue becomes even more pressing for these guys in the wake of Denver’s 2018 Draft class. Elway’s first seven picks are all guys who can come in and make an impact right out of the gates, which is going to put pressure on the vets above them on the depth chart.

The pressure’s on.

Jeff Heurman, TE

The Broncos inexplicably invested a third round pick in Ohio State tight end Jeff Heurman back in 2015. Alas, Heurman’s pro career was derailed early, due to an ACL tear suffered in his rookie mini-camp (covering a kick return drill, no less).

He watched from the sideline as Peyton Manning and the Broncos fought and clawed their way through the AFC playoffs and emerged victorious in Super Bowl 50. Heading into 2016, which would really be Heurman’s first season of pro football, expectations were high on the former Buckeye.

Two seasons later, Heurman has yet to cash in on the high-round Draft investment the Broncos made in him. He has just 18 career receptions for 283 yards and two touchdowns, and when you consider that all three of his accrued NFL seasons have come post-Julius Thomas, with no real entrenched veteran tight end ahead of him to vulture snaps, his lack of statistical production becomes even more underwhelming.

This time around, there might not be a Virgil Green ahead of him on the depth chart, but there are two young tight ends in Jake Butt and rookie Troy Fumagalli poised to create a demand for snaps. Throw in Austin Traylor as yet another mouth looking to get fed, and you can see that eventually some tight end will be left without a seat when the music stops.

This is all by design. Competition breeds excellence and the Broncos brass know what they’re doing.

Heading into a contract year, Heuerman has become the elder statesman in Denver's tight end room but it's the opportunity of a lifetime. Can Jeff Heuerman capitalize?

I have my doubts, as the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. But this cliché is not absolute.

Regardless, Heuerman's Draft pedigree will serve him no longer. It's put up or shut up time for the big tight end.

Max Garcia, OG

The Broncos also drafted Max Garcia in 2015 — one round later than Heuerman. Coming out of Florida, it was a questionable pick at the time, due to Garcia's power-scheme skill-set coming to a Broncos team under Gary Kubiak that employed the zone blocking system.

However, I understand why Garcia was selected. I was at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, AL that year and Garcia was one of the few offensive linemen who 'popped' off the field (so to speak) during the week of practice.

After each session, defensive linemen would consistently tell me about the 'strong' and 'powerful' Garcia, and how tough of a matchup he was in one-on-one drills. We've seen that skill-set during his time as a Bronco, but it's never been consistent.

Garcia has started all 16 games for the Broncos over the last two seasons at left guard. In 2017, the Broncos paid Ronald Leary big money in free agency, only to inexplicably move the career left guard over to the right side.

The offensive coaches made that decision because Garcia struggled so badly at right guard. But the team was so intent on Garcia starting that they ultimately chose to sacrifice Leary's comfortability for his sake.

Needless to say, it was yet another poor personnel decision made by the 2017 coaching staff. Garcia saw 869 snaps last year, but finished as the No. 59 offensive guard in the NFL, according to Pro Football Focus.

Garcia can be a mauler in the run game at times, but he's a straight up liability in pass protection. Fast forward to 2018 and the honeymoon is over for him.

Garcia's name has been conspicuously absent from the remarks of both GM John Elway and Head Coach Vance Joseph, when the two have been put on the spot publicly and asked to talk about the coming competition on the offensive line. Ronald Leary is being moved back to left guard finally, which has left a wide open competition for right guard.

Connor McGovern's name has been floated by the brass publicly as a contender for right guard, as has Menelik Watson's. Heck, even J.J. Dielman has received some praise from Coach Joseph but nary a word about Garcia.

For a backup swing guard, the Broncos could do worse than Max Garcia. But it would seem that his days as an incumbent starter are over.

If Garcia wants to maximize his opportunity to earn a big second contract from a team in 2019, he'll have to enter this coming summer like a man with a mission and lay claim to that right guard job. The opportunity is there, but this time around, nothing will be given to him. Garcia will have to earn it.

Paxton Lynch, QB

When it comes to guys facing a 'make or break' year, no name emerges as more obvious than that of Paxton Lynch. In the wake of Peyton Manning's retirement and Brock Osweiler's defection, the Broncos were desperate to find an answer at quarterback in 2016.

Elway traded up to get in front of Jerry Jones and the Cowboys to take Lynch with the No. 26 pick in the first round. When his name was called on Draft night, and the broadcast panned to Lynch at home with his family, he was in tears and overcome.

The first images that accompanied Lynch as a pro were tears and ironically, it has become the most recent and defining snapshot in the minds of Broncos Country, too. After losing the quarterback competition to Trevor Siemian for the second straight season, and subsequently suffering a shoulder injury in the third preseason game, Lynch finally got his chance to start in Week 12 at Oakland.

After a rough start, Lynch left the game in the second half with an injury and could be seen weeping on the bench on the Broncos sideline. Considering the disappointment that had permeated his brief career in Denver, Lynch's tears in the Black Hole came with a stark realization that this kid might never have what it takes between the ears to become the franchise quarterback he was drafted to be.

Questions of maturity and work ethic have plagued Lynch's time as a Bronco, and might be the two biggest factors that have held back his development. Unfortunately, Lynch represents a significant investment by the front office, and heading into 2018, the team has little choice but to hold onto him — for now.

The Broncos were not willing to pin their hopes on Lynch, and so Elway went out and signed Case Keenum, anointing the former undrafted free agent as the starting quarterback right out of the gates. Rather than simply announcing that Lynch would serve as Keenum's backup, the Broncos have chosen to publicly pit him against yet another former seventh-round quarterback in an open competition.

Two years in, you would hope that the QB you drafted in the first round could at least be trusted to serve capably as the backup. Not so in the case of Paxton Lynch.

He will compete with Chad Kelly for the privilege of holding the clipboard in 2018. Again, competition is key in mind's of Denver's brass

If Lynch fails to take his situation seriously and doesn't attack this offseason in way heretofore unseen from him, the Broncos aren't going to bend over backwards to accommodate him on the roster. The front office already has egg on their face with regard to Lynch.

If Kelly vanquishes him in an open competition, what use is there to keeping Lynch around? If that's indeed how the dominoes fall, the Broncos will have nothing left to lose by waiving the Memphis product. For a team coming off a 5-11 season, those roster spots are invaluable.

However, it doesn't have to end that way for Paxton Lynch. With Keenum signed on a two-year deal, the opportunity remains for Lynch to prove to this coaching staff and front office that he has the wherewithal and maturity to warrant a chance to start next year.

He has the talent. But does he have the drive? I don't think anyone is holding their breath — both inside and outside Broncos HQ.

Should Matt Patricia have volunteered information about his past indictment?

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
May 12, 2018

In the two days since word emerged that Lions coach Matt Patricia faced an indictment 22 years ago for aggravated sexual assault, some have argued that Patricia should have volunteered the information to the Lions in connection with the process that resulted in Patricia being hired.

Should he have done it? Putting it another way, would you have?

Patricia, based on his comments from Thursday, believes he was falsely accused, and that he did nothing wrong. If that's the case, Patricia spent several months in 1996 constantly worrying about what would happen if the case went to trial, surely obsessing over everything from whether to testify, whether he'd be able to handle aggressive cross-examination, whether the jury would see his side of the case, whether the judge would be fair to him, and what will happen if he's convicted of something he didn't do?

After the case was dismissed, Patricia surely fretted over the possibility that his future had been derailed by the false accusation. And he undoubtedly spent the last 22 years fearful that news of the indictment based on a false allegation would come to light. (He probably is relieved that can now stop worrying about it, issues caused by the disclosure notwithstanding.)

There's a chance Patricia at some point in the past 22 years researched the question of whether employers can or can't ask applicants about arrests/indictments. Most responsible employers will ask only about convictions. (Indeed, the NFL specifically advises teams not to ask incoming players about mere arrests.)

So he had every right to keep his mouth shut, especially since the information was readily available to anyone who wanted to find it.

That said, Patricia's hiring came in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, which provided widespread encouragement to victims of sexual misconduct to make their experiences known — and which created a belated day of reckoning for many offenders. The new sensitivity to issues of this nature makes it a much closer question as to whether Patricia should have volunteered information that the Lions could have found on their own.

Ultimately, Matt Patricia chose to exercise his right to remain silent about something that he believes never happened. Most of us would advise a child, spouse, brother, friend, cousin, nephew to do the same.

Once again, this opinion is premised on contention that the allegation was false. If the allegation was true, that's a much different analysis, obviously.