

Here's why the Broncos really need CU star and undrafted rookie Phillip Lindsay to make the team

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
May 13, 2018

It's an underdog story too good to be true. And that's precisely why the Broncos need running back Phillip Lindsay – proud Denver native, South High alum and an undrafted rookie out of Colorado — to make the football team.

There's a love affair between the Broncos and Denver. Always has been. Always will be. But right now, the NFL team that Broncos Country adores has bruised the hearts of the fans that love this team the most.

The reasons why are personal, as unique as each fan's Sunday ritual to help coax the Broncos to victory. Maybe you lost a little trust because Vance Joseph hasn't demonstrated he can coach. Or maybe it was because Trevor Siemian wasn't the answer or quarterback, or you were irked when linebacker Brandon Marshall kneeled during the national anthem. Or maybe that 5-11 record within two years of winning Super Bowl 50 was a shock to the system.

Phillip Lindsay, as infectiously upbeat as any athlete I've met during my 35 years covering Denver sports, can be the antidote to what ails fans in Broncos Country.

I'm not going to predict Lindsay will elbow his way past fellow rookie Royce Freeman and every other running back on the roster to the top of the depth chart. But if Lindsay stays healthy, I guarantee he will stick with the team. Why? Because the stuff Lindsay brings to a football team is as powerful as anything Denver has seen since Tim Tebow departed town. Make no mistake. Winning requires talent. But winning is also an attitude.

Lindsay is chasing a dream at Dove Valley Headquarters. It's a dream, a dream sorely in need of rekindling in Broncos Country.

When my media brethren gathered Friday, as the rookie class of 2018 talked about their first 24 hours as professionals, Lindsay was asked: When did it become a reality he could play in the NFL?

"Right when I stepped foot here," replied Lindsay, standing on the same turf where linebacker Von Miller and Broncos executive John Elway go to work. "Just to be around all my teammates and be able to see some of the veterans and seeing the locker room, it's like, 'Dang! It's really here.' Now it's time to go seize the moment and get after it."

Lindsay was given \$15,000, chump change by NFL standards, to sign with his hometown team as an undrafted rookie free agent. But that's the American story all Americans find so irresistible: When nobody else really believes in you, bet on yourself.

Why did Lindsay decide Denver was where he wanted to chase his dream, as opposed to Baltimore or any other city in the league looking for a running back with small stature but heart too big to ignore?

“One,” replied Lindsay, immediately ticking off his primary reason as “being home and being able to play for my home state and represent my home state.”

He’s not an NFL mercenary. Lindsay will bleed orange, just as fans in the South Stands do.

So without sitting him down in a rookie seminar to explain the nuances of being a pro, the natural intensity Lindsay brings to the field can combat a problem that has gradually grown for the franchise, as the health of longtime owner Pat Bowlen slowly fades and season tickets are abruptly seized from fans when the club deems their loyalty unworthy. Damage the pure passion for pro football in Denver and there’s collateral damage to the business.

Of course, what determines whether Lindsay sticks with the Broncos will be all the usual football stuff. Can he pick up the blitz, or circle out of the backfield and catch a pass to move the chains on third down? Does Lindsay understand the first responsibility of a kick-returner is to not drop the ball? After being a big star at Colorado, is Lindsay willing to get his nose dirty with all the menial tasks assigned the back end of a 53-man roster?

But those are the X’s and O’s, not the real reason Lindsay is here, given a shot to be the coolest underdog story of 2018.

Broncos Country needs a reason to believe, some tangible evidence that anything and everything is possible for this team.

Lindsay was born to do that job.

What’s the best reason to believe Lindsay will make the Broncos?

Love for football begins with the heart.

Broncos coach Vance Joseph says quarterback pecking order has “been a weight off all of our backs”

By Gina Mizell
The Denver Post
May 13, 2018

Chad Kelly was the quarterback throwing to Broncos' rookie pass-catchers during Saturday's workout, after the 2017 seventh-round pick spent last season on injured reserve due to knee surgery. But coach Vance Joseph also spoke about the mentality of former first-round signal-caller Paxton Lynch, who will compete with Kelly for the backup job after Denver signed Case Keenum during offseason to be the team's starter.

“For Paxton and our football team, it's been a weight off all of our backs to have a starting quarterback and have everyone's roles defined from Day 1,” Joseph said. “... It takes time to be an NFL quarterback. You would hope, with Case being here, (Lynch) can sit back and relax and not worry about being ‘the guy’ right now and just compete to be our backup.”

Joseph added he hopes Lynch can learn from Keenum, an undrafted NFL journeyman before a breakout 2017 season with Minnesota. Keenum completed 67.6 percent of his throws for 3,547 yards, 22 touchdowns and seven interceptions while leading the Vikings to the NFC Championship game.

Broncos general manager John Elway said after the draft that opting not to select a quarterback during the seven rounds means “we're not kicking (Lynch) to the curb” despite injuries and shaky play to begin his career. Lynch has played in five games (four starts) over two seasons, completing 61.7 percent of his passes for 792 yards, four touchdowns and four interceptions. Trevor Siemian beat Lynch out the past two seasons for the starting job, before Denver signed Keenum and traded Siemian to Minnesota.

“We think he can still develop,” Elway said of Lynch following the draft. “When we drafted him two years ago, we knew that it was going to take some time.”

Butt making his return. After spending last season on injured reserve, Broncos tight end Jake Butt was also back on the field with Denver's rookie pass-catchers during Saturday's workout. And he was “pretty confident saying that this is the best I've ever felt in my career.”

“Selfishly and being a competitor, I wanted to be on the field (last season), obviously,” Butt said. “But I think it's gonna pay off for me, just really getting 100 percent before I go out there.”

Butt was a fifth-round pick last year following a decorated career at Michigan. He was the 2016 John Mackey Award winner, given to the nation's best tight end, after compiling 46 catches for 546 yards and four touchdowns. He tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his knee in the Orange Bowl, causing his draft stock to slip.

Butt acknowledged last season was emotionally trying. “It hurt” when he'd lift weights on his own during practice. While teammates studied their own play on film, he was “just kind watching back from afar.”

But now that he's regained his health and added eight pounds of muscle, Butt's goal is to become Denver's starting tight end in 2018. Rookie Troy Fumagalli, a fifth-round pick out of Wisconsin in last month's draft, will be one of Butt's primary challengers.

"You've got to have that confidence to play in this league," Butt said. "That's my goal. That's everybody in the room's goal. And that's what's going to make us better is we're going to be competing for that No. 1 spot."

Offseason theme: Accountability. Bradley Chubb, the Broncos' prized No. 5 overall pick, faced reporters Saturday wearing a navy blue t-shirt with the word "ACCOUNTABILITY" plastered in orange letters across the front.

Butt acknowledged last season was emotionally trying. "It hurt" when he'd lift weights on his own during practice. While teammates studied their own play on film, he was "just kind watching back from afar."

But now that he's regained his health and added eight pounds of muscle, Butt's goal is to become Denver's starting tight end in 2018. Rookie Troy Fumagalli, a fifth-round pick out of Wisconsin in last month's draft, will be one of Butt's primary challengers.

"You've got to have that confidence to play in this league," Butt said. "That's my goal. That's everybody in the room's goal. And that's what's going to make us better is we're going to be competing for that No. 1 spot."

Offseason theme: Accountability. Bradley Chubb, the Broncos' prized No. 5 overall pick, faced reporters Saturday wearing a navy blue t-shirt with the word "ACCOUNTABILITY" plastered in orange letters across the front.

Broncos linebacker Josey Jewell raised on tending to 130 cattle, 18,000 turkey and a lot of corn

By Gina Mizell
The Denver Post
May 13, 2018

Josey Jewell's family farm in northeast Iowa houses about 130 cattle across 1,200 acres. And as a kid, it was Jewell's job to make sure they were fed.

He'd pour grain from a silo into a cart to take to the animals. He'd tend to the fences in the summertime. He'd take on other chores across the property that also features about 18,000 turkeys and "a lot" of corn.

"You have to do stuff with repetition," Jewell said. "You have to do it day after day. Even if you don't want to do it, you gotta do it."

These days, a similar type of meticulous, humble routine has resulted in machine-like tackling. Jewell racked up 437 career stops during a wildly productive career at Iowa that concluded with unanimous All-America honors. His next challenge is bringing that to the Broncos, after Denver selected him in the fourth round of last month's NFL draft.

"He's ultra-competitive," Iowa linebackers coach Seth Wallace said of Jewell. "Like, ultra-, ultra-competitive. I can't describe the level of toughness this kid has."

Jewell grew up in Decorah, Iowa, a town with a population of about 8,000 amongst the high limestone bluffs along the upper Iowa River. Jewell, who is named after Clint Eastwood's title character in "The Outlaw Josey Wales," learned the value of hard work and time management while working on the farm.

He quickly applied that efficiency to the football field. Jewell was Decorah High School's leading tackler as a junior and senior, plus a lead-blocking fullback so intimidating that opposing defenders often backed away. He already had a knack for making stops behind the line of scrimmage "in the blink of an eye," coach Bill Post said. And after Decorah lost in the state championship game as a junior in 2011, Jewell helped lead his team to a title the following season.

"That (championship-game loss) really rubbed him the wrong way," Post said of Jewell. "... That really set his determination wheels into play. The next year, he came back as a senior just playing lights out."

But premier recruiting interest did not arrive until late, when Iowa offered Jewell a scholarship just before signing day. That opportunity fulfilled a childhood dream, as Jewell's grandfather Robert was also a star fullback at Decorah High School but could not continue his football career with the Hawkeyes because of a brain tumor.

Jewell thrived in an Iowa defensive scheme that relies on its linebackers to gobble up tackles. He'd "throw a fit," Wallace said, when coaches would try to manage his workload by limiting his reps in practice, laser-focused on the importance of drilling small fundamental details during game prep. The 6-foot-2, 230-pound Jewell became the only three-time captain in head coach Kirk Ferentz's 20-year

tenure at the school, recognition for Jewell's businesslike approach. A highlight during Jewell's senior season — when he compiled 136 tackles and was the Big Ten defensive player of the year — came against Penn State, when he made two consecutive stops (including one against No. 2 overall draft pick Saquon Barkley) inside his team's 2-yard line to help force a field goal.

"It's just his innate ability to find the football," Wallace said. "He does a (heck) of a job of picking a line, committing to a line and going and getting it. ... There's obvious moments in every game where you're like, 'Boy, that's something that a select few of the guys playing that position are able to do.'"

That natural instinct and tenacity does not necessarily translate well to the various tests during the pre-draft process. Jewell ran the 40-yard dash in a disappointing 4.82 seconds at the NFL combine, then reduced that time to 4.68 seconds at Iowa's pro day. But while questions lingered about Jewell's athleticism, he impressed the Broncos during a trip to Dove Valley.

Jewell also called Denver his favorite team visit before the draft, noting the culture and coaching staff "kind of feels like what I've grown up with." He hopes to contribute immediately on special teams, then challenge for time in a deep linebacking corps.

That quest began Friday, with the opening of rookie minicamp. Jewell knows earning a spot on the Broncos' roster will require maintaining a meticulous and humble routine.

Luckily, he acquired that mind-set as a child, while tasked with making sure 130 cattle were fed each day.

"I try to think people see me as an average player, and I want to use that to better myself," Jewell said. "I don't ever want to overvalue myself or look at myself like I'm better than I really am. I always want to think less of myself, so I keep on pushing myself.

"I learned that from my family, growing up on the farm."

Broncos reach out to DeMarcus Ware for part-time coaching role

By Mike Klis

9 News

May 13, 2018

In their quest to have first-round draft pick Bradley Chubb develop into the next DeMarcus Ware, the Denver Broncos have called on the man himself.

DeMarcus Ware.

The Broncos have reached out to Ware and other former NFL players with hopes of bringing them in to work on a part-time basis with players this offseason.

Nothing life changing. The hope is for Ware and others to be in a few days during organized team activities and a couple days during training camp.

As Ware has already served as a player-coach of sorts for active Bronco pass rushers Von Miller, Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett, there is little doubt his pet project would be Chubb, providing his consultant-type role is finalized with the club.

The 6-foot-4, 258-pound Ware played the final three of his 12 NFL seasons with the Broncos and registered 21.5 of his 138.5 career sacks that rank No. 8 on the NFL's all-time list.

Ware retired after the 2016 season primarily because of a troublesome back. Ware, Miller, Barrett and Ray formed a modern-era Fearsome Foursome of edge rushers in 2015, when they led the Broncos to a Super Bowl 50 title.

Ware's most memorable game as a Bronco was in the 2015 AFC Championship Game when he had 7 hits -- count 'em, 7 -- on New England quarterback Tom Brady. And that didn't include his hurry on a 2-point attempt with 12 seconds remaining that forced Brady to throw errantly, an incomplection that preserved the Broncos' 20-18 win.

Bringing Ware in as a pass-rush consultant is a natural. During his days as a player, Ware was often seen working with his fellow outside linebackers and defensive linemen on pass-rush techniques.

A slimmed-down Chad Kelly already turning heads as competition for Broncos' backup QB job awaits

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

May 13, 2018

Eighteen months passed as Chad Kelly went from Ole Miss record holder to the NFL's Mr. Irrelevant, a rookie who spent his first year in the bigs as an afterthought on injured reserve.

His name, along with his play in college (he set 25 records at Mississippi), carried weight. But "Swag," as even his head coach sometimes will refer to him, was the "other guy" behind a rotating cast of starters in Denver last year.

That changed when the Broncos' season ended with a thud and Case Keenum was promptly signed to right the ship.

At the culmination of the draft, general manager John Elway said Kelly would no longer be shelved as the last-string quarterback on the roster. Instead, he'll vie with former first-round pick Paxton Lynch for the backup job.

Kelly's window opened, while Lynch's might have closed a little more.

"I've been proud of Chad overall," coach Vance Joseph said Saturday at mini-camp. "He's been here every day. He's worked his butt off and ... he's changed his body. Last year, he was a little tubby kid. He's really lean now, he's eating right, he's working hard. He's definitely put the work in and he's throwing the ball really well now."

Kelly credits the chicken and spinach for helping him get back to his playing weight from college. But his offseason thus far has been about much more. He has trekked across the country to work on his conditioning and technique with trainers and various quarterback gurus, from his uncle and Hall of Famer Jim Kelly, to former Colorado State coach Steve Fairchild, to even former New York Giants' Super Bowl champ Phil Simms.

"I try to use all my resources and try to get ahead, because every day everybody is getting better," Chad Kelly said. "If I can take one thing from some guy and another thing from another guy, it's only going to help me out."

The connection with Simms was made through Jim Kelly, who posted a video clip of their workouts on social media in late February. For about a month, the CBS analyst counseled Chad Kelly, who says he plans to return for more before the start of the Broncos' season.

"He's just right behind you every time you throw the ball, whether it's correct, it's wrong, he's going to tell you how it is, and that's what I need to hear," Kelly said. "I need to know if the ball spun out of my hand correctly. When he says it's good, it's good. You can feel it, you can tell."

The time on the field was a long time coming.

A knee injury cut short Kelly's final season at Ole Miss, and a wrist injury suffered during his pro day eliminated his chances of playing as an NFL rookie. He saw the field briefly midway through the season, but was placed on season-ending injured reserve soon after.

"I kind of came in thinking that I can't compete at a high level," Kelly said. "I was a month or two removed from having my last surgery on my wrist. It was an opportunity to go out there and feel the game, but also just to be around the guys and seeing how things work in real-time practice."

It wasn't until near the end of the Broncos' season that Kelly said he felt like he had returned to full health. He resumed training in early January, but his wait for football would be a bit longer as the Broncos retooled its roster, along with the coaching staff, and set out to start anew after a losing season.

Saturday, Kelly joined the Broncos' rookies and some fellow second-year players for individual drills and a walkthrough as part of the team's rookie orientation. He was the only quarterback on the field, and the added reps, he said, were invaluable.

But the real work lies ahead. For the first time in three years, the Broncos will not have an open competition to determine their starter. The backup battle, however, could draw as many eyes.

"I think for Paxton and our football team it's been a weight off all of our backs to have a starting quarterback and have everyone's role defined from Day 1," Joseph said. "So for Paxton, he can relax and get better each day and not worry about a competition. I think for Paxton being around Case also — I mean, Case has been through some ups and downs in his career — he can learn from Case on how to handle those things."

"It takes time to be an NFL quarterback. You would hope with Case being here, he can sit back and relax and get better as a quarterback and not worry about being the guy right now and just compete to be our backup."

The Broncos traded up to draft Lynch at No. 26 in 2016, and Elway believed at the time that Lynch could surprise with a quicker-than-expected acclimation to the NFL. But the hope never came to fruition. Lynch lost two consecutive offseason competitions for the starting job and has played in only five games in his career.

"With Paxton, we still think he is young," Elway said. "We are not kicking him to the curb. He can still develop."

Kelly, meanwhile, has zero NFL games to his name. His play in the SEC earned the praise of Joseph, who called him his "favorite quarterback" in the 2017 NFL Draft. Kelly's focus now is two-fold: reps and consistency.

"Because that's what it's all about, being consistent, being athletic back there and getting those guys to rally around you and play hard and play tough and come out with a victory," Kelly said. "That's what the game is about."

"I have to come in and prove myself, just like any other guy does coming into the NFL."

Chad Kelly has chance to win Broncos backup QB job

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
May 13, 2018

Not even the signing of free agent Case Keenum could keep the Broncos from staging yet another quarterback competition this offseason.

This time it's a battle for the backup job.

After bypassing a quarterback in a draft that was deep on passing prospects, general manager John Elway declared that Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly would duke it out for the No. 2 job.

That served as a vote of confidence in Lynch, his 2016 first-round pick who hasn't been able to win the starting job, and a golden opportunity for Kelly, "Mr. Irrelevant" in 2017 as the last player picked in the draft.

"With Paxton, we still think he is young. We are not kicking him to the curb. He can still develop. When we drafted him two years ago, we knew it was going to take some time," Elway said. "Paxton is going to compete with Chad for that backup spot. We are not going to bring another one in for OTAs."

That marked the first time Elway had publicly mentioned Kelly as having a chance to win a roster spot a year after missing his entire rookie season while recovering from wrist and knee surgeries.

"I thought of it as, OK, perfect, I can get more reps," Kelly said Saturday after serving as the only quarterback during a 90-minute walkthrough that capped the Broncos' three-day rookie orientation. "I just look at it as another opportunity to get better each and every day and each and every rep."

Kelly's offseason work habits have resulted in a reshaped body.

Kelly said "eating a lot of spinach and chicken paid off instead of fried food. ... I came here and knew I needed to move around and get back to my old playing weight back in early college and high school. So, I'm kind of feeling I can move around and do some things with my legs but also be powerful in throwing the ball."

Kelly has impressed both on and off the field.

"Well, I've been proud of Chad overall," coach Vance Joseph said. "I mean, he's been here every day. He's worked his butt off. And he's changed his body. Last year he was a little tubby kid. He is really lean now. He's eating right. He's working hard. He's definitely put the work in.

"And he's throwing the ball really well right now."

So much so that bare hands are a bad idea for receivers, suggested tight end Jake Butt.

"He can rip that thing now," said Butt, who also sat out his rookie season. "You've definitely got to wear gloves. He'll be spinning that bad boy pretty tough. He's learning the offense, he's taking leadership, he's doing a great job."

Joseph insisted Lynch was handling himself fine, too.

In March, the Broncos declared Keenum the starter as soon as he signed. In April, they said Lynch would have to beat out Kelly for the backup job.

"I think Paxton's done a good job, also," Joseph said. "I think for Paxton and for our football team, it's been a weight off all of our backs to have a starting quarterback and have everyone's role defined from Day 1."

He said that allows Lynch to "relax and get better each day and not worry about a competition."

Joseph suggested Lynch could learn how to handle adversity from Keenum.

"Case has been through some ups and downs throughout his career. So, he can learn from Case on how to handle those things," Joseph said. "And it takes time to be an NFL quarterback. And you would hope with Case being here, he can sit back and relax and get better as a quarterback and not worry about being the guy right now and just compete to be our backup."

Chad 'Mr. Irrelevant' Kelly working on becoming a revelation

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
May 13, 2018

Chad Kelly is done with being irrelevant.

"I haven't played a game in a year and a half. I'm approaching this as 'now or never' time," the Broncos' mysterious quarterback told me Saturday afternoon at Dove Valley.

Kelly's last football game indeed was 18 months ago – Nov. 5, 2016 – when the Ole Miss QB tore the ACL and lateral meniscus in his right knee.

Actually, though, he has played games in Denver.

"The only way I could stay competitive was I bought a Pop-A-Shot (arcade basketball game) for my home and beat everybody, mostly my girlfriend."

Kelly concluded his 2015 season with the Rebels by defeating Dak Prescott and bitter in-state rival Mississippi State. Next up was Oklahoma State – with quarterback Mason Rudolph – in the first Sugar Bowl for Mississippi since 1969, when the quarterback was Archie Manning. Kelly was selected the game's Most Outstanding Player – the only SEC quarterback to win the award since Tim Tebow in 2010.

Prior to his fifth year, split between two major programs with a junior college stop in between, Kelly was ranked among the top seven quarterbacks (above Lamar Jackson, Josh Rosen and Patrick Mahomes) and leading Heisman Trophy candidates (one ahead of Oregon running back Royce Freeman).

However, he underwent sports hernia surgery, and a team that had lost its other offensive talent plummeted from a 10-4 record (which also included victories over Alabama, LSU and Auburn) to a 4-5 mark before Kelly's career abruptly ended.

Kelly was not invited to the NFL draft Combine because of past transgressions (a 2014 arrest for involvement in a nightclub brawl and another skirmish at his younger brother's high school game). At the Ole Miss Pro Day, Kelly hurt his right wrist, which forced a third operation within a year.

He was unwanted in the 2017 draft. Well, almost. The Broncos chose Kelly as the final pick (253rd) – "Mr. Irrelevant".

With the Broncos, Kelly became the character from the Broadway show "Chicago".

"Mister Cellophane should have been my name . . . 'cause you can look right through me, walk right by me and never know I'm there."

Kelly vanished, on the injured reserve list for the entire season while Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch and Brock Osweiler took turns leading the Broncos into the abyss of agony.

"I want to thank Coach Joseph," Kelly said – and I thought he would mention Vance's remark last April that Kelly was "my favorite quarterback in the draft".

Instead, Kelly told me that Joseph "allowed me to go on every road trip and stand on the sideline." Kelly's presence went unnoticed. Cellophane Man. "I learned so much about the offense, the play-calling, the Broncos organization, what the NFL was all about. That and being in the quarterback room all year helped my growth. For the past year, I've come to work trying to get better every day. It's my craft."

The 6-foot-2 Kelly, who turned 24 on March 26, has tightened his body structure and dropped his weight from 236 to 212 pounds – "where I was in high school and college ... Lot of spinach and chicken paid off."

At the draft this year, Kelly received praise again when Broncos boss John Elway announced that Kelly and Lynch would compete for the backup job behind Case Keenum.

"My reaction was: 'Perfect. I'll get more reps.'"

And he showed up for the rookie minicamp on Thursday, even though Kelly is not technically a rookie. Kelly and tight end Jake Butt, who spent last season on IR, were the only 2017 picks practicing with this year's draft class, undrafted free agents and other holdover free agents. Where are you, Carlos Henderson?

Kelly was the only quarterback among the 27 players on the field.

Butt said of his mate's performance: "He can rip that thing now. You definitely have to wear gloves."

Both declared totally healthy, Butt and Kelly were leaps and bounds in front of the neophytes trying to absorb the system at Saturday's session.

Afterward, Joseph was asked about Lynch. "He can relax now."

No so fast, Vance and Paxton. Lynch lost a starting competition to another seventh-round draft choice the past two camps.

And Kelly is determined to be Mr. Relevant.

Sacco Sez: Remembering rookie minicamp

By Jim Saccomano
DenverBroncos.com
May 13, 2018

With the Denver Broncos annual rookie minicamp upon us this weekend, it is another reminder that the camps were not always the way they are now — and neither was the scouting that produced the players.

Once upon a time, teams did not even have rookie minicamps.

There was no collective bargaining agreement in the first half of National Football League history, and some teams — like the Denver Broncos — were very reluctant to spend money in the early and mid-1960s.

To compensate, training camps were often very long.

"When I was with [Hall of Fame head coach] Hank Stram, we once started camp before the Fourth of July, and with all players," former general manager John Beake said. "But we had very long camps in those days, and often had six preseason games."

In fact, in the 1976 season, the Denver Broncos played seven preseason games.

Teams began to bring their rookies in for a three-day camp in the late 1960s, but that often was coupled with bringing the veterans in, as well.

"A lot of coaches wanted to replicate that college experience of spring ball that all the players had been accustomed to, and that was a good way to do it, in addition to getting a look at the young players," Beake said.

This time of the year always reminds me of when I got my first look at a lot of our players — and some of those moments made lasting impressions.

I remember seeing Dave Studdard as a free agent in camp. Studdard had been cut by the Colts the previous year, but at his first Broncos practice one of our coaches said to me, "That kid has great feet. Looks like he's going to make the team."

Studdard played 10 seasons for the Broncos as John Elway's prime protector at left tackle.

Of course, nothing matched the circus atmosphere when John Elway attended his first rookie camp. This was before digital photography, and the click of cameras reminded someone of a major press conference — except the shooting continued for as long as Elway was on the field.

The only thing close to that experience — relative to the media at mini camp — was when Tim Tebow was a rookie. It was a different era, but it was very similar.

Keith Bishop is another player whose rookie minicamp I will never forget.

Bishop was our sixth-round draft choice in 1980, and one look at his commanding presence suggested he would make the team and be a true player.

He turned out to be a two-time Pro Bowler who started on three Super Bowl teams in the 1980s. He was as gentlemanly off the field as he was ferocious and tough on it.

We do not know if any of this year's players will turn out the same way, but we do know that more is known about them than was ever the case with previous players.

No doubt many of these players will go on to make a names for themselves — and two things about them all are certain.

Every player has been scouted thoroughly, and every one will get an equal chance.

When they take the field, they do so in the same uniform, and it does not matter how thick the press clippings are, what the former coaches said, or how big the signing bonus is.

The field is the ultimate equalizer, and they'll take their first steps onto it this weekend.

Chad Kelly and Jake Butt show this weekend isn't only about the Broncos' rookies

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
May 13, 2018

Two of the most-watched players at Broncos rookie orientation weren't even rookies.

And when 2017 seventh-round pick Chad Kelly connected with 2017 fifth-round selection Jake Butt on a series of passes during individual drills early in Saturday's on-field session, it didn't feel like just another series of repetitions that could be quickly forgotten. Instead, it seemed more like the culmination of over a year of conditioning and injury-rehabilitation work, and maybe the dawn of something bigger.

Butt's routes were crisp, just like they were at Michigan. Kelly threw with zip, just like he did at Mississippi when he diced up Alabama's defense in 2015 and 2016 games, throwing for a combined 762 yards and six touchdowns with no interceptions. Even against air, both sights were promising.

"He can rip that thing now," Butt said of Kelly's passes. "You've definitely got to wear gloves. He'll be spinning that bad boy pretty tough."

Kelly's rookie season was waylaid by a torn anterior cruciate ligament suffered during his senior season at Mississippi and a wrist injury incurred as he prepared for his pre-draft Pro Day workout. Butt's 2017 was doomed by the torn anterior cruciate ligament he suffered in Michigan's 2016 Orange Bowl loss to Florida State.

In both cases, the Broncos got them at well below their expected draft value because of the injuries. The team had to be patient. So did Butt and Kelly -- but that doesn't mean it wasn't difficult to sit, watch and wait.

"It's been really long," Kelly said. "But finally getting out, the time's here, and you can feel like yourself again. This is what you do. This is your job -- to be able to get out here with guys and kind of get back in the swing of things."

Both had brief glimpses on the practice field last season as the Broncos evaluated their progress while they were on the non-football-injury list before they were shut down for the year.

"Selfishly and being a competitor, I wanted to be on the field, obviously," Butt said. "But I think it's going to pay off for me, just really getting to 100 percent before I [was] out there this spring."

The anticipation of seeing both Kelly and Butt in action has been growing for a year, but both stand in different spots in terms of their competition. Butt is in a wide-open race at tight end, with no previous full-time starter among the group. The Broncos' six tight ends have just 12 collective starts among them.

If Butt plays up to the capability that had him poised to be a first- or second-round pick in last year's deep tight-end class before he suffered the torn ACL, he has every chance to seize the top role in the rotation.

"Of course. You've got to have that kind of confidence," Butt said. "I think we all do in the tight end room. I think all the receivers do. You've got to have that confidence in this league. That's my goal. That's everybody in the room's goal, and that's what's going to make us better, that we're competing for that No. 1 spot."

It's different for Kelly, with an established No. 1 quarterback in Case Keenum leading the way. But the No. 2 job is there for him to seize, as President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway said after the draft that Kelly would compete with Paxton Lynch for the backup spot behind Keenum.

"At the end of the day, I thought of it as, 'Perfect, I can get more reps.' And that's what it's about," Kelly said. "Being consistent in what you do, being athletic in what you do and going out there and competing, whether it's in individual drills [or] it's in a team activity. I just look at it as another opportunity to get better -- each and every play and each and every rep."

It's an opportunity that he's earned through rehabilitation and conditioning work. Kelly reported for the offseason in far better shape than he was late in his college career, and last year, crediting "a lot of spinach and chicken instead of fried food" for his slimmer physique.

"He's changed his body," Head Coach Vance Joseph said. "He is really lean now. He's eating right. He's working hard. He's definitely put the work in, and he's throwing the ball really well right now. So I've been really proud of Chad."

So far, so good. The next few months offer the chance for Kelly and Butt to demonstrate that the Broncos' patience in them was justified.

The Broncos reportedly want to bring back DeMarcus Ware, but not as a player

By Jared Dubin

CBS Sports

May 13, 2018

With the No. 5 overall pick in this year's NFL Draft, the Denver Broncos selected North Carolina State pass-rusher Bradley Chubb. Considered the top edge defender in the draft, Chubb has worlds of potential. Best case scenario, he turns into something like DeMarcus Ware, who tore up opposing offensive linemen for 12 years as he racked up 138.5 sacks.

Of course, the Broncos know Ware very well. He played his final three seasons in Denver after spending his first nine in Dallas with the Cowboys, and Ware helped the Broncos win their most recent Super Bowl.

If they get their way, he'll also be helping mold Chubb into the best player he can be. According to a report from Mike Klis of 9 News in Denver, the Broncos have reached out to Ware (among others) to come to OTAs and training camp and help out with some pass-rushing instruction.

"The plan is for Ware and others to be in a few days during organized team activities and a couple days during training camp," Klis wrote. "As Ware has already served as a player-coach of sorts for active Bronco pass rushers Von Miller, Shane Ray and Shaquil Barrett, there is little doubt his pet project would be Chubb, providing his consultant-type role is finalized with the club."

There are few better teachers for a team to turn to than one of the best pass-rushers of his generation, and there's no doubt the young Broncos edge rushers would benefit from some hands-on tutelage from Ware. There was already speculation earlier this offseason that Ware might serve a similar role with the Cowboys, so it will be interesting to see if he chooses instruction with one team over the other, or if he just does both.

Sexual assault case against Lions coach Matt Patricia reportedly had at least 5 prosecution witnesses

By Jack Baer
Yahoo Sports
May 13, 2018

More details have come out in the 1996 sexual assault case against new Detroit Lions coach Matt Patricia, specifically the makeup of the prosecution's list of witnesses against the 43-year-old.

According to court documents obtained by the Detroit Free Press, the witness list included a nurse, doctor, police detective, police officer and college friend of the alleged victim. Accounts from the five helped lead to an indictment by a grand jury of Patricia and college friend Greg Dietrich on charges of aggravated sexual assault, but the charges were ultimately dismissed 10 months after the incident when the victim decided she couldn't take the stress.

In The Detroit News' story that brought the charges to light, Patricia and Dietrich were accused by a 21-year-old college student of bursting into her hotel room and taking turns sexually assaulting her during spring break in 1996 at South Padre Island, Texas.

The whole episode is currently under review by the NFL. Patricia and the entire Lions organization have vigorously defended the coach's innocence, even though Lions leadership reportedly didn't know about the incident until they were contacted by a reporter asking about it.

"As someone who was falsely accused of this very serious charge over 22 years ago, and never given the opportunity to defend myself and clear my name, I find it incredibly unfair, disappointing, and frustrating that this story would resurface now with the only purpose being to damage my character and reputation. I firmly maintain my innocence, as I have always done," Patricia said in a statement released by the Lions.

Patricia's former boss Bill Belichick also supported the man who worked under him as an assistant coach for 13 years, saying that while the New England Patriots were not aware of the charges, Patricia conducted himself with "great integrity" during his time in New England.

Vance Joseph: Keenum to give Lynch chance to 'relax'

By Edward Lewis

NFL.com

May 13, 2018

Vance Joseph is all aboard the same give Paxton Lynch a chance to develop train John Elway is currently conducting.

Just days after the Broncos' general manager told media members that Denver isn't just going to kick Lynch "to the curb" after acquiring veteran Case Keenum this offseason, the Broncos' head coach echoed Elway's sentiments.

Joseph told media members Saturday that Denver is not only not ready to punt on the Lynch experiment -- they're confident the third-year QB will thrive in a role where he's sitting and learning behind Keenum.

"I think for Paxton and our football team it's been a weight off all of our backs to have a starting quarterback and have everyone's role defined from Day 1," Joseph said. "So for Paxton, he can relax and get better each day and not worry about a competition. I think for Paxton being around Case also -- I mean, Case has been through some ups and downs in his career, so he can learn from Case on how to handle those things.

"It takes time to be an NFL quarterback. You would hope with Case being here, he can sit back and relax and get better as a quarterback and not worry about being the guy right now and just compete to be our backup."

In theory, Joseph and Elway's confidence in Lynch's career revival behind Keenum makes sense. Lynch was always considered a project, even when Denver outraced the Dallas Cowboys to take him with the No. 26 pick in the 2016 NFL Draft. Now, the former Memphis QB finally has some time to develop his big toolbox without the pressure of getting ready week in and week out for NFL defenses.

Yet of the top 10 or so quarterbacks in the league the past two decades, not many -- and likely not any -- have started their careers with a 1-3 win-loss record, four touchdowns to four picks ratio, a minuscule 76.7 quarterback rating and 18 sacks taken; and bounced back to become elite.

Denver's brass certainly sounds like it's hoping Lynch can change that, particularly with the decision to pick up his fifth-year option looming about 12 months away.

Shane Ray opens up on Broncos' decision to decline his fifth-year option

By Ryan Koenigsberg

BSN Denver

May 13, 2018

It's a harsh reality. You pour your heart and soul into something. You soak blood, sweat and tears into the colors of your jersey. You live by the wins and die by the losses. Your team becomes a part of your identity.

But, at some point, for almost every NFL player, you are reminded that around here, decisions aren't made with the heart, they're made with the head. Around here, every decision starts with the bread.

For Denver Broncos linebacker Shane Ray, that harsh NFL reality hit close to home last Wednesday, when the organization informed him that they would not be picking up his fifth-year option.

On Friday, in a one-on-one interview with BSN Denver, Ray opened up on the wide range of emotions he's experienced since receiving that news.

"You get a little disappointed," Ray said his initial reaction. "You get an injury, you blow your wrist out, you have three surgeries. I could have stayed on IR the entire year, but instead I tried to do whatever I could to help my team and, of course, there's not much you can do when you can't even use your left hand. At first, it was kind of like, 'Man, how could you guys do that to me?'"

It's a fair reaction, right? In fact, it would be understandable for Ray to have held on to those original feelings. Sure, there's still a chance he could be a Bronco for life, but it would be naive to not read into the message sent by the organization. Just because the NFL operates a certain way doesn't mean you necessarily have to like it.

But Shane didn't hang on to his frustrations, after some reflection and a productive man-to-man meeting with John Elway, the fourth-year pass rusher came away with a very different view of things.

"I mean, it's business," he shared, coming to terms with an age-old cliché. "This is my first time dealing with the business aspect of the NFL. My option is \$9.5 million and if I'm looking at it—I blew my wrist out last year, so do you give \$9.5 million to a guy who had three wrist surgeries the year before? Because it's not based on production, my first two years, there were no complaints, so it's not based on that."

"I really just looked at the big picture of things," he added. "It's really a blessing in disguise. The ball is in my court now; I have control. I have the ability to go out there and have a great football season with my teammates, and that could lead me to a new contract here in Denver or a new contract somewhere else. Regardless, it's going to be good for me; it's not a bad thing... That's just how the game goes. I have no hard feelings or anything about it."

One interesting layer in the Broncos' decision to pass on Ray's option was the event that took place just days before the decision was due—the NFL Draft—where, of course, the Denver Broncos selected a pass

rusher in Bradley Chubb in the first round. Much has been made about the correlation between the two nearly-subsequent moves. Did Chubb falling to Denver at No. 5 play a role in the decision?

“No. It wasn’t correlated. At least from my knowledge,” Ray said. “Even if it was, how would people expect me to take that? It’s not like I look at it as a smack in the face. I was drafted in 2015 when they had Von, DeMarcus and Shaq. It’s the same situation; it’s me, Shaq, Von and now we have Chubb, another great player, and great pass rusher. I’m excited for him to come in. I’m going to teach him everything I know because he’s going to help us.”

“You can have me, Von and Shaq out there at the same time. You can put Chubb on the inside; he’s a 270-pound kid, that adds a lot of versatility to our pass rush,” he added. “That’s something that we lacked last year, whether it be from the interior or from us outside guys, we needed that. I feel like we’re getting back to the pass-rush formula that we had in 2015 when we had Malik, Wolfe, Sly, Von, DeMarcus, me, Shaq—it feels the same way. I’m excited, man, it’s going to be a helluva year for us, and I think people are going to be really happy about what we’re bringing to the table this year defensively.”

Some may say that Ray’s future is uncertain, but in his eyes, the future is now.

“I’m just trying to be the best Bronco I can be.”

Dismissed sexual assault case against Lions coach Matt Patricia had at least five witnesses

By Tresa Baldas
Detroit Free Press
May 13, 2018

The prosecution's witness list in the sexual assault case against Detroit Lions coach Matt Patricia included a nurse, a doctor, a police detective, a police officer and a college friend of the alleged victim, according to court documents obtained by the Detroit Free Press.

The documents shed light on how police and prosecutors built their case against Patricia, who was set to go to trial on Oct. 21, 1997, until his accuser decided she couldn't take the stress. The charges were dropped 10 months after the alleged incident.

According to court documents, the alleged victim was treated at a hospital called Valley Regional Medical Center in Brownsville, Texas, which is about a 20-minute drive from South Padre Island. That's where the woman claims Patricia and a college friend sexually assaulted her in a hotel room during a March 1996 spring break trip.

Prosecutors, court records show, obtained medical evidence.

"In a sexual assault case, part of the investigation is medical ... the victim is taken to a hospital to have medical exams taken on her to corroborate (her claims)," Cameron County District Attorney Luis Saenz said Friday.

It is not known whether DNA evidence was obtained.

Former emergency room nurse Nancy Nadeau, 54, one of the prosecution's witnesses, declined comment on the case citing HIPPA rules. But she did say that generally, when sex assault victims go to the length of going to a hospital for testing and police are involved, that raises suspicion that "something happened."

Former South Padre Police Chief E.E. Eunice, who oversaw the police department during the alleged incident, said "it's likely a detective took the person to the hospital for the examination," as is customary in sex crimes.

"They were slowly progressing," Eunice said of the prosecutor's office, noting he couldn't recall the investigation given it happened so long ago. "During spring break, there are thousands of people on the island. Based on my experiences, a sexual assault like this is not necessarily a rarity."

Saenz said during spring break, the DA's office, on average, handles two to five sex assault cases, half of which end like the Patricia case: Charges are dropped because the accuser decides not to testify.

The sticking issue in these cases, Saenz said, is consent.

“It’s more often than not a consent issue. The defendant said she consented and the victim says ‘No I did not.’ It’s not whether or not there was sexual activity. The key question is the consent.” Saenz said.

Patricia and a former college friend Greg Dietrich, were indicted by a Texas grand jury in 1996 on aggravated sexual assault charges. The pair were accused of bursting into a 21-year-old college student’s hotel room at 6 p.m. in March 1996 and sexually assaulting her, according to the Brownsville Herald newspaper.

The woman told police she knew both men and that she had befriended them on the beach prior to the alleged attack, the newspaper reported. Both Patricia and Dietrich were arrested that same night and released on bond.

Five months later, they were indicted by a Texas grand jury. In January 1997, the case was dismissed.

The South Padre Island police department does not have a computerized record of the investigation. Police officials said Friday that in 1996, the retention policy for police records was only 10 years. But the department is currently going through old storage files manually to see whether a paper record of the police report still exists.

In the Patricia case, the NFL coach has adamantly maintained that he is innocent and that he was falsely accused.

“I was innocent then, and I am innocent now,” Patricia said, in a news conference Thursday.

When asked whether he was in the hotel room on the day of the alleged incident, or if any consensual sex took place, he would only say: “Again, I did nothing wrong, and that’s all I’m going to say on that matter.”

The Lions organization is standing by Patricia. The NFL has said it is investigating the alleged incident.

Chad Kelly readying to compete for Broncos' backup job

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

May 13, 2018

Chad Kelly has stuck to chicken and spinach, while getting back to his college playing weight. He also has spent time working on his game with a Hall of Fame quarterback, a Super Bowl-winning quarterback and a quarterback whisperer.

The Broncos are giving Kelly, a seventh-round pick in 2017, a chance to compete with Paxton Lynch for the backup job behind Case Keenum, and Kelly is doing what he can to take advantage of the opportunity.

"I've been proud of Chad overall," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said Saturday, via Nicki Jhabvala of The Athletic. "He's been here every day. He's worked his butt off and . . . he's changed his body. Last year, he was a little tubby kid. He's really lean now; he's eating right; he's working hard. He's definitely put the work in, and he's throwing the ball really well now."

Kelly, who spent his rookie season rehabbing from a wrist injury, has worked with his uncle and godfather, Hall of Famer Jim Kelly. He also has sought help from personal quarterbacks coach Steve Fairchild, the former Colorado State head coach, as well as CBS analyst Phil Simms, who quarterbacked the Giants to a Super Bowl.

"I try to use all my resources and try to get ahead, because every day everybody is getting better," Chad Kelly said of Simms. "If I can take one thing from some guy and another thing from another guy, it's only going to help me out."

Kelly worked with Simms for about a month this offseason and plans to return before the start of training camp. Jim Kelly made the introductions.

"He's just right behind you every time you throw the ball, whether it's correct [or] it's wrong," Chad Kelly said. "He's going to tell you how it is, and that's what I need to hear. I need to know if the ball spun out of my hand correctly. When he says it's good, it's good. You can feel it, you can tell."

Texas police search records for copy of police report in Patricia case

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
May 13, 2018

With Lions coach Matt Patricia vowing on Thursday to “clear my name” but with no specifics provided in order to come to the detached, unbiased conclusion that Patricia was falsely accused of aggravated sexual assault in 1996, reporters will now attempt to fill in the gaps by uncovering forgotten or previously unknown facts. The process already has begun.

According to Tresa Baldas of the Detroit Free Press, police in South Padre Island, Texas have begun searching files in storage manually in an effort to locate a paper copy of the police report.

Currently available documents, per Baldas, show that the alleged victim received treatment on the evening of the alleged incident at Valley Regional Medical Center in Brownsville, Texas. Matt Patricia and Greg Dietrich were arrested that same night, and they were indicted by a grand jury four months later.

The case was due to go to trial on October 21, 1997. The prosecution’s witnesses included (beyond the alleged victim) a nurse, a doctor, a police detective, a police officer, and a friend of the alleged victim. Obviously, however, prosecutors did not believe that a conviction could have been obtained without the testimony of the alleged victim, who chose not to testify, citing the stress of a trial.

The Free Press reports that, although a medical examination occurred of the alleged victim, it’s unknown whether DNA samples were obtained from the defendants.

The search for more facts will continue, with the key question being whether the alleged victim will choose to tell her story now, and then whether her story seems credible and persuasive. If that happens, Patricia may have to do something more than generally state that he is innocent.

Again, he may be. Absent proof to the contrary, he’s entitled to the presumption of innocence and the benefit of the doubt. But if there’s contrary proof, professional journalists will be looking for it.

And that’s really what journalism in sports is, or at least should be. The vast majority of the “reports” that emerge every single day amount to advance notice (often as brief as a matter of minutes) of a transaction that is about to be announced by a team or the league office. True journalism entails finding out things that otherwise aren’t known, and won’t be.

Although Lions receiver Golden Tate has objected to the fact that the 22-year-old incident has become a story, Patricia is a public figure whose life is and will be, to a certain extent, an open book. A criminal prosecution for felony sexual assault is a matter of public record, no different (but much more serious) than property transactions, divorce paperwork, and death certificates.

The fact that the Lions didn't know about the incident before hiring Patricia creates added interest, and his decision to address the situation publicly with a general denial but no specifics opens the door to a search for more.

If it's a false accusation, Patricia actually should welcome the opportunity for the facts to come out now. "While I'm thankful on one level that the process worked and the case was dismissed, at the same time I was never given the opportunity to defend myself or to allow to push back with the truth to clear my name," Patricia said Thursday.

Professing innocence into a vacuum of facts doesn't clear anyone's name. Proof does. The search for specific proof continues, in part because Patricia and the Lions have declined so far to provide any.