

# Here's a sure bet. Case Keenum and Broncos will get booed more with legalized gambling on NFL games.

By Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
May 17, 2018

Let the gamblization of sports begin, and we know one thing for certain: This is going to really stink for Case Keenum. His job as Broncos quarterback is about to get more unpleasant, as every point on the scoreboard will be counted in money.

Wanna bet?

The NFL has a gambling problem. Or it did, until the Supreme Court voted 6-3 this week to establish the Patriots as 5-to-1 favorites to win the Super Bowl. So why fight gambling on sports one more day, when professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey can monetize it ASAP?

There are 150 billion solid reasons sports gambling should no longer be a shady, illegal enterprise in 49 of our great United States. But here's my fearless prediction: With every dollar wagered, the rooting interests of spectators will change ... and, in some ways, for the worse.

As the NFL snuggles up to legalized gambling, Broncos Country will bleed less orange and more green. When the fan sitting next to you at the Broncos' stadium wagers \$250 Keenum will throw for more than 250 yards against Oakland, don't be surprised when he gets booed running off the field if Denver beats the Raiders but the quarterback fails to cover the bet.

What happens in Vegas is spreading to the rest of the United States, and although nobody asked me, we need a legal sports book on every street corner about as much as we need another coffee shop to serve up caramel macchiato.

This is not a puritanical rant. I don't smoke Camels or shoot an AR-15, but if that's your thing, it's your money. In America, when was the last time anybody viewed gambling as a vice? It's a way of life, whether we're talking Powerball or fantasy football.

Fantasy football, I think, offers a glimpse of how more widespread legal gambling will change the way fans relate to their local team. I'm reminded of a conversation with running back C.J. Anderson after the Broncos started the season 2-0 in 2015, but Anderson gained only 56 yards on 23 carries in the two victories.

"I don't go to other people's jobs and tell them: 'Hey, you (stink). You're trash,' " said Anderson, expressing a desire to shout on national television for every fantasy general manager to cut him from their fantasy leagues, where there was nothing at stake except a few bucks in the office pool.

Just wait until some knucklehead wagers — and loses — \$1,000 because Keenum throws an interception that costs the Broncos a game.

Which brings me to a piece of advice from Anderson that really stuck with me: “Don’t bet on sports. You never know what’s going to happen.”

It seems reasonable to expect a spike in everything from TV ratings to franchise valuations with the introduction of legal gambling to NFL games. A fan is more likely to watch the Bills play the Browns in late December if there’s money riding on the outcome. But the juiciest stories will be found in the you-never-know of unintended consequences from the proliferation of legal gambling on sports.

What we cheer for reveals what’s in our hearts. So what worries me about gambling being extensively woven into the fabric of the NFL aren’t the big issues of enforcement and integrity, but how gambling could slowly begin to fray the community spirit that has made the Broncos about the only thing almost everyone in Colorado solidly supports.

Around here, the one sure thing has been the sound of 70,000 die-hards at Mile High, united in orange as brothers and sisters in football, all cheering for the same thing, exiting the stadium happy together, so long as the home team wins. Most people, however, are more loyal to their wallets than the home team. And that’s how gambling could change everything.

For example: What happens when Denver is favored by 6½ points and the coach orders Keenum to take a knee to protect a 21-17 lead with the Broncos in easy field goal range during the final minute of the fourth quarter? Who cheers? And who boos?

All bets are off.

# **“It’s just really moving and empowering for me.”**

## **Brandon McManus made the day of 125 Special Olympics Colorado athletes**

By Kyle Frederickson  
The Denver Post  
May 17, 2018

Broncos place-kicker Brandon McManus has worked with Special Olympics dating to his time as a high school student in Pennsylvania. Tuesday at Dove Valley, he was reminded exactly why he continues to volunteer.

The Broncos welcomed about 125 Special Olympics Colorado athletes to its indoor practice facility through the NFL’s Play 60 campaign for an hour-long event with select players, along with cheerleaders and mascot Miles, to run various football drills.

McManus, leading a running back agility workout, was caught by surprise when one attendee took charge, unannounced, while breaking down a huddle.

“Teamwork on three,” he said. McManus followed his lead.

“Seeing these kids out here encouraging one another and clapping for one another, it’s just really moving and empowering for me,” McManus said, “and makes me want to do what I do even more.”

Special Olympics athletes rotated through four stations to practice several football techniques. Other notable Broncos in attendance included quarterback Chad Kelly, tight end Jeff Heurman and cornerback Brendan Langley.

“(The players) are so great,” said Mindy Watrous, president and CEO of Special Olympics Colorado. “They’ll kneel down and take the time to talk and understand. To show them how to put their fingers on the laces and to do all of that ... They were like miraculous in their kindness and their 100 percent commitment to what’s happening here today.”

When organized team activities (OTAs) begin next week, second-year Broncos linebacker Joseph Jones will work toward keeping his roster spot as a valued member on special teams. But those goals were on hold Tuesday as Jones found fulfillment working with Special Olympians.

“Everyone thinks that community service is about making the people that we’re serving smile,” Jones said. “For me, it always makes me smile more than I feel like it makes them smile.”

The love is mutual.

“They will talk about it for months and years to come,” Watrous said. “It is incredibly meaningful to them.”

# John Elway deposed in Colin Kaepernick's collusion case, according to report

By Daniel Boniface

The Denver Post

May 17, 2018

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick was at the Denver Broncos' Dove Valley headquarters on Tuesday, but he wasn't there to talk about a potential new contract.

Kaepernick was in attendance for Broncos GM John Elway's hour-long deposition in the former 49ers quarterback's collusion case against the NFL, according to a report by 9NEWS, citing an unnamed source.

Kaepernick, who has been out of the NFL since the end of the 2016 season, filed a grievance in October accusing NFL teams of improperly colluding to keep him out of the league. Lawyers for the NFL and the NFL Players Union were also in attendance Tuesday, 9NEWS reported.

The collective bargaining agreement between the league and the players' union prohibits teams from conspiring to make decisions about signing a player. But the CBA also says the mere fact that a player is unsigned and evidence about the player's qualifications to be on an NFL roster do not constitute proof of collusion.

In the offseason leading up to the 2016 season, Elway attempted to acquire Kaepernick from the 49ers, but Kaepernick turned down the deal when he refused to take a substantial pay cut.

After remaining in San Francisco, Kaepernick began his protest during the national anthem that preseason. Kaepernick sat and then later kneeled during the anthem to instigate change and challenge authority when it comes to race relations.

According to the 9NEWS report, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, Baltimore Ravens GM Ozzie Newsome and head coach John Harbaugh, Seattle Seahawks GM John Schneider and head coach Pete Carroll and NFL owners Stephen Ross and Bob McNair have also given depositions in the case.

# NFL Insiders predict: Players with the biggest impact on new teams

By STAFF

ESPN

May 17, 2018

Which offseason addition will make the biggest impact in 2018?

Matt Bowen, NFL writer: Tyrann Mathieu, S, Houston Texans. His past injuries have to be discussed, but the former Cardinal played faster on tape toward the end of 2017. He's an upgrade in Houston at a position of need, and defensive coordinator Romeo Crennel can utilize Mathieu's versatility in the game plan. Think of a defensive matchup weapon here who can find the ball and play multiple roles for a secondary that struggled last year.

Mike Clay, NFL writer: Marcus Peters and Aqib Talib, CBs, Los Angeles Rams. It's hard to mention one without the other, so I'm going to cheat and go with the two trades the Rams made to acquire superstar corners Peters and Talib. Yes, Peters has some off-field concerns and Talib is now 32, but both have been top-10 performers at the position over the past few years and, along with Ndamukong Suh, help position the Rams as legit Super Bowl contenders in 2018.

Dan Graziano, national NFL writer: Nate Solder, OT, New York Giants. The Giants haven't scored 30 points in a game since Week 17 of 2015 -- Tom Coughlin's last season as their head coach. There are myriad reasons for the drought, but the main reason the offense hasn't worked is that the line hasn't played well. Moving on from 2015 draft bust Ereck Flowers and replacing him with a reliable veteran at left tackle should allow the Giants at least a chance to see how good their offense really can be. The price tag on Solder was massive, and could cause the Giants problems down the line. But he should make a big difference in 2018.

KC Joyner, NFL writer: Jimmy Graham, TE, Green Bay Packers. Rodgers has the reputation of not throwing to his tight ends often enough, yet over the past four years Rodgers ranks 10th in completion percentage (51.6) and touchdown percentage (51.6) on end zone throws to tight ends. Those numbers should vault close to the top of the league now that Rodgers has a jump-ball tight end of Graham's caliber, so this pairing could combine for double-digit touchdowns this season.

Mike Sando, senior NFL writer: Case Keenum, QB, Denver Broncos. It's either Keenum or Tyrod Taylor, simply because they are competent quarterbacks joining teams that were horrendous at the position last season. Even average play from them will provide massive upgrades. I'll go with Keenum because there isn't a highly drafted quarterback waiting to take his job.

Aaron Schatz, editor-in-chief of Football Outsiders: Tyrod Taylor, QB, Cleveland Browns. Or Baker Mayfield. It doesn't matter which one of them it is; either should be a massive upgrade on what Cleveland had at the quarterback position last season.

Kevin Seifert, national NFL writer: Jimmy Graham, TE, Green Bay Packers. Rodgers has a strong history with tight ends that provide even the slightest mismatch. He looked often for Jermichael Finley from

2009 to 2013 (5.6 targets per game) and Jared Cook (5.1) in 2016. Even if Graham's best days are behind him, he is with a quarterback who wants to use the tight end as much as any in the NFL.

Field Yates, NFL Insider: Saquon Barkley, RB, New York Giants. It's hard for me to look past a player who is primed for the possibility of handling 250-plus total touches right away. We've seen rookie running backs make an immediate impact in recent seasons, and Barkley has a decidedly clear avenue to doing the same for the G-Men.

Which team declined most this offseason?

Yates: Buffalo Bills. Note an important caveat: There is a long-term building process that was followed and not in any way compromised this offseason. The Bills performed exceptionally well in single-score games last season (6-2), which played an integral part in snapping their postseason drought. But it was clear they were not sold on Tyrod Taylor as the long-term quarterback solution, and they utilized their robust draft capital to select Josh Allen seventh overall. Factoring in the QB transition and offensive-line shuffle, Buffalo profiles as a regression team in the short term.

Seifert: Miami Dolphins. Their plan is difficult to discern. They've parted ways with most of their best players, from Ndamukong Suh to Jarvis Landry, and added a crew of aging veterans that includes tailback Frank Gore (35 when the season begins), receiver Danny Amendola (32) and guard Josh Sitton (32). Their faith in quarterback Ryan Tannehill, who is returning from ACL surgery, is risky at best. The Dolphins aren't rebuilding in any functional way, but their roster is not ready to compete for a playoff spot, either. That's a major step back.

Schatz: Buffalo Bills. The QB situation is a mess. Even if you're a believer in Allen (I'm not), you have to admit he's the kind of quarterback who will likely require a lot of work to transition. The offensive line is a mess, too, with Buffalo's three best linemen gone via either trade or retirement. Football Outsiders' free-agency analysis also shows edge rusher Trent Murphy as one of this year's signings least likely to live up to the value of his three-year, \$22.5 million contract.

Sando: Miami Dolphins. They subtracted Suh, Landry and Mike Pouncey. They appear to be a less talented team as a result.

Joyner: Seattle Seahawks. Mel Kiper gave them his lowest grade of the draft, and their free-agent additions were arguably the least inspiring in the league. Those might be enough to drop Seattle to the bottom of this list, but how in the world did the Seahawks do so little to upgrade the offensive line, which was arguably the worst in the league last season?

Graziano: Seattle Seahawks. The decline obviously started last season, sooner than most of us expected. But losing Michael Bennett, Richard Sherman, Cliff Avril and Sheldon Richardson in the same offseason (with Kam Chancellor's situation still unresolved) is to see a foundation crumble underneath you. Pete Carroll is not to be underestimated as a puzzle-solver, but does he have enough pieces?

Clay: Miami Dolphins. It was hard not to think of the Chip Kelly-era Eagles when watching the Dolphins chase "culture" while moving on from talented players such as Jay Ajayi, Suh, Pouncey, Landry and Michael Thomas over the past several months. Miami is weak or below average at most positions and is suddenly a candidate for the first overall pick in next April's draft.

Bowen: Seattle Seahawks. The "Legion of Boom" used to dictate the flow of the game. Play three-deep coverage, challenge routes and physically control the middle of the field. No free passes there. However, with Sherman now in San Francisco, Chancellor facing an uncertain future and a front-four pass rush that must be retooled, the Seahawks have crucial roles to fill on the defensive side of the ball in a division that features quarterbacks Jared Goff and Jimmy Garoppolo.

Which team improved the most this offseason?

Bowen: Los Angeles Rams. The arrow is pointing up for the Bears and Browns after productive offseasons, but I'm looking at the Rams due to the proven, veteran talent they brought in via trades and free agency. Cornerbacks Marcus Peters and Aqib Talib have the playmaking skills to find the ball in the secondary. Go get it. Defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh bolsters the interior of the front line next to All-Pro Aaron Donald. Wide receiver Brandin Cooks is an upgrade for the passing game. Strong, aggressive moves put this squad in position to win the NFC West and make a serious playoff run.

Clay: Cleveland Browns. They had the league's worst quarterback play in 2017 but solidified it by acquiring Tyrod Taylor and first overall pick Baker Mayfield. Joe Thomas and Danny Shelton are gone, but Cleveland stocked up with talent: E.J. Gaines, TJ Carrie, Carlos Hyde, Jarvis Landry, Chris Hubbard and Damarious Randall as well as early-round rookies Denzel Ward, Austin Corbett and Nick Chubb. This is a team on the rise.

Graziano: Chicago Bears. The problem is that because of the strength of their division, I don't know that the improvement will necessarily show in the standings. The Bears spent big in free agency, which isn't always the best way to go, but they've improved their wide receiver corps and kept their secondary intact with that spending. I believe their top three draft picks -- Roquan Smith, James Daniels and Anthony Miller -- are guys who can help them right away at positions of significant need.

Joyner: Cleveland Browns. It's incredible that the Browns were able to improve in as many ways as they did this offseason. They added two quality quarterbacks, have a logjam of good running backs with the additions of Hyde and Chubb, brought in three solid cornerbacks in free agency and acquired the best coverage cornerback in the draft (Ward). Three new offensive linemen give the Browns one of the deepest blocking walls in the NFL, and they added Landry, arguably the best possession receiver in the league.

Seifert: New York Jets. Stay with me for a moment. There is no doubt that the Browns have raised their talent level more from 2017 to 2018. But they also had the furthest to go. The Jets' drafting of quarterback Sam Darnold establishes a long-term focus for what was already a decently talented roster. For the first time in six years, the Jets know whom they're building around. Don't underestimate the value in that, even if Darnold doesn't make a huge impact in 2018.

Yates: Cleveland Browns. From a talent-added standpoint relative to where the team was last season, Cleveland takes the cake. That, of course, includes the fact that this team was historically bad in 2017, becoming just the second to go 0-16. The Browns have cultivated a short- and long-term plan at quarterback and talent across the offense, and they reshaped the secondary.

# QB Confidence Index: Post-draft ranking of all 32 depth charts

By Dan Graziano

ESPN

May 17, 2018

Are you feeling any more confident about your team's quarterback situation than you were three months ago?

Remember this before you answer: The question is about confidence. Not hope. Not optimism. Confidence. This is a great time on the NFL calendar for hope and optimism. Maybe your team signed a guy you like, or drafted one, or both. That doesn't necessarily mean things are fixed to the point of confidence. Draft picks take time to develop. Free-agent signings don't always click in Year 1.

Fortunately for you, dear reader, we maintain a laser focus here with our periodic QB Confidence Index. You may not like where your team sits on our list, but before you get too angry, remember what we're talking about here. Not hope, not even faith. Confidence.

Before we get to the list, our usual disclaimer that no one reads: This is not merely a ranking of starting quarterbacks. This is a ranking of teams based on how confident those teams are in their quarterback situation as a whole. That means it includes the reliability of the backup situation, the injury history (recent and otherwise) of the starter, the long-term plan at the position ... lots of stuff other than just which starting QB is better. So try to remember that as you peruse, and thanks as always for doing so.

Here's the post-draft edition of the QB Confidence Index.

## 1. Philadelphia Eagles

We kept them out of the top spot back in February because starter Carson Wentz is recovering from a torn ACL and there's a good chance he's not ready for Week 1. But as we'll discuss in a second, the situation with the team that sat in this spot last time (the Patriots) has grown murkier. And if ever there were a team built to earn the top spot on a list like this, it's a team that knows it has its franchise guy for the future and whose backup just won a Super Bowl MVP trophy. If it's Nick Foles to start the season, the Eagles have plenty of confidence he can get it done.

## 2. Green Bay Packers

Starter Aaron Rodgers is on his way back from an injury too, but there's no indication that training camp or any part of the regular season is in jeopardy. The Packers soon will demonstrate their confidence in Rodgers with a lucrative long-term contract extension. Backups include Brett Hundley and DeShone Kizer, who combined to start 24 games in the NFL last season. How many teams' QB rooms can make a claim like that?

## 3. New England Patriots

Tom Brady turns 41 in August, hasn't been to offseason workouts, seemed to at least dangle the possibility of retirement at one point this offseason and doesn't seem to be on super-great terms with coach Bill Belichick. As long as Brady is playing, he's in the discussion for best QB in the league, along with the guy we discussed at No. 2. But Brian Hoyer isn't the most confidence-inspiring backup, given the loftiness of the Patriots' goals, and seventh-round pick Danny Etling isn't likely the long-term successor. Brady's brilliance keeps the Patriots this high on the list, but a high level of uncertainty locks them out of the top spot for now.

#### 4. New Orleans Saints

Drew Brees is poised to set all-time records for career passing yards and completions at some point early in the 2018 season. After Sam Bradford broke his record for single-season completion percentage in 2016, Brees came right back and broke it again last year. He's a slam-dunk Hall of Famer who, like Brady, shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. So even at age 39, he keeps the Saints at this lofty spot on the list. Tom Savage is the backup, and he has started games in the NFL, but like Hoyer in New England, he'd represent a significant drop-off should the starter get hurt.

#### 5. Seattle Seahawks

This team is set for longer than the two teams in front of it because Russell Wilson is only 29. Had the Seahawks been a playoff team last year, Wilson -- who led his team in rushing as well as passing -- would have had a strong MVP case. He doesn't miss games, which mitigates the otherwise troubling fact that Austin Davis is his backup. Seattle is a prime example of a team whose confidence in its starter is enough on its own to merit a top-five spot.

#### 6. Atlanta Falcons

Matt Ryan was obviously due for a bit of a comedown following his 2016 MVP season. But he's still reliably healthy and productive, and his second season with offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian should go better than his first did. Matt Schaub is the veteran backup who knows his role and the system perfectly, and the Falcons' confidence in Ryan was made clear a couple of weeks ago by the record \$100 million in guaranteed money in his new contract.

#### 7. Detroit Lions

Matthew Stafford got his huge contract extension last offseason, and nothing has changed here since then. Matt Cassel and Jake Rudock are the backups, but like the guys in front of him on this list, Stafford doesn't miss games. He plays hurt, he loves the offensive system in which he plays, his receivers fit what the Lions are doing perfectly and they trust Stafford to get them the ball. If the Lions have problems, quarterback isn't one of them. That's the definition of confidence.

#### 8. Los Angeles Chargers

We get into this zone every time we do this where things start to sound the same. Throw the Falcons, Lions and Chargers into a hat and pick them out in any order you like. Philip Rivers is 36, but last year he posted his highest Total QBR since 2014 and his lowest interception total since 2009. He won't be around forever, and Geno Smith and Cardale Jones don't look like long-term success solutions. But Smith

has played in the league, Rivers doesn't miss games and as long as he's there, the Chargers can be confident in what they have.

#### 9. Minnesota Vikings

Yeah, \$84 million in guarantees for Kirk Cousins tells you they're confident he's the missing piece. Underappreciated in Washington, Cousins has a chance to thrive with the receivers and running game the Vikings can put around him. Backup Trevor Siemian started 24 games the past two seasons for the Broncos, and while you may not have enjoyed watching them all, that's a better backup option than a lot of teams have. And by the way, three months ago, new offensive coordinator John DeFilippo was the quarterbacks coach for a team that won the Super Bowl with Nick Foles.

#### 10. Dallas Cowboys

There may be some external trepidation about Dak Prescott after a 2017 in which he understandably fell short of the high expectations his dazzling rookie season set. But I don't detect much of that in Dallas, where the Cowboys believe Prescott is the guy for them. They're going to be a run-heavy team, and the release of Dez Bryant and the retirement of Jason Witten took 220 targets away from the passing game. But if Tyron Smith is healthy and Ezekiel Elliott plays all 16 games, the Cowboys believe they have a team built to help Prescott thrive in Year 3. Cooper Rush and Mike White don't inspire a ton of confidence in the backup situation.

#### 11. Pittsburgh Steelers

Uh ... yeah. What's the latest on Ben Roethlisberger and Mason Rudolph? Are they best buddies now or what? Look, this situation is weird. Roethlisberger is 36 and this is the first offseason in recent memory in which he didn't indicate at least some inclination toward retirement. Then he flipped out when the Steelers drafted a quarterback in the third round. Big Ben got through last season without missing a game because of injury, which is unusual for him and encouraging for 2018. But long term, who knows what happens here in terms of how long he plays, who the successor is, whether Rudolph or Landry Jones is the backup this year ... lots of layers to this one.

#### 12. Carolina Panthers

New year, new offensive coordinator for Cam Newton, who gets to try the Norv Turner experience after blossoming under Mike Shula. Same old questions about Cam: Can he survive if he keeps running the way he does, taking those hits, etc.? But he keeps on ticking, and while it doesn't always look pretty in the passing game, the Panthers know what they have in Newton, who finds various ways to win games. Backup Taylor Heinicke is a guy Turner had in Minnesota a couple of years ago, and he knows how to operate the system.

#### 13. New York Giants

Well, there's little doubt about how confident the Giants are in Eli Manning. They spent the offseason making move after move designed to support their veteran QB, including using the No. 2 pick in the draft on a running back. If they're right, and the 37-year-old Manning has three good years left, they could look very smart. If they're wrong, and the decline Manning has shown the past two years continues, they could be looking for a replacement sooner rather than later. Fourth-round pick Kyle

Lauletta is intriguing but flawed and isn't likely to be in position to replace Manning if they have to do that soon. And 2017 third-rounder Davis Webb remains a complete mystery.

#### 14. Washington

The contract extension Washington gave Alex Smith after acquiring him from the Chiefs shows more confidence than they were ever willing to show in Cousins. Smith is a reliable 34-year-old veteran who doesn't turn the ball over and just had the best statistical season of his career. He may not register high on the excitement meter, but you can feel confident in what you have in him. Backups Colt McCoy and Kevin Hogan don't do anything to push the ranking higher.

#### 15. Oakland Raiders

Derek Carr's numbers dropped across the board from his stellar 2016 season, so the Raiders changed ... well, basically everything around him. New coaching staff, overhauled wide receiver corps, personnel changes on defense, an influx of 30-somethings all over the roster. Can Jon Gruden get Carr back to playing the way he did two years ago? If so, the confidence meter will spike back up in a hurry. EJ Manuel and Connor Cook are the backups, each with some modicum of NFL experience. But Carr is only 27, so the bulk of the confidence in Oakland rests with him.

#### 16. Tennessee Titans

Marcus Mariota, like Carr, is another young quarterback who declined instead of moving forward in 2017. We give Tennessee the slightest edge over the next team on this list because of the playoff experience Mariota got last season. He needs to show he can stay healthy, and it would help the Titans' position on this list if Mariota and Corey Davis found a way to click in 2018. Blaine Gabbert sits there as yet another backup who we know can step in and manage an NFL game if need be.

#### 17. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Add Jameis Winston to the list of dudes we thought would take a big leap forward in 2017 and didn't. Winston was hurt, and when he came back (into a lost season) he played about as well as any quarterback in the league did down the stretch. Tampa Bay is surely confident it has its guy, and it kept the coaching staff intact around him even after a disappointing season. Ryan Fitzpatrick returns for another year as the backup, and he's one of many in the building who speak highly of Winston as a leader.

#### 18. Cincinnati Bengals

Here's where we get into the distinction we made in the intro to this column. The teams that follow Cincinnati on this list surely feel more excited about the prospects of their QB situation than the Bengals do. But Andy Dalton is more proven as a starter than the guys who start for those teams, and in the three years prior to 2017, he completed 64.9 percent of his passes. His 2017 decline is troubling, but a midseason offensive coordinator change is never easy. If he doesn't bounce back, Cincinnati slides down this list and could find itself moving on from Dalton before long. AJ McCarron's departure also leaves the backup situation shaky, as it's now in the hands of Matt Barkley or Jeff Driskel.

#### 19. Los Angeles Rams

A year ago, Sean McVay and the Rams' new coaching staff weren't sure what they had in Jared Goff. They feel much more confident now, though obviously they gave Goff a lot of help last year and will work to help him advance more on his own in 2018 and beyond. The 2016 No. 1 overall pick at least looks like one at this point, and the Rams can hope that he continues to build on his successful 2017. Sean Mannion and Brandon Allen are the backups at this point.

#### 20. Houston Texans

No one was more dazzling in 2017 than Deshaun Watson while he was healthy. And the Texans believe he'll be ready for training camp and the start of the season coming off his torn ACL. They are confident they have a special talent who can handle the NFL game. That confidence will skyrocket (as will Houston's place on this list) if Watson can come back healthy and play even close to the way he did over the first half of 2017. Brandon Weeden, Joe Webb and Stephen Morris are the other QBs on the roster, and while Bill O'Brien has made the playoffs with a bunch of different dudes, obviously his hope is that things are finally settled for him at the position with Watson.

#### 21. Denver Broncos

No team struggled more to figure out who to play at quarterback in 2017 than the Broncos did, which is why they tried to lure Cousins and ended up bringing in Case Keenum. A one-time backup who emerged as one of the top passers in the league in 2017, Keenum settles things down for Denver at the most important position and should be able to return the offense to some degree of respectability. If nothing else, this is the first time since Peyton Manning was there that the Broncos go into an offseason knowing who their quarterback is. Former first-round pick Paxton Lynch is still there, and they technically haven't given up on him yet. But Keenum is the man for at least this year and next, and the Broncos feel good about it.

#### 22. San Francisco 49ers

No team is more fired up about a relatively unproven QB than the Niners are about Jimmy Garoppolo. And hey, I get it. He has literally never lost a game (7-0 in his career). Garoppolo is a bit like Watson in Houston, in that a continuation of the small-sample-size performance we saw last year would necessitate a big jump on this list the next time we do it. A spring and summer spent really digging into Kyle Shanahan's offense will tell the tale, as will the way Jimmy G handles things when he inevitably does lose a game. But the contract extension screams confidence, and away they go by the Bay. C.J. Beathard, who was starting last year until the Jimmy G tornado swept into town, is in place as the backup and obviously knows the scheme.

#### 23. Baltimore Ravens

Joe Flacco has completed an impressive 64.5 percent of his passes over the past three years, but he's averaging only 244 yards per game and has a touchdown-interception ratio of 52-40 over that same time. Oh, and the Ravens just moved up to draft Lamar Jackson at the back end of the first round. Odds are, they spend this year designing an offense around Jackson's skill set while developing him in a backup role and then part ways with Flacco in 2019 or 2020. Flacco would have to play very well this year to get the Ravens to rethink that plan, and Jackson's arrival doesn't indicate much confidence at all in the QB situation as it stands in Baltimore.

#### 24. Jacksonville Jaguars

The Jags gave Blake Bortles an extension early in the offseason, indicating they'd prefer to stick with him and what worked in 2017 than to go out and spend big on someone like Cousins. They didn't draft a quarterback until the sixth round, and the backup as of now is Cody Kessler. The Jags are, for the moment, all-in on Bortles. The reason they're down so low is that (A) the commitment isn't an overly long-term one and (B) they don't ask Bortles to do as much as other teams ask their quarterbacks to do. The Jags want to run and run and run some more, and while Bortles has played well in flashes, he hasn't shown the consistency you need to see to inspire confidence. And if he flops, there isn't much behind him.

#### 25. Indianapolis Colts

Yeah? You tell me. Is Andrew Luck, who hasn't thrown a football in a year and a half, going to be ready to start the season? If he is, is he going to be confident enough in that shoulder to throw the ball the way he used to throw it? If the answers to those questions are yes, then you're right, the Colts need to be much higher on this list. But how can you, I, he or they really know those answers? Especially when they were all saying the same things this time last year, and he missed the whole season? Jacoby Brissett was a surprisingly good backup, but the record indicates that plan didn't REALLY work.

#### 26. Chicago Bears

Mitchell Trubisky showed during his 2017 rookie season that he can handle the pressure of playing in the NFL. He didn't show much else, mainly because the Bears didn't ask him to do very much. But new coach Matt Nagy should change that, and we may get to see the talent that made Trubisky the No. 2 pick in last year's draft. If Nagy can install anything like what he was running in Kansas City last year, Trubisky could move up very quickly on this list and others. Chase Daniel is the backup and knows what Nagy wants to do from their time together in Kansas City.

#### 27. Kansas City Chiefs

Patrick Mahomes has played one NFL game. In it, he dazzled with his arm strength and led us to believe his raw ability mixed with Andy Reid's creativity and all of those offensive weapons the Chiefs have can put together something magical. The question is one of timetable, as Mahomes will surely need time to develop as a starter. Plenty of hope and excitement around this youngster, and the team feels confident enough in his readiness to give it a try that they dealt Alex Smith to Washington. But it's a high-risk move, and it's hard to have much confidence in it until we see how it all unfolds.

#### 28. Miami Dolphins

Miami is committed to Ryan Tannehill, for this year at least, but he's coming off a torn ACL as well and didn't play at all last year, so confidence isn't easy to come by. They didn't draft a quarterback, and so far they've added Brock Osweiler and Bryce Petty to the backup corps. So Tannehill's job looks safe. You just wonder about the sustainability of the whole situation in Miami, and whether changes are on tap for next offseason that would include the quarterback.

#### 29. Cleveland Browns

It's got to be better. Honestly, that could be the Cleveland Browns' official 2018 team slogan. "The 2018 Browns: It's got to be better." You go 0-16 with an unprepared rookie starting games ahead of unprepared backups, you can only improve your confidence and your expectations for the quarterback position. Enter Tyrod Taylor, late of the Buffalo Bills, to start while No. 1 overall pick Baker Mayfield gets ready. Taylor is fine, and makes the Browns better, and Mayfield ... who knows? Obviously, they believe he's the guy there long term. He provides hope, while Taylor should provide the week-to-week competence and stability the Browns lacked at QB last year.

### 30. Arizona Cardinals

When we did this three months ago, the Cardinals had literally no quarterbacks on their roster. They ranked last on the list. And you can argue that the addition of Sam Bradford in free agency alone should move them higher up this list. I could argue in return that Bradford's health history gives me pause, that backup Mike Glennon was a mess as a starter for the Bears last year and that No. 10 overall pick Josh Rosen is at this point an unknown from an NFL standpoint. If Bradford is healthy or Rosen advances quickly this summer, no issue moving the Cardinals up ahead of some of the questionable situations above them. But we'll need to see at least one of those things to warrant that move.

### 31. New York Jets

They brought back veteran Josh McCown, who's a known quantity and played well for them last year. They added Teddy Bridgewater, who's a major health concern and basically hasn't played in two years. And they drafted Sam Darnold No. 3 overall, which could be fantastic down the road. Heck, Darnold (or Bridgewater!) could theoretically beat out McCown for the starter's job this offseason. But it's tough to feel confident about this situation in the short term or long term, even if there's reason to hope either or both could be OK.

### 32. Buffalo Bills

Someone has to be last. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the way Buffalo addressed the QB position this offseason. AJ McCarron deserves a shot, and maybe he'll take advantage of this opportunity and establish himself as an NFL starter while No. 7 overall pick Josh Allen gets ready as a backup. Maybe Nathan Peterman shows enough in camp to get a shot ahead of McCarron. There are some maybes here that can help Bills fans build a case for optimism. But confidence? Hard to make any kind of confident bets on any of these guys right now. Even if it's legal now.

# Broncos quarterback Chad Kelly ready to 'compete at high level'

By Troy Renck

KMGH

May 17, 2018

In the 2017 draft, the Broncos piqued the interest of fans when they made quarterback Chad Kelly the last pick overall. The idea of Kelly as Mr. Irrelevant struck as a contradiction. Kelly has been known forever. First, for his athletic prowess. Later for his relation to uncle Jim, a Hall of Famer. And finally, for all the wrong reasons.

Kelly, a top prep prospect, produced a star-crossed college career. Clemson kicked him off the team in 2014 for arguing with coaches during a spring game. He was arrested for a bar fight and later involved in a brawl at his brother's high school game after a late hit.

Kelly's issues and injuries plunged his draft stock. General manager John Elway drafted Kelly based on Jim's recommendation. Kelly said all the right things at the Senior Bowl. Given a life raft, the time arrived to walk it like he talked it.

As difficult as draft weekend was, Kelly believes his redshirt season could be the best thing that ever happened to him. He sits in a competition for the backup spot with former first-round pick Paxton Lynch.

"I don't think there really is one key. I think the key is to get better every day, whether you are first-string, second-string, third-string or practice squad. It's about finding one thing you can work on everyday to get better," Kelly told Denver7 in an exclusive interview Tuesday. "If you are doing that every day, and not repeating your mistakes, then you will improve. And I need to be consistent in what I am doing."

Perception can become reality for rookies. And when Kelly arrived a year ago with his belly protruding from his No. 6 jersey, it caused alarm. True, he was rehabbing from knee and wrist injuries. However, without discipline in his recovery, how could he be viewed as a threat to anyone on the depth chart? Kelly took advice seriously. He dropped from 236 pounds to his current 210. He looks the part as he attempts to land a significant role behind veteran Case Keenum.

"Last year I was able to develop my game, whether in the run game, the pass game, the protections, finding out how a real NFL offense is supposed to run and the mechanics and communication that go with it. It was definitely an advantage to be able to sit back and watch it unfold," Kelly said. "I was able to take care of my body and get back into the best playing shape so I could be ready to compete at a high level. You have to eat clean. You can't stay up late. You have to make sure you have your greens always, and you need a specific regimen if you want your body working at a high level. I really took pride in feeling great again in my mind and body."

Coach Vance Joseph welcomed the addition of Kelly during the draft. He viewed the Ole Miss quarterback as the best prospect. He, too, has seen Kelly mature over the past 13 months. Watching

Kelly interact with Special Olympic athletes during Tuesday's Play 60 event at the Pat Bowlen Fieldhouse, Kelly's joy was palpable.

"I've been proud of Chad overall. He's been here every day, and he's worked his butt off. You mentioned it, 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," Joseph said after Kelly worked with the rookies last weekend. "He's definitely put the work in and he's throwing the ball really well right now. He's been good for our new guys."

It's easy to forget how good Kelly was before he became sidetracked. He eclipsed 4,000 yards as a junior, and was topping the SEC with 2,578 passing yards when he tore the ACL and meniscus in his right knee in his final season.

His became a journey interrupted. Kelly grew up watching Buffalo Bills games from the sidelines. While a fierce competitor in basketball, lacrosse and snow skiing, he zeroed in on the NFL as his dream.

Kelly made his path to the pros more challenging by making mistakes.

Those missteps, those failures, he believes, have prepared him for future success.

"Every kid goes through hard times. I had the strength to overcome it and get where I wanted to be. You know college didn't end exactly the way I wanted it to end," Kelly said. "I am where I want to be now. God works in mysterious ways. I am excited about this opportunity in front of me, and thankful for what happened before."

# Former Broncos QB Peyton Manning to play with Tiger Woods in Memorial Tournament Pro-Am

By Aric DiLalla  
DenverBroncos.com  
May 17, 2018

Broncos fans will see a familiar face during the Memorial Tournament's Pro-Am in late May.

Former Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning will be paired with 14-time Major winner Tiger Woods for the event, according to Sports Illustrated, and the duo will take on the field on May 30.

The two have played together in a Pro-Am before. In 2009, Woods and Manning played at the Quail Hollow Championship, and they also participated in a Pro-Am at Bay Hill in 2005.

"It's everything you'd think it would be," Manning said in 2009. "It's really special. Watching him hit the ball, listening to him hit the ball, he tells great golf stories."

Manning, who helped lead the Broncos to a Super Bowl 50 title, should be able to glean some information about the Muirfield Village course from Woods.

The 79-time PGA Tour winner last played in the Memorial Tournament in 2015, but he has won the event five times — most recently in 2012.

Manning has played with other top-tier golfers in the past. He has paired up with three-time major winner Jordan Spieth at previous Pebble Beach Pro-Ams.

# Here are the new kickoff rules NFL owners will be voting on at the spring meeting

By Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz

USA Today

May 17, 2018

May is a time for NFL teams and fans to entertain all possibilities for the upcoming season. Even the league's most downtrodden franchises can envision a swift rise, especially given the examples set by others last year.

The Philadelphia Eagles became the first team since the 2009 New Orleans Saints to win the Super Bowl after finishing in last place in their division the previous season. The Jacksonville Jaguars captured the AFC South crown for the first time in franchise history after finishing in the cellar in 2016. (The Carolina Panthers made a similar jump, but a tiebreaker relegated them to second place last season even though they shared an 11-5 record with the NFC South champion Saints.)

Here's our ranking of how likely last-place finishers from 2017 are to complete a worst-to-first transition:

## 1. Texans

Houston actually finished tied with Indianapolis in the AFC South basement last year. But while the Colts are holding out hope that Andrew Luck's potential return can restore them to credibility, the Texans have the top-end talent to rise much higher. Deshaun Watson could make a Carson Wentz-level leap in Year 2 as he recovers from a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Meanwhile, a defense that ranked last in scoring is bound to improve with the returns of three-time defensive player of the year J.J. Watt and underrated pass rusher Whitney Mercilus, as well as the additions of Tyrann Mathieu, Aaron Colvin and rookie Justin Reid to the secondary.

But Houston's roster doesn't have much in the way of a middle class, and its shortcomings — especially an offensive line that gave up 54 sacks — are significant. Still, there's little question that the Texans have the highest ceiling of any team on this list.

## 2. 49ers

If this exercise were solely based off how teams finished the 2017 campaign, San Francisco would be the clear choice for No. 1. Kyle Shanahan's group looked well ahead of schedule when it closed the year 5-0 after Jimmy Garoppolo took the starting reins. With former nemesis Richard Sherman filling a glaring hole at cornerback, the defense also looks to be taking shape.

Both the Seahawks and Cardinals could be headed for transitional years amid significant offseason changes, but the star-studded Rams remain a major obstacle atop the division. Given the multiyear rebuild that Shanahan and general manager John Lynch took on, the Niners likely still need some leeway as a young roster continues to develop.

## 3. Broncos

After being grounded by subpar passing the last two seasons, Denver is ready to find out how far steady quarterback play can take the current outfit. Case Keenum looks capable of being the plug-and-play option the team needs to take advantage of its third-ranked defense. Von Miller and first-round pick

Bradley Chubb need to reignite the pass rush to make up for vulnerabilities along the defensive line and in the secondary, but Denver still has the tools to move past the memories of last year's eight-game losing streak.

The AFC West might be tightly contested again, but the uncertainty surrounding the Chiefs amid Patrick Mahomes' ascension to starting QB leaves the door open for a new champion. General manager John Elway said the Chargers might be the team to beat, but Denver looks poised to right the ship in short order.

#### 4. Giants

After Ezekiel Elliott and Leonard Fournette helped recalibrate the Cowboys and Jaguars' offenses as rookies en route to division titles, the Giants are hoping Saquon Barkley can bring about a similar sea change. The No. 2 pick should provide a needed sense of balance next to Odell Beckham and Eli Manning, who likely will have improved blind side protection with Nate Solder taking over. New coach Pat Shurmur also figures to be a steadying presence in the reset.

But returning to the franchise's seemingly perennial status as a playoff contender won't be as simple as dismissing any lingering drama. The defense gave up an NFL-worst 32 passing touchdowns last season, and a pass rush that generated just 27 sacks lost Jason Pierre-Paul. With the Eagles way out in front of the rest of the NFC East, Big Blue will be hard-pressed to capture its first division title since 2011.

#### 5. Bears

Taking cues from the Rams' rapid rise, Chicago hired a young, innovative offensive mind in Matt Nagy to bring along second-year quarterback Mitchell Trubisky and revive a passing attack that ranked as the NFL's worst last season. General manager Ryan Pace provided new tools with wide receivers Allen Robinson and Taylor Gabriel and tight end Trey Burton. With a top 10 defense and room to grow for Jordan Howard and Tarik Cohen in the running game, the Bears could enjoy a quick turnaround.

The NFC North competition, however, might temper Chicago's prospects. The Bears were just one of two teams to go 0-6 in their division last season (along with the Browns) and have neither the star-studded roster of the Vikings nor the transformative talent that the Packers boast in Aaron Rodgers.

#### 6. Buccaneers

Jason Licht quietly implemented an aggressive offseason plan. Saddled with the league's worst pass rush, he overhauled the defensive line by adding Pierre-Paul and Vinny Curry on the edge before drafting Vita Vea. The ninth-ranked offense was explosive in stretches, but speedy rookie Ronald Jones should jolt a running attack that had just five gains of 20 yards or more.

Yet there might be too much ground to make up in a division that features three returning playoff teams, all of whom boast a quarterback capable of elevating his respective group. Unless Jameis Winston can establish himself on that level by taking a significant step in his development and curbing his turnovers, Tampa Bay will have a difficult time keeping pace.

#### 7. Browns

No one will accuse general manager John Dorsey of standing pat in his first offseason as he rebuilds a team that's 1-31 since 2016. A completely new set of quarterbacks, led by Tyrod Taylor and No. 1 pick Baker Mayfield, might be the best representation of how bold Cleveland has been in reconstructing its roster. While there are still several holes, the Browns look poised to make a sizable leap.

But even substantial progress might not amount to much more than a handful of wins. The Browns have dropped their last six games against the Steelers, so catching up to Pittsburgh this quickly seems like a pipe dream. Finishing anything other than last in the AFC North for the first time since 2010 would mark significant progress.

#### 8. Jets

Take solace, Gang Green fans: At least there are signs of progress. In Sam Darnold, the Jets appear to have finally found a starting point for their rebuild. Saddled with a weak supporting cast, he could have a rough ride should he have a significant role as a rookie. But with the right breaks, New York could push the Dolphins and Bills.

Yet the Jets are the clear choice for the last slot on this list given the presence of the Patriots, who have claimed the AFC East a record nine consecutive seasons.

# Here are the new kickoff rules NFL owners will be voting on at the spring meeting

By John Breech  
CBS Sports  
May 17, 2018

The NFL's 32 owners are going to be pretty busy next week when they get together in Atlanta for their annual spring league meeting (May 22-23), and that's because the group is going to have quite a few things to vote on.

First and foremost, the owners will be voting on several rule changes that will affect the kickoff. The kickoff as you currently know it will be going away if all the proposals are passed.

Here's a look at the proposed rules along with the current rule (via the NFL):

Current rule: Kickoff team must have at least four players on each side of the ball.

Proposed change: Kickoff team must have five players on each side of the ball. This rule will likely have its biggest impact on onside kicks, because teams like to line up six players on one side and four players on the other, as you can see below. Under the current rule, that's legal. However, if the new rule passes, it would be illegal.

Moving on.

Current rule: Kickoff team can set up five yards behind the line of scrimmage

Proposed change: Kickoff team cannot line up for more than one yard from the line of scrimmage (This eliminates running starts and means players would have to line up at the 34-yard line for a kickoff from the 35. Currently, players can go back to the 30)

Current rule: The ball is dead if it is downed in the end zone by the receiving team.

Proposed change: The ball is dead for a touchback if it touches the ground in the end zone, even if hasn't been touched by the receiving team. The returner doesn't have to down the ball in the end zone to get the touchback.

The rule above means that a touchdown the Jets scored against the Bills in their 2016 regular season finale wouldn't have counted.

In the play above, Bills returner Mike Gillislee decided to let the ball roll into the end zone, where the Jets recovered it for a touchdown. Under the proposed rule, since Gillislee didn't touch the ball, the ball would have been dead for a touchback as soon as it hit the goal line.

Let's keep going.

Current rule: Players on the receiving team can move beyond their restraining line and block players on the kicking team after the ball is kicked.

Proposed change: No player on the receiving team may cross its restraining line until the ball is touched or hits the ground. The receiving team also cannot initiate a block against the receiving team in the 15-yard area from the kicking team's restraining line.

Current rule: Two-man wedge blocks permitted; can take place anywhere on the field

Proposed change: No wedge blocks. Only players who were initially lined up in the setup zone may come together in a double-team block

Here's a closer look at each rule from the NFL.

Basically, the NFL is looking to make the kickoff safer by eliminating wedge blocks, eliminating running starts and making it harder for a player to make a cheap shot. Speaking of cheap shots, that's another rule that will be discussed. If a player gets ejected for targeting -- or any other reason -- there's a good chance the ejection will be reviewed starting this year. One of the rules being voted by owners would make all ejections subject to replay review.

Of course, the kickoff rules and ejection replay won't be the only two things on the docket next week. The owners will also be voting on the location for the next two drafts.

The five finalists to host the event in either 2019 or 2020 have already been revealed, with Nashville, Denver, Las Vegas, Cleveland/Canton, and Kansas City still in the running. Nashville is reportedly the favorite to land the draft in 2019, which means the other four cities will likely be competing for 2020.

The owners will also use the meeting to approve David Tepper as the new owner of the Panthers, which should just be a formality. Tepper needs to be approved by 24 of the league's 32 owners. Another topic of discussion will be a possible league-wide policy for players in regards to the national anthem. Although the topic was discussed in March, owners decided not institute any rules that would require a player to stand.

# **Peyton Manning, Tiger Woods to pair up in golf tourney**

By Marc Sessler

NFL.com

May 17, 2018

Peyton Manning and Tiger Woods are at it again.

The retired star quarterback and iconic golfer are set to join forces May 30 for the pro-am at The Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio.

Tournament officials announced the pairing Wednesday.

The twosome first teamed together for a pro-am in 2005 at Bay Hill before linking again in 2009 for a pro-am at the Quail Hollow Championship in Charlotte, N.C. They've golfed together intermittently since, while forging a close friendship.

The timing is fitting for Woods, the 14-time Major champion enjoying something of a comeback. Tiger has overcome a rash of back surgeries to rank as a top-12 finisher in four PGA Tour events in 2018.

Manning, meanwhile, has plenty of time to swing the clubs after walking away from football before the 2016 season.

# NFL to consider several proposed kickoff rule changes

By Austin Knoblauch

NFL.com

May 17, 2018

Several proposed rule changes aimed at improving player safety during kickoffs will be presented to NFL team owners at next week's Spring League Meeting in Atlanta.

The proposals, which need to be approved by 24 of the 32 NFL team owners before being ratified for the 2018 season, will make kickoffs more like punts and limit full-speed collisions. The proposed adjustments were made in conjunction with special teams coaches and members of the league's Competition Committee during a player safety summit at the league's headquarters in New York earlier this month.

Some key takeaways from the proposals:

1. Players on the kicking team cannot line up more than one yard from the point of the kickoff. The current rule allows players to line up five yards from the restraining line (typically 35-yard line), allowing them to have more of a running start before the kick.
2. The wedge block has been eliminated. Only players who line up in the setup zone (between their own 40 and opponents' 45-yard line) can put together double-team blocks.
3. Until the ball is touched or hits the ground, no player on the receiving team may cross the restraining line (typically its 45) or initiate a block. This forces blockers on the receiving team to run back and block, which greatly decreases the chance of an "attack" block that can result in a high-speed collision.
4. When the ball hits the end zone, it's immediately ruled a touchback. There is no need for a player to down the ball in the end zone to initiate a touchback.

As NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport reported on NFL Up to the Minute Live, the proposals have the potential to make kickoffs more exciting since they place limits on blocking schemes.

The proposals, if approved, would collectively represent the second significant change made this offseason to improve player safety. In March, team owners approved an expanded helmet-hit rule that penalizes players who lower their heads and initiate contact on an opponent with their helmets.

The NFL has made 49 rule changes since 2002 to protect players, improve practice methods, better educate players and personnel on concussions and strengthen the league's medical protocols. The NFL deploys 29 medical professionals on the sidelines for each game. Working with the NFL Players Association, the league enforces a concussion protocol for players that has been instrumental in immediately identifying and diagnosing concussions and other head-related injuries.

The Spring League Meeting opens on Tuesday.

# I'm a Pro Football Player Now, but I'll Be Black Forever

By Justin Tinsley  
New York Times  
May 17, 2018

## THINGS THAT MAKE WHITE PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE

By Michael Bennett and Dave Zirin  
220 pp. Haymarket Books. \$24.95.

Part of the mythology of sports, according to Michael Bennett, the Super Bowl champion defensive end, is that sports make society more equal. "That's miseducation," he writes in "Things That Make White People Uncomfortable." "The only thing that's going to make us equal isn't sports. It's going to be people realizing we're all human."

One of the raging debates of our times centers on social justice — and, in particular, the political views of athletes in the age of President Trump. Near its epicenter is Bennett, now a Philadelphia Eagle, who as a Seattle Seahawk sat during the national anthem last season to protest systemic inequalities. He is now fighting assault charges after being accused, unjustly he argues, of injuring an elderly woman while rushing through the crowd after last year's Super Bowl to congratulate his twin brother, Martellus, on the Patriots' win.

Bennett's worldview and understanding of race has been intensified by experiences like these. Wasting few words and fewer emotions in this memoir (written with Dave Zirin, sports editor of *The Nation*), he starts by examining the brutal realities of both collegiate and professional football.

The former Texas A&M Aggie includes poignant descriptions of his undergraduate years, noting that racism was at the center of his college experience. He also explains how post-traumatic stress disorder triggered in high school and college can follow athletes long after the stadium crowds stop roaring. As an Aggie, Bennett explains, he was "half god, half property," subject to so many restrictions that he was socked with a one-game suspension for leaving campus to attend his 2-year-old daughter's birthday party. Bennett still resents going undrafted in 2009, the result, he believes, of his inability to live by the advice given to athletes: "Stick to sports."

Asking the N.F.L. "to lead on social issues sometimes seems like asking a dog to meow," he remarks early on. But he's also found football's brotherhood invaluable, forming bonds with his former coach Pete Carroll, as well as Russell Wilson, Marshawn Lynch, Cliff Avril, Justin Britt, Albert Haynesworth and the late Cortez Kennedy. At the same time, the physical toll football has taken isn't an inheritance he wishes to pass along. If he were to have a son, Bennett says, he wouldn't let him take up football. The fear of dying while playing is very real, something Bennett carries onto the field each Sunday — not necessarily because he's afraid of death but because he's aware of the crater such a loss would leave in the lives of his three daughters and his wife, Pele, whom he credits with helping form his compassionate worldview.

Activism is important to Bennett. It's why he's involved in eliminating food deserts in black communities. It's why the death of Charleena Lyles, shot by the Seattle police after she called to report an attempted burglary, tied him to the Black Lives Matter movement. It's why he's uncomfortable merely calling himself a feminist, deciding to act on his beliefs by helping provide science, technology, engineering and

math programs to young women of color. It's why he's adamant about taking inspiration from the June 1967 meeting of pro athlete social activists that's come to be known as the Ali Summit. And it's why Colin Kaepernick, still in exile from the N.F.L., has his lifelong support. The conversation Kaepernick's actions helped ignite, Bennett believes, was more valuable than any of his own paychecks.

That conversation — illuminating systemic racism — is the most important “thing” that makes white people uncomfortable, as his title has it. An admirer of Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Muhammad Ali and many others, Bennett is an agent of change. Faced with apathy from white athletes and fans, he urges them to take action. “Don't feel guilty,” he writes. “Do something to make it better. Help us heal by standing — or sitting — alongside us.”

By the conclusion of his book, Bennett has delved into all the hot-button issues his title suggests. “I'll be a football player for just a few more years,” he points out, “but I'll be black forever. When I'm driving with my family down the street in a nice car in a nice neighborhood and the police see us, they don't see Michael Bennett the college graduate, the husband or the loving father. ... They immediately see a black man who could possibly be dangerous.”

#### EDITORS' PICKS

Hallucinogenic Drugs as Therapy? I Tried It

Surest Way to Face Marijuana Charges in New York: Be Black or Hispanic

Flow of Refugees to U.S. Has Slowed to Nearly a Halt

This book is the necessary prelude to the serious work of Bennett's life, which will take place once he's done with football. “If you don't ask why, you'll never be attacked or criticized. No one is going to go after you or your family,” he declares. “But if you don't ask why, nothing, not a damn thing, is ever going to change.”

# NC State to honor stars Bradley Chubb and TJ Warren. Here's how.

By Jonas Pope IV  
The News & Observer  
May 17, 2018

Two of the best football and basketball players at N.C. State in recent years will have their jerseys honored by the school.

Bradley Chubb, a four-year defensive end out of Marietta, Ga., will have his name and number hung at Carter-Finley Stadium, and TJ Warren, a forward from Durham who played with the Wolfpack for two seasons, will have his jersey hung in the rafters at PNC Arena, the school announced Wednesday.

Chubb wore No. 9 the last two years, with a jersey patch to honor former N.C. State defensive end Mario Williams, the top pick in the 2006 NFL draft.

In future seasons, coach Dave Doeren will choose a player to wear the No. 9 jersey and patch to honor Williams and Chubb, who was selected by the Denver Broncos as the No. 5 pick in the 2018 NFL draft.

Chubb, who was a senior this past season, left the Wolfpack as the career leader in tackles for loss and sacks at N.C. State. He was named the 2017 ACC Defensive Player of the Year, the Bronko Nagurski Trophy winner, given to the nation's top defensive player, and a consensus All-American.

"I am very humbled by this honor and wish I could share it with my Wolfpack teammates," Chubb said in a statement. "NC State will always be a very special place for me, and having my name up in Carter-Finley Stadium is a dream come true. I was very proud to wear No. 9 because of Mario Williams and hope that future players wearing it will be proud to represent me as well."

Warren, who played at N.C. State from 2012-2014, was named the ACC Player of the Year in 2014. During his sophomore season, Warren led the ACC in scoring and field goal percentage, just the third player in league history to do so. During the 2013-14 season he averaged 24.9 points per game, the fifth-highest single season mark in school history.

In the 2014 NBA draft, Warren was picked 14th by the Phoenix Suns. He has started 124 games the last two seasons, averaging a career-best 19.6 points per game last season.

Warren's No. 24 jersey has also been honored in PNC for former players Tommy Burleson, Tom Gugliotta, John Richter and Julius Hodge.

Dates for when the jerseys will be honored have not been announced.

# NFL to vote on new kickoff rules, limiting full-speed collisions

By Michael David Smith  
Pro Football Talk  
May 17, 2018

The NFL is planning further changes to the kickoff, hoping to reduce the number of high-speed collisions that happen on the play.

A proposed new rule that owners will vote on next week will make several changes to the kickoff. The key takeaways are:

1. The kicking team must line up within one yard of the line where the ball is kicked (typically the 35-yard line), and must have five players on each side of the kicker. That changes the rule that allowed players to line up five yards behind the spot where the ball is kicked to get a running start. Now the kicker will be able to get a running start, but everyone else will get one step at best.
2. At least eight of the 11 players on the receiving team must line up within 15 yards of their restraining line, which would typically mean between the kicking team's 45-yard line and the receiving team's 40-yard line.
3. At least two players on the kickoff team must be lined up outside the numbers, and two players between the numbers and the hashmark.
4. Until the ball is touched or hits the ground, players on the receiving team can't cross the restraining line (typically the 45), or initiate a block within 15 yards of the line where the ball is kicked.
5. Wedge blocks will be eliminated. Past rule changes have limited wedge blocks to two players, but now even the two-man wedge will be banned.
6. The ball will be dead if it touches the ground in the end zone. In the past the returner could pick up the ball off the ground in the end zone and run it out, but now it would be a touchback immediately if it touches the ground in the end zone.

These rules are likely to result in fewer high-speed collisions on kickoffs and, the NFL hopes, fewer concussions.

# “Rookie Premiere” rules spark a social-media skirmish

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
May 17, 2018

The annual NFLPA “Rookie Premiere” happens this weekend, with select draft picks making the trek to L.A. for the event. The requirements of the exercise triggered a social-media skirmish that resulted in ESPN’s Darren Rovell once again being stuffed in a locker.

Said Rovell on Twitter: “The NFLPA told at least one rookie that if he turned down today’s Rookie Premiere, where they take photos in their new team gear, they would not be let into their practice facility to work out.”

Said NFLPA spokesman George Atallah in response, also on Twitter: “NFLPA’s Rookie Premiere is more than a photo in the new team gear. You either don’t know that (which is hard to believe since you’re so smart) or you’re just being obtuse. 2. The CBA has dictated this rule since our union has had Rookie Premiere.”

Teams are required to allow the players to attend the Rookie Premiere if they want, and it makes sense that the players can’t choose both to not attend and to stay behind and work out at the team facility. Such a “voluntary” act would be every bit as “voluntary” as the “voluntary” offseason workouts.

And regardless of what happens, the Rookie Premiere is indeed baked into the CBA. For a sport that makes it hard for players to market themselves individually, there’s nothing wrong with taking a weekend to put on their new uniforms and pose for photos that will end up on trading cards and elsewhere.

# Panthers announce sale to David Tepper

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
May 17, 2018

Now it's official.

The Panthers announced the sale of the team to Steelers minority partner David Tepper, setting the stage for his being approved at next week's owners meetings in Atlanta.

"I am thrilled to have been selected to be the next owner of the Carolina Panthers," Tepper said in a statement from the team. "I have learned a great deal about the community and the team over the past several months and look forward to becoming part of the Carolinas. I want to thank Jerry Richardson and the other Panthers partners for all they have done to establish and develop the NFL in the Carolinas. It has been a remarkable 25-year journey and I promise to build upon the Panthers' success on the field and in the community."

Tepper was able to buy the team after Richardson put it up for sale hours after a Sports Illustrated story regarding his alleged workplace misconduct.

That closed the book on the run of the only former NFL player to own a team, as the North Carolina-native said goodbye.

"Bringing the Panthers and the NFL to the Carolinas in 1993 was enormously fulfilling for Rosalind and me and all of our partners," Richardson said. "We are deeply grateful for the outpouring of support over the last 25 years. You have taken the Panthers into your hearts and made them part of this warm and supportive community. We want to thank all of our past and present players, coaches and staff for their hard work in making the Panthers a great success both on the field and in the community. The personal relationships we have enjoyed have been very meaningful to us.

"I look forward to turning the stewardship of the Panthers over to David Tepper. I have enjoyed getting to know him in this process and am confident that he will provide the organization with great leadership in both its football and community initiatives. I wish David and his family the very best as they enter this exciting new phase of their lives."

The sale might not close until July, but the league was eager to get Tepper into the club on a bigger basis, making him one of the richest in a club of very rich people.

# Peter King warns of unintended consequences of gambling

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
May 17, 2018

On Monday, the floodgates and/or Pandora's box opened. (Chris Simms learned on Tuesday's PFT Live that Pandora refers to something other than a music service.) On Wednesday, Peter King of SI.com has sounded the alarm (a little) about the potential problems that gambling can cause for the NFL, along with some of the questions it raises.

"If the NFL prohibits players from betting on football games, and a player is found to have done so, will he be suspended the same length of games a player gets whacked for PEDs? More games? Less?" King writes. "Will the NFL have to employ a gambling czar? And 32 enforcements officers, one per team, to make sure there's no funny business going on? Will the NFL have its own Pete Rose case?"

For all we know, the NFL already has had its own Pete Rose case. And its own Tim Donaghy case. And, quite possibly, plenty of players and coaches providing inside information about game plans and injuries and non-injuries to people who would pay very good money for that enhanced knowledge.

The point is that gambling has been around for decades. Making it more prevalent and acceptable by the general public shouldn't corrupt the sport any more than the widespread ability to play fantasy football for money.

Then again, maybe fantasy football for money already has corrupted the sport, with players and/or coaches secretly involved in high-stakes leagues (possibly through a third party), using what they know about the games and/or how they can affect them to make plenty of money on the side.

The point is that the temptation to do things that the NFL doesn't want players and coaches to do as it relates to the "integrity of the game" won't suddenly appear with eventual gambling on a widespread basis. If anything, the prevalence of legalized gambling will make it harder for players and coaches to get away with it.

King, by the way, will be spending a full hour in studio during Wednesday's PFT Live, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. ET on NBCSN and NBC Sports Radio. I have a feeling that this topic may come up.