

# Why did Broncos dumb down the offense for Case Keenum and young players alike? Scoreboard, baby.

By Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
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They blew it up. The Broncos needed an extreme makeover on offense. It started with signing quarterback Case Keenum and cutting leading rusher C.J. Anderson. But that was only the beginning. The offense was so bad, in order to fix it, Denver had to change everything, from the personnel and the scheme to the terminology and the attitude.

“It’s pretty much all different,” offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave said last week.

The Broncos really had no choice except to blow it up.

Let’s not mince words. In 2017, Denver had the worst NFL offense this side of Cleveland. Oh, there were five league teams, including the Browns, that averaged worse than the Broncos’ 18.1 points per game. No offense, however, looked more painfully uncoordinated than the Denver offense.

On the way to a last-place finish in the AFC West, nothing screamed dysfunction louder than the firing of offensive coordinator Mike McCoy after only 10 games. It was a move required not only because the Broncos had trouble finding the end zone, but players and coaches had difficulty getting on the same page of the game plan.

In his first job after being dumped as head coach in San Diego, McCoy appeared to be more interested in operating the Denver offense his way, rather in a way that best suited his quarterback, Trevor Siemian, or in a way that made sense to his boss, Vance Joseph.

The NFL is all about the quarterback, not some coach’s ego. So that’s why I needed to know this from Musgrave: Is offensive success more dependent on the system or the quarterback?

“The quarterback would come first,” Musgrave said. “Usually a sound system, or one that’s worth its salt, is built around the strength of its players. The quarterback is the focal guy, and he’s touching the ball every time. We want to do things that play to his strengths, and really all of his 10 teammates, as well. Whether it be the run scheme, the pass scheme, the protections, the deceptions and things like that.”

In order to build a more perfect offense (or at least an attack that could get Denver back in the playoff hunt), all the coaches sat down during the winter and rewrote the playbook, nearly from scratch. This is not Musgrave’s offense. It’s the Denver offense, with input from a number of assistants, designed with the skills of quarterbacks Keenum, Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly foremost in mind.

“It’s really a system that we build as a staff this offseason,” Musgrave said. “We had wholesale changes on the offensive staff. We have our framework that I’m comfortable with and that I can teach and call in a timely manner. And then our staff has put together what we feel is a great system for our players, especially our QBs.”

It took the Broncos two years, but they've finally figured it out: Peyton Manning doesn't work here anymore. When Manning was in charge, the offense could be a complex mix of Mandarin and advanced calculus. Manning was smarter than anybody else on the field and could do the thinking for the other 10 teammates in the Denver huddle, if necessary.

When it became obvious the gears inside Lynch's head were moving so slowly defenders could see what he was thinking about doing next with the football, criticism of a first-round draft pick for his failure to pick up the concepts and verbiage of Denver's was inevitable and fair. But John Elway, as the architect of this roster, has also been frustrated with the Broncos' failure to get meaningful production from young players, dating to when John Fox was in charge of the team on the field.

Isn't it also the coaching staff's responsibility to make football an opportunity to showcase an inexperienced player's talent rather than expose how much he doesn't know? Maybe it's too late to save Lynch. If the Broncos want to score more points, however, they need immediate contributions from rookies such as wide receiver Courtland Sutton and running back Royce Freeman.

"We're trying to make it concise. We don't want long-worded plays in the huddle," Musgrave said. "We've got three or four ways to go no-huddle. And a lot of those are one-word calls. We'd love for guys to know it like the back of their hand, then they can just cut it loose and play. That's what we're trying to get done."

So there's your new mantra for the Denver offense: Get R Done.

With a defense led by Von Miller and Chris Harris, the Broncos don't need the No. 1 offense in the league. They need to score six more points per game than in 2017. That translates to 96 more points in a season.

If Musgrave can get that done, Denver will be back in the playoffs. Guaranteed.

# Bradley Roby is ready to unleash his edge with Broncos' secondary

By Kyle Frederickson  
The Denver Post  
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Bradley Roby received a “get out of practice free” card.

He chose not to use it.

The Broncos' fifth-year cornerback missed the team's fourth day of organized team activities this past week with an illness. Roby awoke the next day with the same symptoms and he could easily have been excused again from the team's voluntary offseason workouts.

But Roby showed up, still far from 100 percent, and he said Broncos' coach Vance Joseph even asked: “Why?”

“I just want to them to see that even though I'm sick, I'm still here,” Roby told The Denver Post, sitting outside the outdoor practice fields with white compression material draped over his head as protection from the hot sun.

“There's no time to relax. We don't have a lot of days. I still don't feel the best today, but I got out there and practiced. I wanted to sweat.”

Roby's dedication level isn't new. His place in the Broncos locker room, though, is primed for evolution. Aqib Talib's departure to the Los Angeles Rams opens up a starting cornerback role alongside Chris Harris. Roby, 25, is most qualified to fill those shoes with 14 career starts, 168 tackles, six interceptions (two for touchdowns) and 49 pass deflections as primarily the team's third cornerback.

“To me, Roby was always a starter,” defensive coordinator Joe Woods said. “I think it will be easy for him to make that transition. Just to be a full-time starter in base and sub (packages).”

Over his previous four seasons, Roby was the young addition to a veteran savvy “No Fly Zone.” The former Ohio State star has soaked in the leadership styles of all-pro Broncos. And, for the most part, Roby has let his play do the talking — unlike the outspoken Talib.

Woods described Roby's leadership style as: “Quiet. He's a guy that keeps to himself.”

But when Roby walked across the NFL draft stage in 2014 as the 31st overall selection, former All-Pro NFL receiver turned analyst Michael Irvin served this quick breakdown: “They signed an attitude guy,” Irvin said. Roby aims to show Broncos' fans exactly what that means this fall.

“Somebody that holds his own, brings a high competitive nature to the game and high intensity,” Roby said. “That's what I feel like an attitude guy is.”

Those traits were never in question at Ohio State, where Roby started all 37 games he played. His fiery demeanor was most on display in the biggest games — and none were bigger than Michigan.

ESPN cameras once caught Roby jawing with three Michigan players in pregame warm-ups. Roby shoved one Michigan player in the chest. “Tempers flaring,” ESPN analyst Chris Fowler said at the time.

“I used to always get up in front of the defense and give a passionate speech,” Roby said. “Get everybody around — and just yell. Whatever came to my mind I would say, just to motivate the guys. Emotions are everything in those types of games.”

But walking into an NFL locker room with the same swagger isn’t so simple, especially when joining up with established teammates like Talib, Harris, T.J. Ward and Darian Stewart. Leadership requires respect and respect is always earned. “I didn’t know the way,” Roby said. “How could I come from college and yell at some vets that have been doing this? That wouldn’t make sense.”

Roby has waited for his opportunity to star in the Broncos’ vaunted secondary. His moment in the spotlight arrives at a time when his unit could use some emotional edge — something it lacked at times through an 5-11 season in which opponents scored 18 red zone passing touchdowns.

Roby is done answering questions about Talib and the past. He’s ready to establish his own edge in the Broncos’ secondary, no matter how he’s feeling. The “attitude guy.”

“It’s just got to be in you in and your personality,” Roby said. “That’s why cornerbacks are always different types of guys. You have to have certain mental toughness to do it. All the elite-level corners have always had that attitude.

“It’s just in me. It’s who I am.”

Roby’s rise

A look back at Broncos’ cornerback Bradley Roby’s statistical development over four seasons in Denver.

2014 — 17 games played (2 starts); three interceptions; two forced fumbles; one sack; 14 pass deflections; 67 tackles.

2015 — 19 games played (4 starts); one interception; one forced fumble; one fumble recovery touchdown; 39 tackles; 10 pass deflections.

2016 — 16 games played (4 starts); two interceptions returned for touchdowns; one forced fumble; 34 tackles; eight pass deflections; one sack.

2017 — 16 games played (4 starts); one interception; one forced fumble; one fumble recovery; 35 tackles; 17 pass deflections; one sack.

# Musgrave not only has a new QB, he has devised a whole new offensive system

By Mike Klis

9 News

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It couldn't have been the play caller. We'll find out soon enough if it was the quarterback.

What the Broncos' brain trust believes for certain is its problems in 2017 stemmed from its offensive system.

The Broncos aren't tweaking their offense this year – they 86'd it and devised a new one.

“Yeah, it's pretty much all different,” said Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave.

The Broncos scored just 18.1 points per game in a 5-11 season last year. Only five teams scored fewer in the NFL.

The reason why the play caller can't be blamed is, statistically, the Broncos' offense was a tad worse after offensive coordinator Mike McCoy was fired following game 10.

Musgrave took over and while he made some subtle changes, it's impossible to change an offensive system in midseason.

A look at how the Broncos performed under their two offensive coordinators last season:

McCoy Musgrave

First 10 games Last 6 games

YPG (Rk) 329.8 (18) 314.5 (20)

PY/G (Rk) 216.9 (18) 194.0 (20)

RY/G (Rk) 112.9 (15) 120.5 (7)

Pts/G (Rk) 18.3 (24) 17.7 (23)

3D% (Rk) 41.8 (8) 34.1 (20)

TO/G (Rk) 2.3 (31) 1.8 (25t)

Musgrave emphasized the run a little more than McCoy did, and he got his passes out of the quarterback's hand quicker, which in turn led to protecting the ball better.

But otherwise there wasn't much he could do with a team that was already in the throes of a six-game losing streak, had little confidence and played four of its final six games on the road.

This offseason, general manager John Elway, head coach Vance Joseph, personnel advisor Gary Kubiak, Musgrave, quarterbacks coach Mike Sullivan and other offensive assistants put their heads together.

A new offense was born.

"It's really a system that we built as a staff this offseason," Musgrave said in his press conference last week as the Broncos finished up week 2 of their four-week offseason team practice session. "We had wholesale changes on the offensive staff.

We have our framework that I'm comfortable with and that I can teach and call in a timely manner. And then our staff has put together what we feel is a great system for our players, especially our QBs."

The QBs, of course, were another adjustment. The top two from last season, Trevor Siemian and Brock Osweiler, are out. Case Keenum is in.

"It's a new system for him," Musgrave said of Keenum. "It's a new system for everybody."

McCoy has been a successful NFL coach, which is why he quickly got another offensive coordinator job with Arizona.

But his system – which has many of the same principles the New England Patriots employ and worked well for the Broncos when Peyton Manning was their quarterback in 2012 – wasn't a good fit for the collection of offensive talent in 2017.

From the upstairs' offices to the downstairs' locker room, the Broncos to a man said the McCoy offense was too complicated, specifically in the verbiage.

The players have so far called the new offense "Player friendly."

Translation: They know what to do when the play is called.

"We're trying to make it concise," Musgrave said. "We don't want long worded plays in the huddle. We've got three or four ways to go, 'no huddle.' And a lot of those are one-word calls. We'd love for guys to know it like the back of their hand, then they can just cut it loose and play."

The offensive struggles weren't a one-year anomaly. The Broncos' offense has been struggling since the second half of the 2014 season.

They won a Super Bowl in 2015 with an offense that ranked 16th in yards, 19th in points. Adam Gase and Kubiak were the controlling offensive minds in those two seasons.

So, it's not just the system. In Keenum, the Broncos hope they will get their most consistent quarterback play since Manning's last hurrah.

There are plays in every game when the system is virtually worthless. But if you're quarterback is capable, they can become some of your better plays.

"He can stay on the move and remain a passer," Musgrave said of Keenum. "He can process what he sees instantaneously. Those are good attributes to have, especially when things break down."

# Battle lines drawn as Bowlens argue over Broncos leadership

By Woody Paige  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
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The contentious franchise-family affair Pat Bowlen never wanted and attempted to prevent has reared its ugly head.

The matter matters, and will become more provocative. But how will it affect the team?

Control of the future ownership and leadership of the Broncos, an NFL team valued at more than \$2.5 billion and an incalculable Colorado asset, is at stake.

The harsh reality is that Bowlen, who was one of the most successful and powerful owners in sports, now is powerless to do anything about the sordid situation.

The former marathon and triathlon athlete is suffering from Alzheimer's and his physical health is rapidly deteriorating. Others mostly talk about "Mr. B" in the past tense as he sits unaware in his Cherry Hills Village mansion.

Elizabeth "Beth" Bowlen Wallace, one of Pat's seven children from two marriages, announced in a press release from a public relations agency three days ago that she desires, and is prepared, to become her father's heir apparent.

Wallace's intentions will have to be carried out in a hostile takeover, because the three members of the Bowlen Family Trust governing board offered an adversarial and antagonistic response that she is "not capable or qualified at this time" to become the Broncos' controlling owner.

The Broncos' belligerent battle began. Barrages have been exchanged.

Pat's two younger brothers – Bill (a former minority owner) and John (who recently sold some of his minor ownership shares to the trust) – publicly support Wallace. Amie Bowlen Klemmer, Bowlen's oldest daughter at 48, also declared she was in favor of her younger sister continuing the Bowlen Broncos legacy.

Franchise CEO Joe Ellis – one of the trustees, along with team general counsel Rich Slivka and Mary Kelly, a Denver attorney specializing in family law – issued his own statement opposing Wallace's efforts. John Elway, president of football operations, stated on social media that he backs Ellis, his boss, and "Pat put a lot of good people in place to follow his plan, and that's what they're doing."

Pat's sister Marybeth (a former Broncos' co-owner with her brothers and mother) has not become involved, and the other five children – Pat III, John Jr., Brittany, Annabel and Christiana – have not spoken.

Sides have been chosen.

Basically, the 47-year-old Wallace would have to gain approval from a majority vote of the trustee trio, and have the NFL owners' consent, to assume command.

That sanctioning will not happen— ever.

The trustees are grooming the 28-year-old Brittany Bowlen to succeed Pat (and Joe) eventually.

But that significant change to the Broncos will not occur for at least five years.

The Broncos' trustees don't ever have to act, in fact.

League owners voted 31-0, with one abstention (the Titans, who have their own ownership mess), to allow family trusts to own franchises. The primary purpose was to escape the overwhelming inheritance tax consequences (as much as 40 percent of appreciation of a franchise's valuation), but they also were resolving the Broncos' family trust potential problem. The franchise won't be sold to outside interests, or name a Bowlen successor, indefinitely.

Of the 32 NFL franchises, 18 have been passed through second and third generations of families, and two – the Titans and the Saints – have experienced serious family ownership disputes recently. Most of the rest have transitioned somewhat smoothly from father to son, daughter, brother, in-laws, wives or former spouses.

The three other franchises in the AFC West with the Broncos – the Chiefs, Chargers and Raiders – have kept ownership all in the family. Alex Spanos still is listed as the Chargers' owner, but he disclosed in 2008 he had dementia. Spanos is 94. Bowlen is 74. Spanos' sons oversee the Chargers; Dean Spanos is the top executive.

When Chiefs owner Lamar Hunt died in 2006, his four children became equal partners, and they chose Clark Hunt as CEO. After the death of Al Davis, his wife Carol became the owner, and son Mark is the managing general partner.

Despite what some Colorado media neophytes wrongly claim, neither Beth Wallace nor Brittany Bowlen would become a rare controlling owner. Martha Firestone Ford, 93, has been majority owner of the Lions since the death of her husband. Virginia Halas McCaskey, eldest daughter of George Halas, owns the Bears.

Gayle Benson survived lawsuits and trials to replace her late husband, Tom Benson, as Saints owner, and Amy Adams Strunk, one of the daughters of Bud Adams, ultimately became the controlling owner of the Titans. The Bills are co-owned by Kim and Terry Pegula, and Christina Weiss Lurie received a sizable share of the Eagles' ownership in the divorce with Jeffrey Lurie.

Before Bowlen stepped down in July of 2015 because of his worsening Alzheimer's, he and attorneys established the Bowlen Family Trust with equal divided ownership for the seven children, and he hoped that one would emerge in his own image to be CEO.

A set of conditions – including advanced university degrees, senior executive positions in and out of football, integrity and leadership skills – were outlined to the two young men and the five daughters. Two, Klemmer and Wallace, were from Bowlen's first marriage to Sally Parker.

In the lengthy telephone interview Bowlen agreed to do with me in May, 2009 – which went viral nationally -- he made several important disclosures. But the two most critical were: In answering a casual opening question about his health, Bowlen said he was in great physical condition, but he had “short-term memory loss.” I suggested that since both of us were about the same age, I shared his dilemma. He was completely serious, saying he couldn’t remember details of the Broncos’ two Super Bowl victories.

Unrelated, later in the conversation, I wondered if any of his kids were eager to one day be the Broncos owner.

He said that the matter hadn’t been discussed often, but “Brittany is the only one who seems to be interested, and I think she may be an attorney or in business or media or come to work for us, but she’s still very young (19) and at Notre Dame, and that whole ownership thing is a long way off.”

Not anymore.

The jovial Pat III, the only Bowlen currently employed by the Broncos, doesn’t fulfill elements of the criteria and appears to be satisfied with his position as stadium “facilities coordinator.” John Jr., who was with the Broncos in the role of marketing parking lots, does have a MBA from the University of Denver, but he also has a history of legal, substance-abuse and girlfriend-abuse troubles, and he’s out of the ownership picture.

Klemmer, married to a doctor in Honolulu, has never expressed any curiosity about working for the Broncos. Annabel “Little Bel” Bowlen seems more drawn to the fashion industry, and Christiana is in the early stages of college.

As The Gazette reported first months ago, the only two viable candidates were Beth and Brittany, and Brittany had become the Chosen One by the trustees.

She’s the one brought up by Bowlen nine years ago in his only statement on which child would be next.

Wallace got a late start in Colorado and with the Broncos.

She and Klemmer lived in Hawaii, where one of Pat Bowlen's homes, on the beach near Waikiki, is located. They both got married and had two kids each – Pat’s grandchildren.

Wallace owned a prosperous wedding and event planning company in the 1990s, then divorced and decided later to move to Colorado. She married John Wallace, and they originated an oil and gas company.

Beth received her undergraduate degree from the University of Colorado. She joined the Broncos for almost four years as an executive in community involvement, event planning and heading the Broncos Ring of Fame Plaza at the stadium.

She left the Broncos, it was asserted, to earn a law degree at DU. However, the trustees claim in their statement that Wallace “is fully informed as to why her employment with the team ended in 2015.”

That sounds like she was fired – for unknown reasons.

At DU, according to a fellow student, Wallace created her own faux franchise of the NFL, and had a group of eventual lawyers direct every aspect of the process. "It was incredible. She was the 'franchise' owner. She built a team from the ground up," he told me.

Wallace says she has the required qualifications and the qualities, and the business acumen and experience, and she was mentored by "the best", her father, to be the Broncos' CEO.

I had a conversation with Wallace's spokesman Saturday evening and asked several questions, and he sent me a statement that includes: "We believe when the full story is known ... Beth will prevail and become controlling owner ..."

The Broncos had no additional follow-up statements on Saturday.

However, this statement is accurate: Ellis and Wallace do not like each other. At all.

Nobody has brought up since Thursday's shocking development that there also is a true disconnect, as might be suspected, between Bowlen's former family and his second family.

Pat's second wife Annabel, who was an elementary teacher and a figure skater when they met in Canada, never has immersed herself in the Broncos' operation, but certainly would prefer that one of her children someday would follow her husband. The younger Bowlen kids side with Brittany. Beth has the backing of her sibling and Pat's two brothers.

Brittany was a national champion in figure skating, worked as an intern for NBC during the 2012 Olympics, served in the intern rotation program at the NFL offices in New York after graduation, joined the Broncos as a business analyst for almost year (heading the project to bring the NFL draft to Denver, and the city has been listed as one of the finalists), then went to Duke to get her master's in business administration, and work for an investment firm that has a branch office in Denver.

She will rejoin the Broncos at some juncture to be trained in various departments as an executive, and eventual chief executive.

Pat would hate the current consternation and attention, but maybe he should have realized it was inevitable, and that the strongest aspirant would survive.

He didn't permit his kids to be mentioned in the annual Broncos media guide, and closely guarded their privacy.

If he could, Bowlen would put an end to the in-fighting and the firestorm engulfing step-sisters, his brothers, the two daughters from his previous marriage, five children from his second marriage, the trustees, the team's chief executive and the most legendary Bronco of them all.

The Bowlen Family & Friends is acting more like fictional TV characters – the Carringtons, who also were based in Denver. Litigation is a possibility.

Broncos fanatics must be confused, confounded and concerned about how this will affect the team. It won't.

The coaches, the players and everyone else at Dove Valley are riveted to their own jobs and the coming season, not the long-term ownership matter. They're thinking about Case Keenum throwing a pass, not an impasse. Broncos Country would rather argue about the team's offensive line than the offensive lines being exchanged between Joe Ellis and Beth Bowlen Wallace.

Pat Bowlen would say: "The only thing that matters is going 19-0 this season and winning another Super Bowl. Everybody, just shut up."

And he would know that nobody in the family is qualified – yet.

# Sacco Sez: The Broncos' 'mistaken identity' running backs

By Jim Saccomano  
DenverBroncos.com  
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The Broncos once had a pair of running backs with nearly identical last names and uniform numbers just one digit off, making for a confusing situation for fans, Jim Saccomano writes.

As we prepare for the 2018 NFL season, there is virtually no limit to getting information on players, with sources including television and newspapers, radio and the internet, to say nothing of the most complete of all, the Denver Broncos website.

You can see pictures of everything on every venue but live radio.

But there was a time in team history when two players were confused with one another for a full season, sometimes with angry arguments ensuing about who was who, or even if there were actually two separate guys.

I am talking about 1965, when the Broncos had two guys who played the same position, running back, one named Abner Haynes and the other named Wendell Hayes.

In addition to the similarity in last names, they wore uniform numbers often difficult to tell apart from the stands or even in black-and-white television, as the networks had not yet started doing the games in color.

Haynes wore 28 and Hayes wore 29, which did not seem like a big deal at first.

Abner Haynes had come to Denver by trade from Kansas City, and he had always worn 28 in an illustrious career, from college, to the NFL before his time with the Broncos, and after joining the Broncos.

But it was not illustrious for the Broncos, it turned out.

But while Abner Haynes had all the pedigree, Wendell Hayes was from the other side of the tracks. Far on the other side. He had been on the Broncos' practice squad the previous year, and because he certainly was not expected to make the team, it did not seem like a big deal that the numbers and names were so close.

A little background is in order, as most fans of today need some on these two guys.

Haynes was a top draft choice of the Dallas Texans in the 1960 AFL Draft (interestingly, he went to Lincoln High School in Dallas, and many years later Hall of Fame Broncos back Terrell Davis would go to Lincoln High School in San Diego) and was both Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player in the first season of the American Football League.

He was an AFL All-Star from 1960-63 and was voted an All-Pro in 1960-62 and again in 1964.

When all the dust settled on his career, he was on the AFL's All-Time team and now is in the Kansas City Chiefs Hall of Fame.

The road was a little rockier for Wendell Hayes.

An undrafted free agent, Hayes was signed and cut by Denver, signed and cut by the Oakland Raiders, and then again signed and cut by the Broncos in 1964.

So, not much was expected in 1965, other than it being a certainty that Haynes would be terrific.

But the Broncos live on the other side of the tracks too, and it turned out that Hayes knew those mean streets way better than Haynes.

Hayes had come to pro football from working class Humboldt State, and he ultimately played for Denver from 1965-67.

In that first year, he had 526 rushing yards and 294 more on 24 pass receptions, and his 820 yards from scrimmage more than doubled the total produced by Haynes.

It was a season of confusion, sometimes argumentative confusion, among fans. I was a season ticket holder at the time and an avid listener of the only sports talk show in Denver, that being one hosted by Broncos play-by-play voice Bob Martin.

Martin had his hands (or ears) full trying to keep things straight for callers, many of whom were more casual fans than I.

To paraphrase some comments from memory:

"That Hayes has lost a step!" And Bob Martin would say, "I wonder if perhaps you mean Haynes."

"That was a great game Haynes had yesterday!" And Bob Martin would say, "I wonder if perhaps you mean Hayes."

"Who the heck is Hayes?"

"We have two guys with the same name?"

"Don't tell ME what I saw! It was number 28 (or 29)!!" And Bob Martin would say, "I think that run (or catch) was by 29 (or 28)."

This was entertaining listening if one was in the know, but it was a problem for radio and television announcers, official statisticians (especially if the jerseys got muddy, and every fan in general.

That's how it went for all of 1965. The Broncos solved this identity crisis by changing the number worn by Hayes to 33 for 1966, and the two were photographed by both papers sitting side by side — which at least proved there were two individual players!

By the way, Hayes had another fine season in 1966 with 484 all-purpose yards, while Haynes rebounded to catch 46 passes for 480 as well.

Shed no tears for how it all ended. Both were traded by Denver and as mentioned, Haynes was on the all-time AFL team, while Hayes went on to start at fullback on the Kansas City team that won Super Bowl IV.

But in 1965, they were the Broncos' "mistaken identity" running backs.

# NFL tries to clarify new helmet rule that can result in ejections in social media video

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

June 3, 2018

Earlier this offseason, the NFL enacted a new helmet rule that is its version of the targeting rule. Now, after hearing the backlash from several players, the league is attempting to bring more clarity to the rule so that the NFL community has a better understanding of what kinds of hits can result in a penalty and/or an ejection.

Below, you'll find a video that the NFL football operations department released on Saturday. It contains examples of hits that would be a penalty and hits that would lead to an ejection. You'll probably remember at least one of the examples (Danny Trevathan's hit on Davante Adams last season).

According to the video, "it is a foul if a player lowers his head to initiate and make contact with his helmet against an opponent." To be ejected, a player has to lower "his helmet to establish a linear body posture prior to initiating and making contact with the the helmet," a player needs to have "an unobstructed path to his opponent," and the contact has to be "clearly avoidable" in the sense that the "player delivering the blow had other options."

The rule, which was passed in late March, has been widely criticized by players. During an interview with USA Today Sports, 49ers cornerback Richard Sherman called it "ridiculous," compared it to a driver getting ticketed for touching the lane lines, and predicted that it would "lead to more lower-extremity injuries." Bills linebacker Lorenzo Alexander agreed with his assessment, saying, "There are going to be injuries that you can't avoid. You can't legislate everything out." Other former players also have spoken out against the rule.

There's no doubt that enforcing the rule will be difficult and there's no doubt that fans and players will be skeptical of the officials' ability to make the correct call. Nobody wants to see a star player get incorrectly ejected in a big moment of a big game. But the intent of the rule is to prioritize player safety, and it's tough to argue against player safety after seeing countless players -- including Ryan Shazier last year -- get seriously injured when they've lowered their head.

"For us this is a pretty significant change," NFL competition committee chairman Rich McKay said after the rule was passed, via NFL.com. "This one technique, we saw so many hits when a player lowered his head and delivered a hit and either hurt himself or the player he was hitting.

"It was time for a change of this magnitude."

# Broncos Film Room: Why run blocking, not pass protection, is more important for Case Keenum

By Andre Simone

BSN Denver

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A big part of our film rooms is to find if common perception is correct on a certain player or scheme. Another part is being able to establish if there's some deceiving information in the statistics, and often film rooms can go against the evidence brought forth by conventional stats.

This one is a rare case in which the statistics and film are actually in agreement. The entire premise of this film breakdown is based on the fact that Case Keenum, while great on third down a year ago, was amongst the worst quarterbacks in the NFL on third-and-long.

Keenum was the NFL's fifth-best quarterback on third down in 2017, converting over 45-percent of his attempts, which is a huge upgrade from what the Denver Broncos had a season ago. His numbers on third-and-short and third-and-medium were also great, ranking him amongst the league's best.

Where things got tricky was on third-and-long—defined as 3rd-and-8 or more—where he was 29th in the league, converting only 18 percent of his 56 attempts for first downs. That figure ties him with Brock Osweiler a season ago, which isn't exactly what fans in the Mile High City would like to hear.

With that premise in mind, with an emphasis on how the offensive line ties into it all, we dug into the film to see why Keenum struggled on third-and-long, while also trying to figure out what the Broncos offense around him needs to do for him to succeed.

## LACK OF ARM STRENGTH OR BEING RISK AVERSE?

Keenum's arm isn't the biggest. He's also small in stature, and if you read our previous film breakdown on the Broncos' new quarterback, it's easy to see how his physical talent isn't his best asset. Thus, it stands to reason that when he's in a situation like third-and-long, where everyone in the stadium knows Keenum has to throw the ball downfield, he's not at his best.

When watching the tape, Keenum was fairly efficient in shorter third downs, even taking a few nice deep shots, particularly off of play action.

Of course, play action isn't a possibility on third-and-long, when it's obvious the offense has to pass the ball. With a less-than-stellar pass blocking offensive line in Minnesota a year ago, and here in Denver, such situations become especially tricky.

Regardless of how good Keenum was a season ago under pressure—and he was the best QB in the NFL—it's one thing to be able to make a play and complete a short throw with pressure bearing down, and entirely another to be able to fling the ball deep to the sticks to make a play.

Keenum can make plays deep, but he needs to be unpredictable. If the defense expects those types of passes, he's just not physically gifted enough to consistently make throws downfield.

Another thing that's noticeable on tape is Keenum's propensity to take check downs and not force things on third down. This might be maddening at times, and might remind some fans of Trevor Siemian, but he wasn't a huge gambler in 2017 with the Vikings, which is a big part of why his percentages weren't better on third-and-long.

We noted in our previous film room how Keenum can sometimes take too many risks and how he needs to be cognizant of not regressing to his gunslinger mentality. He did a good job of this last season, which was a big part of his success. However, thrusting him in situations where he needs to make big plays to succeed could really complicate his approach and cause him to regress.

Essentially, Keenum's strengths are his IQ, ability to throw accurately with anticipation, and his poise under pressure. All areas that can serve him well on third down, where Denver was not good a year ago.

His weakness is first and foremost his arm strength. In situations where he needs to stand tough and sling it, he's at a disadvantage, which is why it's so key to keep him out of third-and-long situations.

If forced into too many long down-and-distance situations, the Broncos risk setting Keenum up for failure and seeing him struggle like he did against the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFC Championship game, who essentially were able to just tee-off on Keenum as the game progressed.

#### THE IMPACT OF THE RUN GAME AND OFFENSIVE LINE

The running game plays a big part in all of this, by limiting third-and-long situations altogether. Last season, the Vikings were the NFL's seventh-best team in total rushing yards and were second to only the Jacksonville Jaguars in rushing attempts. Those numbers, on the surface, look really enticing. When you dig deeper, though, the Vikings rushed for fewer yards per carry than Denver in 2017, racking up only 3.9 yards on average.

Sticking to that run game was essential for Minnesota in letting Keenum do his thing on third-and-manageable, which was a big part of why their QB was able to perform so well.

That means a few things for the Broncos. First and foremost, they'll have to practice what they preach and truly be a run-first, ground-control type offense. That's what'll be best for Keenum, even if the run game isn't spectacular like it was in Minnesota.

Another comforting sign for Keenum's transition to Denver is that the Broncos line actually outperformed the Vikings in most metrics when it came to run blocking, per Football Outsiders, this past season. If the Broncos performed above league average in run blocking last year, with a new veteran addition in Jared Veldheer and improvements from the young guys like Garrett Bolles, plus a full bill of health from Ronald Leary, the line should improve significantly.

Keeping a commitment to the run will also open up play action plays, an area in which Keenum performed very well last season.

Another aspect of this that can't be neglected is avoiding penalties, especially on the offensive line, where flags for holding and false starts killed drives regularly last season. That's something the diminutive veteran gunslinger won't be able to overcome given his weaknesses. A disciplined and balanced approach is paramount.

## IN CONCLUSION

Keenum is far from perfect, but his strengths line up pretty well with Denver's offense. The narrative that improved pass protection is needed from the tackle spots is somewhat overrated given what the Vikings former quarterback did a year ago with similarly "talented" pass protection. It might seem counterintuitive, but this quarterback needs good run blocking more than he does sound pass protection, especially if the scheme in place is based on quick-hitting throws.

# NFL offers some clarity on new helmet rule

By Michael David Smith

Pro Football Talk

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Months after the NFL adopted a significant new rule about how players can use their helmets, the league is providing some clarity.

The NFL published a video today showing examples of specific plays that would be penalties under the new rule.

The league's basic explanation of the rule is, "It is a foul if a player lowers his head to initiate and make contact with his helmet against an opponent."

Most significantly, the league says players will be ejected if a hit meets the following standards: The player lowers his helmet to establish a linear body posture prior to initiating and making contact with the helmet, the player delivering the blow had an unobstructed path to his opponent and the contact was clearly avoidable because the player delivering the blow had other options.

There's still some room for interpretation here — two different officials might look at the same hit and have different ideas about whether "the player delivering the blow had other options" — but there's at least some more clarity now than there was previously.