

# Why Broncos safety Su'a Cravens wore a specialty "big ol' helmet" during OTAs

By Kyle Frederickson  
The Denver Post  
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Want to understand why Su'a Cravens is so thankful to be wearing a Broncos helmet?

Look inside.

The 6-foot-1, 221-pound safety completed his first organized team activities Thursday since being acquired by Denver via trade from Washington, where Cravens sat out last season dealing with personal and health issues following his rookie year.

Concussions nearly derailed Cravens' NFL career as he reportedly told Washington teammates last September that he contemplated retirement. But Cravens sought the help of medical specialist Micky Collins, and the Broncos gave him a second chance. Now he has the opportunity to compete for snaps in the rebuilt "No Fly Zone."

Before that happens, though, Cravens has taken special precautions — starting with head protection.

"They got me wearing this big-old helmet," Cravens told The Denver Post on Thursday.

That "big-old helmet" is the easy descriptor for what's known specifically as the "VICIS Zero1." Cravens' specialty lid combines a flexible polymer shell on the outside with advanced padding technology on the inside to best combat the potential for brain injury. For two consecutive years, VICIS has earned the NFLPA's highest safety rating as part of its annual helmet laboratory testing.

"It's comfortable," Cravens said. "You can see and there is a lot of cushion in it."

Not long ago, Cravens said a doctor told him: "I don't think you're going to be able to play football anymore," as the result of head injuries.

It's a dire diagnosis that Cravens, 22, still keeps in mind today as he enters what will be just his second NFL season on the field. "At that point it was, 'I've got to get healthy and make sure I'm good and I have a long life to live,'" Cravens said.

That fight-another-day mentality, paired with a dynamic skill set as a run stuffer and pass defender, has already impressed teammates like safety Justin Simmons. Cravens, a former second-round draft pick out of USC, recorded three starts with 34 tackles, one interception and one sack as a rookie in Washington.

"I think bringing in Su'a just gives us another level of our defense that we can totally explore," Simmons said. "He gives us so much more versatility and mobility, both at safety and if we put him at like our dime and nickel packages."

He's also another smart safety, too. He's already picking up the defense, knows it well and is making his checks. Su'a already seems like he's been a Day 1 guy. Like he's been here since all last year."

Cravens added that the Broncos teammates have welcomed him with open arms.

Yet another reason to be thankful — even with a "big ol' helmet."

"I'll never take this situation for granted," Cravens said.

# As OTAs end and minicamp begins, biggest difference in Broncos: Case Keenum

By Mike Klis

9 News

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If it's been asked once, it's been asked at least nine times.

What's the difference between how the Broncos look in OTAs [organized team activities] this year compared to last year?

The answer is easy. Last year, the Broncos were trying to force Paxton Lynch to become their starting quarterback. No one – not the coaches, not the players, not the media witnessing the occasional OTA practice – thought he was ready.

This year, everyone knows Case Keenum is the quarterback. And he's looked good.

That doesn't mean the Broncos will be different this year. It just means it feels different.

"Case is getting exclusively all the reps with the ones," Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave said last week. "We're not splitting them like you would if you didn't have an established starter. So, he's getting more concentrated work and it's paying dividends."

"Yeah, he's a great leader," receiver Emmanuel Sanders said Wednesday of Keenum. "Every day, the majority of the days, he'll come in and ask me and D.T. (Demaryius Thomas) to go and watch practices and we'll sit in the back room and watch film and go over what he's thinking and what we're thinking."

"I've been a part of two Super Bowl teams and that's what it takes. That extra work that's not mandatory, where guys are in there working out or working on their mental game. That right there, when it's the fourth quarter or when it's fourth-and-5 or third-and-8, that's the stuff that gets you over the hill."

Last year, it really wasn't a quarterback competition between Trevor Siemian and Lynch. It was Lynch the first-round talent with great upside vs. Lynch the second-year quarterback who was struggling to figure out how to read, process, throw it accurately and do it all quickly.

Siemian, the capable if not extraordinarily skilled quarterback with experience, sat back and waited for the Broncos to come around to decide Lynch needed more time.

Lynch is still around, but this year it's universally agreed upon he's not ready to start. Keenum is the unquestioned No. 1.

"He wants it," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr. "It's good when you have a quarterback that's hungry. Just like any other player out there on the field, he wants it. He wants to be the best. He wants to prove to Minnesota, 'You all should have never let me go.' He's hungry out there, I like that chip that he has on his shoulder and it's good to have a quarterback that really wants it and really wants to be the best."

The Broncos finished their 10th and final OTA session Thursday at UCHealth Training Center. All they have left to their 2018 offseason is a three-day minicamp next week.

The difference OTAs and minicamp? In OTAs, the players have meetings, then one practice, then one weight-lifting session, and that's pretty much it.

In minicamp there are morning meetings, a practice, a lift, then more meetings and a walkthrough. Players get 1 ½ more hours on the practice field (thus the walkthrough) and another 2 and a half hours of meetings.

Minicamp more closely resembles training camp – which will begin in the final days of July, after the players get a five- or six-week break.

The Broncos wound up 5-11 last year, in part because they never did decide on their quarterback. How they'll finish this year is subject to conjecture, but not at quarterback. That position is known. And it belongs to a guy who led Minnesota to the NFC Championship Game last season.

# NFL's best defenses: Who got better, worse, and who's next up

By STAFF

ESPN

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Despite the three months that remain until kickoff, a handful of NFL teams are vying to stay in the conversation among the league's best defenses long before they play a single snap in 2018.

During the offseason, these teams took steps via pricey free-agent acquisitions, trades and the draft to make marked improvements to their defensive personnel; moves that aim to bolster the championship aspirations many of them already had.

Here's a look at where things stand for the top five defenses from last year, from roster additions and subtractions to how much better or worse each got, as well as which other team might crack the top five by the season's end.

Minnesota Vikings

2017 NFL rank: First (total defense)

Major additions: DT Sheldon Richardson

Major losses: DT Tom Johnson, NT Shamar Stephen, LB Emmanuel Lamur

2018 outlook: The Vikings already had one of the most talented defenses in the NFL before they signed Sheldon Richardson to a one-year deal in free agency. Adding Richardson to the league's reigning top defense not only upgrades the 3-technique spot, it solidifies Minnesota as a Super Bowl contender. Richardson earned a top-10 pass-rushing grade from Pro Football Focus last season and should provide a serious push from the interior next to Linval Joseph. Between those two and edge rushers Everson Griffen, who is coming off a career sack year despite battling through plantar fasciitis, and Danielle Hunter, the Vikings will rival the likes of Philadelphia and Jacksonville as the best D-line in the NFL. Mike Zimmer's stout defense finished first in yards (275.9) and points allowed (15.8) last season while holding quarterbacks to a 73.0 passer rating. The rich got richer in the draft when Minnesota focused a bulk of its efforts on adding depth pieces, from selecting cornerback Mike Hughes at No. 30 to drafting players to compete for a spot in the defensive line rotation, an element that was missing in 2017.

Zimmer hinted at wanting to experiment with four cornerbacks in some of Minnesota's sub packages, and having a player like Hughes, along with three other first-rounders in the secondary alone (Harrison Smith, Xavier Rhodes and Trae Waynes) should allow the Vikings to utilize exotic looks often. That will be critical given the elite passers they're set to face this season, from Aaron Rodgers to Tom Brady to Carson Wentz, Jared Goff, Jimmy Garoppolo and Russell Wilson. Minnesota could use some more depth at linebacker, and if the Vikings don't sign a veteran free agent this summer, training camp will feature an important position battle to see who will fill that void, particularly at outside linebacker. Minnesota locked up Eric Kendricks to a long-term deal in April and could be looking to do the same with Anthony Barr next. The strength of this franchise has long been its defense. The moves the Vikings made this offseason reflect that, putting Minnesota in prime position to continue its run as the NFL's top defense. -- Courtney Cronin

Jacksonville Jaguars  
2017 NFL rank: Second

Major additions: DT Taven Bryan, CB D.J. Hayden, S Ronnie Harrison

Major losses: CB Aaron Colvin, LB Paul Posluszny

2018 outlook: The Jaguars return 12 of their top 14 defensive players from last season, including six Pro Bowlers: DE Calais Campbell, DT Malik Jackson, DE Yannick Ngakoue, LB Telvin Smith, CB Jalen Ramsey, CB A.J. Bouye. Campbell and Ramsey also were first-team All-Pros. Colvin was the nickelback and the Jaguars signed Hayden to replace him. Myles Jack moves inside full-time to replace Posluszny, and second-year player Blair Brown takes over at strongside linebacker. Those are the only changes from a unit that ranked second in interceptions and sacks and first in pass defense. Ramsey and Bouye are arguably the best cornerback tandem in the NFL, and Bouye has come back with a chip on his shoulder because he felt he got slighted by not making the All-Pro team. The defense had some issues later in the season, giving up at least 24 points in five of the final nine games (including twice in the playoffs), and several players admitted they lost focus at times during that stretch. Coordinator Todd Wash has made consistency a focus during OTAs, and that's going to be the biggest issue (other than staying healthy) in 2018. -- Michael DiRocco

Denver Broncos  
2017 rank: Third

Major additions: OLB Bradley Chubb, CB Tramaine Brock, DE Clinton McDonald, S Su'a Cravens

Major losses: CB Aqib Talib, LB Corey Nelson

2018 outlook: Many of the Broncos' defensive statistics in 2017 were what the team has grown accustomed to in recent seasons, especially the 290 yards allowed per game and 89.4 yards rushing allowed per game. But the bottom line is they couldn't get Von Miller free in the pass rush enough because opposing offenses weren't worried enough about anybody else in the formation to take the almost constant double- and triple-teams away from Miller. And their 29 touchdown passes allowed was a factor of both poor field position caused by their own offense's turnovers, but also inconsistent red zone play. They believe they've addressed a major piece in that with the selection of Chubb at No. 5 in the draft. Chubb, as well as a healthy Shane Ray (he had three wrist surgeries last season), should give Miller more room to work, and he's poised for a huge year because of it. Bradley Roby has to be ready to replace Talib, who went to four Pro Bowls in his four seasons in Denver. The Broncos liked what they saw from Roby when Talib got tossed from one game for fighting with Michael Crabtree and was suspended for another in the wake of that fight. -- Jeff Legwold

Philadelphia Eagles  
2017 NFL rank: Fourth

Major additions: DE Michael Bennett, DT Haloti Ngata

Major losses: DE Vinny Curry, CB Patrick Robinson, DT Beau Allen, LB Mychal Kendricks

2018 outlook: The Eagles' defensive line -- one of their great strengths during the Super Bowl run -- has dealt with its share of turnover and injury this offseason. Curry and Allen are now in Tampa Bay, DT Tim Jernigan has a long road back following surgery to repair a herniated disk, and DE Brandon Graham is recovering from ankle surgery. The Eagles imported a pair of accomplished players in Bennett and Ngata to help fortify the front, though both are in the twilight of their careers and dealt with injuries of their own in 2017. Things will have to break right on the defensive line for the Eagles to experience a similar level of success as last year. Defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz will also have to find replacements for contributors Robinson and Kendricks. Robinson in particular played a critical role as the standout nickel corner. Fortunately for him, CB Sidney Jones (Achilles) is healthy and full of star potential. He should help stabilize the secondary. With a lot of miles on the odometer from last season and a few question marks hanging over this group, it wouldn't be surprising if the defense took a half-step backward. But there's enough talent here to keep the Eagles among the elite. -- Tim McManus

Pittsburgh Steelers  
2017 NFL rank: Fifth

Major additions: S Morgan Burnett, LB Jon Bostic, S Terrell Edmunds

Major losses: LB Ryan Shazier, S Mike Mitchell, CB William Gay

2018 outlook: It's hard to say the Steelers' defense is markedly better without Shazier, who was having an All-Pro season before undergoing spinal stabilization surgery in December. The rushing defense fell apart without him, giving up 133 yards per game on the ground in Weeks 13-17 and the playoffs. Free-agent addition Jon Bostic and backup Tyler Matakevich might be able to produce, but they won't replace Shazier. Still, the Steelers have enough firepower to contend for a top-five defense yet again. They are well-stocked with pass-rushers, led by one of the league's best defensive end duos in Cam Heyward and Stephon Tuitt. They apply consistent interior pressure. The Steelers are hoping for major jumps from outside linebackers T.J. Watt and Bud Dupree. Inside linebacker Vince Williams can build off his eight-sack campaign last year. And the secondary hasn't been this deep in years. They have at least four capable corners and a first-round safety (Edmunds) who might have trouble seeing the field behind starters Burnett and Davis. And at 6-foot-2 and 217 pounds with 4.4 speed, Edmunds could grow into a dime linebacker in pass coverage. Since 2013, the Steelers have invested serious draft capital in the defense. That investment has paid off in overall improvement, but the cracks showed in big moments against New England and Jacksonville last season. Time to patch those up with a more consistent defense. -- Jeremy Fowler

Los Angeles Rams  
2017 NFL rank: 19th

Major additions: CB Marcus Peters, CB Aqib Talib, DT Ndamukong Suh, S Lamarcus Joyner (re-signed)

Major losses: CB Trumaine Johnson, DE Robert Quinn, LB Alec Ogletree

2018 outlook: The Rams took a win-now approach in the offseason, opting for the veteran trade market and free agency to add key pieces to Wade Phillips' defensive unit. Yes, the lack of proven edge rushers and second-level defenders should be brought into this discussion. I get it. However, with the additions of cornerbacks Marcus Peters and Aqib Talib via trades -- along with placing the franchise tag on versatile safety Lamarcus Joyner -- the L.A. secondary looks legit. That's a ball-hawking unit, a physical group with

the ability to play man coverage, challenge routes and finish. Love it. Lock those receivers down and let the boys up front hunt the QB. Plus, with the Rams landing Ndamukong Suh in free agency, L.A. can pair the veteran defensive tackle with All-Pro Aaron Donald. That gives L.A. two disruptors in the middle of the defense who can also put those linebackers in a position to run free. Read, react and track the ball. And with Phillips pulling the strings in the game plan, the Rams can cater to their strengths to create turnovers, pressure and positive field position. The way I see it, this is a unit with the talent and the upside to make a sizable leap in 2018. -- Matt Bowen

# Report: Colin Kaepernick expected to subpoena Donald Trump, Mike Pence

By STAFF

ESPN

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The next move in Colin Kaepernick's collusion case against the NFL could involve subpoenas against President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, according to a report.

Kaepernick and his legal team are expected to seek a federal subpoena to get testimony from Trump, Pence and other officials, Yahoo Sports! reported Thursday. The goal, according to the report, is to find out, via the Federal Arbitration Act, what Trump, Pence and those officials said in direct discussions with NFL owners about Kaepernick's free agency and NFL player protests during the national anthem.

Kaepernick became the first player to sit and later kneel during the anthem as a way of protesting police brutality and racial injustice. He has not played for an NFL team since opting out of his contract with the San Francisco 49ers in March 2017 and is suing the league, claiming the owners colluded by not signing him to a contract.

While testifying as part of the collusion case, several NFL owners said in depositions that Trump factored into conversations about how to handle protests during the national anthem, The Wall Street Journal reported on May 30.

In his testimony, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said Trump spoke with him about the anthem.

"This is very winning, strong issue for me," Jones said Trump told him during a phone call. "Tell everybody, you can't win this one. This one lifts me."

The Journal also reported that Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross testified that New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft had also discussed the anthem with Trump.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell and Kraft are also among the people who have been deposed in the case.

While at an Alabama rally in September, Trump blasted NFL players who knelt during the anthem. He said owners should pull players who kneel from games and referred to a player who protested during the anthem as a "son of a bitch."

NFL owners approved a new policy at the league meetings earlier this month that requires all players and team personnel on the field to stand during the national anthem. They have the option to remain in the locker room for the anthem if they choose.

If players or personnel on the field do not stand, the league can subject teams to a fine. Teams also will have the option to fine any team personnel, including players, for the infraction.

# White House visits become political litmus test for athletes

By Errin Haines Whack

Associated Press

June 8, 2018

For victorious sports teams these days, the confetti and champagne are apt to be accompanied by a politically fraught question: Are you going to the White House?

What used to be one of the most innocuous photo-ops in sports is anything but. Going — or not going — has become a political statement in the era of President Donald Trump, who has managed to draw athletes into his game, whether they want to play or not.

"If you do go, you're associating yourself with his policies," said Howard Bryant, author of "The Heritage: Black Athletes, A Divided America and the Politics of Patriotism." "If you don't go, you run the risk of branding yourself as not having enough respect for the office."

This week, Trump canceled a White House celebration for the Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles after it became clear very few players planned to attend.

Trump instead went to his go-to play: attacking as un-American the NFL players who have knelt during the national anthem to protest police killings of black men. (In truth, none of the Eagles took a knee this past season.)

In the NBA, both the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Golden State Warriors have already rejected a White House celebration, however their championship matchup turns out.

And the Villanova Wildcats — this year's NCAA men's basketball champions, who also won in 2016 and celebrated with President Barack Obama — will have to decide, if an invitation comes, whether to return to Washington for a ceremony with Trump.

"Sports are not a distraction from politics — they are politics by a different means," said University of Southern California sociologist Ben Carrington. "Because Trump's administration is so highly charged, it's understandable that many players would refuse to attend. It's happened before, but never on this scale."

Before Trump took office, one of the biggest fusses to emerge from a White House victory celebration was the great flip-flop incident of 2005, when the Northwestern University women's lacrosse championship team wore the sandals to meet President George W. Bush.

In snubbing the Eagles, Trump praised other championship teams that have attended White House celebrations during his administration, among them the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Houston Astros.

Athletes are now being put in the position of taking a patriotic litmus test during their shining moment of victory, said Cornell University professor Grant Farred.

"It's incredibly difficult for these athletes, and not a choice they have imposed on themselves," Farred said. "A reporter is asking you about your win, and you're now having to deal with an obviously political question, not of your making. It's not a good situation to be in, one way or the other."

Asked about the feud on Wednesday, the Eagles tried to move on. Rather than answer reporters' questions, safety Malcolm Jenkins silently held up poster boards referring to problems he has worked to change, including urban violence and mass incarceration.

For two years, the NFL protests have divided fans, largely along racial lines, and given Trump a powerful issue with which to fire up his core supporters.

During the season, the president referred to the protesting players as "sons of bitches" and suggested at a rally in Alabama before a mostly white audience that they be fired. Last month, in response to the NFL owners' decision to punish kneeling, Trump said players who continue to protest "maybe shouldn't be in the country."

Farred said that while Trump is likely to return to the issue, he risks overplaying his hand: "How many swing voters can he afford to alienate?"

The question could come up again soon, with the Washington Capitals on the verge of winning the Stanley Cup against the Vegas Golden Knights. Though they may have to confront the question of whether to go to the White House, for most of the players, their patriotism would not be at issue.

Only three of the Capitals are American.

# DenverBroncos.com relaunched with new look

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

June 8, 2018

The Denver Broncos' website has a new look.

With an emphasis on the mobile experience as more and more fans access information from their mobile devices, the relaunched site boasts a cleaner and more intuitive design.

This relaunch is part of the NFL's rollout of a consistent design across all 32 team websites that also allows for each club to have its own distinctive features.

Change can be daunting, but don't worry — it's just the external that's different. The articles, videos, galleries and other featured media will remain at the high standard that we are proud to share with the legion of fans across Broncos Country.

As with any new site, there may be some bugs at first but as we discover them, we will aim to fix them as fast as we can. If you'd like, you may report those you find to [broncos.website@broncos.nfl.net](mailto:broncos.website@broncos.nfl.net). To best view the site, it may help to update your browser to the most recent version.

# Case Keenum to release new book in September

By Matt Wyatt  
Houston Chronicle  
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Case Keenum will tell his life story of football and faith in a new book entitled "Playing for More: Trust Beyond What You Can See."

Keenum details his football life from before his days at Wylie High School in Abilene to his ascension to the NFL after a record-breaking career as quarterback at the University of Houston.

Keenum, who joined the Denver Broncos this offseason after a memorable playoff run with the Minnesota Vikings, describes how his faith in God has helped him overcome adversity and paved his path every step of the way.

The book, co-authored by Andrew Perloff and with a foreword by Tony Dungy, will be available at Amazon and LifeWay on Sept. 4.

The current price is \$22.99.

# Debate over Peyton Manning and HGH still bubbles years after Al Jazeera documentary

By Will Hobson  
The Washington Post  
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The emails containing Peyton Manning's explanation for the human growth hormone shipments sent to his home went out just after midnight on Dec. 16, 2015.

A few weeks earlier, an investigative reporter with Al Jazeera network informed Manning's agent that an unidentified source had made a series of allegations about the star quarterback using HGH.

That week, Manning's lawyers had tried to convince Al Jazeera their source was lying. An Indianapolis clinic had sent HGH to the quarterback's home in Florida, Manning's lawyers confirmed — according to documents filed in federal court and interviews with those with knowledge of the discussions — but they said the shipments weren't meant for Peyton Manning. The HGH was meant for Peyton's wife, Ashley, who had been prescribed the drug by a doctor who specialized in "anti-aging" medicine, a controversial discipline that espouses disputed theories about the benefits of HGH.

Manning's lawyers provided Al Jazeera's lawyers with information about Ashley Manning's HGH prescription, according to an email obtained by the Washington Post, including her diagnosed conditions and the quantities of HGH she had taken. An Al Jazeera producer then sent a late-night series of urgent emails to medical experts, asking if Ashley Manning's diagnosis and HGH prescription sounded legitimate.

Eleven days later, Al Jazeera's documentary, "The Dark Side: The Secret World of Sports Doping," would feature undercover footage of Charlie Sly, an aspiring pharmacist who worked with a trainer for several NFL and MLB players, claiming he supplied athletes including Washington Nationals third baseman Ryan Zimmerman and retired Philadelphia Phillies first baseman Ryan Howard with banned drugs. In one scene, Sly suggested Peyton Manning ordered HGH under his wife's name.

Two and a half years later, the documentary remains the subject of ongoing defamation lawsuits against Al Jazeera filed by Zimmerman and Howard, and continues to cause headaches for Manning, now retired. Evidence that has emerged in hundreds of pages of court filings has shed more light on how Al Jazeera produced the documentary, and what its journalists knew about the Mannings before it aired, but has yet to answer the core questions raised by "The Dark Side" — and its critics: Did Al Jazeera catch a "chemical mastermind" who had supplied a bevy of pro athletes with banned drugs, or did it recklessly televise the fabrications of a wannabe drug dealer lying to try to impress a potential client?

In a December 2015 email to medical experts, Al Jazeera producer Jeremy Young included the information lawyers had relayed about Ashley Manning's ailments and HGH usage.

"Is there any genuine medical justification for treating those conditions with HGH?" wrote Young, who also asked if the situation sounded legal.

The answers from the experts, corroborated by the Post: Ashley Manning's conditions — withheld from this story at her lawyers' request — were not treatable with HGH, and her doctor may have broken the

law. Because of its rampant abuse by bodybuilders and athletes, HGH is tightly controlled under federal law, and doctors can prescribe the drug legally for only a short list of conditions. While it's been banned for decades by all major pro sports leagues, the NFL didn't begin testing for HGH until 2014.

After the documentary aired, as Al Jazeera took criticism for basing explosive allegations on a single source, one of the network's reporters claimed a second source confirmed the allegations involving Manning.

"We had a second source, absolutely impeccably placed, knowledgeable and credible," Al Jazeera reporter Deborah Davies said on CNN.

Last week, in court filings, Al Jazeera revealed this source as one of Manning's lawyers, prompting a confusing series of media reports in which some news outlets incorrectly suggested Peyton Manning had admitted to purchasing HGH under his wife's name.

In reality, Manning's lawyers only confirmed Ashley Manning's HGH prescription. When Al Jazeera's Davies cited the "second source," she neglected to mention this source had also strongly denied the HGH shipments to the Manning home were meant for, or taken by, Peyton Manning.

In a phone interview, Matthew D. McGill, lawyer for the Mannings, termed it "unethical and utterly despicable" for Al Jazeera to cite publicly some of the information he had provided in off-the-record discussions as a "second source" for a documentary that suggested Peyton Manning took HGH.

"We went to their lawyers in good faith, we explained that their source was a pharmacy intern who had unlawfully compromised Ashley Manning's private medical information," McGill said. "Instead, they exploited her private medical information to raise these baseless innuendos about Peyton. Any notion that we confirmed Sly's veracity as a source is obviously false, and is beneath contempt."

Al Jazeera's attorney, Charles Scheeler, said in a statement that recent court filings referencing the Mannings are redacted, and don't contain all relevant details of their discussions.

"Al Jazeera stands by its reporting, and wants the whole story told," Scheeler said. "We invite the Manning parties and Plaintiffs to join Al Jazeera in a request to unseal all court filings in this case. Let's let the public see the full story and draw their own conclusions."

Al Jazeera launched its doping investigation in February 2015, with a sizeable budget and a goal to out high-profile athletes getting an illicit pharmaceutical edge. After seeking the doping expertise of Lance Armstrong (who declined to talk with them) and former BALCO president Victor Conte (who agreed to talk), Al Jazeera journalists settled on a plan to enlist an aging British track star, Liam Collins, to go undercover.

Posing as a middleman for European soccer players in search of a new connection, Collins had no problem catching medical professionals offering banned drugs. But catching high-profile athletes cheating proved more difficult.

In late August, in an email to the investigative team, an Al Jazeera executive producer expressed frustration that reporting trips to France, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Canada, and several cities across the U.S., had yet to deliver evidence of star athletes using banned drugs.

“We now have a ton of hidden camera material in which we’ve identified a key drug supplier and a number of people involved in a drug supply chain. ... But so far we have no supporting evidence of wrongdoing on the part of leading athletes,” executive producer Peter Charley wrote on Aug. 28. “We need to get irrefutable, corroborating evidence implicating athletes.”

In late September, another Al Jazeera supervisor reminded the team a hard deadline was approaching.

“It is a network imperative that we broadcast this investigation this calendar year,” wrote Phil Rees, manager of Al Jazeera’s investigations.

In late October, Al Jazeera had an apparent breakthrough with Sly, a 31-year-old with an education in pharmacology who worked with professional trainer Jason Riley, who counted Zimmerman, Howard, New York Yankees star Derek Jeter, and many others as clients. (Riley has denied any involvement with banned drugs.)

In a meeting in Sly’s Austin, Texas, apartment surreptitiously recorded by Al Jazeera, Taylor Teagarden, a journeyman MLB catcher who last played for the Chicago Cubs, discussed how Sly had helped him get Delta-2, a banned steroid.

A few days later, as Al Jazeera’s Collins accompanied him on several long drives across Texas, Sly listed athletes he claimed he’d supplied with banned substances, including Howard, Zimmerman and Manning, and particulars of their treatment.

Although Sly had an obvious motive to lie to inflate his doping résumé — Collins was posing as a potential client — Al Jazeera’s producers and reporters didn’t make any effort to contact any of the players until Dec. 4, court records show, when the documentary was in editing and 23 days before it was scheduled to air.

That day, reporter Davies sent a wave of emails, including one to Tom Condon, Manning’s agent. The same day, Al Jazeera director of investigative journalism Clayton Swisher boasted to a network executive that the upcoming documentary “stands to be one of our best ever.”

“Our undercover Liam Collins has recorded video and audio ... that implicates MAJOR American sports icons,” Swisher wrote in email. “The sporting industry is no doubt going to be shaken.”

In her email to Condon, Davies did not identify Sly as Al Jazeera’s source, but detailed a list of claims Sly had made about Manning. Among them: that Peyton purchased HGH from a clinic in Indianapolis, had the drugs shipped to his home in Florida under Ashley’s name, spent up to \$20,000 a month on HGH, and used the drug so excessively it had caused a “bone development” on his forehead. Davies gave Manning 10 days to respond.

Within days, Manning had hired former White House press secretary and crisis management consultant Ari Fleischer, as well as Gibson Dunn law firm in Washington, which, in turn, hired a private investigations firm to try to identify Al Jazeera’s source.

On Dec. 14, McGill, a partner at Gibson Dunn, emailed Al Jazeera’s lawyers and asked for an extension. The next day, McGill met with two lawyers for Al Jazeera at their office.

Emails between the two legal camps have been included in recent court filings with several redactions, but references to HGH make clear what the lawyers were discussing.

In a Dec. 16 email, Bob Corn-Revere, a lawyer for Al Jazeera, wrote McGill: “One thing that was not clear from our conversation yesterday is how much money the Mannings spent on HGH. ... Is that something you can share with us off the record?”

A few hours later, Corn-Revere followed up: “To be clear, i wasn’t asking what (in retrospect) may have sounded like a trick question. I wasn’t asking how much Peyton Manning spent on HGH, but was asking what was the total amount spent?”

In McGill’s reply, his discussion of the amount is redacted. That night, Al Jazeera producer Young sent emails to medical experts, detailing the conditions Manning’s lawyers claimed Ashley Manning had been diagnosed with, and the amounts of HGH her doctor had prescribed.

The emails are redacted in court filings. The Post obtained an unredacted version from one of the recipients, Dr. Mark Molitch, a professor of endocrinology at Northwestern medical school.

In phone interviews, Molitch and two other experts agreed that Ashley Manning’s conditions are not among those permitted by the Food and Drug Administration for legal HGH usage. The federal law prohibiting prescribing HGH for unapproved uses is rarely enforced, however, and experts suspect the law is largely ignored by “anti-aging” doctors who believe HGH can reverse the effects of aging.

“The bottom line, however, is it’s still illegal,” said Dr. Thomas Perls, a professor at Boston University medical school.

Dr. Dale Guyer, the Indianapolis physician who prescribed the HGH for Ashley Manning, did not reply to requests to comment.

On Dec. 22, five days before “The Dark Side” was set to air, private investigators hired by Manning’s lawyers tracked down Sly in suburban Indianapolis, where he was visiting his parents for the holidays. Two days later, on Christmas Eve, Sly videotaped himself as he read a prepared statement.

“There is no truth to any statement of mine that Al Jazeera plans to air,” Sly said in the video, which he uploaded to YouTube and then emailed to Al Jazeera reporter Davies and Corn-Revere, the network’s lawyer.

The same day, McGill, lawyer for the Mannings, called Al Jazeera’s lawyers to inform them he knew their source was Sly and he was aware Sly had recanted his claims.

In an email to Al Jazeera journalists that afternoon, Corn-Revere recounted the conversation.

“McGill said the Mannings were reserving all their rights, that they would litigate, and that there would be significant adverse publicity about what Al Jazeera knew in advance of the broadcast (including Sly’s recanting),” Corn-Revere wrote.

When “The Dark Side” aired three days later, several of the claims Sly had initially made about Manning — up to \$20,000 a month on HGH, and a bone deformity as a result of excessive use — were not included. Left in the program was Sly’s suggestion that Peyton ordered HGH from the Guyer clinic in Indianapolis, where Sly had interned, under Ashley’s name.

Manning never sued Al Jazeera, but the lawsuits filed by Zimmerman and Howard are keeping the retired quarterback involved. Al Jazeera’s lawyers are fighting in court to get records from Manning’s private investigators, in an effort to determine any influence they had on Sly’s recantation statement. McGill, in an interview with the Post, denied any involvement in Sly’s statement.

In the days after the documentary aired, Davies, the reporter, acknowledged in interviews that Al Jazeera had no direct evidence Peyton Manning had taken HGH, and that accusations against Howard, Zimmerman and the others rested entirely on claims Sly had recanted.

Still, Davies said she believed what Sly told her undercover colleague in more than 27 recorded hours over several days was more reliable than his 55-second statement after a visit from two private investigators.

“We’re saying we’ve raised questions,” Davies said in one interview. “And those questions haven’t been answered.”

# NFL executive VP Eric Grubman leaving after 14 years

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

June 8, 2018

The NFL's executive vice president of business operations is leaving after 14 years. The league informed teams of Eric Grubman's departure in a memo Thursday, via multiple reports.

"He has handled some of the most challenging and important issues to the NFL," Commissioner Roger Goodell said in the memo, via NFL Media.

Grubman, one of the league's highest-ranking executives, was instrumental in the Rams' move to Los Angeles. He headed sales of teams and construction of stadiums.

Goodell tried to convince Grubman to stay, Adam Schefter of ESPN reports, but Grubman follows other high-ranking executives to leave the league in recent months. Former COO Tod Leiwicke left to become the president of the future NHL Seattle franchise, and former executive vice president of communications Joe Lockhart departed to spend more time with his family.

Grubman graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1980 and served in the nuclear submarine service aboard USS Boston, SSN703. He was a partner of Goldman, Sachs & Company from 1996-2000 and also previously served as a former co-president of Constellation Energy Group, a Fortune 500 company located in Baltimore, Maryland.

# Report: Kaepernick's legal team will try to depose the President and Vice President

By Mike Florio  
Pro Football Talk  
June 8, 2018

While likely not the “dramatic turn” that attorney Mark Geragos promised a week ago, the Colin Kaepernick collusion grievance has definitely taken a turn. And it could end up being very dramatic, because it involves someone whose name has been closely associated with allegations of a very different sort of collusion.

Charles Robinson of Yahoo Sports reports that Kaepernick's legal team “is expected to seek federal subpoenas in the coming weeks to compel testimony from [President Donald] Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and other officials familiar with the president's agenda on protesting NFL players.” The interest in questioning the President and others close to him flows from the argument that the NFL and its teams colluded to keep Kaepernick unemployed in order to avoid the ire of the administration.

Robinson lists the various occasions on which the President and the NFL have skirmished over the anthem issue, with Kaepernick continuously at the heart of the controversy. From the President suggesting in the early days of the protests that Kaepernick should find another country to the President mocking owners for fearing a “nasty tweet” from the President if any of them sign Kaepernick to the President telling Cowboys owner Jerry Jones that the anthem debate is a “very winning issue” for the President to the “get that son of a bitch off the field, he's fired!” rant at an Alabama rally, the President's fingerprints are all over this one.

Forcing him to attach his voice to this one by answering questions under oath will be a far different issue, however. First, the NFL's system arbitrator must decide that the depositions are justified. Next, a federal court must decide to issue and to enforce the subpoena requests.

Surely, the President and his team will fight the effort, every step of the way. Especially since it's possible that any proof of interference in Kaepernick's employment interests could possibly result in a claim that the President and/or the Vice President violated the law.

# Bears chairman: Players should stand, but we should “listen to each other”

By Darin Gantt  
Pro Football Talk  
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Bears Chairman George McCaskey stuck to the party line, saying he agreed with the NFL’s policy that all players on the field should stand for the national anthem.

But he also clearly has been listening to the concerns of players (and/or reading Malcolm Jenkins’ signs) that the original intent of players who took a knee during the anthem have been misconstrued.

“The first players to take a knee during the national anthem did so to bring attention to two issues — police misconduct and social inequality,” McCaskey said, via J.J. Stankevitz of NBC Sports Chicago. “There are legitimate issues that deserve discussion and action. As a country, we can do better. It’s part of the founding fathers’ charge to us to form a more perfect union. Commissioner [Roger] Goodell said it very well, and it bears repeating — it was unfortunate that on-field protests created a false perception among many that thousands of NFL players were unpatriotic. This is not and was never the case.

“The players’ actions were characterized by some and perceived by some as disrespectful to the flag, our country and our military, and what should be a unifying moment for our communities and our country has become in some instances another source of divisiveness.”

That divisiveness might not have been created by President Donald Trump, but he was certainly willing to stoke the flames for political advantage. When the NFL tried to appease him with their recent change, it backfired terribly, leaving the teams to clean up their own mess. But McCaskey denied that Trump influenced the policy.

“What the President was doing or not doing, or thinking or not thinking, or saying and not thinking didn’t really impact our support of this,” he said.

(Sure, and the Eagles just decided they’d rather practice an extra day this week.)

McCaskey said he’s met with team president Ted Phillips and Bears union rep Sam Acho about the matter, and they’ve still discussing potential discipline (or whether they’d discipline) for violating the policy.

“I think we continue the dialogue,” McCaskey said, “and listen to each other.”

While it’s a little late now, it’s at least a good start.