

Case Keenum taking reps as established starter already 'paying dividends' for Broncos offense

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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The Broncos are just six practices into OTAs, but Offensive Coordinator Bill Musgrave can already see the benefit of having an established starter in place at quarterback.

As the team installs their offensive system, Case Keenum has gotten each of the first-team reps, and that value can't be understated for both Keenum and the team.

"Case is working hard," Musgrave said. "It's a new system for him, it's a new system for everybody. Case is getting — exclusively — all the reps with the ones. 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."

Musgrave's system — which has been described as player friendly by several members of the offense — will retain a variety of formations and packages to disguise itself from defenses, but the wording of plays will be shortened.

That should help the Broncos' offense achieve its overall goal: putting its players in position to make plays. "Any offense worth its salt," as Musgrave said Thursday, should be based around its players' skills. One of Keenum's strengths, as he showed off last year during an 11-3 campaign for the Vikings, is his ability to make plays out of the pocket.

"He definitely was mobile last year in Minnesota, and he's been mobile when he played for Houston and St. Louis before," Musgrave said. "So I think that's a great part of his game. He can stay on the move and remain a passer [and] process what he sees instantaneously. So those are good attributes to have, especially when things break down."

On Thursday, Keenum had a chance to learn a little more. The signal caller spoke with former quarterback Peyton Manning, who observed the team's practice and addressed the group as they huddled to end the day.

With Manning in attendance, Musgrave sensed an added sense of urgency from the entire team.

"Fun to have Peyton out there and fun to have DeMarcus Ware," Musgrave said. "Made for a special day. That was our sixth day of OTAs, and the energy was great to begin with.

"When those two guys are on the field, everybody steps it up a notch, that's for sure."

The Broncos named a starting punt returner early in last year's training camp, but as OTAs roll on, there is no set hierarchy.

"I want them to earn it," Special Teams Coordinator Tom McMahon said. "I think naturally, Isaiah [McKenzie], Jordan [Taylor] — in my opinion, they're doing a great job right now. Royce Freeman's back

there. We're using them all. David Williams is back there. [DaeSean] Hamilton is back there. Phillip [Lindsay] is back there. If you watch us after practice, we've got seven punt returners that are rookies. I don't know who that guy is. I learned my lesson a long time ago with thinking, 'This is going to be the guy, not the guy.' A year ago, Chester Rogers popped out for us in Indy, and no one thought he could do it. We've got great talent here, we're going to have a great returner, whoever it is — and they'll develop."

McMahon stressed the Broncos "have got to have guys that make plays for us," but he also acknowledged the importance of catching the punt.

To ensure that happens, the returners have added a drill in which they must call out the words or numbers that have been written on the football as they catch a punt. You catch the ball with your eyes, McMahon said Thursday, and this drill makes sure the returners aren't looking elsewhere.

McMahon will also be busy helping his team adapt to the NFL's new kickoff rules. He spoke favorably of the changes, but he added that Strength Coach Loren Landow will be instrumental in helping the coverage team make the most of a shortened takeoff zone.

When the Broncos added safety Su'a Cravens via a March trade, they gained a player who has plenty of positional flexibility. The former second-round pick can play in the box at 6-foot-1, 224 pounds — but he also has the speed to play in coverage.

"He's a unique player," Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods said. "You can see his natural instincts in the box. When he's in the box, he fits the run like a linebacker. Right now, you can see that — you can see it's easy for him. We're just really spending a lot of time teaching him how to play off the ball, playing the deep safety position.

"But I think he's going to really help us in terms of what we're able to do with our sub-packages. I think there's a few things, actually, that we can do that we couldn't do last year."

So, is Cravens the missing piece that can help the Broncos solve their woes covering tight ends last year?

"Part of it," Woods said. "We're going to have to do it with safeties, with linebackers, with dime[-package players]. But he's definitely a big part of it."

Just days after Head Coach Vance Joseph said he was proud of Paxton Lynch's development, Musgrave provided a specific example of where the third-year player has improved.

"Paxton's growing every day," Musgrave said. "He's learning more about football, learning more about defense. He's learning more about the way that he can be effective at this level of football, which is completely different than college and a world apart from high school. So he's going through the process and, shoot, he had another good day today.

"He's doing a good job late in the down being real smart with the football. We have our times out there at practice where the ball doesn't go where it's supposed to. We've got to learn from when we stub our toe, but to Paxton's credit, after six OTAs, he's doing the best of the three in terms of protecting the football and making smart decisions, especially late in the downs."

Case Keenum has to go from new guy to 'The Guy' for Broncos

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Jake Plummer knows exactly what Case Keenum is going through.

Plummer was once the newly signed quarterback of the Denver Broncos – the new guy in a locker room full of new teammates trying to figure him out.

And Plummer knows that Keenum needs to move fast to become the kind of leader the Broncos are thirsting to have.

No coach, no GM, no staff member, can have the chance to lead your guys like (a quarterback), that's just where the league is," Plummer said. "And if you're going to be in that locker room, your guys have to believe in you, have to believe you're doing what you need to do, that you won't give up. But this organization is primed for someone to just grab those keys and take off."

With a two-year, \$36-million deal, Keenum needs to start driving. The Broncos believe Keenum's breakout 2017 season with Minnesota Vikings (3,547 yards passing and 22 touchdowns) and his grit are just the combination they're looking for in the offense, and his winding path to becoming a starter also gives him the ability to relate to wide variety of teammates.

"I think we were missing some of that leadership at the position last year," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph of the 5-11 campaign that saw three starting quarterbacks. " ... We looked at a lot of things and I think Case has shown he can be that guy."

The early returns are, well, still early, but the reviews are good, especially in a locker room with plenty of players who were in uniform when the Broncos won Super Bowl 50.

"He's a leader," said Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders. " ... He's confident in himself. He's one of those guys that when he steps into the huddle, he's that leader. You don't have to second guess what his thought process is."

Corner Chris Harris Jr. put it more succinctly. "I like him."

Keenum has made his presence felt in the early weeks of the team's offseason program, especially as the offense has started to do some on-field work together.

"The biggest thing is you show them right away what you're about, you get to work, do the things you need to do," Plummer said. "Before that, maybe they played you on Sunday and that's what they know about you. Now you show them what you're about Monday through Saturday, you know? Man, you can't hide that when you're in that same locker room, so you have to do the job and work your ass off because nobody is going to give a crap about what you say if you don't."

Keenum is a player who has been cut three times, by two different teams. He lost the first eight games he started. Through it all, he still prepared himself well enough to have his best season when the Vikings put him in the lineup when Sam Bradford was injured last year.

Now, Keenum's new teammates talk about that toughness because part of their issues on offense last season revolved around the team's inability to rebound from mistakes.

One turnover, one penalty, one missed assignment would turn into several and one loss eventually turned into an eight-game losing streak because of it.

"Those guys who play and survive, they get better," Joseph said. "Most guys who play and don't survive, they're out of the league. For [Keenum] to be here at this moment and be our guy, with what he's gone through ... he's hardened because of that process."

For Keenum, he is hoping this is the foundation of what happens in the weeks and months to come.

"It's all part of playing quarterback, the craft of it," Keenum said. "I've said I think you earn the right to be a leader, you can't just say it, it's how you approach the job, making that effort to know people beyond the job too. But it starts with how you handle your job as a quarterback and that they know what you're about and you're doing all you can to help everybody win."

Case Keenum voted No. 51 on NFL Top 100 list

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

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Quarterback Case Keenum checked in at No. 51 on this year's NFL Top 100 for his 2017 performance with the Minnesota Vikings.

Keenum, who joined the Broncos this spring as the prized addition of Denver's free-agent class, enjoyed a breakout final season in Minnesota.

He led the Vikings to an 11-3 record as a starter as he completed 67.6 percent of his passes and recorded a 98.3 quarterback rating. Keenum also threw for 3,547 yards, 22 touchdowns and just seven interceptions.

In his final home game as Minnesota's starter, he led the Vikings to a last-second comeback win over the New Orleans Saints.

Broncos fans certainly hope Keenum can replicate that sort of performance as Denver's starting quarterback in 2018.

Keenum, who earned his first career NFL Top 100 selection, joins Chris Harris Jr. on this year's list.

Broncos depth chart: Case Keenum brings clarity to the offense

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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With free agency and the draft completed, and OTAs and minicamps scheduled for the next month and a half, here's a closer look at the depth chart for the Denver Broncos (starters in bold):

OFFENSE

Quarterback (3): Case Keenum, Paxton Lynch, Chad Kelly

Keenum was the centerpiece of the Broncos' work in free agency and is the unquestioned starter. Lynch is a 2016 first-round pick who the Broncos hope can find his way. As the draft closed, president of football operations/general manager John Elway said the Broncos would not sign another quarterback during the offseason program, so Lynch and Kelly will compete for the No. 2 job.

Running back (5): Devontae Booker, Royce Freeman, De'Angelo Henderson, David Williams, Phillip Lindsay

Booker will go into OTAs and likely minicamp as the starter, but Freeman has the size, speed and overall game to compete to be the early-down back. Williams and Lindsay should push Henderson for the No. 3 spot.

Fullback (1): Andy Janovich

He's solo at the position, but he's a core special-teams player, and offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave is expected to have some two-back looks in the run game. Coach Vance Joseph has said he wants a power run game.

Wide receiver (13): Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders, Jordan Taylor, Courtland Sutton, DaeSean Hamilton, Carlos Henderson, Isaiah McKenzie, Tim Patrick, Kenny Bell, River Cracraft, Jordan Leslie, John Diarse, Jimmy Williams

The rookie draft picks -- Sutton and Hamilton -- are physically ready, with the route-running ability to push for roster spots. Last year's draft picks at the position -- Henderson and McKenzie -- are going to find it a more difficult climb this time around.

Tight end (6): Jake Butt, Jeff Heuerman, Austin Traylor, Troy Fumagalli, Matt LaCosse, Brian Parker

After Butt spent his rookie season on injured reserve in 2017, the Broncos believe he's ready for a significant role in the offense. Heuerman and Traylor have experience in the scheme, but the Broncos have high hopes for Fumagalli.

Tackle (7): Garrett Bolles, Jared Veldheer, Menelik Watson, Cyrus Kouandjio, Elijah Wilkinson, Andreas Knappe, Leon Johnson

Bolles will start at left tackle, with Veldheer at right tackle as the Broncos hope Watson, who has never played more than 12 games in a season, can stay healthy enough to be the swing tackle. Kouandjio and Wilkinson got limited looks as developmental prospects last season.

Guard (7): Ron Leary, Connor McGovern, Billy Turner, Max Garcia, Sam Jones, Jeremiah Poutasi, Austin Schlottmann

Leary is expected to move back to left guard -- he was moved to right last season -- and the Broncos believe McGovern is ready to move into the starting lineup. Turner, Garcia and Jones (a rookie) will likely battle for the backup spots.

Center (2): Matt Paradis, J.J. Dielman

Paradis has played every snap over the past three seasons, including 2016 when he didn't practice much because of injuries to both hips. McGovern can also play center and Dielman is expected to get a long look as a guard/center option.

DEFENSE

Cornerback (8): Chris Harris Jr., Bradley Roby, Tramaine Brock, Isaac Yiadom, Marcus Rios, Brendan Langley, Michael Hunter, C.J. Smith

Harris is a lock to be in the starting lineup to go with any and all specialty packages. The Broncos believe Roby will be the other starter in the base defense, but Brock will get a chance to push him as the rookie Yiadom should get some snaps.

Safety (8): Justin Simmons, Darian Stewart, Su'a Cravens, Will Parks, Jamal Carter, Dymonte Thomas, Jordan Moore, Trey Marshall

Simmons has the look of a longtime starter and a future team captain, and it remains to be seen how the Broncos plan to use Cravens and Parks. They liked what they saw from Carter and Thomas as prospects last season.

Inside linebacker (6): Brandon Marshall, Todd Davis, Josey Jewell, Zaire Anderson, Joseph Jones, Jerrol Garcia-Williams

The Broncos re-signed Davis in free agency to keep him in the defense alongside Marshall. Jewell has the instincts and savvy to compete early to find a role on special teams with Anderson.

Outside linebacker (8): Von Miller, Bradley Chubb, Shane Ray, Shaquil Barrett, Stansly Maponga, Deiontrez Mount, Marcus Rush, Jeff Holland

If Chubb is as prepared to move into the lineup as the Broncos believe he is, it shouldn't be long until he is paired with Miller. Ray is healthy after multiple wrist surgeries in '17 and has promised a breakout season.

Defensive line (11): Derek Wolfe (DE), Domata Peko (NT), Clinton McDonald (DE), DeMarcus Walker (DE), Zach Kerr (DE), Adam Gotsis (DE), Shelby Harris (DE), Kyle Peko (NT), DeShawn Williams (DE), Paul Boyette Jr. (DE), Lowell Lotulelei (NT)

The Broncos say Wolfe has recovered from offseason neck surgery and is ready to participate fully in the team's offseason work. McDonald, a team captain with the Buccaneers, will play plenty in the rotation as will Walker.

Punter (1): Marquette King

The Broncos used a draft pick on Riley Dixon in 2016, but traded him to the Giants shortly after they signed King in free agency. The Broncos hope King can repair some of the field-position issues they had on special teams last season.

Kicker (1): Brandon McManus

After making 85.7 and 85.3 percent of his field-goal attempts in 2015 and 2016, respectively, McManus dipped to 75 percent last season with misses in four of the first five games.

Long-snapper (2): Casey Kreiter, Christian Kuntz

Kreiter has been the long-snapper for the past two seasons -- he finished 2016 on injured reserve after 10 games. The Broncos added Kuntz this offseason to get a look at the rookie.

Kick returner (4): Devontae Booker, Carlos Henderson, Isaiah McKenzie, Brendan Langley

Booker will continue to be the "safe" option for the job, until somebody else shows he can handle the ball without incident. When the Broncos selected Henderson in the 2017 draft, he was expected to be the kickoff returner early on.

Punt returner (3): Jordan Taylor, Emmanuel Sanders, Isaiah McKenzie

Coach Vance Joseph liked how Taylor handled the job last season after McKenzie was benched due to fumbles. Sanders will be the fail-safe option if injuries happen.

Emmanuel Sanders all-in on Case Keenum: 'Case is our guy'

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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For the first time since 2015, the Broncos will go into OTAs knowing who their starting quarterback will be. For Emmanuel Sanders, that makes all the difference -- whether he's running routes against air in Phase 2 of offseason work or he's answering questions about where the team stands.

"I appreciate it, for sure," Sanders said Wednesday. "This is the first time in two or three years that I'm not standing up here talking about a quarterback debate."

In 2016, Mark Sanchez, Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch rotated through OTA snaps. A year later, Siemian and Lynch split the repetitions. Without an obvious starter each offseason, the opportunities to build cohesion were limited.

"You can sit back and say we're all professional football players and you've got to deal with that situation, but at the same time, obviously you can't gain the same chemistry. You don't have the same mindset. You have to talk to two different quarterbacks," Sanders said.

"When you're going into individual routes, you have to go to one guy and then go with the next guy. You don't really gain that chemistry. You're not maximizing the opportunity. Now we're maximizing the opportunity, and hopefully it pays off."

The work involved with that is ongoing, and Sanders admitted that this year's session have a "different feel" than last year's.

"I can see it in guys just trying to get in shape and trying to get their conditioning up," Sanders said. "When guys are messing up, guys are going back and getting seconds. It has that 2014 feel where guys are flying all over the field and want to be good and want to be successful."

The opportunities to work are still limited by league rules. During the current phase of offseason work, players can be at the facility four hours each day, and they can't face a defense or do one-on-one work until Phase 3 begins in just under three weeks.

For now, Keenum and his receivers can work on their timing. So far, so good.

"Every single pass that he's thrown so far -- I wouldn't say every single one, but a majority of the passes, 95 percent or 98 percent -- have been there," Sanders said.

"He's confident in himself. He's one of those guys that when he steps into the huddle, he's that leader. You don't have to second guess what his thought process is. We're going to complete this ball. We're going to keep the ball moving. I'm liking what I'm seeing from him so far."

And Sanders likes what he's seeing elsewhere as a result of Keenum's arrival.

"I remember when I got out here, I went out to the team store and I saw Case Keenum jerseys. I was like, 'Thank God I don't have to deal with that again,'" Sanders said.

"Case is our guy. We can go from there. We can work our butts off, try to gain chemistry and try to put up points."

Keenum in charge of 11-man offense as Broncos begin Phase II

By Mike Klis

9 News

April 30, 2018

For the first time, Case Keenum lined up the Broncos' first-team offense Monday, called out the signals, and ran a play.

Phase II of the Broncos' offseason program has begun at the team's UCHealth Training Center headquarters. After Phase I was limited to strength, conditioning and classroom work, Phase II puts Vance Joseph and his coaching staff on the field for 90 minutes of instruction. Practice allows for 11 players to a side to run their plays, although there can be no opposing side.

Keenum, Paxton Lynch and Chad Kelly – and nothing but -- are the Broncos' quarterbacks taking turns running their 11-man offensive units through plays.

Keenum is the Broncos' new starting quarterback after he signed a two-year, \$36 million contract in mid-March. Of that \$36 million, all \$18 million is fully guaranteed this season and \$7 million of his \$18 million is fully guaranteed for 2019.

Wish we could have seen his practice debut, even if there was no defense. NFL rules prohibit fans from watching practice until training camp in late-July. The media can't observe until organized team activities (OTAs) begin May 22.

Keenum is "the guy" after Broncos general manager John Elway decided against drafting a quarterback over the weekend. And how many readers out there thought the Broncos had given up on Lynch?

The first-round pick in the 2016 draft, Lynch will enter Phase II of his third season as the Broncos' backup quarterback.

"We are not kicking him to the curb," Elway said. "He can still develop. When we drafted him two years ago, as I said, we knew it was going to take some time.

"Paxton is going to compete with Chad for that backup spot. We are not going to bring another one in for OTAs. We will take a peek at that. It will be those two and Case. We are going to OTAs with those guys and go from there."

First-round draft pick Bradley Chubb wasn't around Monday to figure out where to line up with the Denver defense. Keenum, Lynch and Kelly could not share reps with rookie receiver Courtland Sutton, running back Royce Freeman or the rest of the Broncos' new draft class.

Rookies must stay away from their team's facility until the rookie minicamp, which for the Broncos will be held May 10-12.

Rookies will join the veterans in time for OTAs in late-May.

New Broncos QB Case Keenum's Drive As Strong As Ever

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

April 17, 2018

Case Keenum couldn't wait to get out of Minnesota. No, he's not bitter over the Vikings' decision to move on to Kirk Cousins.

And he isn't gloating over being "the man" for the first time in his NFL career after signing a two-year, \$36 million deal last month in Denver.

He's just glad to see some sunshine, that's all.

Before coming to Colorado for the Broncos' offseason program, Keenum made a stop in Minneapolis to accept the "Uncommon Award" from Tony Dungy at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska on Friday.

The only downer was the blizzard that struck the nation's midsection.

"It dumped like 25 inches on us," Keenum said. "So, I was ready to get out of there and get to Denver and the sunshine."

Keenum is entering the season as the starter for the first time in his six-year career after coach Vance Joseph declared him the Broncos' No. 1 QB at the free agent's introductory news conference a month ago.

Yet, Keenum's role beyond 2018 remains up in the mile-high air because general manager John Elway could still use the fifth overall pick in next week's NFL draft to select a quarterback.

Elway and his lieutenants have taken long, hard looks at this year's college crop of QBs, including the "Big Four" prospects. They hosted Baker Mayfield on Monday but Keenum said he hadn't run into him.

Keenum also insists he isn't concerned that he'll soon be tutoring his successor should Elway choose a quarterback.

"I'm excited for whoever's going to come in and make us better," Keenum said. "That's what competition breeds within your own team. I think it makes you better. So, whoever comes in I'll be looking for them to help us be a better football team. No matter what position it is.

I know they're going to draft a lot of positions. It doesn't change my mindset at all."

Yet, non-QB blue chippers such as Penn State running back Saquon Barkley, North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb or Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson would provide immediate help for Keenum this season and maybe even stability for his future.

Von Miller has said he'd love to have Chubb lining up next to him.

“He’s Khalil Mack and Von Miller put together,” Miller said with a laugh. “He is a great player and I would love to have him on my team. You don’t come across guys like that often.

We don’t (normally) have the No. 5 pick in the draft. I hope we don’t have a high pick like that for a while. So if we can steal a player like that, I’m all for it.”

When Keenum reported to work Monday, it marked the first time he’d been the unquestioned starting quarterback since his final days at the University of Houston, where he set NCAA passing records but still went undrafted before compiling a 20-18 record with the Vikings, Rams and Texans.

“It feels good, it does,” Keenum said. “It’s not something where I feel like I’ve made it. That’s not ever my mentality. I’m going to stay hungry.

“Nothing’s ever been handed to me. I’ve earned that right, and I’m going to continue to earn that right being in this building, in the weight room, meeting room, practice field and then on game day.”

The Broncos’ anemic offense was a big reason for their slide to 5-11 last season, just two years after they won the Super Bowl, and Elway’s makeover includes the arrival of right tackle Jared Veldheer and the departure of running back C.J. Anderson on Monday.

Anderson could have provided a valuable sounding board to Keenum much like he did with Peyton Manning, Brock Osweiler and Trevor Siemian.

“It doesn’t change me and my mindset and what I’m prepared to do here and what I want to do here, what I feel like I need to do,” Keenum said. “I know that NFL teams change constantly.

So, I’m here right now, just trying to get into the building and just become familiar with everything.”

For now, the Broncos’ quarterback room also includes holdovers Paxton Lynch, a first-rounder in 2016 who so far has flopped, and Chad Kelly, last year’s Mr. Irrelevant who spent his rookie season on IR.

Keenum said his interactions with Lynch and Kelly have been good so far.

“We’ve got a great quarterback room, and I appreciate that because I’ve been in some other quarterback rooms that haven’t been,” Keenum said.

Did Von Miller and Case Keenum just become best friends?

By Troy Renck
KMGH
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The Broncos began Phase 1 of their offseason conditioning program this week. They returned to Dove Valley as a humbled, hungry group. The Broncos have not posted back-to-back losing seasons since 1972. "Just be accountable. You let last season go, but you have to learn from it. There's things we have to fix," said All-Pro linebacker Von Miller, whose stellar 2017 season was wasted without any other player providing consistent pressure on the quarterback. "I need to play better. Just across the board we have to get back to that winning culture. We have to win, and it starts with being accountable."

Any Broncos rebound starts with a new starting quarterback. Case Keenum is the man for the first time in his career. He no longer has neck pain from looking over his shoulder in Minnesota for four months. This is his team. His time. The Broncos are counting on him providing steady play -- they would love him to repeat last season's 22-touchdown, seven-interception performance -- and being a rudder in the locker room.

It requires little leap of imagination to see this team contending if Miller and Keenum play well. He has no choice, perhaps, but Miller believes in Keenum. He talked about the new quarterback like they were going to star in "Step Brothers 2" together on Tuesday.

Did they just become best friends?

"He's a great leader. In 30 seconds of being around him, you can kind of tell what he's going to bring. He's going to be a great leader for us," said Miller before adding with a smirk. "I envision a whole bunch of magical moments between me and Case. Holding hands and dancing around the locker room. All we have to do now is get wins."

Keenum laughed when told of Miller's description. He said he was DFW -- down for whatever -- or implied it.

"I'm always down for some shenanigans," Keenum said. "I'm excited to get to know Von. Just the reputation that he has obviously. I'm excited. Locker rooms are always fun."

April brings off-beat questions and light-hearted answers. There are no games for four months, no public failure, no injuries. The spring is the NFL's version of Febreze for disappointing teams.

The Broncos overhauled their coaching staff, leaving Vance Joseph more comfortable with new faces, but working to keep his job on a weekly basis this fall. They addressed multiple needs, adding Keenum, safety Su'a Cravens, right tackle Jared Veldheer, cornerback Tramaine Brock (who will brazenly wear No. 21) and defensive tackle Clinton McDonald.

But holes exist.

Keenum joins a team without an established third receiving target -- will it arrive through the draft or with Jake Butt in year two? -- and inexperience at running back. C.J. Anderson, coming off a career-high 1,007 rushing yards, represented a potential safety net for Keenum in pass protection and knowledge of the offense. The Broncos cut him Monday, leaving them looking in the draft for a running back to vie for the starting job with Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson.

Does this mean Keenum must microwave his leadership role?

"I just want to get to know guys. How are you off the field? I try to build a relationship from there. Getting to know the person is more important," Keenum said. "I am going to stay consistent. That's what's gotten me here, and who I am. I will stay hungry. Nothing has ever been handed to me."

Keenum is considering hosting an off-site passing camp, something that drew rave reviews when Peyton Manning held the job in Denver. First, he's learning names. One thing at a time. Miller admitted he will hold a second annual pass rushing summit with some of the game's most talented stars and legends.

"We're still finalizing where we're going to do it, sponsors and all that stuff," Miller said. "I don't plan on letting it go anytime soon. It's a great event. Wherever you can get rookies in there with vets, with guys like DeMarcus (Ware), Bruce Smith and Warren Sapp, to share knowledge, it's a magical thing."

Part of the offseason makeover sits on the horizon. Another nip and tuck will come from the draft. The Broncos continue to keep an open mind with the fifth pick, doing their due diligence on quarterbacks. Josh Allen, Sam Darnold, Baker Mayfield, who toured the facility on Tuesday, and Josh Rosen remain on the radar.

Keenum said he didn't bump into Mayfield, and insisted he has no issue with the Broncos taking a quarterback with the fifth pick. Miller remained diplomatic as well. He trusts general manager John Elway. However, he named names, and no quarterback was among them, something I could not help but notice. "We have a Hall of Fame quarterback leading the ship (in Elway). I have all the faith in them," said Miller, who pays attention to mock drafts. "Whatever happens, I am cool with it. If we take Saquon (Barkley), I am cool with it. If we take (Bradley) Chubb, I am cool with it. If we trade away, I am cool with whatever he does with that pick."

Case Keenum aims to “make a good first impression and build on that” as Denver Broncos begin voluntary workouts

By Gina Mizell
The Denver Post
April 17, 2018

Case Keenum has started diving into his new playbook. He’s navigating how to move from the Broncos’ weight room at its Dove Valley training facility to the cafeteria. But Denver’s newest quarterback’s first priority in the next few days is learning everybody’s names.

The start of Denver’s voluntary workout program this week also marks Keenum’s first opportunity to get to know his new surroundings. Keenum acknowledges things feel a little bit different here. The NFL journeyman now arrives as the man expected to immediately fix Denver’s quarterback woes, as evidenced by the two-year, \$36 million contract he signed last month. So his goal is simple – “make a good first impression and build on that.”

“There’s a precedent set with certain things,” Keenum said during a Tuesday news conference. “It feels good. It does. I’m gonna accept it. I know there’s a responsibility with that, too, so it’s not something where I feel like I’ve made it. That’s not ever my mentality.

“I’m gonna stay hungry. I’m gonna stay consistent with the same mindset I’ve always had. That’s what’s gotten me here and that’s who I am. Nothing’s ever been handed to me. I’ve earned that right, and I’m gonna continue to earn that right.”

By Tuesday afternoon, Keenum had gone through just one workout, one team meeting and one lunch. He’s shared handshakes here and there with people around the facility. But he’s already gained approval from the most visible Bronco, all-pro linebacker Von Miller, who said he first reached out as soon as Keenum signed his deal.

“You can just tell by being around guys, by having a conversation with guys,” Miller said. “In 30 seconds, you can kind of tell what he’s going to bring. He’s gonna be a great quarterback for us and a great leader.”

Keenum put up stunning numbers in 2017, completing 67.6 percent of his passes for 3,547 yards, 22 touchdowns and seven interceptions while helping guide Minnesota to the NFC championship game. He took over once Sam Bradford went down with an injury. But perhaps the best example of that leadership is where he spent last weekend before returning to Denver. Keenum was back in Minneapolis to accept the “Uncommon Award” from Hall of Fame coach Tony Dungy, an honor for a player who is not afraid to “take the tough road, to follow a higher calling or set a higher standard.”

In addition to the Broncos' OTA workouts in May and early June and a mandatory minicamp from June 12 through 14, Keenum is open to organizing more throwing sessions to help build chemistry with his receivers. But he's most looking forward to sitting down with teammates over the next several weeks and asking about their families and lives away from football.

"I try to build a relationship there and start there," Keenum said. "I think on-the-field stuff comes more from actions than words ... I think getting to know the person is more important.

It should not be hard for Keenum to get to know Miller, whose locker is right across from Keenum's. Miller said he "envisions a whole bunch of magical moments" with his new quarterback, such as "holding hands and dancing around" the space.

Is Keenum ready for such bonding with his new teammate?

"I'm always down for some shenanigans," Keenum said.

Peyton Manning: 'I'm a big Case Keenum fan'

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 18, 2018

Manning said Wednesday at his Colorado Sports Hall of Fame induction that the two had been communicating. He suggested the two may meet up on the course so that Keenum could ask some questions about playing in Denver.

"He said he wanted to pick my brain on a couple things," Manning said. "I just told him I'm here as a resource. I pull for quarterbacks. I really do. It's a unique fraternity and I'm excited for the opportunity for him.

"He's got a chance to play with some great players and what he did last year in Minnesota was really special. I know Broncos fans kind of hope to see some of that same magic here this year."

Manning has previously spent time with Keenum at the Manning Passing Academy, which Keenum participated in while playing at the University of Houston.

"I like Case Keenum," Manning said. "I'm a big Case Keenum fan. Case came to our football camp years ago as a college player. He's one of our alumni and my dad's kept in touch with him since. I've seen him through the years.

"...He's a hard worker. He's really been a winner all his life — high school or college. What a great opportunity for him, and I'm certainly pulling for him."

Manning said Wednesday his willingness to reach out to new players to offer his support extends to both Broncos players and the larger quarterback contingent across the league.

"Certainly, quarterbacks are a pretty unique fraternity, and I think quarterbacks need to look out for each other and kind of stick together," Manning said. "That's always been important, and I think certainly, [the mentality is] kind of 'Once a Bronco, always a Bronco.' I don't know what resource I can be, but [I] just try to be there for anything a player might need, especially a quarterback.

"I know what it's like to change teams. There's expectations. There's pressure. And there's a lot of adjusting.

Jake Plummer: Case Keenum might be 'fearless competitor' Broncos need

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

March 31, 2018

As the Denver Broncos make plans for their newly signed quarterback to flourish in the kind of offense that has brought the team some of its greatest successes, it is a good time to check in with a former player who once walked in those exact shoes.

For while Case Keenum is the Broncos' quarterback of choice to lead the climb out of last year's 5-11 finish, while he is a player the Broncos believe has even more to give than the career-best 3,547 yards and 22 touchdowns he posted last season, it is Jake Plummer who knows both the weighty expectations and the potential for football glory that await Keenum.

Because Plummer has been that guy for the Broncos.

"You've got to have someone pulling the trigger that's a fearless competitor, who no matter what will fight hard for everyone on the team, everyone in the organization," Plummer said. "Find that kind of a player who has that kind of mentality. Case Keenum is that kind of guy. He's a fiery competitor, who even if he makes a mistake, goes back out there and pulls the trigger again."

In the cascade of historic numbers that came out of Peyton Manning's time with the Broncos, including the highest-scoring season in league history and two Super Bowl trips, it can be easy to forget where Plummer fits.

Until Manning's arrival, no quarterback in team history had helped lead the Broncos to a higher percentage of wins in his starts than Plummer's .722 mark. Plummer's 4,089 passing yards in 2004 were a franchise single-season record at the time and he still holds the franchise record for consecutive passes without an interception. Plummer was, as a player, fiery and irreverent, and at times he swam against the current convention.

But Plummer believes emphatically in the offense he thinks John Elway and coach Vance Joseph plan to run with Keenum at quarterback, because he ran a version of it. He calls the Broncos, even after his somewhat messy benching by Mike Shanahan in 2006, when Jay Cutler was a rookie and the Broncos were 7-4, "a team with people that will do anything and everything you need to win a Super Bowl." Plummer also believes the quarterback has to do his part and understand what he's getting into.

Elway has often said that simply handling all the intangibles that come with the job of quarterback can be more difficult than the football part. That maintaining confidence through the rough spots, handling criticism and leading a locker room impacts how a quarterback plays after the ball is snapped.

Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch and Brock Osweiler were all cycled through the starting job last season, and none of the three could rise above an often ill-fitting offense or stop the flood of turnovers. Both Elway and Joseph have routinely used the word “grit” to describe an important attribute Keenum brings to the table.

“Rebounding from mistakes, that’s all this league is sometimes for a quarterback,” Plummer said. “Everybody, of course, wants Tom Brady or Peyton Manning, but watch their film, they have days, they have times, when they suck. But when it matters most, those guys don’t remember that, all they do is ball out and make the plays now. You have to be a consistent badass. That’s what you’re looking for, a consistent badass.”

The Broncos, since Pat Bowlen bought the team more than three decades ago, have had more Super Bowl trips than losing seasons. Their current GM happens to be a Hall of Fame quarterback whose picture is scattered all over the team’s complex. Manning’s unprecedented four-year run, which included a 55-touchdown season as well as a Super Bowl win, is still fresh in the minds of most everyone in the seats on game day. In short, Broncos quarterback is a gig that comes with a cargo plane’s worth of baggage in tow.

And beyond game plans, arm strength and creativity on the playcalling, Plummer sees the ability to handle that legacy as one the most important items for Keenum or anyone else who tries to fill the job.

“Watching their games is the most important thing and I would like to sneak down on the sideline and watch him come off after an interception and see what they do,” Plummer said. “Does he sulk on the sideline? Oh, pity me, I’ve got to answer for a mistake. Or are they over yelling at their defense to gimme the damn ball back so I can go score.

“But so much is expected and if you can’t handle that, don’t come here ... Even Peyton took some flak when he didn’t win it all. But this is a place where you have everything you need to win, they’ll do every single thing in the world that needs to be done. It’s up to you to make the plays when it’s time to make the plays. But if you don’t want that, don’t come.”

Broncos quarterback Case Keenum draws strength from support of his wife

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
March 24, 2018

Case Keenum and Kimberly Caddell fell for each other while slurping snow cones in Abilene, “the prettiest town you’ve ever seen,” Waylon Jennings sang.

And, ultimately, the Broncos got a twofer.

During the press conference introducing the Broncos’ “new starting quarterback,” Case constantly made plural references. “This was our first choice,” “We’re very excited to represent the city of Denver and Colorado,” “We want to play the rest of my career here.”

Kimberly and Case have been together since their first quasi-date in 2004 — when the junior starting quarterback led Wylie High School to its only state championship and Caddell, a senior who attended that game, was a volleyball player and pole vaulter at a rival school.

Although they grew up apart in Abilene, Kimberly was in a Sunday School class taught by Case’s mom. The two had many of the same friends and crossed paths, but it wasn’t until a Fellowship of Christian Athletes conference that they actually talked.

Case asked the young lady to join him afterward for a free snow cone.

The couple continued to connect at the University of Houston — the only college to offer Keenum a scholarship.

As a redshirt senior in 2010, Keenum was a Heisman Trophy candidate after passing for 5,671 yards and 44 touchdowns the previous season. But in the third game, Case tore the ACL in his right knee — and believed his dream of becoming an NFL quarterback had faded. He was depressed, became addicted to pain-killers and lost 25 pounds.

After the surgery, Kimberly moved him into her garage apartment, dressed and fed Case and helped him wean off the drugs.

In mid-January the NCAA granted Keenum a rare sixth year waiver.

A few weeks later Case took Kimberly to Houston’s stadium, where she was surprised by their families and friends. At the 50-yard line, surrounded by candles and flowers, Keenum took a knee (the good left one) and proposed.

They married in June, 2011.

Given a new start, literally, Keenum threw for 5,631 yards (71 percent) and 48 touchdowns, with only five interceptions.

Except, no NFL team drafted the quarterback who set most of college football's passing records.

Texas coach Gary Kubiak, once an overachiever himself, gave Case a chance.

Kimberly, as always, was by his side. She memorized the Texans' offensive playbook and tested him every morning before workouts. Nevertheless, he was relegated to the practice squad.

In 2013 Case was promoted to the roster as third-string quarterback. However, after Matt Schaub was injured, Kubiak surprisingly named Case the starter.

The Texans lost eight straight games. Keenum was out as starter, and Kubiak would be out as coach. At the next camp Keenum was battling for a spot when the Texans came to Dove Valley for joint practices with the Broncos before their Aug. 23 exhibition. Case and Kimberly got their first look at Denver, and the Broncos got their first view of Keenum.

In the game, with Peyton Manning and Brock Osweiler sharing time for the Broncos, Keenum completed 11 of 18 passes for 74 yards. "I was at (Mile High Stadium) that night, and I thought Case played well" Kimberly told me after the media conference.

However, without his mentor Kubiak, Keenum was released a week later as the Texans added Ryan Mallett.

Keenum was picked up by the Rams for their practice squad. He was cut, then returned to the scout team and, in December, was grabbed away from St. Louis by, of all teams, the Texans.

He won two games as the starter, but was traded back to the Rams and had a 3-2 record as a starter in 2015. The Rams moved to Los Angeles — and drafted Jared Goff No. 1 overall.

Meanwhile, Kimberly continued to assist Case with his playbook and study of defenses, and served as the den mother to the players' wives, explaining the intricacies of the game.

The Broncos tried unsuccessfully in the 2016 offseason to trade for Keenum after Manning retired and Osweiler signed with, of all teams, the Texans. After starting 4-5, Keenum was back on the bench. Kimberly kept insisting that he would make it.

And, last season, Keenum, again a free agent, signed with the Vikings, and made it.

Which brings us, and them, to Denver.

"When I was young, my family would come snow skiing to Colorado, and Case and I stayed once at The Broadmoor," Kimberly said. "Anywhere you recommend we should go?"

I said: "You two obviously should visit the U.S. Mint."

Team Keenum has just made its own money — \$36 million.

Case wouldn't be where he is — with the Broncos — without Kimberly.

The indomitable, inspirational, inseparable, loving couple have taken Robert Frost's "road less traveled by" to reach Denver.

Case Keenum will thrive as Denver Broncos quarterback

By David Ramsey

Colorado Springs Gazette

March 19, 2018

Case Keenum delivered a Drew Brees-like season in 2017. Highly accurate. Impressive ratio of touchdowns to interceptions. Solid, consistent leadership.

The doubters will say Keenum's season was a fluke, the tale of a journeyman quarterback who produced because he was surrounded by elite offensive talent and supported by the NFL's finest defense.

I'm saying Keenum, 30, is hitting his prime and will repeat his mastery in 2018. He's a bargain at \$18 million per season. With Keenum at quarterback, the Broncos will not stumble to another losing record. In an instant, the Broncos vaulted from the NFL's fifth-worst team to playoff contender.

On Friday, Keenum introduced himself to Colorado. I talked with Keenum several times during his career with the University of Houston, where he threw 155 career touchdowns and battled against Air Force's defense three times.

He never will be described as the life of any press conference. He's calm. He's measured in his words. He would rather be throwing passes or studying video than talking to a collection of media types.

He's also sincere. He grew up in Abilene, a city on the windblown and desolate plains of West Texas. He's happy to be surrounded by vastly more beautiful scenery.

And he's thrilled to playing for John Elway, his new boss. When Keenum was a child, a poster of Elway hung on his bedroom wall. He's worn No. 7 for most of his career in honor of Elway. (He will wear No. 4 for the Broncos, who never will allow any quarterback to again wear No. 7.)

"It's incredible to be introduced by John Elway," Keenum said a few seconds after being introduced by Elway. "A dream come true."

Keenum's NFL dreams have always been unlikely. He's been forced to swim against a strong tide of skepticism. Elway and Peyton Manning look like NFL quarterbacks. Keenum looks like your next-door neighbor.

He's been silencing those skeptics for more than a decade. At Abilene's Wylie High, Keenum collected 6,783 yards and 48 touchdowns passing and 2,000 yards and 41 touchdowns rushing. He won a state title in Texas, which is America's toughest state title to win.

Only Houston offered a scholarship.

In college, Keenum passed for 19,217 yards, 155 touchdowns and busted the 5,000-yard barrier three times. And no NFL team drafted him. He bounced from the Texans to the Rams to the Vikings before finally busting loose this season.

“I’ve earned everything I got,” Keenum said. “Nothing has been handed to me. I’ve battled my way through. I’m definitely the better for it.”

At times, it seemed as if Kirk Cousins was in the room with Keenum and the media. Several questions were asked about Cousins, seen as the No. 1 free agent available.

I never understood Cousins-mania. He lost three of his final five starts with Washington and in those three defeats he led the offense to 37 total points. That’s 12.3 per game. Those are Trevor Siemian-like numbers.

Cousins appears to have failed to dazzle Elway, too. Elway said, over and over, that Keenum was his first choice at quarterback. This might be a public relations move. Or, this might be the truth.

“It’s very arguable who had the best year,” Elway said in comparing the Cousins of 2017 to the Keenum of 2017.

Elway is right. Cousins threw his way to 27 touchdowns, 13 interceptions and a 93.9 quarterback ranking. Meanwhile, Keenum threw for 22 TDs, seven interceptions and a 98.3 rating. More importantly, Keenum’s Vikings scored 383 points and finished 13-3 while Cousins and Washington scored 342 points and stumbled to a 7-9 record.

All those numbers lead to this question: Is Cousins worth \$10 million more per season than Keenum?

No. No way.

Keenum will continue to resemble Brees. Both struggled to earn recruiting interest after amazing Texas high school careers. Both took the hard road to NFL starting jobs. Neither boasts a cannon of a right arm, but both thrive because of meticulous preparation.

The skeptics are still out there. A year ago, Keenum was a wandering quarterback who seemed on his way to lifetime backup status. He took the Vikings to the NFC Title Game and transformed his career.

What about 2018?

“I’ll be better,” Keenum said without hesitating.

I believe him.

John Elway, Broncos knew Case Keenum's mettle best

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

March 16, 2018

No one evaluating free-agent quarterbacks the last two months had the insight into Case Keenum that the Broncos did.

That went beyond President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway. It included Senior Personnel Advisor Gary Kubiak, who was in Houston as head coach when the Texans signed Keenum as a college free agent in 2012.

"He has a great deal of knowledge and is a very good evaluator, but also Gary's relationship with Case and knowing Case, that was a big feather in Case's cap," Elway said.

Kubiak and Head Coach Vance Joseph -- then the Texans' secondary coach -- watched Keenum grow on the Texans' practice squad in 2012. They also saw how Keenum handled his first NFL start, seven games into the 2013 season.

It is one thing to be tossed into the deep end of the pool, as is the case for some young players, and quite another to be lobbed into a bacteria-tinged body of water filled with sharks, which is closer to what Keenum faced in his first NFL start.

The Texans had lost four consecutive games, including three by three or more scores. Starter Matt Schaub had injured his ankle and foot in the previous week's loss to the Rams. Backup T.J. Yates had floundered in relief of Schaub. Meanwhile, the undefeated Chiefs, six games into what would be a 9-0 start, loomed. The game would be at hostile Arrowhead Stadium.

Keenum, with no regular-season snaps to his name, got the start.

"It was a packed stadium, and he battled," Joseph recalled of Keenum's performance in the 17-16 loss, a 15-of-25, 271-yard day with one touchdown pass, no interceptions and one lost fumble in the final moments as he tried to rally the Texans on a desperate, late-game drive.

"He is a battler, man. Every week, he is going to give it his best shot. It won't be too big for him."

Joseph and Kubiak could look at that day and contrast the Keenum they knew then to the one they saw on film from Minnesota last season.

To Joseph, the biggest change in Keenum was in his maturity, which revealed itself in his play.

"Taking care of the football. Playing in a relaxed state. That's always a key component when you're watching a quarterback play," Joseph said.

While leadership matters, ball security is a crucial component, as well, and Keenum's progress in that area is perhaps the single biggest reason why he has the opportunity he now possesses in Denver.

In 10 games over the 2013 and 2014 seasons with Houston, Keenum averaged one fumble or interception every 25.1 plays (pass attempts, sacks and rushing attempts). In the 2015 and 2016 seasons with the Rams, he averaged one fumble or interception every 24.1 plays.

Last year with Minnesota, his rate improved to one fumble or interception every 57.8 plays, a number that offers evidenced of his game's maturation.

"Case has done a real nice job of taking care of the ball," President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway told Orange and Blue 760. "As we were talking today, he said, 'Every series needs to end in a field goal, an extra point or a punt.'"

That is exactly what the Broncos need after a season in which over 36 percent of their defensive touchdowns allowed came on possessions that started at midfield or in Broncos territory, mostly because of giveaways.

"That mentality right there [helps], because last year, the fact was that we turned the ball over," Elway said. "We were minus-[17 in turnover margin] on the year, and that was a big problem in what we did offensively. I think the maturity level, plus the experience and understanding the ability to take care of the ball and not make mistakes."

It's not that Keenum isn't going to go for the big play. But he will start by making sure he gives his team the best chance -- which begins by not making the mistakes that undermine its hopes.

That is a pragmatic -- and, yes, a mature -- approach, gained through a pro experience that has seen him cut, tossed aside and relegated to the scrap heap. It has tested his resolve but never broken it.

"Obviously, when those guys like Case Keenum, when they play and survive, and they play and survive, they get better and better each year," Joseph said.

"I mean, he said it: He's going to be better this year. To have a chance to finally be the guy walking into the building -- this is his first time being that guy. He's excited about it. But those guys who play and survive, who play and survive, they get better. Most guys who play and don't survive, they're out of the league.

"So for him to be here at this moment and be our guy, what he's gone through as a free agent, a guy out of college, and to work his way through [three] teams, he's hardened because of that process."

No one knew that better than the Broncos.

John Elway says Case Keenum was his main man all along

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
March 16, 2018

Kirk Cousins was the unequivocal jewel of this year's free agent quarterback class in just about everyone's mind but John Elway's.

"We got our guy," the Denver Broncos general manager said Friday at Case Keenum's introductory news conference. "We got the guy that was our target."

Even though Keenum was No. 1 in Elway's eyes, he was viewed over the last several weeks as something of a runner-up even in the Broncos locker room.

Several stars such as Von Miller, Brandon Marshall and Emmanuel Sanders campaigned for Cousins, issuing public pleas for the ex-Washington QB who ultimately signed a three-year, \$84 million deal with Minnesota.

Keenum, who led the Vikings to the NFC championship game after replacing an injured Sam Bradford and going 11-3, said his phone has "been blowing up" with congratulatory texts from his new teammates — Miller's was the first — and he brushed aside all that cajoling of Cousins, too.

"I applaud those guys for wanting to make their team better," Keenum said after signing his two-year, \$36 million deal that includes \$25 million in guarantees. "I want guys that want their team to be great, that want to do everything they can to help the team. So, no, it's not awkward to me at all."

Neither will it be clumsy, Keenum insisted, if Elway decides to use the fifth overall pick in next month's NFL draft on another quarterback.

This year's class is unusually deep at quarterback with as many as six teams expected to use first-round picks on passers, and Elway has a high draft pick for the first time since selecting Miller at No. 2 in 2011.

"I've been around long enough to know that anything is a possibility in this league. I was a starting quarterback when a team drafted somebody No. 1 overall and traded a bunch of draft picks. I know how that goes," Keenum said, recalling when the Rams selected Jared Goff in 2016.

"I know that my teammates, my coaches and the front office — everyone — is doing everything they possibly can to be the best Denver Broncos that we can possibly be. For me, it doesn't change my mindset. It really doesn't."

Elway spent the week scoping out QB prospects Baker Mayfield and Josh Rosen during their pro days and issued invitations to Sam Darnold and Mayfield for interviews at team headquarters in the coming weeks.

Yet, landing Keenum gives Elway the flexibility to draft a blue chip prospect such as Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson or North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb should there be an early run on quarterbacks.

That would give Keenum a premier pick to help him rather than his eventual replacement to fend off as long as he can.

"We have a lot of opportunities at five now," Elway said.

The Broncos are coming off a 5-11 season in which they cycled through Elway's former draft picks Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch and Brock Osweiler at quarterback. They're sending Siemian to Minnesota. Osweiler is a free agent and Lynch is now Keenum's backup. He also won't have the chance to earn the starting job in training camp like he had the last two summers.

Coach Vance Joseph welcomes the lack of another quarterback competition, saying it's good for players and coaches to just focus on building an offensive scheme rather than wondering who will be running it.

Elway lauded Keenum's renowned work ethic, his leadership and his success after going undrafted out of the University of Houston but building a strong resume with the Texans, Rams and Vikings.

"As far as leadership qualities, the grit that he has, the way that he plays the game, the way that he competes, he was the perfect fit for us," Elway said.

The Broncos' crush on Keenum goes way back, too.

Senior personnel adviser Gary Kubiak gave him his start in the NFL and coached him in Houston for two years when Joseph was on the Texans' staff.

The Broncos even tried to pry Keenum away from the Rams after Peyton Manning retired two years ago only to be rebuffed.

Keenum, who only had one scholarship offer after high school, isn't used to such fawning.

"To have a team pursue me, and like John said, to be their guy, that instills a lot of confidence in me and I am ready to be that guy," Keenum said. "I know I am, and I'm excited to be the Denver Broncos' quarterback."

Elway introduced Casey Austin Keenum as the “Broncos’ starting quarterback” on Friday morning in the team’s Fieldhouse.

Incredibly, Zimmer, the Minnesota coach, never did acknowledge Keenum as his starter – even weeks after Case took over as the Vikings’ quarterback as starter in Game 3 and didn’t relinquish the role though the NFC Championship.

Zimmer even bristled when the starter subject was broached. In mid-November, the coach told a local beat writer not to bring up the matter again. “We have a plan in place,” he said.

The Vikings signed Keenum as an afterthought last season because of the horrific injury to Teddy Bridgewater in 2016, and because of the injury issues starter Sam Bradford had suffered throughout his career.

The Vikings even signed Kyle Slotter, who was released by the Broncos.

Keenum replaced an injured Bradford in the second-game defeat to the Steelers.

Keenum won 12 of 15 starts and drove the Vikings to a miraculous comeback victory over the Saints with a 61-yard touchdown pass connection to wide-receiver Stefon Diggs on the last play of the game. Actually, Keenum’s last play in Minnesota with the Vikings was a kneel-down on the final extra point.

The next day, Zimmer still wouldn’t commit to Keenum as the starter in Philadelphia.

Ironically, Keenum had been acquired by the Rams (in St. Louis) in 2015 on the same day Bradford was traded to the Eagles for Nick Foles. Keep up with this. Then, during the season, Keenum replaced Foles as the starter. Keenum was displaced as the starter late the next season by the Los Angeles Rams’ No. 1 overall pick Jared Goff.

And castoffs Keenum and Foles started against each other in the NFC title game. The Eagles won easily.

Zimmer, in keeping with his tone, wouldn’t pledge in late January and again on March 1 that Keenum would be the starter in 2018 – despite the record, the division championship, the advancement to the NFC Championship, 3,547 yards passing, 22 touchdowns and only 7 interceptions, and a 98.3 quarterback rating.

“Is he the guy who played for the Rams and Houston, or is he the guy who played for us?” the coach said without a hint of confidence.

Last season Zimmer’s most compelling comment about Keenum was that “the thing I like about him is he’s big (testicles) . . . He’s not afraid . . . He’s going to pull the trigger.”

(Elway told me before a Broncos’ playoff game against the Steelers that he wanted Tim Tebow to “pull the trigger.” The Broncos’ Boss obviously is happy about Keenum in more ways than one.)

The Vikings didn’t make an effort to keep Keenum.

Meanwhile, at the media conference on Friday, Elway said he and staff examined every unrestricted veteran free agent quarterback available, and did background and personality checks, and Keenum was the right fit for the Broncos. Elway didn't address reports (in limited time of questioning; he even checked his clock after a few answers) that the Broncos made a bid to trade for Bills quarterback Tyrod Taylor.

Keenum called his signing with the Broncos "the dream of a lifetime."

He also used that same phrase when Gary Kubiak, coach of the Texans, signed him as a college free agent in 2012 after 11 quarterbacks, including Kirk Cousins and Brock Osweiler, were drafted, and he wasn't. The University of Houston was the only school to offer him a scholarship, and the Texans were the only team to offer him a chance to compete (and he later would start 10 games).

Part of the dream must be earning at least \$27 million guaranteed of a contract signed (for two years and \$36 mil). Everybody else is making a big deal of Keenum reuniting with Gary Kubiak and Vance Joseph. But he never really was in meeting rooms with Joseph, a defensive backfield coach in Houston. And Kubiak is no longer a coach and only occasionally will show up at Broncos' practices.

But, to most people, Keenum is a bridge to a younger quarterback. (Keenum wants to finish his career in Denver, he said.) Elway brought up Paxton Lynch again Friday, and he and Kubiak, Joseph and what seems like a horde of Broncos have been all over Baker Mayfield, like flies to a cow, at the Senior Bowl, the NFL combine, the pseudo-Oklahoma Pro Day (which was a Mayfield party), and he has been invited to Broncos headquarters for pre-draft meetings and a tour. Where there's smoke . . .

Elway has shifted interest from 6-foot-7 quarterbacks to two who are barely over 6 feet.

I tell this story Elway told me on his 50th birthday. After retiring as a player, John studied college scouting with his dad Jack, a former long-time college head coach, then the Broncos' director of player personnel for many years.

The younger Elway looked at tapes of Purdue quarterback Drew Brees and dismissed him as too short at 6 feet. His father explained to John that he had to search deeper into a player's heart, desire and determination to succeed. John said to me that Brees proved that a 6-footer can become a (Hall of Fame) player.

It seems as if John Elway has stopped searching for another John Elway and is trying to find another Drew Brees. Case Keenum won a state championship with the Wylie (Texas) Bulldogs. The Broncos have signed a Bulldog underdog.

Elway says Case Keenum was Broncos' target at QB

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

March 16, 2018

Not only was Case Keenum the quarterback the Denver Broncos were able to sign in free agency, but general manager John Elway said Friday that Keenum was "our target" all along.

Keenum, who signed his two-year, \$36 million deal Thursday, was formally introduced Friday at the team's suburban Denver complex. And while the Broncos considered any and all quarterbacks who were on the market, including Kirk Cousins, they reeled in Keenum during the first hours after free agency opened Wednesday afternoon.

"We're real excited that Case is here," Elway said. "We talked about it after the season that we need to upgrade at that position, and we got our guy. The guy who was our target ... with everything we look at, it all came out Case."

"We didn't wait around, we made it happen," Keenum said. "Denver was No. 1 on my list, too."

Keenum, who entered the league as an undrafted rookie in 2012 with the Houston Texans, had impeccable career timing this past season. In relief of an injured Sam Bradford with the Minnesota Vikings last season, Keenum threw for 3,547 yards and 22 touchdowns in 15 games.

The Vikings went 11-3 in Keenum's 14 starts as they advanced to the NFC Championship Game with Keenum set to become an unrestricted free agent.

"We looked at everybody, we went through the whole process ... we did as much digging as we could possibly do, found out about them as people, also mentality, when we came out of all that, and all of the homework that we did, Case was our guy," Elway said. "[We] figured there's a special fit for everybody, and obviously all those other quarterbacks available are good players, but we thought the year Case had last year, what he's been through, where he's been, his mentality ... the year that he had last year, it's arguable, even though Kirk got a lot of the hoopla, Case had the best year."

Elway added he wanted to move quickly to sign Keenum as soon as the market officially opened -- "we wanted to get on it as quickly as we could" -- and Keenum was the first of the free-agent quarterbacks to agree to a deal.

Elway and coach Vance Joseph have said throughout the offseason that an upgrade at quarterback was the offseason's top priority. The Broncos used three starting quarterbacks in last season's 5-11 finish as they finished tied for 17th in yards per game and tied for 26th in scoring.

Only the winless Cleveland Browns had more turnovers than the Broncos (34), and only the Browns had more interceptions than the Broncos' 22.

"To have a team pursue me ... be their guy, that instills a lot of confidence in me," Keenum said. "I'm ready to be that guy, I know I am."

Keenum's plan as Broncos QB outlasts his 2-year contract

By Mike Klis

9 News

March 16, 2018

Based on first impressions, Broncos Country is going to like Case Keenum.

He's poised, down to earth. He's not afraid to answer a question truthfully. And he's not afraid to bet on himself.

The biggest surprise about the Broncos deal with Keenum was that it was only for 2 years.

"First of all, we want to be here long-term," Keenum said. "My wife and I love it already. We want to play the rest of my career here. There's no doubt about that. I think the two years is an opportunity to prove myself as a starting quarterback. As a franchise quarterback. As somebody a team, a franchise can count on.

"For me, I've earned everything I've got. Nothing's ever been handed to me. And I want to continue to earn everything from this point out."

There are good reasons why a team ordinarily wants a longer-term commitment from its quarterback. Starting with: he needs time to impose his will on his teammates, to steal a phrase from former University of Colorado coaching icon Bill McCartney.

Players and fans want to invest in their quarterback knowing he's going to be around for a while. Broncos customers won't be happy shelling out \$99.99 for a new, No. 4 orange-and-blue jersey today at team stores today if it's going on the discount rack in a year or two.

The best case for Keenum: He has a terrific first season in Denver, and people start pushing for an extension.

9NEWS obtained details of Keenum's two-year, \$36 million contract. He gets a fully guaranteed \$18 million this year (\$6 million signing bonus, \$4 million roster bonus, \$8 million salary). In 2019, Keenum has \$7 million of his \$18 million salary fully guaranteed with the other \$11 million guaranteed against injury-only.

This is not like most two-year contracts in the NFL where only the first year is promised. This is an ironclad two-year commitment to Keenum as the Broncos' starting quarterback. The contract says the Broncos would be wasting their No. 5 overall pick if they selected a quarterback. They're going to have a No. 5 pick sit for two years? That's not what No. 5 picks are for.

Keenum also has \$1 million worth of incentives each year based on the greatest of reasons: playoff wins. Not Pro Bowls, or passing-yard thresholds. Wins when it matters. Now that's an incentive the Broncos would not mind paying.

John Elway on new Broncos quarterback Case Keenum: "We got our guy."

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Denver Post
March 16, 2018

Growing up in Texas, Case Keenum went against the grain and had a John Elway poster hanging in his bedroom. The image is of Elway, donning his all-blue Broncos uniform and in position to throw. Timestamps in the background count down from two minutes to the last second and the words "it's never over" are stamped across the front.

Elway, the king of the fourth-quarter comebacks, was the childhood idol of the player who recently pulled off one of the game's most thrilling finales in playoff history, as quarterback of the Minnesota Vikings last season.

"That's why I always wore No. 7," Keenum said. "As a kid growing up, a coach's kid, wanting to play quarterback. It was Elway and the Broncos and (Troy) Aikman and the Cowboys. That was a big part of my childhood."

Keenum's childhood dream became reality when he signed a two-year, \$36 million contract with the Broncos and, on Friday, was introduced by Elway as Denver's next starting quarterback. Keenum won't get to don his No. 7 — Elway will hold onto that — but No. 4 will do just fine.

"Just getting introduced by John Elway as the Denver Broncos' quarterback," he said, "that is a dream come true. ... I'm excited to get in the locker room. I'm excited to earn the right to be a leader. I'm excited to be the quarterback of the Denver Broncos."

In the months leading up to free agency, the league's focus was primarily on one guy who most believed would dictate the market for quarterbacks behind him. Kirk Cousins was on the move and as a 28-year-old, injury-free quarterback, he was bound to be chased by numerous suitors.

The Broncos set their sights elsewhere though, thanks in part to the intel received from coach Vance Joseph and senior personnel advisor Gary Kubiak. The two worked with Keenum in Houston when he was signed as an undrafted free agent in 2012, and they knew the player he was, the guy he was and the quarterback he could be for the Broncos.

"We talked about after the season that we needed to upgrade at that position and we got our guy. We got the guy that was our target," Elway said. "Having gone through the whole process in the offseason, with where we are until today, everything that we looked at, it all came out to Case."

Keenum did the same on his end. When the Vikings' playoff run ended at the hands of the Philadelphia Eagles in January, he and his agents began to examine his next potential landing spots.

"The fact that I was their guy from the start. We didn't wait around," he said. "We made it happen. Denver was No. 1 on my list, too. It's been an incredible welcome here."

Monday evening, the sides reached an agreement on a two-year deal that is player- and team-friendly but left open a chance for questions about the Broncos' quarterback conundrum. The team has rotated through three different starters over the past two seasons, and landing Keenum on a shorter-team deal raised the possibility of more turnover for a franchise that needs stability.

"For myself and my agents, first of all, we want to be here long-term," Keenum said. "My wife and I love it already. We want to play the rest of my career here. There's no doubt about that. I think the two years is an opportunity to continue to prove myself as a starting quarterback, as a franchise quarterback, as somebody a team can count on. I think that made the most sense for my agents and I and the deal they put together, it was great."

The road here, however, was unlikely and winding and often trying. Keenum was largely unrecruited coming out of Wylie High School in Abilene, Texas. He received only one scholarship offer, from the University of Houston, and when the 2012 draft rolled around, he never heard his name.

The Texans, then coached by Kubiak, signed Keenum and later added him to their practice squad before he was called up to start in place of the injured Matt Schaub in 2013. Keenum's first eight NFL games were a string of losses that included the firing of Kubiak.

After bouncing between the Texans and Rams over the years, landing backup and starting roles, Keenum signed a one-year deal with Minnesota last offseason. When Sam Bradford went down with an injury, Keenum took over and guided the Vikings to an 11-3 record as a starter, led them to the NFC championship game and played a starring role in the Minnesota Miracle — a 61-yard touchdown pass to Stefon Diggs as the clock expired in a divisional playoff win over New Orleans.

That game, that play, that moment under pressure painted the picture of a quarterback much different from the one that started his career in the NFL six years earlier. The 2017 season — when he ranked second in completion percentage (67.6 percent) and ranked among the league's top 10 in multiple other passing categories — also solidified what the Broncos had suspected: the guy has it, and he was the right guy for the Broncos.

"There's a special fit for everybody," Elway said. "Obviously, all the other quarterbacks that were available are good players, but we thought that the year Case had last year but also what he's been through, where he's been and his mentality and plus having V.J. know him and Gary know him ... plus the year he had last year. It's very arguable whether, even though Kirk got a lot of the (attention), who had the best year?"

"He's won a lot of football games, so when we all came to it, Case was the guy that we wanted."

Case Keenum a smart move for Denver Broncos — now don't stop there

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

March 15, 2018

Hey, check out the Broncos, acting all smart at the — all together now, sports fans — quarterback position.

If reports are right, Case Keenum is two years and \$36-40 million well spent. Short and sweet. The Broncos left themselves an out. Case can make his case.

Keenum turned 30 on Feb. 17 and is not a better quarterback than Kirk Cousins, 31. He is, however, a better quarterback fit for the Broncos. Follow the (less) money. Cousins reportedly will assume Keenum's starting spot in Minnesota for \$84 million — all of it guaranteed. Can you even imagine?

The Broncos have more potholes than Cheyenne Boulevard that must be filled. Now they can.

The next moves — plural — were always going to be just as important. Teams that lose by 26 to the flippin' Dolphins, 13 to the Giants, 28 to anyone (even the Super Bowl champion Eagles) are not one player away from Super Bowl contention. The Broncos remain a work in progress. It was learned in domed Minnesota that Keenum, who helped the Vikings to the NFC title game, is good enough to win big with the right players around him.

Now the Broncos must find the right players to put around him. They saved money by going Case over Kirk. (Why would Cousins come here? A disastrous debut by Vance Joseph precluded it.) They still need help at right tackle (for sure), tight end (please), linebacker, running back and defensive back. The Broncos cut money (Aqib Talib) to spend money (Case and Co.) and shouldn't stop now. Elway reportedly will attend Oklahoma's Pro Day to scout Baker Mayfield and UCLA's Pro Day to scout Josh Rosen. Hope it's a smokescreen.

I'm sold on Mayfield as an NFL star, but the Broncos should not use the No. 5 pick on a quarterback. Not in this case. If winning now is still the goal, their attention should turn to the best players in the entire draft, Alabama defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick and North Carolina State pass-rusher Bradley Chubb. But methinks the Broncos now can wheel and deal with teams who need quarterbacks — there's a bunch! — in a quarterback-strong draft class. Trading down in the draft would help the Broncos move up in the standings.

Yes, every John, Gary and Wade knows the surest path to a Super Bowl is paved by a Hall-of-Fame quarterback. Was Tom Brady available and I missed it? Just this year backup quarterback Nick Foles won the Super Bowl. Keenum played in one conference title game, Blake Bortles in another. But the Eagles, Vikes and Jags had enough stellar athletes around their quarterbacks to overcome any QB limitations. When the Broncos played at Philly, the two teams looked like two different levels of football. The Eagles had so many quality players they later withstood the loss of their starting quarterback, Carson Wentz, to win it all.

There's your blueprint.

It comes with Gary Kubiak's fingerprints. There's always a history with these Broncos. They trust what and who they know. There's the Elway-Kubiak thing, and Kubiak's back, and when Joseph was hired as coach, he listed Kubiak as his top influence. Great to see the Broncos read *The Gazette*: in November I lobbied for Kubiak to return to the Broncos as a personnel guy. It was Kubiak's (and Joseph's) Texans who signed Keenum as an undrafted free agent out of the University of Houston in 2012. For Kubiak, looks like winning Super Bowl 50 came with a prominent voice to go with a sweet ring.

Since the start of the 2015 season, the Broncos have changed starting quarterbacks seven times. Baby diapers have less turnover.

The AFC West these days is one smart operation. The Chiefs recognized you can't win big with me-minded knuckleheads like star cornerback Marcus Peters, no matter how gifted they are. He gone. The Chiefs and Raiders appear to have drafted franchise quarterbacks. The Chargers are loading up for Philip Rivers' sunset stroll.

Now the Broncos will sign a quarterback, a still-unknown in Keenum, while giving themselves plenty of room to mix and match and maneuver with all the other holes that anyone can see. It's a relief they recognize they have those holes.

"It speaks volumes that not a single former teammate of Case's has a negative thing to say about him," Super Bowl 50 champion lineman Ryan Harris, a former Keenum teammate, told me on Tuesday. "At the Super Bowl you had guys from his Texans, Rams, Vikings days chatting with him about everything from fishing to seeing him on the field next year. The Broncos need that type of guy on their team."

The 2018 quarterback battery should be Keenum, a devout Christian and avid outdoorsman ("He's from Texas," Wade Phillips would say), and mystery man Chad "Swag" Kelly. They left room to grow the roster.

Gary Kubiak connection helps bring Case Keenum to Denver Broncos

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
March 14, 2018

Case Keenum, The Little Engine That Could, is about to become the Broncos' new quarterback.

The Keenum-Kubiak connection continues.

But the relationship goes even deeper and longer than most people know.

Before Gary Kubiak - John Elway's confidant - met Keenum in Houston in 2012, his son Klint, Broncos' offensive assistant/quarterbacks, caught a pass from Special K 10 years ago.

Keenum has played only one game in his life in Colorado - against CSU in Fort Collins on Sept. 20, 2008. In the prior three games the redshirt sophomore quarterback for the University of Houston threw for 1,061 yards, with 13 touchdowns and one interception (in a loss to Air Force).

However, the Rams kept Keenum distressed and led at halftime 21-3. Case responded with three touchdown passes in the second half (and finished with 38 completions of 55 passes for 385 yards) and was driving Houston, behind 28-25, to a potential winning touchdown inside the CSU 10-yard line.

However, with two seconds remaining, Rams free safety Klint Kubiak made an amazing, leaping, game-saving interception in the end zone.

Keenum would congratulate Kubiak, who will be one of the coaches working with the Broncos' quarterback every day.

Small world.

Klint's dad certainly was aware of Keenum. Gary began coaching his hometown Texans in 2006, the same year Case arrived from Abilene at Houston - the only school to offer the state championship quarterback a scholarship.

Keenum was considered too small, too short and too slow at barely over 6 feet and 200 pounds.

All Keenum did was set or tie college football records in eight categories. His passing marks for most yardage (19,217), completed passes (1,546) and touchdowns (155) - in a high-octane, spread offense - still stand.

Case assumed in 2012 he would be drafted in a middle round after several interviews. Then, one day, he walked up to the first hole at Wildcat Golf Club, and Gary Kubiak was on the tee. "One more interview," Keenum would say. Kubiak brought Keenum in for a private workout, and called him "a sponge who soaked up everything I told him."

Yet, the Texans, who had two veteran quarterbacks, didn't draft him. No team in the NFL did.

Kubiak, the Broncos' former backup QB who would be regarded as a quarterback whisperer, was the only coach who decided to sign Keenum as a free agent. He served as a scout team quarterback and didn't play a down in 2012. In 2013 he was the backup for the first six games as the Texans struggled.

Case was elevated by Kubiak to starter for the next eight games - and the Texans lost them all. In Keenum's first home start, Kubiak collapsed on the sideline at halftime, suffering what was diagnosed as a "ministroke." Keenum said afterward that he and the other players "were really worried, and we couldn't focus in the second half." Wade Phillips, who took over as interim coach, mercifully demoted Keenum before the game with the Broncos. The Broncos won 37-13 as Peyton Manning - a quarterback who also chose to sign with the Broncos as a free agent - set the all-time single-season touchdown record, as Keenum witnessed from the sideline.

Kubiak would be fired at season's conclusion, and Keenum would be released by new coach Bill O'Brien. He was signed to the Rams' practice squad, then plucked away by the Texans late in the season when they lost two quarterbacks to injury. He won both starts.

The next season, cut again, Keenum returned to the Rams.

In 2016, Kubiak, the Super Bowl-winning coach with the Broncos, and Elway lost Manning to retirement and Brock Osweiler to, of all places, Houston. They tried to trade with the Rams for Keenum in August, but the Rams wanted a high draft pick or a veteran starter. The Broncos balked.

Ultimately, Keenum would join the Vikings the past season, and, when Sam Bradford was hurt, went 12-4 as a starter - with a miraculous touchdown pass on the final play to beat the Saints in the playoffs, and a blowout loss to the Eagles in the NFC Championship. And the Vikings didn't desire to have Keenum back.

Kubiak obviously had a pivotal role in bringing Elway, Keenum and the Broncos together.

Keenum has been honored with the retirement of his jersey number by the University of Houston.

But he can't wear his number with the Broncos. That number has been retired.

Will Elway let No. 7 come back out of retirement for The Little Engineer That Has Proven He Can?

How he fits: New Broncos quarterback Case Keenum

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2018

It's as simple as this: In Case Keenum, the Broncos have a viable starting quarterback and a clear upgrade at the position after cycling through three starters last season.

No matter what else happens this offseason or who else is added to the roster -- whether in the quarterback room or elsewhere -- Keenum's arrival assures that the first, biggest task of the Broncos' offseason plan was checked off the list.

"There is no doubt we have to get better at that position," President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway said on Jan. 2. "For us to have a chance to get better, we have to get better at that position."

By adding Keenum, who finished in the league's top 10 in passer rating, completion percentage, interception rate and sack rate, the Broncos feel they did exactly that.

"When I heard that we got him, and then I went back and watched some of his highlights from when he played with the Rams and when he played with the Vikings, I saw a guy that can deliver the football, that can stand up in there, that's very pocket-aware," wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders told Orange and Blue 760 on Wednesday.

"I think the guy has got all the intangibles to be able to deliver the football and get the football to the open guy."

And a player doesn't have to be that open for Keenum to find him. One of the hallmarks of his play last year with the Vikings was his ability to drop the football into tight windows, setting up Stefon Diggs, Adam Thielen and Kyle Rudolph for big plays despite tight coverage.

Keenum's ability to properly place the ball on outside-shoulder throws near the sidelines also helped him maximize the opportunity for big plays while minimizing risk.

"I was watching an interview of him at the Super Bowl -- I've been doing my research on the guy -- and one question that he answered that I liked is that 'First and foremost, you've got to take care of the football. You've got to find the mismatches, and it's all about the game plan,'" Sanders said.

"That right there got me excited, because that's the way I think, as well."

Protecting the football in particular is crucial, as a failure to do so -- particularly in the passing game -- doomed the Broncos last year, when one of every 25.7 passes was intercepted, the second-worst ratio in the league, well worse than the league-wide rate (including playoffs) of one interception every 41.6 attempts.

Including the postseason, Keenum was intercepted once every 56.9 attempts, the ninth-best rate in the NFL, placing him just behind Philadelphia's Carson Wentz and Philip Rivers of the Los Angeles Chargers and just ahead of Detroit's Matthew Stafford and New Orleans' Drew Brees.

If Keenum provides the same sort of accuracy and protection of the football as he did in Minnesota, the defense will operate from a more advantageous position. Last year, 36.8 percent of the touchdowns allowed by Denver's defense -- 14 of 38 -- came on drives that started at the 50-yard line or in Denver territory. One-third of the field goals surrendered -- eight of 24 -- came on drives that started on the Broncos' side of midfield.

This is part of the singular importance of the quarterback position, and why the Broncos had to fix it. Their scoring defense numbers did not match up with their per-play and per-possession metrics, in large part because of the poor field position set up by the offense's giveaways. If Keenum continues to protect the football well, he gives the defense a chance to operate on steady ground.

The other thing Keenum does well is operate under pressure. According to numbers compiled by Pro Football Focus, Keenum's passer rating of 78.5 on 205 passes under pressure was seventh-best in the league last year. The NFL average last year was 64.6.

Even if Keenum levels off somewhere between his early-career work and his Vikings performance, the Broncos are better today at quarterback than they were when the week began. But if he approaches or meets his Minnesota standards, the Broncos will have one of the game's most efficient passers.

Broncos pick Case Keenum to get back to being playoff contenders

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

March 14, 2018

There is one way to make a steely-eyed Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback get a little uncomfortable in his own skin.

Just ask John Elway to say "rebuilding."

Or as Elway put it at the scouting combine: "I didn't say it. I'm not going to say it. Life is too short to rebuild in the NFL."

In an effort to lift the Denver Broncos back into the playoff conversation and to avoid the dreaded "R" word, the Broncos have gone in all-in on Case Keenum, who is expected to sign with the Broncos when free agency officially opens Wednesday afternoon.

The 30-year-old Keenum led the Minnesota Vikings to an 11-3 mark in his 14 starts last season in place of an injured Sam Bradford as the Vikings advanced to the NFC Championship Game. Keenum, Kirk Cousins and Drew Brees are considered the top quarterbacks in free agency, with the Broncos heavily evaluating Cousins and Teddy Bridgewater before deciding Keenum would be their pick.

The Broncos' desire to upgrade the offense quickly enough to take advantage of a quality defense came with a hefty price tag, which will be revealed once the terms of the multiyear deal are finalized. But that is the cost of doing business in free agency, and Keenum had impeccable timing after he had played so well for the Vikings in their playoff run.

Elway is now in his eighth year as the Broncos' chief decision-maker. The Broncos have missed the playoffs in each of the past two seasons, and at the moment, linebacker Von Miller is the only former Broncos draft pick on the roster who has been named to a Pro Bowl.

Miller was in Elway's first draft class -- in 2011.

And just as folks once used to add up former Denver coach Mike Shanahan's statistics "without John Elway," Elway now finds himself sometimes being measured as a team executive for what has happened "without Peyton Manning." When Elway romped into free agency in 2012 and signed Manning, who was not yet 100 percent after his fourth neck surgery, the result was four AFC West titles, two Super Bowl trips, one title and a historic season as the only 600-point team in league history.

In order to try to recapture a little of that history, the Broncos went after Keenum and got him. And it should be noted that the Broncos' best quarterbacks have largely arrived from somewhere else.

Five of the top seven passers in the franchise's history, including Elway at No. 1, have arrived either by trade or by free agency. The Broncos had four quarterbacks with the team this past season, including

Chad Kelly on injured reserve, who were former draft picks, and Denver will have simply bypassed them all to sign Keenum.

While Keenum comes as a "safer" bet than the Broncos using the No. 5 pick of this draft on a quarterback to groom, Elway's ability to build the kind of team that competes for a playoff spot each and every season will now largely hinge on his ability to build a roster around the players with the biggest contracts on the roster -- Keenum and Miller.

Miller signed a \$114.5 million deal in 2016.

In short, the Broncos have to be right on this one. Keenum has to be what the Broncos have seen in their evaluations and then a little more. He has just two playoff starts in his career -- both this past January -- or two more than Trevor Siemian or Paxton Lynch.

But the biggest impact of all of this is the multimillion-dollar admission that Lynch has not become what the Broncos hoped he would be. The Broncos traded up to select Lynch in the first round of the 2016 draft. He has lost back-to-back training camp battles to Siemian and has four career starts, and he lost crucial developmental time in 2017 with shoulder and ankle injuries.

Keenum's arrival turns back the clock, or perhaps even stops it, on Lynch. Elway has left open the possibility that Lynch could be the team's backup if he's ready to work on his game, but in the end, even one of Elway's most notable first-round picks couldn't avoid the team's current mission.

Because if you can't help Elway avoid a rebuild, you'll be moved aside for those who can.

Elway once again relies on his instincts in landing Keenum

By Mike Klis

9 News

March 14, 2018

The Broncos were in trouble. They were coming off an 5-11 season and they didn't like their quarterbacks.

His back to the wall, what did John Elway do? What he's done since he arrived in Denver 35 years ago.

He went with his instincts.

This is an instance when second-best became a stunning victory.

There were two top 12 quarterbacks available in free agency. Two top 12s and a bunch of uninspiring castoffs.

When negotiations opened Monday, Elway quickly moved off everybody's No. 1 choice, Kirk Cousins, and pounced on Case Keenum, who was considered a distant second, but perhaps even further ahead of the third-best QB option.

After an initial, Elway-directed negotiating session with Mike McCartney, Cousins' agent, the Broncos moved all their attention to Keenum.

The Vikings were hoping to string Keenum along as their backup plan. But when Elway jumped, the Vikings had no choice but to get aggressive with Cousins. They got him at the cost of a double-record contract: One, the average salary was \$28 million a year, a half-million more than the previous record set by San Francisco and quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo five weeks earlier; and two, it unprecedentedly fully guaranteed all three years of the deal.

Look at what happened to the two other losers of the Cousins' sweepstakes: Arizona wound up with Sam Bradford for \$20 million with a second-year option for another \$20 million – providing he passes a physical, which is hardly certain given his oft-ripped up knee.

Veteran safety Eric Weddle nailed it. Bradford has been paid more for nothing than anyone in NFL history.

The New York Jets, the other loser in the bid for Cousins, wound up with aging Josh McCown, and Teddy Bridgewater, who missed the past two seasons with one of the most harrowing knee injuries in recent times, to one-year contracts.

Here's hoping Bradford and Bridgewater become medical marvels and stay physically healthy this year and McCown has a few more effective games left in his 39-year-old body.

But these were hardly impressive consolation prizes that would never fly in Broncos Country.

Elway wound up not with nothing, but with Keenum. Cousins may have had three consecutive seasons of exemplary passing stats with Washington. But he never came close to posting an 11-3 record, as Keenum did in 2017 with the Vikings.

Cousins has never won a playoff game. Keenum won one of the most memorable playoff games in NFL history.

Elway then fortified his secondary by signing veteran cornerback Trumaine Brock and closing in on signing Delvin Breaux, providing the Saints' defensive back can pass his physical.

Starting linebacker Todd Davis was brought back. And so there's no awkward feelings in head coach Vance Joseph's locker room, Elway traded away quarterback Trevor Siemian to Minnesota.

Elway did all but the Keenum deal Wednesday while he was personally scouting quarterback Baker Mayfield, offensive tackle Orlando Brown and pass-rushing outside linebacker Ogbannia Okoronkwo at Oklahoma's Pro Day.

Elway isn't done, but already the Broncos are better. And he's working on adding a right tackle and possibly a No. 3 receiver.

Yes, he has to hit on all those draft picks. Come late-April, perhaps Elway should go less on the scouting reports and more on his gut. It's that approach that has helped guide the Broncos to the third-best overall record, even with that 5-11, since he took control seven years ago.

In his 23 years with the Broncos as a quarterback and a GM, Elway has as many Super Bowl wins (3) as losing seasons.

Elway is a poker player. When it came to quarterbacks in free agency, Elway read the table and folded early on Cousins. Doing so allowed him to win the next pot that was Keenum.

When it came to making the move quickly under pressure, Arizona and the Jets were no match for Elway.

How new Broncos QB Case Keenum first proved himself a winner under the Friday night lights of Texas

By Nick Kosmider
The Denver Post
March 14, 2018

They called it a miracle in Minneapolis.

In Abilene, Texas, they called it a flashback.

When Hugh Sandifer watched Case Keenum's desperation pass in the final seconds of January's NFC divisional playoff game land in the hands of Vikings wide receiver Stefon Diggs, completing one of the most incredible plays in the league's postseason history, Sandifer began replaying in his head similarly jaw-dropping plays made by the quarterback at Wylie High School more than 13 years earlier.

"It reminded us of some late-game heroics when he was in high school," said Sandifer, who coached Keenum at Wylie. "That play was on the national stage and had a lot of drama, but it still reminded us of stuff he did when he was young."

High school football in West Texas is a big deal. Schools don't play against other schools, Sandifer points out. Communities play against communities. Follow Interstate 20 east from Odessa — the scene of the "Friday Night Lights" book by Buzz Bissinger later turned into a major motion picture — to Abilene on Friday nights, and you'll be guided by the beaming lights of stadiums that can fit residents from every small town along the way.

So reaching the Class 3A Texas state championship game in Waco was like reaching the Super Bowl for folks in Abilene, and it was up to Keenum to deliver the school's first-ever championship. Wylie had the ball near midfield with less than one minute to play in a 14-14 game. Sandifer dialed up a play that had led to a touchdown pass from Keenum earlier in the game, but the Cuero High School defense saw it coming the second time.

"They pretty much came with a full-out rush, man-to-man coverage," Sandifer said. "They blitzed everybody, and Case just sensed it. He got loose, got out of the pocket and got down the sideline on everybody. It looked like he was going to go out of bounds to stop the clock, but he turned it up and I thought he was going to score. He got tackled inside the 10-yard line, we ran a play to clock it and then kicked the game-winning field goal. He set us up in position to win the championship, no doubt."

It is still the only state championship Wylie has ever won. And Sandifer, who has coached the school's football team for 40 years, believes Keenum's performance that season still serves as snapshot of how he has worked himself into becoming a starting NFL quarterback — one who this week agreed to a lucrative contact with the Broncos.

"One thing that always stood out was his competitive nature," Sandifer said. "And the other was his maturity. He was beyond his years with the game. It seemed like it slowed down for him earlier than it did for other kids. That was due to a lot of study, a lot of preparation. Plus, when you have God-given ability and all those traits, you're going to be successful."

That package left Sandifer flummoxed in 2005, when few college scholarship offers for Keenum were reaching his mailbox. Coaches were concerned about Keenum's size, strength and speed. When recruiters would ask Sandifer for Keenum's 40-yard dash time, the coach didn't have a time to give them.

"I didn't know what he would run a 40 in because he would go from football to basketball to a spring sport," Sandifer said. "We knew he was a winner. What I would tell them on that 40 time was, 'I don't know his speed, but I know everybody is chasing him. He's about a half-step ahead of everybody, whether the guy is a 5.4(-second) defensive lineman or a 4.5 corner, he just always seemed to be half a step ahead of them.'"

That was enough convincing for the coaching staff at Houston, where Keenum simply turned doubt into a record for the most passing yards (19,217) in NCAA history. But what Sandifer appreciates most about Keenum, the trait he believes has led the 30-year-old to the doorstep of major NFL success, is that he doesn't spend his time worrying about the people he has proved wrong by setting records in college, making it to the NFL as an undrafted free agent, becoming a starter, delivering an unforgettable playoff win and, now, being asked to guide a franchise decorated with a history of prolific passers.

"He doesn't use anything as a chip on his shoulder," Sandifer said. "He always talks about never wanting to prove anybody wrong who didn't believe in him. He loves just proving the people right who did believe in him."

Broncos to land Keenum for 2 years, \$36 million

By Mike Klis

9 News

March 13, 2018

Case Keenum, who is coming off a magical, out-of-nowhere season with the Minnesota Vikings, is about to become the Denver Broncos' new quarterback.

The Broncos and Keenum will have a short-term deal in place when free agency officially opens at 2 p.m. Wednesday, a source confirmed to 9NEWS. One prominent agent told 9News the Keenum deal is for two years and for at least \$36 million.

Denver will mark Keenum's fifth city in five years: His home team was Houston in 2014, St. Louis in 2015, Los Angeles in 2016, Minnesota in 2017 and now Denver in 2018.

Talk about a journeyman. It all came together for Keenum in 2017, though, as he threw for 22 touchdowns against just 7 interceptions while posting an 11-3 record as a starter for the Vikings. Keenum also threw a miracle touchdown pass to Stefon Diggs on the final play of a second-round playoff game to stun Drew Brees and the New Orleans Saints.

As of Sunday night, a source told 9NEWS Broncos general manager John Elway was planning to negotiate with two free-agent quarterbacks – Washington's Kirk Cousins, who was the consensus top prize, and Keenum, who was considered a strong No. 2 choice, when the free-agent negotiating period opened at 10 a.m. Wednesday.

The Broncos did hold a negotiating session with Cousins' agent on Monday but apparently didn't like they heard and quickly moved on to Keenum, league sources told 9News.

But by the time the free-agent negotiating window did open, Elway had settled on Keenum. Cousins reportedly was seeking a three-year contract worth at least an NFL record \$28 million a year. Keenum figured to be had for around \$18 million.

One source said the Broncos had serious concerns about the contract structure, and total guaranteed dollars, Cousins was seeking.

Although the Broncos had serious interest in Cousins throughout the process, Elway figured his team was a longshot to land him, with the Minnesota Vikings and New York Jets the favorites.

The Vikings because they had the best team – with Keenum as their quarterback, Minnesota advanced to the NFC Championship Game – and the New York Jets because they had the most cap space.

Gary Kubiak was a strong connection between Keenum and the Broncos. Keenum was undrafted out of the University of Houston when he signed with the Kubiak-coached Houston Texans as an undrafted college free agent in 2012.

"He gave me a shot," Keenum told 9NEWS during the NFL Honors red-carpet ceremony on the eve of Super Bowl LII. "No one in the NFL called after the draft besides the Texans. That was coach Kubiak.

"The amount of football I learned those first two years I can't even put into words how much he's meant to me in my career."

Keenum actually went 0-8 in his first eight NFL starts for Houston in 2013 – when Kubiak was fired. Kubiak is now the Broncos' front-office consultant. In 2016, when Trevor Siemian unexpectedly beat out veteran Mark Sanchez and first-round draft pick Paxton Lynch to win the Broncos' starting quarterback job, Elway nearly acquired Keenum in a trade from the Los Angeles Rams but backed off.

Not this time. With Keenum as their quarterback, the Broncos are expected to keep Lynch as their backup. It means the Broncos probably won't take a quarterback with their No. 5 overall draft pick, although Elway won't rule it out.

The expectation is the Broncos will soon try to trade away Siemian. Many Broncos players, most notably Von Miller, lobbied Cousins to sign with Denver. But not everybody in the NFL thinks Keenum is second to Cousins as a quarterback.

"After a year like Case had, I don't know how you don't go Case," said Cam Jordan, the Saints' best defensive player. "We beat Kirk, We didn't beat Case."

What do pundits and football fans think about the Broncos' plan to sign QB Case Keenum?

By Nick Kosmider

9 News

March 13, 2018

The Internet was a sleepy place late Monday night when news broke that the Broncos intend to make Case Keenum their next quarterback as soon as NFL free agency begins Wednesday.

But the rising sun Tuesday brought a heavy volume of mixed reactions across social media about Keenum being tabbed to lead the Broncos, who have struggled mightily at the position since Peyton Manning retired following the 2015 season.

Let's start with the hosts of "First Take," ESPN's morning dish of punditry served at high volume. Co-host Max Kellerman called Keenum's performance while guiding the Vikings to an 11-3 record in his 14 regular-season starts as MVP worthy. Stephen A. Smith on the other hand? He's not buying it.

Skip Bayless, the who hosts FS1's "Undisputed" alongside former Broncos great Shannon Sharpe, said Elway "took the short-term, safe way out" by signing Keenum. But Bayless insisted he didn't necessarily view that as a negative given the Broncos' previous struggles in drafting successful quarterbacks.

"I've always liked Case Keenum," Bayless said. "Is he Tom Brady or Aaron Rodgers? No, he's not, but he's pretty good, and he'll be pretty good for the Broncos next year."

Sharpe, meanwhile, believes the move signals that John Elway could be aiming to collect multiple picks with a trade in the first round of next month's draft.

"I believe that's what John would like to do," Sharpe said, "accumulate some picks and go into the draft and maybe build some depth through young guys."

Bill Simmons, the longtime ESPN personality who now runs The Ringer, believes the Broncos got the best end of the free-agency frenzy at the quarterback spot:

And what about the fan reaction? The most succinct way to describe it is all over the board. Some fans on Twitter were quick to offer of the evidence of Keenum's stellar 2017 season in Minnesota, in which he completed 68 percent of his passes, threw 22 touchdowns against seven interceptions and led the Vikings to the NFC championship game, as proof the 30-year-old is just reaching the top of his game.

For others, though, signing Keenum isn't the splash they were hoping for at the quarterback spot.

On Tuesday afternoon, players began weighing in with their take on the team preparing to sign Keenum. Chief among them was all-pro pass rusher Von Miller, who had previously publicly campaigned for Denver to sign Kirk Cousins.

Miller was quickly on board with Keenum.

“Looks/Feels right to me!” Miller wrote in an Instagram post. “We got what we were looking for! Franchise QB that’s the perfect fit for DENVER! @johnelway with deep 3 pointer! Like always! ... Tim for me to hold up my end of the deal now!”

QB Case Keenum to sign with Broncos when free agency opens

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Denver Post
March 12, 2018

The Broncos have found their quarterback.

When the free agency period officially begins Wednesday afternoon, former Vikings quarterback Case Keenum plans to sign with Denver, NFL sources confirmed.

ESPN first reported the impending deal.

Although Kirk Cousins has been touted as the top quarterback to hit free agency this year, the Broncos, after extensive evaluation of all their options, felt more comfortable with Keenum.

He played for coaches Vance Joseph and Gary Kubiak in Houston at the beginning of his career (2012-13) and already has a feel for the staff and offensive system. Keenum guided the Vikings to recent success in the playoffs — an experience Cousins still lacks after six years in the NFL. And he comes at a cost that affords the Broncos more flexibility in reshaping their roster and adding to it in the upcoming draft. His new deal is expected to be a shorter-term contract, with approximately \$18 million per year in average pay.

“We all understand how the quarterback position has a direct influence on how your team plays,” Joseph said in February. “Obviously, we have to get better there, whoever is going to be the quarterback. That being said, we can get better in a lot of areas, like protecting the quarterback, continuing to run the football better and to play dominant defense. Having a quarterback that can help us become a more efficient offense and help us score more points and not turn the ball over, that can only help us get better. But we have to focus not only on that, but also on other parts of the football team.”

Within the first 12 hours of the NFL’s legal tampering period Monday, the Broncos held preliminary talks with Cousins but moved in on Keenum and quickly reached an agreement by late that night. No offer was extended to Cousins.

In landing a player they see as their starter, the Broncos expanded their options with their first-round draft selection this year. Though they could still add a quarterback at the No. 5 overall pick, if they’re not in love with any of the projected first-round quarterbacks, they no longer need to draft one to simply fill a hole. They can select the best player available, add an immediate impact player or even move out of the top five and acquire more picks in a trade.

“I still think we’re not too far away. Obviously, we have to get better at that (quarterback) position,” general manager John Elway said at the NFL combine. “We didn’t play well there last year. That doesn’t all go on the players. There were some things that we should have done that we should have done differently that we didn’t do. I feel like we can get right back in the thick of the things rather quickly. I think we still have a good defensive football team.”

But Keenum's arrival means the likely exit of another quarterback on the Broncos' roster. According to a source, the Broncos are expected to move on from Trevor Siemian, a former seventh-round pick who started 24 games, and have already fielded calls from interested teams.

Since Peyton Manning's retirement in 2016, the Broncos have featured a revolving door of starting quarterbacks acquired via free agency, a trade and the draft, and none of them has excelled. After reaching the peak of Super Bowl 50 two years ago, the Broncos have sunk on the heels of two playoffless seasons. The offense, with its rotating cast of quarterbacks, has lacked an identity and consistency that the Broncos have desperately sought to solve, to little avail.

To try to right the ship, Elway made it clear last month that he intended to scour the free-agent market to find his guy. Cousins was undoubtedly the top quarterback soon to become available, but with his spot atop the list of most teams came a price tag that could have ended up being too high for the Broncos' plans; while they have options, they also have plenty of needs and limited salary cap space, unlike some other quarterback-needy teams.

And according to those close to the situation, Cousins simply wasn't viewed as the best fit for the Broncos. Keenum was billed by Kubiak and others who have worked closely with him to possess the leadership sorely needed and the grit to handle the pressure of playing one of the lead roles in Denver.

Keenum, 30, was among the second tier of available quarterbacks, though not necessarily in the eyes of the Broncos brass. After beginning his NFL tenure with the Texans as an undrafted free agent out of the University of Houston, Keenum reached the pinnacle of his five pro seasons by helping the Vikings to the NFC championship game and producing the Minneapolis Miracle, a game-winning, 61-yard touchdown pass to Stefon Diggs in a divisional playoff game against the Saints.

But before Keenum found glory in Minnesota, he played for three other teams in hope of a consistent gig. After a rookie season on the Texans' practice squad, he got his first start in 2013 when starter Matt Schaub went down with an injury. But a loss in Keenum's debut spiraled into eight consecutive defeats and Kubiak's firing before season's end. The Texans finished that year 2-14.

"One thing I learned about Case is that he's such a mentally strong person," Kubiak, now a senior personnel adviser for the Broncos, told the Houston Chronicle after Minnesota's divisional playoff win. "A lot of guys would just go in the tank with a start like that, but Case kept battling because that's the kind of guy he is. He's very comfortable in his own skin. I don't care who he plays for, you're not going to put Case in an uncomfortable situation. He's got a lot of confidence in who he is and how he carries himself. Guys respond to that."

From 2014-16, Keenum bounced between the Texans and Rams, starting 16 games collectively in that span before getting benched in place of Rams first-round pick Jared Goff in 2016. Last March, Keenum moved on to his fourth NFL team and signed with the Vikings for one year and \$2 million as their backup.

He was anything but as he started 14 of 15 games and guided the Vikings to a 13-3 record, their best finish in nearly two decades. In the regular season, Keenum completed 67.6 percent of his passes for a career-high 3,547 yards, 22 touchdowns and only seven interceptions for a 98.3 passer rating. In Minnesota's two playoff games, he tacked on 589 more yards, two touchdowns, three picks and a 60.2 completion percentage. Now the Broncos hope he can replicate that play for the foreseeable future in Denver. Case Keenum is taking over.