

# Why Ronald Leary should absolutely stay on the right side

By Andre Simone  
BSN Denver  
August 24, 2017

There's been lots of talk this offseason about who the two starting guards for the Denver Broncos will be.

As the offseason began, it seemed as if former Dallas Cowboy and big free agent acquisition Ronald Leary would stay on the left side, where he's played his entire NFL career, thus shifting Max Garcia to the right – the spot formerly held by Michael Schofield.

As things have progressed, Leary's been moved to the more coveted right side, and that's exactly where he should be. While Garcia is battling to stay in the starting lineup with the newest member of the line, Allen Barbre, now challenging him for the LG spot.

Right versus left guard isn't a matter of preference or comfort, it's a matter of value and importance to the scheme, and no matter how the battle with Garcia and Barbre ends, Leary should only play on the right side if the Broncos are going to get their money's worth.

Allow me to explain.

## **They don't call it the strong-side for nothin'**

The right guard spot is simply a harder position to play. The responsibilities in the run game are greater as teams are more likely to run to the strong side of the formation and it also requires more one-on-one blocking responsibilities.

This is particularly taxing for players pass protecting in today's NFL, as pass rushing ace five-techniques (defensive ends in a three-man front) or penetrating three-techniques (the defensive tackle playing opposite the nose in a four-man front) are often lined up across the RG and ready to wreck havoc.

In comparison, a left guard has much more help from the center and doesn't have nearly as tough a job. It could be argued that with the "death of the blind side" in modern football, that transitioning from right to left guard is even harder now than it is at tackle.

Former NFL offensive lineman Russ Tucker explained it this way in a 2008 piece in Sports Illustrated, saying this when talking about the toughest interior O-line position:

"Without question the most difficult of the interior line positions, right guards are most likely to be left one-on-one with an elite inside rusher. The predominance of teams to slide their center to the left to protect the quarterback's blind side creates a greater value for the right guard position. Fourteen-year veteran Todd Steussie, currently available on the free agent market, says, "Right guard is definitely harder than left guard." Recently-retired lineman Todd Fordham, a 10-year NFL vet, agreed: "The left guard always has help."

Former NFL scout and current NFL.com analyst Bucky Brooks echoed those same sentiments when ranking the most valuable positions in football, listing right guard no. 15 while left guard was the second-least valuable position on offense in front of only a team's third-receiver.

Comfort has nothing to do with this folks; it's all about value on the football field and on the books, which is especially pertinent considering Leary's substantial contract.

### **The pay scale difference between RG's and LG's is noticeable**

This doesn't just end with scheme, as right guards are literally much more valuable than left guards in the NFL and there's no greater proof of that than in the diverging salary gaps for the two positions.

Just by comparison; the leagues' top 20 RG's make roughly a total of \$145.25 million annually (per average yearly salary) while the top 20 LG's, make \$104.9 in annual average salaries. The gap should be even greater if some of the top left guards weren't simply glorified right guards playing on the left side because their team already has invested heavily at the other guard position.

The top two highest paid blockers on the left are Oakland's Kelechi Osemele – who is paid that much in part because he can also play tackle at a high level – and the Cleveland Browns Joel Bitonio. The Raiders and Browns are the only two teams to have both guards on their rosters earning more than \$11 million a year. By comparison, the Broncos only offensive player earning more than the Raiders two guards is Demaryius Thomas.

Leary is the seventh highest paid right guard in the NFL – assuming he stays on that side – and the eighth highest paid guard, period. Make no mistake he should be playing on the right side if he's to truly earn that kind of pay.

This phenomenon isn't exclusive to free agency as almost all the top drafted guards in the last several years are all playing on the right side as well. That should increase the difference in yearly earnings between the two positions in the near future once first rounders like Zack Martin and Brandon Scherff are eligible for big raises.

### **Garett Bolles doesn't need a babysitter**

One of the few arguments you could make for Leary starting at left guard instead of on the right side would be to help in protecting and aiding first round rookie Garett Bolles.

In Bolles' one season of major college football at Utah, he had the Utes best guard on the left side next to him, Isaac Asiata. This was scheme based as the Utes like to use lots of pulls from their left side going to the right, thus manipulating running lanes.

These types of concepts are fairly similar to what Gary Kubiak would have used in his offense, a scheme that Mike McCoy has used to some extent in the past. With McCoy and Bill Musgrave now running the show, Denver's much more likely to implement a power scheme, in which the strong side (the right side) is much more important.

This isn't to discount the left guard position, by any means, which will still require athleticism as lots of bubble screens and outside pulls should be used on that side, all concepts that Bolles fits perfectly.

Giving the rook a partner who can equally dominate on the move would also be important, but that's not Leary. The former Memphis man is all about power and his skills belong on the right side.

So don't let anyone tell you it's just a matter of preference or comfort. Not even the players themselves. If Leary is going to live up to his big contract, his only place is at right guard.

# Ronald Leary: Everyone on Broncos offensive line needs to be pushed more

By Josh Alper  
Pro Football Talk  
May 10, 2017

Guard Ronald Leary made the jump from the Cowboys to the Broncos as a free agent this offseason, which meant he went from being a part of the top offensive line in the league to joining one that ranked at the bottom during the 2016 season.

Leary is not the only new addition in Denver. They signed tackle Menelik Watson, drafted tackle Garrett Bolles in the first round and hired Jeff Davidson as the new offensive line coach as other parts of their effort to improve in 2017.

He is the only one coming from Dallas, however, and he shared some of his thoughts Tuesday about what needs to happen for the Broncos line to produce different results.

“I just try to lead by example,” Leary said in comments distributed by the team. “I talk a little bit, but I just like to work hard and try to do everything to the best of my ability. I think they see that — they already had it. It’s not like that this o-line was just missing. Everybody just needs to be pushed more and just work harder and that’s what we’re trying to do as a group. It’s not an individual thing, it’s always as a group on everything with the o-line. We’re just going to try to get that mentality that we’re physical, that we don’t take anything from anybody. I think once we develop that in the offseason, it will carry over to the season.”

No one’s expecting the Broncos to have a group that will rival the one the Cowboys put together, but the improvement doesn’t need to be that dramatic to lift the offense enough to do its part to support the defense in a bid to return to the playoffs.

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# On Guard: Broncos left guard Ron Leary prepares to implement physical style

By Troy Renck

KMGH

May 9, 2017

Ronald Leary should come equipped with a grill and mudflaps.

He looks like he could truck over a defender and use the goal post for dental floss. When examining why the Broncos expect to be more physical this season, it starts with Leary. He brings back-alley, sleeves-rolled up toughness.

"We are trying to get that mentality that we don't take anything from anybody," Leary said.

Leary is a brute. He continues to work at left guard with third-year pro Max Garcia starting at right guard. Garcia echoed Leary's sentiments on the offensive line's goal to "take crap from nobody and run things." Leary has an edge. He started last season in Dallas where the Cowboys dominated the line of scrimmage, imposing their will. Dallas coach Jason Garrett told Denver7 Leary brought a workmanlike approach to his craft. He was predictable, ready and rugged.

He will be counted on to help the Broncos' improve dramatically upfront.

"I think the O-line plays a big part in a successful running game," Leary said, knowing new Broncos coach Vance Joseph wants to revive an attack that averaged 92.8 yards, ranking 27th in the NFL last season. "I love this group. They want as much knowledge as I can give them. And I want knowledge from them."

Signing players with a similar mindset provides step one to change. It will not work, however, without consistency of approach in coaching. In new line boss Jeff Davidson, the Broncos are implementing man-on-man schemes with less emphasis on zone blocking. Davidson brings a reputation for developing players.

"He treats us like grown men. He's a technician," Leary said. "That's going to help us and make us more responsible."

Fair or not, the line will be viewed, in large part, through the left tackle position. The Broncos have been seeking a solution since Ryan Clady manned the spot. In first round pick Garrett Bolles, they hope the solution has arrived. During the NFL combine, Bolles distinguished himself with his attitude, his desire to be a "nasty (expletive), and drive my opponent into the dirt," as he so eloquently stated. Leary spoke with Bolles recently and came away impressed with his approach.

"I mentioned a play to him and he already knew it. That's a good sign that he's already in his playbook," Leary said. "He's a grown man (at 24 years old). He's ready to come in here and work."

# Broncos guard Ronald Leary leading offensive line in pursuit of continuity, nastiness and an identity shift

By Cameron Wolfe

Denver Post

May 9, 2017

Seniority has its perks. Only one man can start at left guard for the Broncos and Max Garcia, who just finished his second season, didn't put up a fight to protect his spot when the team signed marquee free agent Ronald Leary.

"I said I'll play right (guard), just off the bat. Whatever we have to do to be more comfortable," Garcia said Tuesday. "There are a few differences. It's just how you see defenses and your stance. Right now, it's tricky. I always want to get into my left stance when I'm working through drills, but just have to remember to work out of that right stance. It's not a huge difference, but it is a difference."

Leary, 28, has played left guard his entire career and he said he's more comfortable there. Garcia started every game at left guard a season ago, but played both left and right guard as a reserve in his rookie season, 2015.

Now that the technicalities are out of the way, the Broncos offensive line can get to work reshaping their identity. With a new coaching staff aboard, the buzz words this offseason have been physicality and nastiness, which just so happen to be Leary's best attributes.

"Everybody just needs to be pushed more and work harder," Leary said. "That's what we're trying to do as a group. It's not an individual thing. We're just going to try to get that mentality that we're physical, that we don't take anything from anybody."

Leary said developing chemistry among the linemen is a big key to success. Most of the Broncos offensive line, including Leary and Garcia, have spent their offseason training and hanging out with each in Denver, which has strengthened their bond.

The offensive line is undergoing a major facelift with three potential new starters (rookie left tackle Garrett Bolles, Leary and right tackle Menelik Watson), a new offensive line coach, Jeff Davidson, and a scheme shift from zone to power blocking. But unlike the past two seasons, the starting lineup appears set before training camp with center Matt Paradis' health coming off two hip surgeries and Bolles' development being the only variables.

"They're a bunch of young guys that just want to play ball and win. They've accepted me in," Leary said. "I like that. We all talk to each other. They want as much knowledge as I can give them and I want knowledge from them."

Broncos general manager John Elway spent more money rebuilding the offensive line than any other position. The Broncos handed out \$54 million in contracts to Leary and Watson, then used a first-round draft pick to select Bolles.

The goal is to wipe away memories of the deficient 2016 unit, which ranked in the bottom 10 in sacks allowed (40) and rushing yards per game (92.8).

Physicality is a must for offensive linemen, but the Broncos were often pushed around last season. The coaches have challenged the offense, and the line in particular, to carry the load and not rely on the defense to bail them out. A lot of that will fall on Davidson, who as the Vikings offensive line coach from 2011-15 molded three top-five rushing offenses.

"I like him so far. He's super hands on," Garcia said. "He's a technician, that's one thing that I have noticed. When we're out, those small critiques go a long way."

Leary added: "He treats us like grown men."

# Ronald Leary has on-field 'demeanor' the Broncos sought

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

March 10, 2017

The traditional arrival comments for any newly minted free agent are routinely spiced with the sunshine and rainbows of happy-to-be-here missives.

But mixed into Ronald Leary's very happy arrival to the Denver Broncos on Friday were some words that made it abundantly clear why he was a priority target for the Broncos when the market officially opened Thursday afternoon.

The Broncos believe they left a Super Bowl opportunity on the table in 2016 largely because, week after week, the offense couldn't run the ball or protect the quarterback well enough. And they went in search of some toughness, some proven performance, and an "it" factor on the offensive line.

In short, Leary was plenty mild-mannered in a suit jacket Friday, a picture of calm and professionalism, but when asked about how he approaches things as a run-blocker, he simply offered music to Broncos vice president John Elway's ears.

"Oh, I definitely take more enjoyment blocking for the run," Leary said. "Run blocking is all about attitude. It's big guy on big guy, you know, who's going to come out harder and hit who first in the mouth. ... I love that part of the game. I love pass blocking too. I love the game of football."

Since the Broncos finished 27th in the league in rushing last season, 28th in yards per carry and 20th in rushing touchdowns, and didn't have a 1,000-yard rusher for the fourth consecutive season, they want and need Leary to bring plenty of what he showed as the Dallas Cowboys' left guard last season.

The Cowboys were second in the league in rushing and Ezekiel Elliott was the league's rushing champion.

"Once everybody had made up in their mind that we're going to be bullies on the field, then that makes it a lot easier," Leary said. "If everybody thinks like that, has that mentality ... then you say, 'That looks fun, knocking people around.' ... It just trickles down."

The Broncos, as they had planned, largely stayed out of the frenzy of the opening day of free agency this year. But they targeted two players in particular for their first-day attention: Leary and defensive tackle Calais Campbell, a Denver native.

The Broncos got close on Campbell, who decided to sign with the Jacksonville Jaguars, but landed Leary.

"He's the type of player we're looking for ... physical and tough and plays with the demeanor that makes us tough in the offensive line," Elway said. "That was one of our goals."

Leary said he would be open to playing either left or right guard for the Broncos. He met with guard Max Garcia and center Matt Paradis on Friday during his time at the Broncos' complex.

At least initially, the Broncos will likely play Leary on the left side and Garcia on the right, with Paradis at center. Leary's presence on the left side would potentially help the transition if the Broncos use an early-round draft pick on a left tackle with the expectation of starting a rookie at the position.

# Broncos sign guard Ronald Leary to bolster offensive line

By Cameron Wolfe  
Denver Post  
March 9, 2017

The Broncos made fixing their offensive line priority number one this off-season. They took the first step toward doing so Thursday by agreeing to terms with former Cowboys guard Ronald Leary. The Broncos announced the four-year deal shortly after the free agency period opened at 2 p.m.

Leary, 27, is scheduled to make \$36 million over four seasons with \$20 million guaranteed, a NFL source confirmed.

The Broncos badly needed to sign at least one starting-caliber offensive lineman in free agency to help patch up their porous line.

“Ronald is a big, physical and athletic guard who plays with an attitude,” Broncos general manager John Elway told the team website. “Upgrading the offensive line was a priority for us and we’re excited to add Ronald to our team.”

Leary is expected to replace Michael Schofield as a starter at guard opposite Max Garcia. It’s not clear yet whether Leary would play at right guard or assume his normal left guard position, which is where Garcia has played.

Leary, 6-foot-3, 320 pounds, didn’t allow a sack in 13 games (12 starts) last season, per StatsPass.

The Broncos targeted Leary as a top choice early in free agency. He wasn’t at the top of the price range like guard Kevin Zeitler, who reportedly will sign a 5-year, \$60 million deal with Cleveland, but he still presented the opportunity to sign a quality player at a reasonable market rate.

“Having the chance to sign a talented and physical guard like Ronald was very important to us,” Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said in a release. “He played on one of the best offensive lines in football in Dallas and adds toughness to our line.”

For now, the Broncos have their guard problem solved. The interior of the offensive line, with Leary as a key cog, should be expected to be much better in pass protection and run blocking next season given Garcia and Paradis naturally progress.

Leary, a former undrafted lineman out of Memphis, worked his way up from primarily a practice squad player as a rookie to the Cowboys’ starting left guard for the better part of the past four seasons. He made 47 starts with Dallas.

Dallas’ offensive line, with Leary at left guard, paved the way for two different running backs to win the rushing title – DeMarco Murray in 2014 and Ezekiel Elliott in 2016.

Leary's best trait is his ability to run block, which is a good fit working with new offensive line coach Jeff Davidson as Denver attempts to add more power blocking to its offense. He was seen as a luxury for Dallas due to the emergence of La'el Collins at guard at a time when Leary was battling a groin injury. Leary was also limited at the end of this past season with a back injury.

Denver had \$36.7 million in cap space prior to the Leary transaction.

ESPN's Adam Schefter was the first to report the deal.