Former Titans head coach Mike Munchak brings 37 years of NFL experience as Broncos candidate

By Ryan O'Halloran
Denver Post
Jan. 5, 2019

Consecutive wins to end the 2013 season allowed the Tennessee Titans to finish 7-9 under third-year coach Mike Munchak. Many believed he would be fired.

Ultimately Munchak was dismissed but not until he turned down a contract extension and raise in salary when he refused to fire multiple assistant coaches.

Fast forward to Friday, when Munchak, 58, was at the Broncos' facility interviewing with general manager John Elway, president/CEO Joe Ellis and others for the opening created by Vance Joseph's firing on Monday. Munchak's loyalty is to be applauded, but the formation of his potential coaching staff should be a major topic of discussion.

Munchak is the third known candidate to meet with the Broncos, who interviewed Chuck Pagano (Wednesday) and Zac Taylor (Thursday). On the docket are Brian Flores (Saturday) and Vic Fangio (Monday).

Since leaving the Titans, Munchak has been the Pittsburgh Steelers' offensive line coach. Last January, he removed himself from consideration for the Arizona Cardinals' head coaching position. Earlier this week, the Green Bay Packers requested an interview.

Munchak checks two of the boxes Elway is assumed to want: Previous head-coaching experience and a background on offense. He played 12 years at guard for the Houston Oilers, was named to the Pro Bowl nine times, twice selected All Pro and, in 2001 was inducted to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

To his credit, Munchak didn't use his playing status to take short cuts in coaching. He started his second career in 1994 as a quality control assistant before moving up to offensive line (1997-2010) and head coach (2011-13).

As a career Oiler/Titan, Munchak was a shoe-in to replace Jeff Fisher as coach. The Titans went 9-7, 6-10 and 7-9 in his three years. In January 2014, the saga of his departure covered several days.

Titans owner Bud Adams died during the 2013 season and his daughter, Amy Strunk Adams, had yet to take control of the team. Tommy Smith, Adams' son-in-law, was president and CEO of the Titans.

Munchak and general manager Ruston Webster traveled to Smith's office in Houston for postseason meetings. Upon returning to Nashville, Munchak was offered a new contract but under the condition he had to fire offensive coordinator Dowell Loggains, defensive coordinator Jerry Gray, offensive line coach Bruce Matthews and linebackers coach Chet Parlavecchio. The latter two were among Munchak's best friends.

Munchak declined and was fired, ending a 32-year run with the Oilers/Titans organization.

“I can’t fire someone when I don’t believe they should be fired,” Munchak said at the time. “Firing someone is awful. Too many people were going to be affected. I didn’t do anything to look like I was a great, loyal guy who went above and beyond the call of duty by not firing coaches. I did what you should do and what I thought was right.”

The Titans have continued to churn through coaches since Munchak left, hiring and firing Ken Whisenhunt and Mike Mularkey and hiring current coach Mike Vrabel.

During that time, Munchak has developed an offensive line in Pittsburgh that included 2018 second-team All Pro center Maurkice Pouncey, 2017 first-team All Pro guard David DeCastro and left tackle Alejandro Villaneuva, who joined Pouncey and DeCastro in last year’s Pro Bowl.

In Munchak’s tenure, the Steelers have allowed 135 sacks (tied for second-fewest with Baltimore behind New Orleans’ 129) even though they have led the NFL in pass attempts (3,077).

The make-up of a Munchak-Broncos coaching staff would be interesting. Loggains was Miami’s offensive coordinator this past season, Gray was Minnesota’s secondary coach and special teams coordinator Nate Kaczor held the same title in Tampa Bay. The Broncos would likely be hesitant to let Munchak bring his old band back together.

Miller honored. The Associated Press revealed its All Pro teams on Friday and the Broncos’ Von Miller earned second-team honors at both linebacker and edge rusher. Miller’s 14 1/2 sacks were tied for fourth in the league.

Miller was named All Pro for the seventh time in eight years. He was first-team in 2012 and ’15-16 and second-team in 2011, ’14 and ’17-18.

Broncos Insider: What Denver players are hoping for in their next head coach

By Kyle Fredrickson & Joe Nguyen
Denver Post
Jan. 5, 2019

The next Broncos coach will be the team's fourth in six seasons. Imagine if your boss changed so often. Can't be fun.

The decision to replace Vance Joseph ultimately rests on the shoulders of general manager John Elway. But it's worth asking current players what they're looking for in the next head man. Here's a sampling of their responses from locker cleanout day.

Linebacker Todd Davis: "As a defensive player you always want a defensive coach to come in, that's just how it is, but I trust the staff upstairs and John Elway that they're going to bring in the right guy. I trust whatever their decision is."

Quarterback Case Keenum: "Drawing on the qualities of coaches that I've played for before, somebody that instills confident in me and my teammates, somebody that's energetic that you respect, that you know is working hard, is in the trenches and somebody that has your back. That's a big part for me, that I love playing for those guys. I've got a lot of trust in John (Elway). I know his job is not easy. He's working his tail off and those guys upstairs, they're going to make the best decision and do the best thing for this team."

Linebacker Von Miller: "I like to think that no matter what coach we have, I'm going to try to make his job as easy as possible. With me, especially with my role as a leader, I know what it is. I don't think any coach that we bring in here (that) my role is not going to change. I've got to lead these guys, continue to try to inspire these guys and continue to develop as a leader as well."

Wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders: "I'm ready to be in a pass-happy offense (laughs). That's the direction that the league is going. I say that because I play wide receiver, but at the same time, we won the Super Bowl with a play action type of offense as well. It really doesn't matter to me, as long as it's somebody who can score points. Score touchdowns, right. Passing touchdowns, run touchdowns, the goal is touchdowns and explosive plays. We'll see who that is."

Von Miller's mom explains her social media post: 'Always will protect and defend my son'

By Mike Klis
9 News
Jan. 5, 2019

Just because her son is a famous football player, doesn't mean Gloria Miller isn't like every other mom in this world.

Say something cross about her, watch out. Say something she doesn't like about her child? There's going to be hell to play.

Mrs. Miller unleashed her fury on Broncos' general manager John Elway in an Instagram comment under her handle "@momofthemillenium."

"That's a mom protecting her babies," Von Miller Sr. said by phone Friday.

Gloria Miller was responding to a local blog that was headlined, "Elway Talks Possible Von Trade." This was in reference to Elway's state-of-the-Broncos' season-ending press conference Monday. Elway was asked, in a round-about way, if he would consider trading Miller.

Said Elway: "I think we're going to visit all that. I think we have to look all the possibilities and get an evaluation of that. One thing that has to happen is we have to play better. Our great players have to play better, too. Again, when we're going around and trying to assess blame—which we don't, we're trying to find solutions not assess blame. We're trying to evaluate what went on and then find solutions. One of the solutions is that we're going to need our core guys to play better. Von, he had a good year this year. Can Von play better? Yeah, I think Von can play better. That's part of the new thing when that comes in with the next coach."

Elway did not say he would trade Miller. But he didn't remove him from the "we'll look at all possibilities" umbrella that many NFL coaches and executives do when asked about moving their star players.

The blog site, Broncos Report, cut up Elway's comment to: "I think Von can play better … we have to look at all the possibilities.''

This got the attention of Von Miller's mom. She responded with: "Not because he's my Son but, he's the main reason Denver won the Super Bowl. Von's NOT the problem the problem is Elway … EVERY QB he's brought in was a fluke!! He wants to halfass pay the vets but wants them to perform at a high caliber. He has no clue on drafting at any position. He needs to work on an offensive line & QB. Trading Von isn't the answer but best of luck with that. Elway has wasted more money on QBs than ANY TEAM IN THE NFL. I get it it's easier to blame Von but it's NOT HIM. #WhatupDallas #SendJerryJobysNumber

Afterwards, Gloria Miller contacted 9NEWS with this statement:

"The post earlier to my private account AFTER getting the trade timer/alert was from a MOTHER'S perspective which with me is, and always will be, to protect my Son.

"During the year, Vance (Joseph) made several references to Von being the issue or Von's playing being the reason the team lost particular games.

"Being fed up with the coaches blaming Von, I, being the mother I've been for almost 30 years, stood up for my son. Von can't rush the QB, stop the RB and cover the WR/TE, get the interception and score all by himself. He's one player on that team. So that's why I posted what I did to my social media page.''

Case Keenum could not be reached for comment. Elway was interviewing head coach candidate Mike Munchak at the time Gloria Miller's comment created a stir.

9NEWS reached Von Miller, who declined comment. 9NEWS also reached out to Mr. Miller, Von's dad.

"I try to be as proactive as I possibly can by letting my family now there's going to be things said, regardless," Von Miller Sr. said. "I try to keep my family prepared. A trade hadn't entered my mind, but this is the world we live in. You can never say 100 percent something won't happen.

"We would much rather Von spend the rest of his career in Denver, but we don't have any control over it. And his mom feels the same way. With all honesty, we're Denver fans for life. We're Denver parents for life. But that's the only control we have."

It's perhaps worth pointing out Elway made Von Miller the league's highest-paid defensive player following the outside linebacker's heroic Super Bowl 50 performance with a six-year contract that averaged $19.083 million a year. Miller's contract held up for two years as the richest in NFL defensive player history until both Aaron Donald and Khalil Mack were paid more prior to last season.

Miller's contract was negotiated between his agent Joby Branion – who Mrs. Miller referred to in her second hashtag comment -- and Elway. Jerry is Jerry Jones, owner of the Miller's hometown Dallas Cowboys.

In the first three seasons of his large contract, Von Miller has recorded 13.5, 10.0 and 14.5 sacks, made the Pro Bowl all three years, was named first-team All Pro in 2016 and was second-team All Pro at both linebacker and edge rusher this year.

Von Miller named to NFL All-Pro second team

By STAFF
9 News
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One position on the 2018 NFL All-Pro team wasn't enough for Von Miller.

The Denver Broncos star was named second team on the defensive list, selected by a national panel of 50 media members, as both a linebacker and edge rusher, splitting his own vote.

Miller started all 16 games in his eighth season with Denver. He recorded 48 total tackles, 29 solo and 14 for loss.

He also had 14.5 sacks — his second-most (18.5, 2012) in a single season — that helped him set a franchise record for career sacks (98). Miller added a handful of turnovers this season, forcing four fumbles (three recovered) and an interception he returned for 42 yards against the Chargers.

Below is the full All-Pro list:

OFFENSE
Quarterback — Patrick Mahomes, Kansas City
Running Back — Todd Gurley, Los Angeles Rams
Flex — Tyreek Hill, Kansas City
Tight End — Travis Kelce, Kansas City
Wide Receivers — Michael Thomas, New Orleans; DeAndre Hopkins, Houston
Left Tackle — David Bakhtiari, Green Bay
Right Tackle — Mitchell Schwartz, Kansas City
Left Guard — Quenton Nelson, Indianapolis
Right Guard — Zack Martin, Dallas
Center — Jason Kelce, Philadelphia

DEFENSE
Edge Rushers — J.J. Watt, Houston; Khalil Mack, Chicago
Interior Linemen — Aaron Donald, Los Angeles Rams; Fletcher Cox, Philadelphia
Linebackers — Luke Kuechly, Carolina; Bobby Wagner, Seattle; Darius Leonard, Indianapolis
Cornerbacks — Kyle Fuller, Chicago; Stephon Gilmore, New England
Safeties — Eddie Jackson, Chicago; Derwin James, Los Angeles Chargers
Defensive Back — Desmond King, Los Angeles Chargers

SPECIAL TEAMS
Placekicker — Justin Tucker, Baltimore
Punter — Michael Dickson, Seattle
Kick Returner — Andre Roberts, New York Jets
Punt Returner — Tarik Cohen, Chicago
Special Teamer — Adrian Phillips, Los Angeles Chargers

SECOND TEAM OFFENSE
Quarterback — Drew Brees, New Orleans
Running Back — Ezekiel Elliott, Dallas
Flex — Christian McCaffrey, Carolina
Tight End — George Kittle, San Francisco
Wide Receivers — Julio Jones, Atlanta; Tyreek Hill, Kansas City
Left Tackle — Duane Brown, Seattle, and Terron Armstead, New Orleans
Right Tackle — Ryan Ramczyk, New Orleans
Left Guard — Joel Bitonio, Cleveland
Right Guard — Marshal Yanda, Baltimore
Center — Maurkice Pouncey, Pittsburgh

SECOND TEAM DEFENSE
Edge Rushers — Von Miller, Denver; Cameron Jordan, New Orleans, and Myles Garrett, Cleveland, and Danielle Hunter, Minnesota
Interior Linemen — Chris Jones, Kansas City; J.J. Watt, Houston
Linebackers — Von Miller, Denver; C.J. Mosley, Baltimore; Leighton Vander Esch, Dallas
Cornerbacks — Byron Jones, Dallas; Xavien Howard, Miami
Safeties — Jamal Adams, New York Jets; Harrison Smith, Minnesota.
Defensive Back — Derwin James, Los Angeles Chargers

SECOND TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS
Placekicker — Aldrick Rosas, New York Giants
Punter — Johnny Hekker, Los Angeles Rams
Kick Returner — Cordarrelle Patterson, New England
Punt Returner — Desmond King, Los Angeles Chargers
Special Teamer — Cory Littlejohn, Los Angeles Rams

Broncos head coach search moves to 'hot' candidate Brian Flores

By Mike Klis
9 News
Jan. 5, 2019

I called two people, two days apart, to ask what they thought about Brian Flores, the New England Patriots' defensive coordinator who will interview with the Broncos' head coach search committee Saturday.

Both people started their Flores testimony the same way.

He's a leader of men.

And neither person I asked was Matt Russell, the Broncos' director of player personnel who is the connection to Flores. In 2004, Russell was in his third season as a Patriots scout when Flores broke in as a scouting assistant.

Flores is this year's hot coordinator – he had head coach interviews with Miami and Green Bay on Friday and he will sit down with the Broncos' four-man interview group and Cleveland on Saturday.

With the Broncos, Flores is considered a long shot. He is a one-year defensive coordinator with no head coaching experience. The Broncos just fired Vance Joseph, who was a one-year defensive coordinator with no head coaching experience when he got the top coaching job two years ago.

The Broncos don't figure to go there again. Then again, the Broncos didn't interview Sean McVay two years ago because he was similar to Josh McDaniels as a candidate.

The Broncos' list of candidates is a diversified mix. It has three coaches eligible for the senior discount at Denny's – Vic Fangio, 60; Chuck Pagano, 58; and Mike Munchak, 58 – and two coaches who aren't yet Mike Gundy's idea of a man ("I'm 40!") – Zac Taylor is 35 and Flores turns 38 next month.

Pagano and Munchak are former NFL head coaches. Flores, Pagano and Fangio are defensive coaches while Taylor and Munchak are offensive coaches.

Flores, Broncos fans should know, is no McDaniels. He walks into a room and commands presence. He is considered a taskmaster – tough on his players, but his players respond. Fine by Broncos' general manager John Elway, who last year called his team, "soft."

Flores has been Bill Belichick's safeties coach for four seasons and linebackers coach for three. New England's defense ranked 21st in yards allowed this season, but No. 7 in points allowed.

He will meet Saturday with a Broncos' contingent of Elway, Russell, director of team administration Mark Thewes and executive vice president of public relations Patrick Smyth.

Broncos' president Joe Ellis will also meet with Flores in the Boston area where the Patriots are preparing for their second-round AFC playoff game next week against either the Texans, Ravens or Chargers.

The Broncos interviewed Pagano on Wednesday in Denver and Taylor near Los Angeles on Thursday before returning to meet with Munchak on Friday in Denver and were scheduled to fly to Boston on Friday night to see Flores on Saturday morning.

Elway and his group will wrap up his interviews with Fangio in Chicago on Monday. The Broncos' next head coach could be known by Tuesday or Wednesday of next week.

Q&A: John Fox takes us inside the spinning world of an NFL head coach, from the first interview to the hot seat

By Jay Glazer
The Athletic
Jan. 5, 2019

The coaching carousel is spinning at a frantic pace.

There are eight head coach job openings in the NFL this week. There are also about three times as many candidates hoping to interview and punch their ticket as the next head coach at those locations.

I wanted to dive deep into the world of these coaches this week so I went to longtime coach John Fox. He interviewed for four head-coaching openings in his career and won three of those sweepstakes. He's also heard his name on the hot seat in all three places and been replaced at all three places.

I wanted Fox to give us an inside look at the art of the NFL job interview, what takes place during those interviews, where guys go wrong in the process and what they do right as well as what the heck is actually talked about when we hear that a job interview lasted 10 straight hours.

I also asked Fox to take us inside what it's like being on the hot seat. How does it affect you, your family and team? What goes on in a coach's world when the hot seat rumors are swirling?

I chose Fox as he's recently retired and can be more open than those still in search of an interview or currently in the thick of trying to land one of these gigs.

Take us inside the art of the head coaching interview. If you were guiding one of these candidates through their interview to get their first head coaching gig, what would you tell them?

Number one, I tell everybody, be yourself. Most of us aren't smart enough to be anybody else. You've got to be you. Either they like you or they don't. You can't fake it.

You are typically getting an interview because you have had some kind of success in your area of the ball. The problem some assistants don't understand is you're going to be the face of the organization. It's not all football like it was when you are an assistant coach. You are not going to be locked in a dark room watching video and coming up with gameplans. That might be part of it but that's not the only thing they are looking for in this hire.

They're looking for a guy who's the face of the franchise, who's going to interact with the building, whether it's on the personnel side, the administration or the PR department. Basically, you're their new spokesman too.

The next thing they are going to be trying to get a feel for is what kind of people skills you have. You've got to have people skills to do the things I just mentioned.

After that, the most critical thing is your staff. Who are you going to be able to lure? For example, if you're on the defensive side, who is going to be your offensive coordinator? What kind of staff are you going to be able to put together? That is going to determine your success too because one guy can't do it.

The next thing is going to be the power structure of the building. Who is going to be in charge of the draft and the roster? That is all regarding who has the final say. If you look at all the jobs that change, they are all coaches. GMs don't fire themselves. You better have a good understanding of that, otherwise, you could end up like Steve Wilks, he had one year.

It's really going to be about the comfort level of the GM and the comfort level of the power structure.

When you're doing your interviews, at what point are the owners brought in?

That depends. Sometimes on preliminary interviews, they may not be involved, sometimes they are, that's just each individual organization.

When you do get to the owner, I've always felt a lot of it is trying to give the owners answers to help them think that they know football.

Every owner is different. Some guys don't know much, it depends on how long they've owned the team or if they've been around football. It depends on what job it is, what organization it is.

What is the biggest mistake guys make when they go in for these interviews?

It depends on which way you're coming at it. If you really want the job guys can say what they want to hear but some of these things, you've got to be careful what you wish for.

What do you mean?

Meaning, do you want the job just to get a job? Or are you trying to get the right job for you? You want to be able to have an opportunity to fix it. Typically, there are going to be jobs that need work.

You bring up your staff. I was always told you go in there three deep at every position and show whoever you're interviewing with, here's our plan from A to Z. Some guys go in with their buddies on the list. Is that a mistake? Or is that better at first because you have guys who you know have your back?

That is a mistake. They are looking hard at who you're going to hire! They know that will determine part of your success. You better have a good list.

You want to go in with a book. You want to wear the team's colors, you want to go in with a binder that has a calendar that has that day to the opening game. They want to know you're organized.

They want to know you have a plan from what the off-season conditioning is going to be to when you're going to start the weight program, what's your idea of the medical department because they typically have a trainer. You want them to know that you have a system and you have a plan.

The day you get hired on, give me some examples of the minutiae you've got to plan for. What's in that binder?

A calendar of everything, whether it's the combine, free agency begins and how you and the organization will attack it all. There's an off-season calendar so that book will describe how you plan to go about everything from that day through off-season workouts, OTAs, training camp, the season. Everything. You have to have everything in there. Most guys don't do that.

Is there other stuff? Like, "Hey, I'm going to handle travel like this, family like this, tickets like this?" All the other stuff that's not involved with coaching?

It's not quite that detailed. Most of it depends on which way they want to take the interview. That may be more of the second interview. I made one for Carolina and after Carolina, I had a book for all that and just updated it.

Sometimes guys don't have a clue about all that.

We always hear that these interviews last 10 hours. What do you all talk about for 10 hours?

All that stuff I just talked about.

For 10 hours?

Every facet of it. They are going to do background, ask where you grew up, how many kids you have, if you're married. Typically they will know some of that. They'll have questions. They want to see how you're going to interact. Basically, see what kind of personality you have and what kind of energy you have. They are just trying to get to know you. It's like a date.

That's a long date.

I know, but there's a lot of stuff covered and they really want to know more about your philosophy. Hopefully, you studied the team, they are going to ask you about their team, their division. There's a lot of information to go over.

Some of these guys, their teams are in the playoffs. They're probably not going to get too deep into the personnel because, obviously, they haven't studied your team enough. They are getting ready to play. A guy that's done playing, they have access to video and they can say more. Sometimes that can be good and sometimes that can be bad. You need to be honest.

What's the craziest question that was asked of you in your interviews?

(Broncos owner) Pat Bowlen, had my recommendation list that their people had put together and after going through it he said, "how come you're not still in Carolina?" I said, "Well sir you'd have to ask Mr. Richardson that (former Panthers owner Jerry Richardson).

Yeah, it was beautiful, I love Pat Bowlen.

Let's shift gears, you've been on the hot seat at different places. Take us through what it's like when you start hearing your name on the hot seat, when you're a younger coach and when you're an older coach how do you deal with it?

It's very hard on your family and that's really who you feel for. They hear it, often you don't because you are locked in a room all day game-planning and working. Obviously, you're going to be on the hot seat but when you've been in that role for so long you don't really pay attention to that stuff. You're doing everything you can to win games, it's not as you can control it.

As you got older, did you try to get yourself to pay attention less?

No, you never pay attention to the outside noise. You just can't. First of all, there's just not enough time in the day. You hear it all but the problem is, the family are out there in the noise all the time. They've got to go to the store, you lock yourself in a building. Not literally but you're at work all day, you don't even have time.

Take us inside of what happens to the family.

When are we moving? Where are we going? All the normal stuff kids or a wife would ask.

That's got to be hard. Does your family ever get used to it, being a veteran coach, or each time was it still hard on them?

Yeah, I think the longer you do it, whether it's you or your spouse or your children, I'm not saying you get used to it but you get jaded.

In what way?

You get hardened, you get calloused. It's just the way of the world.

Do they? Is it just as hard on them?

I would say yeah, any human would. It's like walking barefoot. Eventually, your body develops callouses.

Do they call you when you're on the hot seat about what they hear from different sources?

They usually learn to keep it from you.

You said they protected you when they were older. When they were younger how was it?

I think as a kid you're oblivious. When you become an adult, you're not as oblivious.

What would you tell them when they would come to you?

When they get older they don't come to you. They keep it in. They don't share it. When they're young they don't know the difference so they will call. Even after a loss, they would want to hit somebody. I would say, use your words. If they say this, this is what happened. That's Monday morning after a loss. It's week to week. You're not even talking about the hot seat, you're just talking about being a son or a daughter of a coach. That's not even a hot seat question. That's every loss.

When they would come to you asking about moving, what would you say to them to calm them or shoot them straight?

Really, what can you say? You just say, “we’ll see at the end of the season.” Sometimes those discussions are good things. It’s just honesty, just part of being in the family of a coach.

It’s like being transferred. People deal with it in their every day lives. Employees who work for a big company, they might transfer you, you’re not going to read about it as much as you do sports, for that matter even a college sport. There’s a lot to it.

Elway meets with fellow Hall of Famer Munchak

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
Jan. 5, 2019

John Elway met with Steelers offensive line coach Mike Munchak about the Denver Broncos' vacant head coaching position Friday, one Hall of Famer to another.

Munchak met with Elway at Broncos headquarters just as former Colts coach Chuck Pagano did Wednesday before Elway flew to Los Angeles to interview Rams quarterbacks coach Zac Taylor on Thursday.

Elway is scheduled to meet with Patriots de facto defensive coordinator Brian Flores on Saturday and Bears defensive coordinator Vic Fangio on Monday.

Denver's is one of eight NFL head coaching vacancies and certainly not as glamorous as those in Green Bay or Cleveland, which feature franchise quarterbacks already in place.

If Elway is sold on one of those five candidates, he's expected to move quickly and name his fourth head coach in six seasons next week.

Broncos continue head-coaching search by talking to Mike Munchak

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
Jan. 5, 2019

When President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway spoke of qualifications for potential head-coach candidates, he didn't specify that they had to be a coordinator at some point in their coaching lives. But he did want them to be successful in an area of expertise.

Few are better experts in their specific area of football than Steelers assistant coach Mike Munchak with the offensive line. His time-tested ability to build some of the league's most effective and cohesive units, built on a foundation of a 12-season playing career that vaulted him into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, vaulted him into consideration for the Broncos' vacant head-coaching position this week.

After completing his interview with the Broncos earlier Friday, Munchak became the second candidate (along with former Colts head coach Chuck Pagano) to meet with the Broncos who possesses previous head-coaching experience, having guided the Tennessee Titans from 2011-13 after the departure of long-time coach Jeff Fisher. The Titans went 22-26 under Munchak despite having three different quarterbacks combine to make a majority of the starts in his seasons.

A strong work ethic distinguished Munchak's teams in Tennessee. His calm demeanor helped provide steadiness through external chaos.

"He's not panicking or freaking out when some things are not going right," Steelers offensive tackle Alejandro Villanueva told the Associated Press last year. "He's always the same consistent person every single day."

Munchak's personality has been perfect for maximizing his players' abilities while nurturing a culture of respect, focus and levity when the time is right.

"He'll make fun of you in a funny, nonaggressive way, not to where (you're offended)," guard David DeCastro told the Associated Press last year.

"If he makes fun of you, you laugh about it but then it's still in the back of your head, so you remember (the lesson) at the same time."

Munchak turned the Steelers' offensive line into perhaps the best unit on the team -- hardly a small feat on a roster blessed with talent at wide receiver, quarterback, running back and edge rusher.

"He created an offensive line and an offensive line is not about individuals, it's about the collective culture you have in the room," Villanueva told the Associated Press last year.

"I've been nothing more than a product of his environment, the standards that he sets and the way he coaches."

Nowhere was Munchak's work most evident than in the Steelers' improved pass protection. In the 10 years prior to his arrival, Steelers quarterbacks -- almost always Ben Roethlisberger -- were sacked once every 12.5 pass plays. Under Munchak, that improved to one sack every 23.8 pass plays.

That meant that Pittsburgh's sack rate improved from the league's second-worst in 10 years before Munchak joined its staff to the league's second-best in five years with him. Only New Orleans had a better sack rate in the last five years.

Munchak's work in Pittsburgh is top-notch, but it's his three years as Titans coach and the lessons he learned from there that provide an extra boost to his candidacy.

After ascending to the head-coach spot following 17 years on the club's coaching staff -- the final 14 as offensive-line coach – Munchak kept the Titans competitive despite issues at the quarterback position.

Tennessee's plan was for Munchak and his staff to guide 2011 first-round pick Jake Locker to a long-term role as the starter, and for some brief moments, it looked like the Munchak-Locker-Titans triumvirate had the potential to be a long-running Nashville act to rival the late Minnie Pearl at the Grand Ole Opry.

Locker's brief, dynamic bursts energized the Titans, but the slight-framed-and-mobile quarterback took a physical drubbing. In 2013 -- what proved to be Munchak's final season as Titans head coach -- the team started 3-1 before Locker succumbed to a hip injury in his fourth start that year. Tennessee lost its next two games, then split the next two after Locker returned to the lineup. But in Locker's third game back, he suffered a season-ending Lisfranc injury in his right foot, sending the Titans on a 1-5 spiral.

Despite the woes, Munchak kept the Titans competitive. One of their losses in that six-game stretch was in overtime to a Cardinals team bound for its first winning season in four years. Two of them were to the eventual AFC South champion Colts by a combined 11 points. Tennessee closed the year with back-to-back wins to finish 7-9.

But six days after that season, the Titans and Munchak parted ways. Titans management wanted Munchak to fire some coaches. He refused.

"I can't fire someone when I don't believe they should be fired. Firing someone is awful. Too many people were going to be affected," he told The (Nashville) Tennessean shortly after his Titans stint ended. " ... For me to maintain a job and a lot of guys lose jobs on a plan I didn't think was right, I couldn't do that.

"I'll make tough decisions, but not if they're not right."

While Munchak quickly joined the Steelers and added to his reputation as perhaps the best teacher of offensive-line technique in the sport, the Titans foundered without their three-decade stalwart. After averaging 7.1 wins per season with Munchak, they won just six of their next 36 games before finally recovering their footing in 2016.

At the time of his departure from Tennessee, Munchak knew he might never get another shot at being an NFL head coach. But he knew he couldn't do the job under terms that differed from his own, and he made a stand on principle.

"I know the chance of me being a head coach again in the NFL aren't that great. Most guys get one shot at it," he told The Tennessean in 204. "But I wanted to do it with the right people, and do it the right way."

And now Munchak might get that second chance.

Chris Harris Jr. expects former teammate Champ Bailey to be a first-ballot Hall of Famer

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
Jan. 5, 2019

When the Pro Football Hall of Fame selection committee convenes on Feb. 2 to select the Class of 2019, Chris Harris Jr. thinks Champ Bailey should be a clear choice.

“He deserves it,” Harris said Monday of his former teammate. “First-ballot, that’d be an amazing honor. He’s one of the best to ever do it, so I’m excited to see him go in. I think he goes in this year, first-ballot.”

Harris played three seasons alongside Bailey, who was winding down a career in which he tallied 12 Pro Bowl appearances and three First-Team All-Pro selections.

Even then, Bailey provided frequent reminders why he was among the game’s best. In the Broncos’ Wild Card win over the Pittsburgh Steelers in January of 2012, Bailey blanketed Steelers receiver Mike Wallace all afternoon.

With just over four minutes to play in the game and the Broncos clinging to a seven-point lead, Bailey made a play that has stuck with Harris in the years since.

Off play-action, Ben Roethlisberger looked deep for Wallace in the end zone with Bailey and Quinton Carter in coverage. Wallace was open, and he likely would’ve caught the ball for a score if not for Bailey, who caught up to Wallace and undercut the route. He nearly intercepted the pass.

“The craziest play I think Champ made was vs. the Steelers in the playoffs,” Harris said. “He came out of nowhere and batted the ball [away] from Mike Wallace.

“[I thought], ‘He can still do it. He can still move.’”

In his prime, Bailey was a cornerback who Harris said could contribute in a variety of ways for a team.

“[He was] just able to be a complete player and play the run, pass, guard No. 1 receivers, just be able to do everything,” Harris said.

And as Harris took the first steps in his own career, he learned from the player who is now on the precipice of a gold jacket.

Harris said Bailey was instrumental in teaching him technique, the fundamentals of the game and how to prepare for the NFL game.

He hasn’t forgotten those lessons as he’s compiled a career in which he’s earned a First-Team All-Pro selection and three Pro Bowl nods.

“I definitely took some tools off Champ [and] Ronde Barber, a lot of those guys,” Harris said. “But Champ, he was right here, so he gave me a lot of different tools I could use and I still use the same things. It stays with me.”

Now, Harris says, it’s time Bailey gets the recognition he deserves.

Von Miller named 2018 Second-Team All-Pro at two positions

By STAFF
DenverBroncos.com
Jan. 5, 2019

Following his first season with more than 14 sacks since 2012, Von Miller has been named a Second-Team All-Pro at both the edge rusher and linebacker positions.

He now has four Second-Team All-Pro selections (2011, 2014, 2017-18) and three First-Team selections (2012, 2015-16). Texans defensive end J.J. Watt and Bears linebacker Khalil Mack were named First-Team All-Pro edge rushers ahead of Miller.

Miller racked up 14.5 sacks in 2018, the second-best total of his career, and had four forced fumbles, 48 total tackles and one interception.

The 2018 season also brought Miller a new franchise record, as he became the Broncos' all-time sack leader after he brought down Baker Mayfield in Week 15 for his 98th career sack. Miller's path to breaking that record this season was paved by his consistency, marked most notably by his nine-game stretch with at least a half-sack. He also had four multi-sack games this season, including a three-sack, two-forced-fumble effort to open the season against Seattle.

Yet, Miller said Monday that he felt that his season didn't live up to his own expectations.

"I hate feeling like I could've done more, but that's definitely the truth," Miller said. "... I could've done more and that's definitely what I feel like. I could've always done more and it's a good thing because I've got another shot at it next year to do more — not only on the football field but in the locker room and as a leader."

Later that day, President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway agreed with that sentiment, and also said he hoped the Broncos' next head coach can help Miller find a new gear.

"Von, he had a good year this year," Elway said. "Can Von play better? Yeah, I think Von can play better. That's part of the new thing when that comes in with the next coach."

Terry Frei: At crossroads, John Elway and the Broncos should hire …

By Terry Frei
Greeley Tribune
Jan. 5, 2019

Here's what the Broncos need in their next head coach:

— An adept and inspiring chief executive officer type who will hire, or accept the front-office hiring of, astute coordinators and let them coach.

— A man who is hungry to win, yet accepting that this is a full-blown, tear-it-down-first rebuild, not a patchwork repair job done on the fly. And who gets that for the greater long-range good, patience will be required to hold things together and at least prevent it from becoming a complete bags-over-heads embarrassment for the spoiled fan base, for the Pat Bowlen Trust and, yes, for president of football operations and general manager John Elway. That won't necessarily be measured by wins, but by being part of creating an impression of poise, organizational purpose and hope … for the future. It's a tightrope, especially given the traditional expectations for this franchise, and the next coach must be able to stay on it.

— A coach with the bona fides and, um, nerve to tell Elway not what Elway wants to hear, but what the coach truly believes. In other words, not a yes man so grateful to get the job, he is reluctant to respond truthfully when the icon GM says: What do you think?

Now, I understand the biggest hole in that argument as the Broncos proceed with interviews, with ex-Colts coach Chuck Pagano Wednesday, Rams quarterbacks coach Zac Taylor Thursday, Steelers offensive line coach and ex-Titans head coach Mike Munchak Friday, and then Patriots linebackers coach Brian Flores Saturday and Bears defensive coordinator Vic Fangio Monday.

The hole is that the Broncos themselves have to reject the notion that this next coach can be such a difference-maker, an implosion isn't necessary. That, hey, a few savvy signings; maturation of young talent; continuation of the Broncos' 2018 draft success after several years of shakiness (that's being nice); and the hiring of a capable head coach are enough to reverse the fortunes of the franchise after the 5-11 and 6-10 seasons under Vance Joseph.

This team is not a player or two away.

There's a difference between: a) blatant and embarrassing tanking, and, b) acknowledging reality and making decisions with that in mind.

This team no longer has an elite defense, even with Von Miller and Bradley Chubb, and it can't be reconstructed overnight.

This team doesn't have an elite quarterback. Case Keenum wasn't a failure in his first season with the Broncos as much as he was … Case Keenum, a marginal improvement over Trevor Siemian.

The Broncos are Exhibit A of how far an off-target quarterback evaluation (i.e., Paxton Lynch) can set back a franchise. If you want to throw Brock Osweiler in there, too, fine. He also was drafted as a tall-quarterback, looks-the-role type Elway was enamored of. But he also at least has shown flashes of competence in his multiple stops.

After a decent run during the Broncos's three-game winning streak, the offensive line struggled again. I'll defend Garett Bolles, whose fascinating and inspiring story I told in a profile following the 2017 draft, to this extent: Part of the trick for young offensive linemen is to either avoid altogether, or eventually shed, the label as the guy who holds, because the flag is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Holding is one giant gray area. He holds, so that's holding … and the established left tackle on the opposition gets away with the same tactic.

It's rebuild time. Full rebuild time. And the coach selection should he made with that in mind. That does not have to mean trading Miller. It does mean seeing what's out there. If it stops there, fine.

I've heard the argument – and it's not out of line — that if you're going full rebuild, emulate the 49ers, hire a young and innovative first-time coach, give him a long contract … and emphasize to your coach that you get it.

The been-there, done-that pedigree makes more sense.

The wild card is that the biggest name on the market — fired Packers coach Mike McCarthy — isn't interested. Others could come into play. Plus, seven other jobs are open, there's competition for candidates' attention and at this point, this isn't among the top three or four most attractive available positions.

This isn't what happened, but the current five-man interview list has the appearance of a search firm delivering a candidate or two for the Broncos' consideration from each of multiple columns.

Column A: Coordinators. (Fangio.)

Column B: Former head coaches. (Pagano, Munchak.)

Column C: Young Blood. (Taylor, Flores.)

There has been some confusion about whether Flores is the Patriots' defensive coordinator. Some later stories even have labeled him the "de facto" DC. He has called the defensive plays this season under Bill Belichick, but he still is listed as linebackers coach on the Patriots' own web site.

Both Taylor, the former Nebraska quarterback and son-in-law of former Packers and Texas A&M coach Mike Sherman; and Flores have interesting, even riveting, backstories, but neither is ready to be a head coach. They're not as far along as Taylor's current boss, 32-year-old Sean McVay — the 2019 poster coach for going young and "innovative" — was when hired by the Rams a year ago.

When I covered the NFL on a national basis, I had to do the annual stories about the "hot" coaching prospects, and it almost always involved coordinators. I've never understood why it had to be that way. Consider coordinators, sure, but not to the point of making it a requirement for consideration. A head coach is a CEO. Every CEO operates differently in the varied circumstances, but the position always has

had more to do with running a staff and inspiring a roster more than it has to do with picking a play off the sheet on 3rd-and-7 from your own 34. Not that some find head coaches don't do that. They do. But some great coordinators have struggled as head coaches — with Norv Turner as the leading example. Joseph's unsuccessful single year as a coordinator, with Miami in 2017, actually should have hurt his case rather than add to it.

NFL conventionality calls for us to buy into the notion that a terrific coach was going to be that, regardless of where he was hired. As Belichick was with the Browns, for example. (Oops.)

No, there's more "horses for courses" involved in this. Or being at the mercy of your roster.

The most petty criticism levied against Pagano, the Boulder native who is from an iconic Colorado coaching family, is that he was a nice guy, bad coach. Bad coach? He went 56-46 with the Colts, and 3-3 in the playoffs, and the most ridiculous element in any evaluation of any coach is to hold it against him if he wins with a strong quarterback — in this case, with Andrew Luck, who sat out the 2017 season. His coaching background is on the defensive side, but that doesn't preclude hiring a progressive offensive coordinator.

By the way, Gary Kubiak, whose potential role remains murky, would need to add some spice in updating his offensive approach if he jumps back in, and more likely will remain more of a consultant than coach. If he can't be 100 percent invested, he shouldn't return to daily-grind coaching in any role. Anywhere.

Munchak gets bonus points for having the class to tell the Titans he wouldn't give in to the scapegoating game and wouldn't fire assistants to keep his job after this third season as head coach. The Titans were 22-26 in those three seasons, from 2011-13. He's in the Hall of Fame for his 11-season career as an Oilers guard, and paid his dues as a Titans assistant before succeeding Jeff Fisher.

Fangio might make a great case for himself Monday, too, and there's something heartwarming about an excellent veteran assistant finally getting a chance.

But at this point, and conceding I'm not in the interview room and don't have a bug planted, either, my choice would be Pagano.

Von Miller was a second-team All-Pro at two positions, showing flaws in the voting

By Michael David Smith
Pro Football Talk
Jan. 5, 2019

Broncos linebacker Von Miller was a second-team All-Pro this year. And Broncos edge rusher Von Miller was also a second-team All-Pro this year.

The Associated Press All-Pro team, voted on by 50 members of the media, officially lists Miller as a second-team All-Pro at two different positions. But that doesn't make a lot of sense: The All-Pro team should be a team of players who could actually line up on the field together. Until we invent a cloning machine, Von Miller can only line up at one position.

The simple solution would be for the AP to place players on the All-Pro team only at one position, and if a player receives votes at two positions, count all of his votes toward the position at which he received the most votes. For Miller, who got 12 votes as an edge rusher and seven votes as a linebacker, that would mean treating him as if he received 19 votes as an edge rusher.

The All-Pro teams have several issues like that. Chiefs receiver Tyreek Hill got six votes as a wide receiver, the position he actually plays. He also got 22 votes, the most of anyone, at the "flex" All-Pro position, where voters are asked to name an additional wide receiver, running back, tight end or fullback. And he got six votes as a special teamer, even though he barely plays special teams. That resulted in Hill being a first-team All-Pro flex and a second-team All-Pro wide receiver. He was third in voting as a special teamer.

Chargers safety Derwin James is listed as first-team All-Pro at safety, as well as second team All-Pro at "defensive back," the catchall category where voters are allowed to choose an extra cornerback or safety. It was a positive development when the AP started allowing voters to choose a fifth defensive back, because that accurately reflects how often NFL defenses line up with nickel personnel. But adding a fifth defensive back shouldn't result in some players splitting their votes between "safety" and "defensive back."

Texans defensive lineman J.J. Watt was first-team All-Pro as an edge rusher and second-team All-Pro as an interior lineman. And Bears linebacker Khalil Mack was first-team All-Pro as an edge rusher and just missed being second-team All-Pro as a linebacker.

Being selected All-Pro is one of the highest honors an NFL player can receive. The voting process should reflect that.

Von Miller's mom isn't happy with John Elway

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
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A couple of years ago, Broncos G.M. John Elway and Broncos pass rusher Von Miller battled at the bargaining table. Elway now has a problem with a member of Miller's family.

As explained by Mike Klis of 9News.com, Von's mom has taken issue with Elway's recent comments regarding potential changes to the team — comments that didn't include ruling out trading Miller.

Wrote Miller's mom in response on Instagram, responding to a now-deleted blog post that apparently overstated Elway's remarks: "Not because he's my Son but, he's the main reason Denver won the Super Bowl. Von's NOT the problem the problem is Elway … EVERY QB he's brought in was a fluke!! He wants to halfass pay the vets but wants them to perform at a high caliber. He has no clue on drafting at any position. He needs to work on an offensive line & QB. Trading Von isn't the answer but best of luck with that. Elway has wasted more money on QBs than ANY TEAM IN THE NFL. I get it it's easier to blame Von but it's NOT HIM. #WhatupDallas #SendJerryJobysNumber."

(Jerry is Jones, the Cowboys owner. And Joby is Branion, Von's agent.)

Von's father spoke to Klis about the situation.

"I try to be as proactive as I possibly can by letting my family now there's going to be things said, regardless," Von Miller Sr. said. "I try to keep my family prepared. A trade hadn't entered my mind, but this is the world we live in. You can never say 100 percent something won't happen.

"We would much rather Von spend the rest of his career in Denver, but we don't have any control over it. And his mom feels the same way. With all honesty, we're Denver fans for life. We're Denver parents for life. But that's the only control we have."

Elway made the comment in question earlier in the week, in response to a question about trading current players.

"I think we're going to visit all that," Elway said. "I think we have to look all the possibilities and get an evaluation of that. One thing that has to happen is we have to play better. Our great players have to play better, too. Again, when we're going around and trying to assess blame — which we don't, we're trying to find solutions not assess blame. We're trying to evaluate what went on and then find solutions. One of the solutions is that we're going to need our core guys to play better. Von, he had a good year this year. Can Von play better? Yeah, I think Von can play better. That's part of the new thing when that comes in with the next coach."

That's the first order of business in Denver. Then, when the new coach is hired, decisions can be made about the roster for 2019 and beyond.