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## ESPN Monday Night Football Conference Call Transcript

Sean McDonough, Jon Gruden, Lisa Salters and Producer Jay Rothman Discuss 2017 MNF Season

ESPN conducted a media conference call on Wednesday with *Monday Night Football* producer [Jay Rothman](#) and commentators [Sean McDonough](#), [Jon Gruden](#) and [Lisa Salters](#) to discuss the 2017 NFL season. ESPN kicks off the 48th year of *MNF* on September 11 with a doubleheader: New Orleans Saints vs. Minnesota Vikings (6:55 p.m. ET) and Los Angeles Chargers vs. Denver Broncos (10:15 p.m.). [Full audio replay](#); [MNF TV schedule](#) and [photos](#).

**Topics discussed on this call:** Adrian Peterson's return to Minnesota ... LA Rams rookie head coach Sean McVay ... New York Giants' Super Bowl window with Eli Manning ... Sean Payton, Drew Brees and New Orleans Saints ... Beth Mowins on MNF ... National Anthem coverage ... Quarterbacks playing in their 40s ... Jay Cutler and Miami Dolphins ... NFL reducing ad breaks ... Kirk Cousins and Washington Redskins ... Joe Flacco and Baltimore Ravens ... Teams identifying franchise quarterbacks ... Sam Bradford and Minnesota Vikings ... Marshawn Lynch and Oakland Raiders ... New technology on MNF and ratings outlook ... Trevor Siemian and Denver Broncos ... Matthew Stafford, his new contract and Detroit Lions ... Nathan Peterman and Buffalo Bills ... Mitchell Trubisky and Chicago Bears ... Carson Wentz and Philadelphia Eagles.

### Transcript:

**Rothman:** Good afternoon, everybody. I guess I would start by saying we're excited about year two with Sean, Jon and Lisa. I think it's always a transition in year one when change occurs, as was the case last year, Sean coming off of seven years with Chris Spielman in college football, and Jon with Mike Tirico and working in our gang, and there are always adjustments that are made in that first year in terms of rhythm, timing, cadence, understanding each other. We feel really good as the season went on, and we've spent a lot of time together in the offseason. A lot of social time, a lot of hard work, getting better, where to improve, and improve the overall presentation of MNF, and I am proud of the team that we have. I think Sean and Jon and Lisa are going to have a terrific year, so we're fired up about that, and we're ready to get going. We're excited about the schedule. We have more division games this year which we're quite pleased with, nine division games. We open in Minnesota. We have the return of Adrian Peterson to Minnesota as a Saint. Also the Vikings are putting in ESPN's Randy Moss into the ring of honor at halftime of that game.

Bill mentioned the LA Chargers and Denver, two new coaching staffs, and the debut of Beth (Mowins) and Rex (Ryan), and we've been working hard with Beth and Rex in the offseason, both rehearsals at ESPN and during our preseason games to get them in the best possible shape. They've been working really hard, and I think they're going to be terrific. Some other highlights from the schedule: Week 2 we're in New York. It's the first normal start time for MNF, our 8:30 eastern time. The Giants will be celebrating their 10-year anniversary of their Super Bowl win over the Patriots. That game is against Detroit. We're in great venues this year. Kansas City twice, Lambeau, Seattle, places we always get excited about. We are more than excited, December 18th, to be in Tampa when the Bucs have announced that Jon Gruden will be going into the ring of honor there, so we are proud and excited to honor our colleague that night. I know that'll be a special night for Jon and his family and certainly for us. And then Christmas night at the Raiders and Philly, another game we're looking forward to, our only Raiders appearance, and so we're fired up about that.

Just one quick note to share on pace of play: Everybody has read and has watched through the preseason the new commercial format that the league has worked hard on with the broadcast partners, and pace of play, I think that's a big win for everybody. I think it's a big deal. It's a great improvement for fans at home. It's a great improvement for fans in the stands, and it's a great improvement for the players on the field, more action, less interruption. I think that's a big win for all of us.

And then lastly for me, really just on the technology front, as we all push to innovate, and while this is not new, we've spent a lot of time with the NFL and their Next Gen technology, and everybody knows that each of the NFL players for the last three years has worn chips in their pads. There's chips in the footballs this year. We've worked really hard on mining what we think is some interesting data that will lead to interesting storytelling and documentation throughout the season, many of which really hasn't been on the air thus far, and we've spent a lot of time with them, including an all-day session we had last week with their team and our team in Tampa with Coach Gruden on the board. I'm actually out in LA now to meet with the team, as well, at the NFL Network and to grind through that. We think there's some really interesting data that we can mine throughout the season that will be of use to fans, timely and relevant, so we're excited to dig into that.

**McDonough:** I would just echo what Jay said. Really excited about the start of the season. Really excited about the changes that Jay just talked about, and in particular really excited about our schedule. I spoke with Jay this morning and would echo what he just said about this being year two. Last year for me was a transition year, and everything was new, and I felt as the season went along a much higher level of comfort really in every way, and that has transitioned into our

two exhibition games this year. I didn't really know Jon and Lisa much at all prior to last year, and the two of them have become really dear friends, and looking forward to spending time with them, and as Jay said, working together to get better. And I think we will. I'm proud of what we did last year, but I think in any walk of life, no matter what it is that we do, we can all get better, and that's been our goal.

**Gruden:** Good afternoon. Just very excited for football season and really confident that our offseason preparation will help us be better this season, and really enjoy working with Sean and Lisa and Jay Rothman and Chip Dean do a great job of preparing the team. Looking forward to seeing all of you guys on the road this year at some point.

**Salters:** I just want to echo what the guys have said. It's pretty great to be able to come to work and work with guys like Jay and Chip and Sean and Jon, so it is really my privilege to be doing this, year six for me. Did a couple preseason games that we did, just a reminder when you see your friends and colleagues who you haven't seen for a long time, it's just great to be back, and can't wait to start doing football again.

**Q. About Adrian Peterson's return to Minnesota in week 1. Given the way that Adrian left and the Vikings didn't pick up his contract option, how do you think he'll be received?**

**Gruden:** Well, I think there's going to be a lot of drama surrounding this, there's no doubt about it. It'll be an emotional night not only for the fans but for Adrian Peterson. I remember talking to Brett Favre about that. He said he felt sick in his hotel room the day of the game. He was just distraught with his emotions of playing against his former team, and I'm sure Adrian is going to have a lot of those same emotions, going to the stadium as a visitor, being booed by the fans, not cheered, and every carry, every snap will be scrutinized, and he's not going to be protected against this Viking defense. Having watched the Vikings in training camp over the years, they weren't allowed to touch Adrian Peterson, and he's fair game in this one, so it'll be fun to watch Linval Joseph and (Eric) Kendricks and Harrison Smith go after their former teammate because it's going to be an intense atmosphere on opening night.

**Q. And obviously with the 2009 NFC Championship Game not that long ago, is that one of the first things that comes to mind when you think about just these two teams, and obviously the way that that game played out? You mentioned Brett Favre and all of that.**

**Gruden:** Yeah, a little bit. I'm not that deep into this just because Peterson plays a different position than Favre. I don't think he's going to have the impact on the Saints' offense the way Brett Favre impacted the Vikings' offense. I'm not even sure how in the world they're going to use Adrian Peterson. The most impressive back I saw in New Orleans this offseason or preseason was a rookie out of Tennessee, and I know (Mark) Ingram is going to get his touches, and I'm anxious to see what role Sean Payton uses Adrian Peterson in. They've never really been known for their running game in the last seven or eight years, so it'll be a huge transition. It'll be very exciting, but there's a lot of unknown heading into the opener.

**Q. Why should Rams' fans have confidence that Sean McVay has the ability to command a room in crunch time, and was there any indication when you were with Sean when he was on your staff, any story you remember that kind of gave you an indication that he would be capable of doing that?**

**Gruden:** Well, yeah. This young man comes from great stock, number one. His dad was the founder really in a lot of ways of the 49ers dynasty, John McVay. He was brought up in a football family. He's been focused on the process the entire time. He's great dealing with players. I'm sure you've found he's really good to deal with the media, as well. He's charismatic, he's sharp, and I don't think he's going to buckle every time they face adversity. I think this is a difficult job right now. I don't think the Rams are a team that's going to contend for the Super Bowl. They have to be content on improving, and it starts with their young quarterback, and I think he's a guy that will bring energy, he'll bring some enthusiasm and intelligence to the building every day, and I like the coaching staff that he's assembled. That just goes to show you people weren't afraid of joining his staff. They had confidence or they wouldn't have signed up, and I'm talking about guys like Wade Phillips, who's one of the best in football. You get what you deserve. He's got to earn people's respect, the fans, the players, the media, but I like the hire a lot, and I expect him to show a lot of improvement with his team throughout the course of the season.

**Q. Is that a hurdle or a challenge that you faced when you first became a head coach, kind of those moments where it could go one way or the other and you really have to keep your team's attention?**

**Gruden:** Yeah, and you've got to keep your own confidence level up, because your parents don't call you and give you a hug every time you get your butt kicked. My opening game in Oakland, we got beat 28-6, I think, in Arrowhead, and we had to fly five hours back to Oakland that night, and I had to sit next to Al Davis. I didn't think we were going to make a 1st down the whole year. I thought about quitting when I got off the plane. It takes a lot of mental toughness, a lot of mental toughness and some confidence in yourself to be a head coach in this league no matter what age you are. But he will be tested. I do like the fact that he has a lot of real good friends and family, and he's been through this process before. He knows what he's up against.

**Q. It's been 10 years since the Giants' first Super Bowl. Do you think at 36 there's a window that they have to get this done again before it's too late for Eli, that this might be a time they can add a third ring before he's done?**

**Gruden:** I do. I think especially after just seeing that team play live. They have a defense that can win. They certainly have the receiving corps. I have some questions about the offensive line, but I don't think they have the heir apparent ready to play in New York at the quarterback position based on what I saw in the preseason. I don't even know who they're going to use as their backup, and Eli is 36, but we've got a guy down the street in New England playing into his 40s. It's got to happen certainly in the next couple years, but they look like a legitimate contender to me because they can play defense, they have firepower at the skill positions, and they have a quarterback that has the intelligence and the playmaking to prove to get it done.

**Q. Sean Payton, 7-9 the past three seasons, Drew Brees going into the final year of his contract, you mentioned Tom Brady, and Drew Brees will be 39 in January. How critical of a season is this for both, given the lack of success overall as a team the past three years?**

**Gruden:** Well, I think it's critical, there's no question, and I know Sean from way back. I'm sure he puts a lot of pressure on himself. He's not the happiest guy in the world being 7-9 three years in a row, either, but I do like the fact -- and I think they're going back a little bit in time here with their offense. It looks to me like they're going to be more committed to slamming the ball, handing it off, much like they did when they won the Super Bowl. They had Reggie Bush, they had Pierre Thomas, and they had a hammer in Mike Bell and Mike Bell closed out games, he set up a lot of play-action passes, and he helped their defense because they had more time of possession. And after watching this defense in the preseason, they have a lot of new faces, and they are playing with great effort. I know it's just the preseason, but they look much better on that side of the ball, and if I was a gambler, I would not gamble against Drew Brees and Sean Payton. They've been too good together for too long. If they can get this defense going and address their running game with the addition of Peterson and (Ryan) Ramczyk, a blocking left tackle, who knows. But it'll be fun to watch.

**Q. The likelihood for the opening week of the regular season, anthem protests will be a story. Can you share your philosophy right now in terms of how much you want to show the sidelines for the National Anthem and what you would have in place specifically with Lisa on the sidelines should that become a story in your game?**

**Rothman:** So I think the right answer is that if it occurs, we do have a responsibility to show it. However, in Minnesota, for example, it is the anniversary of 9/11. We've been working with the league and with the Vikings to make the timings work to be able to show the National Anthem. I know the Vikings have spent a large amount of money to create a card trick, if you will, in the stadium that says, We Will Never Forget. And if you go back to 9/11 and think about it, 3,000 people died, 6,000 people were injured, hundreds of rescue workers were lost, and it was the greatest terrorist attack on our country. We feel good about showing it (the anthem).

Should there be protests during that, I do think we have a responsibility to show it. I would like to -- I would hope to get from the Vikings and/or from players or coaches as to the why. We spent -- as I'm sure other networks did last season, when all of this started, as part of our routine questioning of coaches and players, especially to coaches, was what have you told your players about the National Anthem, what is your response to their protesting, trying to find out from players if they are going to hold any protest, and to why. I think that's a big thing.

So we'll do our due diligence. We're still evaluating how to cover these situations. I question just being fully transparent, when is there viewer fatigue and for how many causes, and I do understand the right to protest, and I think it's a situation as we go on as these events occur, we either show them live or play back and hopefully work hard, as I said, to get the reasoning as to the why.

I guess I would ask you being fully transparent, what is your opinion as a football fan and media member when you're watching games, what do you think is the right approach? We spend a lot of time in conversation about this.

**Q. About Beth Mowins doing the Charger-Broncos game ... When you make a change like this and you have someone like Beth in there, first of all, there's bound to be some social media backlash before acceptance happens. Do you take any of that into account, and can you sort of explain your reasoning or dynamics or if you're trying to make some sort of statement in choosing Beth to make this leap, this high-profile stage?**

**Rothman:** There is no statement there. She is a total pro. I have enjoyed every step of the way working with her. She and Rex did a spring game at Florida State that we worked on. I had separate meetings with Rex in Nashville and with Beth leading into this thing. They came to ESPN. We did a rehearsal of our playoff game last year. And I really got to know Beth because other than her observing a production meeting with her Syracuse buddy Mike Tirico a few years ago, I haven't really had the opportunity to meet her or work with her. She is so buttoned up, she's a total pro, she is rock solid, she's a great coach, she's a great fan of the game. I can go on and on. Her knowledge is deep, and she loves it, and she's really fun to be around. They both were in Jacksonville as part of our meetings down there. We did a rehearsal game there. They came to Cleveland and we did a rehearsal game there. Even going back to our time in Bristol, as we went through each segment and paused the tape, and I went into the voiceover booth and we talked, and as much as I was coaching and helping Rex, she was every part of that. You know, she's a treat to be around. I'm really excited for her. I'm

excited for the opportunity she has, and as I told her when I said goodbye to her at the airport in Cleveland, because I won't see her until then, she just needs to be herself and do her thing, and she's going to be just fine, and I think fans are going to really enjoy her call of the game. She's got a great deal and she's a total pro.

**McDonough:** Yeah, I think she's terrific. I don't think in any way it's a gimmick. She's earned it on the merits within our profession, within the play-by-play people group, she is widely regarded as one of the best in our business, male or female, and I just told her when I saw her in Cleveland last week, just don't do too good a job. I'd like to do this for more than two years. But she is excellent, and I know she's really excited about it, and I think she'll be terrific.

**Q. Jay, in a strange way, do you feel like you have to over-defend this choice in some way. You were speaking very emphatic and not defensive but almost like you sort of need to get it out really why you're making the decision.**

**Rothman:** No, hell no. We're totally pleased with it. She's terrific. She's going to do a great job. I'm just really psyched for her. I'm psyched for the opportunity she has, and I think it's awesome. I'm just a fired-up guy. You don't know me well, but I'm pretty fired up.

**Salters:** Yeah, I'm kind of chuckling that we're even asking about women that have called games before. Beth is great at what she does. I'm just really happy for her. The last thing I said to her in Cleveland was 'crush it like I know you're going to'. It's a little amusing to me that there is even a question about it, but you'll see. Wait until September 11th. You'll see why it was unnecessary to even ask the question. She's great.

**Rothman:** The only thing I'd go back to, of the rehearsal that we did at ESPN of our playoff game, and sitting in the control room as we were playing down the tape, I did not honestly for one second think male versus female, male or female. It was an incredibly solid play-by-play person doing the game with Rex Ryan, and that's how I felt during it so, you know, I echo what Lisa says, too.

**Q. Jon, you've got quarterbacks playing more and more in their 40s. How long can you see a guy like Aaron Rodgers being able to play at a high level before we see him declining?**

**Gruden:** I have no idea. I saw Tom Brady play last year against the Baltimore Ravens, and I was stunned by the way the man moved around in the pocket. What happens is these guys' mental quickness is so much faster than anybody at the position. They see defenses, they know what the coverage is, they know what the matches are. They know where to go with the football. Their mental quickness, the way they play the game, is unprecedented from anything I've seen. They're like a coach on the field. They've taken great care of themselves. If you know Rodgers and Brady, they watch every drop that they put in their body. They're highly conditioned. They're not your typical 36, 37, 40-year-old men, so I commend them. I can see them both playing a few more years. That's for sure.

**Q. Jon, do you think the step from Ryan Tannehill to Jay Cutler is a step down at all, and do you view Miami as a Wild Card contender?**

**Gruden:** I don't know. I know Cutler has had one year with Adam Gase, and I know statistically he had a pretty good season. It wasn't like they won a lot of games. I think Cutler has a lot to prove. I think that's one of the reasons he came back to play. I think he's got a lot to prove to football fans that he can win and win big, and we all know he's got talent, understanding the system is a big story, but I think Cutler's No. 1 agenda now is to win, and the Dolphins need him. They certainly need him. They've got a good defense. They've got a great young running back, they have a receiver in (DeVante) Parker that's coming on, (Jarvis) Landry is an outstanding player. They have pieces. I just can't wait to see if Cutler can do all the little things that I think he did not do in Chicago. That goes with taking care of the football, avoiding the catastrophic plays, and finding ways to win. That's the one thing I'd love to see Jay Cutler do is find ways to put all the talent to use and be more consistent and take Miami back to the playoffs, and hopefully deep into the playoffs. I'd like to see that.

**Q. Jay, I was wondering if you might be able to talk about reducing the ad breaks for viewers and what that means for the show, and if I can ask a second question, just anything else cool you can talk about when having the chip in the football, what that means for viewers.**

**Rothman:** Yeah, so the reduced breaks is simply the NFL has gone to, for all broadcast partners, where there will only be four commercial breaks per quarter. At times they were up to five, six, and if networks got behind, seven, including eight, so you would have situations where there would be a score, an extra point, a commercial break, and coming back from a break, a kickoff and another commercial break. The league is avoiding these double-ups as we refer to them at all costs, and that's dreadful for everybody. So that's a big win. The league claims, and we hope it's all true, that with the -- in terms of replay review and official reviews, with that being done in New York and officials no longer going under the hood, being able to look at tablets, that these decisions should come in a minute, minute, 15 seconds. In those situations we'll be staying. We won't be using those as break opportunities. So there will be just less interruption of play. The breaks will be a tick longer. They will all be 2 minutes and 20 seconds in length, and we'll make up our sponsorship in that additional time per break, but again, less interruptions, better flow, better for everybody. Some different ad innovations that the league is

offering partners, but the idea is to stay alive as much as possible and keep the games moving and keep the flow going. That's a big win for everybody.

And in terms of the chips and the balls, we'll see. There's some things we're going to have access to, and some things based on the competition committee we won't, but things like release time of different quarterbacks, you know, again, I'm leading into Jon as our head coach and play caller some of the data that we get and some things that are of interest to him through his eyes, through his lens, through his world as a play caller and that sort of thing. We're going to walk before we run, but I do think there's some really, really interesting things we're going to get both from the players and from the football, and we're excited about that. And hopefully we'll be smart about when that gets placed into the telecast, nothing forced in, but there are times where I think we'll be able to enhance the moment.

**Q. Jon, what is your philosophy regarding highly drafted quarterbacks, whether to play them right away as rookies or to have them develop on the practice field as a backup and why?**

**Gruden:** Unfortunately I never had a highly drafted rookie. That's one of the reasons I'm talking to you today. You know, I think times are different today. I think when I was coaching and when I was coming up as a coach, I think you had so many reps, you had so much time spent with these quarterbacks, you could distribute the reps and really take a good look at a guy and bring them along slowly because you had so much time to teach them a vast amount of football.

Today there are no reps. I mean, there are none. There are no offseason work -- it's almost zero compared to what it used to be, and in training camp you basically have one practice a day. You can't get one quarterback, two quarterbacks, three quarterbacks ready, so you have to pretty much commit yourself to who the guy is and give that guy all the reps, and I think that's what you're seeing with a lot of the emergence of these rookie quarterbacks. If I was coaching today, I'd probably put the rookie in there right away if I felt he had the aptitude, if he had the ability to learn fast and had some thick skin, and I'm sure that's what a lot of these coaches are doing. There's a number -- I think (Mitchell) Trubisky could end up being a starter by the end of the year, I think there can be a rookie in Houston starting, I think Cleveland is going to start a rookie on opening day, and there's just not enough reps to go around, so you've got to plug the guy in fast and get him ready.

**Q. Coach Gruden, you obviously are familiar with the coaching staff in D.C., and with Kirk Cousins losing his top vertical threat and possession receiver and Sean McVay leaving for L.A. When you watch Cousins in the preseason, what is your sense of how things have changed for him, and how will that coaching staff overcome those losses, and hopefully for them, bring Cousins back to the season he had last year or something close to it?**

**Gruden:** I think Cousins has got to play better than he played last year, personally. I know he had good stats, but I watched the last game against New York. He's got to play better, and they've got to play better around him, there's no question. But listen, welcome to the club. I'm watching Drew Brees getting ready for our opening game. I have no idea what happened to (Terron) Armstead at left tackle. He's hurt. They're using their third-string center because their starter is on PUP. Brandin Cooks got traded. They got rid of Jimmy Graham. I have no idea how he handles it, but that's part of the position. You're going to lose coaches. You're going to lose personnel, and when you have a \$20 million contract, that comes with the territory.

He didn't play very good when I watched him against Green Bay, and he didn't play very good against Cincinnati. Not to the standards that I have for him, nor that he has for himself, and I bet if you talk to Cousins, he'd tell you the same thing. But he's going to have to grit his teeth and fight through some tough moments because he's using a rookie center out of Wyoming. I don't think he expected that, either. But that comes with the territory. He's not alone. There's a lot of quarterbacks going through the same thing right now.

**Q. When it comes to accuracy, anticipation, all the things that make the great quarterbacks great, do you think he has the potential to be one of those team elevators, or is he always going to need a lot of stuff around him?**

**Gruden:** I think he's got potential to do a lot of great things. I think what he's done is amazing to me. Coming in there, backing up Robert Griffin, learning the run offense that they ran, the run-oriented schemes that they ran with Griffin, hanging in there, waiting for his turn. He failed initially. I know Jay (Gruden), I know the coach down there pretty good. He stayed confident in Cousins, gave him another opportunity, and he's proven he can make all the throws. The only thing he's got to prove is that he can handle this adversity and get this team into the postseason, find a way to win the big games down the stretch late in the year.

**Q. Jon, what are the challenges you feel facing Joe Flacco now that it looks like he'll only return to practice just one week before the start of the regular season?**

**Gruden:** Yeah, I'd like to get in a room with Flacco and Cam Newton and Andrew Luck and ask how they can do this. This will be a serious challenge for three of the best quarterbacks in football. No practices, timing, just -- just rhythm, just playing quarterback, getting looks at speed. You need the looks at speed. I disagree with Allen Iverson. I think practice is really important when you've got 11 guys that you've got to manage, and the way that Flacco operates, they've got a different center in there. Fortunately, they've got the same coordinator two years in a row. That's a novelty in Baltimore.

But he's going to have to get out there and not only show that his arm is healthy, but he's got to get himself back in I think to football shape and really work through the timing with this young receiving corps, and I'm sure Cam Newton is fighting the same thing and Andrew Luck will indeed fight the same thing when he comes back. They've lost a lot of valuable time, the snap count, the pre-snap information gathering, the hand signals, all the things that these guys do that no one really studies. I wish those three guys well. The NFL needs them certainly.

**Q. You mentioned you never had a highly drafted quarterback, but you look around the league today, you're seeing a lot of teams take big risks to position themselves for potential franchise quarterbacks – Rams (Jared Goff), Eagles (Carson Wentz), Kansas City (Patrick Mahomes), even the Bills seem to be building up a stockpile of draft picks so they can get one of those quarterbacks next year. What are your thoughts when you see the emphasis now on going after a franchise quarterback?**

**Gruden:** Well, I think it's pretty easy to see the teams that sustain winning, they have won. They have a guy that can make the throws, the guy that can dominate at the line of scrimmage, a guy that doesn't waste plays. These guys are coaches on the field. They have football aptitude. They have the great arm quickness, they have arm strength, and they just have a way of making the other players better. They make the defense better, because the defense, they fight harder knowing if we just get this guy the ball back, we've got a chance. The offensive line plays better because they don't want this man hit. The meetings are better, the practices are better. Life is better when you have a blue chipper playing quarterback in the NFL. You've even got a chance to sell some luxury boxes and jerseys, too. Man, I'm envious of some of these guys that have been able to coach a quarterback like (Ben) Roethlisberger for that many years or Aaron Rodgers, Drew Brees. That's an envious position for those guys.

**Q. Jon, just wondering what you're looking at Drew Brees and Sam Bradford, the league's top quarterbacks in completion percentage, what do you see in those two guys that just make them so effective in that area?**

**Gruden:** Well, Brees, first of all, is a first-ballot Hall of Famer. He's as good a quarterback as you'll ever get a chance to watch play. He's a great athlete. Nobody understands what a phenomenal athlete he is. He could probably win the short shuttle at the combine if you put all the quarterbacks there. He has incredible body quickness. He is such a football master. He understands defenses. He has great recognition. He can make all the throws. He's a Hall of Famer. There's nothing that man can't do.

Sam Bradford, when I studied Bradford, he should get a medal. He might be one of the toughest guys we've got playing. Forget about the 70 percent completion percentage. He got pummeled last year. He showed up, had to learn an offense, very short notice. He won some games for the Vikings. He took a lot of shots, major shots, and I commend him for getting up and keeping the Vikings alive until deep in the season. I'm hoping the new revamped Viking offensive line, the addition of Dalvin Cook and (Latavius) Murray, can offset the loss of Peterson and help him because he needs to be protected better for him to flourish like Drew Brees has. He just hasn't had that.

**Q. What do you expect to see from Marshawn Lynch this year, and to follow up, were you kind of surprised to see the Raiders kind of concentrate on offense more than defense this last offseason?**

**Gruden:** Yeah, a little bit. I thought Murray was a good back. He had a lot of touchdowns. I thought he was a good inside runner. I really like the two young backs that they have. I thought they had a nice backfield last year. I had no idea what Marshawn could give them. It's not common for players to hold out for a year and come back and have success. I don't have that official stat in front of me, but I don't think guys normally hold out of football for a year, come back, and play at the same high level. I'm anxious to see Lynch because he certainly is a talented guy. But the questions on Oakland to me aren't on offense no matter who carries it. Big questions are on defense, and they have not looked extremely well in the preseason either.

**Q. Back to Adrian Peterson's return to Minnesota, from your perspective as a coach and a game planner and play caller, I'm sure there's going to be a tendency for Sean Payton to want to get Adrian Peterson his touches, his touchdowns maybe in that game, and I'm sure that's expected. How do you handle that kind of thing in games like this and maybe games where someone is going for a milestone and things like that?**

**Gruden:** Well, that's a great question. I know Sean would certainly, No. 1, like to get Adrian Peterson the ball and have him run for over 100 yards and score some touchdowns in his return, but he'd probably like a new car, too. I mean, you can't have what you want. It doesn't work like that. This is not a game that you can just go out and say, hey, let's get it for Adrian. They've got to get (Alvin) Kamara the ball because he is a great receiving back. He's dynamic in the open field. They've got to win this game. They have to win this football game because they have New England the next week on a short week at home. This team needs to get off to a fast start, and whether Adrian Peterson is a go-to guy in this game or in week 11 or week 13 remains to be seen, but I think Sean Payton is going to check all those things at the door. He's not going to worry about who touches it. He's just going to worry about methodically moving the ball and finding a way to win this game. He's got to fight that urge, but he's not a novice at this. He's dealt with things like this before.

**Q. Jon, did you ever have a game like that, a milestone game or anything with Jerry Rice or anything like that?**

**Gruden:** Yeah, we did. We had Tim Brown come back and play in Tampa, and he got his 100th touchdown pass reception against the Oakland Raiders. Now, we lost, I think, 48-7, so who gives a damn.

**Q. Jay, lots of good insights on the new technology that you were talking about earlier. Anything else production-wise that you're excited about - new cameras, graphics, replay, anything like that?**

**Rothman:** You know, we have some new virtual graphics, some new dynamic graphics. We're always looking to add some tweaks and wrinkles here and there, so I am very proud. Our team that designs and creates our graphics and animation candidly has won the Emmy for best look over three straight years, so we're very proud of the presentation and look of MNF, and that hasn't changed. We're not standing pat, and as I said, the next chance up I think will be really smart and interesting. We're staying the course and looking to get better and better each and every week.

**Q. Quick follow-up on the graphics: you guys have been experimenting with kind of dropping the score bug out during live game action. How have you felt about how that's looked on screen?**

**Rothman:** You know what, we've had no push-back. We've tried to keep the screen clear of clutter once the ball is snapped, so you know, we beat ourselves up when we were first starting it. It was annoying to be in and out and in and out all the time, but we really have had no push-back from fans. It's meant to sort of be there when play is not in action and drop when the ball is snapped. We like keeping the screen as clear as possible during action.

**Q. A lot of people are watching the ratings this year. How do you feel like this year's slate compares in terms of viewership appeal to last year and previous years that you guys have been doing MNF?**

**Rothman:** I honestly think that the Trump effect last year had a huge impact, I believe, on our ratings and those of others. I really do. We got clobbered. The first debate we had the 10-year reunion of the reopening of the Superdome in New Orleans, which we worked really hard to get that game, and unfortunately the first debate between Trump and Hillary was the same night, and we got crushed, and I really think just the Trump phenomenon had a huge effect throughout the course of last fall during the presidential campaign. And you could look at the network news and the cable news networks, and it's proof of that.

I do believe by having more division games, the league did a great job working with us this past off-season. We've increased our division games from 4 to 9. I think that matters a ton. And we're really excited about our match-ups and marquee teams. I think that does matter, and also the scores of games matter. You know, no matter what you say, if that little score bug the gentleman just asked me before, if it's close in the third quarter and the fourth quarter, people are staying. If the games are out of hand, you know, they're leaving. There's just too much out there. We hope for close games. We're excited about our matchups, as I said. We're really excited about division games, and quarterbacks I would say, as well. Good quarterback matchups, we all like that. We all root for that. Jon was mentioning Bradford and Brees before. We have (Matt) Stafford and Eli (Manning). We have Matt Ryan and Russell Wilson. We have Stafford and Aaron Rodgers. You could go on and on. I think quarterbacks do sell and people like to see duels, really good duels. I have a strong belief that MNF is going to be on the up and up.

**Q. What do you think the difficulty level was in Trevor Siemian winning the job (in Denver) with two different coaching staffs and two different playbooks, and second, I remember when you had Paxton Lynch in before the draft that year and sat down with him. Where does his development have to go from here?**

**Gruden:** Well, his development right now is unfortunately derailed with the injury. That's a concern because young quarterbacks need all the snaps they can get. You've got to remember, too, that Siemian is a young guy. I think it's really hard -- it was hard on Kubiak. I'm sure it's hard on the current staff in Denver, as well, to make it fair -- to not only make it fair but to try to do what each quarterback does best. I think when Lynch is in there, I think you probably cater your schemes a little bit differently because of his athletic ability, his running style. You can probably do a different type of running game with him from the shotgun. Siemian is a steady, drop-back quarterback, and man, am I impressed with him. What he did his first year as a starter, taking over for Peyton Manning, there's a lot to like in Siemian. He is a steady, no-nonsense guy that has a good feel for the pocket. He knows how to get the ball to these marquee receivers, and I think they probably made it as fair as they could. They're in an interesting situation because they're trying to split the reps between two young quarterbacks that need all they can get, but I don't think it's over. I think Lynch will stay on the gas pedal and be a player in this league, whether it's in Denver or someplace else.

**Q. Jon, just wondering, obviously not apples to apples here, but how do you think, if at all, the Matthew Stafford contract could impact Drew Brees, and if you'd also take me back to the Saints-Vikings game, just wondering what you think of that match-up with the Saints offense against the Vikings defense.**

**Gruden:** You know, I have no idea how this contract will affect Drew. I just can't imagine Drew not playing for the Saints. I just have a strong feeling that the market, Stafford's contract will certainly help resolve a lot of situations, but Drew is at a different stage of his career than Matthew is. I mean, that's the common, true, hard facts. He's not going to get the salary he would get, I think, if he was 29 or 33. He's later in his career. I hope he can resolve it and get the contract organized for the Saints.

But anyhow, with this match-up coming up, it'll be a fun one. Loud, it'll be difficult on the Saints' offense, and the noise. They perhaps will be starting a rookie left tackle, a third-string center. I think (Josh) LeRibeus was the guy I saw playing in the preseason. The noise in that dome or in that Minnesota stadium will be rocking, and it'll be a factor because Brees does a lot at the line of scrimmage. However, I think it's going to be an interesting game because there's the unknown of the Saints' defense. Are they the Saint defense of the preseason, or are they the Saints' defense of last season? I can't wait to find that out, and I'm anxious to see the new weapons of the New Orleans Saints. The fans get to see Michael Thomas. A lot of people don't know he had a thousand yards receiving as a rookie. A lot of people don't know Willie Snead almost had a thousand yards, and people probably already forgot that Ted Ginn signed up to play in New Orleans. And who is Tommylee Lewis? Who is this guy? He looked good in the preseason. A lot of unknowns on the Saints. On the offense, on the defense, the only consistent thing I can tell you is Sean Payton and Drew Brees, they'll be there and they'll make it entertaining and fun to watch.

**Q. I would like to get your thoughts on Stafford being the highest paid player in the NFL, that deal that he signed, and then just beyond that, what sort of pressures come with that for a player in that position, and how do you think he'll be able to navigate that?**

**Gruden:** Yeah, you know what, it's a surprise. I don't think a lot of people would say, well, Matt Stafford is the highest paid player in the league. That's a surprise to a lot of people. However, somebody has to be, and the way these contracts work nowadays, it's all about supply and demand. If you're the Lions, you're backed into a corner. Are you going to pay him, his demands, or are you going to go with (Jake) Rudock or are you going to go with the rookie from Miami, (Brad) Kaaya? The Lions have come too far down the road as a football team. I've seen them go 0-16. They've pushed this thing all the way to the playoffs, and they have a very good quarterback. This guy is money when the game is on the line, and he's overcome the loss of Calvin Johnson. Can he overcome the loss of their starting left tackle? We'll have to see.

But they have a chance every week because of Stafford. He puts them, I think, on the brink of winning every single week. So I commend them for getting the deal done. It is eye popping and staggering, but good for Matt Stafford; he's one of the good guys.

**Q. Talk about the pressures that come with that.**

**Gruden:** You know, he's going to feel the pressure anyways, look, whether you're making a million dollars or 28 million. Personally, I like having pressure on me if I'm making 28 million. That would ease the pressure if you ask me. 92 million dollars has a way of easing the pressure, know what I mean?

**Q. Jon, I know you had a chance to sit with Nathan Peterman in the spring. Curious what you've seen from him in the preseason and if you think maybe he might be a better fit in this West Coast offense than Tyrod Taylor is.**

**Gruden:** You know, the cool thing about the Gruden QB camp show that we had is I got a chance to spend a whole day, sometimes two days with these guys. We had almost 60 shows, I think, in the last several years, and to make a long story short, I really felt that Nate Peterman was very similar to Andy Dalton coming out of TCU, similar size, similar personalities, athletic guys that can throw the ball, team guys, leaders. There's a lot of intangibles I see in Peterman that I saw Dalton had. When I watched the tape in the preseason, I see a young Andy Dalton. He's making accurate throws. He has anticipation and touch. He can handle a lot of offense. He played at two colleges. We said that during the show. This man knows the game. He loves the game, and it shows in the way that he performs.

I don't know what offense they're running in Buffalo. I don't know what the West Coast is anymore, but whatever offense you want to run, Peterman can run it. He's athletic. He can run the read option, and he can handle a lot of football. He's a mature young man, and I think he's going to be a starter in the NFL, whether it's in Buffalo or someplace in the next year or so.

**Q. What have you thought of Mitch Trubisky's preseason. His numbers have been pretty good. And secondarily, they're going to run him out to start in the fourth preseason game tomorrow. Is there any benefit just of having a guy go through the process as the starter, even for a game that's not very meaningful?**

**Gruden:** Absolutely. I love what John Fox and Dowell Loggains are doing with Trubisky. I think this is a great idea. Let him play the whole game. Put something on his plate. Give him a game plan to sink his teeth into. Let him go out there and play. He only had the one year at North Carolina. This experience is huge for him. He proved a lot of great stuff in the preseason. I mean, he made some good throws. He can scramble. He's tough. I saw him handle some audibles. He put points on the board. There's a lot to be excited about in Chicago, but I do like the idea of giving him the whole game and letting him continue to develop in game experience. This is where you get it.

**Q. It's worth the injury risk?**

**Gruden:** You know what, I mean, we're going to call off all the practices pretty soon. We might as well call off everything. I mean, look, these guys got to play. They've got to go out and develop, otherwise you can't get a feel for the position. You can only have so many walk-throughs. I go and you watch these training camp practices, and I feel bad for some of these

young linemen, young quarterbacks that are walking through routes and talking through plays. This man needs to go out there and play, and you've got to live in your hopes, not in your fears. Good for Chicago.

**Q. Carson Wentz with the Eagles. Obviously you've coached in Philadelphia, you know the landscape there; is there any job more difficult than living up to that expectation, and the second year in the league, is there anything tougher than that, and how does a guy like Doug Pederson try to balance all the pressure?**

**Gruden:** It's tough. It's tough in Philadelphia, certainly, but I think you've got to look at it realistically. There's also a lot to be excited about in Philadelphia. You could be the first guy to do it. You could be the first man to bring a Lombardi home to Philadelphia. That's something to be excited about. He's got a huge support system there. I think the fans love him. The organization loves him. They've added some receivers to help him. I think their defense is pretty good. They added a big back to help him in some short-yardage and goal-line situations, and they helped him close out games late. There's pressure, but knowing Carson Wentz, he's not feeling the pressure. I think he's going to be one of the guys that applies it, and he has really worked hard on quickening his delivery. I know he's worked with a passing specialist in the offseason, and Doug Pederson has this job for one huge reason: He understands the quarterback position and how to put him in a position of success, so I think this is going to be a fun year for Philadelphia.

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