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ESPN Monday Night Football Conference Call Transcript **Booger McFarland, Lisa Salters, John Parry and Producer Jay Rothman Preview MNF's 50th Season**

ESPN conducted a media conference call on Wednesday to kick off the 50th season of *Monday Night Football*. Participants included new booth analyst **Booger McFarland**, reporter **Lisa Salters**, officiating analyst **John Parry** and *MNF* producer **Jay Rothman**. ([Full audio replay](#), [2019 MNF schedule](#) and [photos](#).)

Notable topics discussed: ESPN's new MNF team ... officiating and interference calls, including the 2019 NFC Championship game ... top NFL quarterback situations ... New York Jets and Adam Gase ... uncertainty with Houston Texans ... expectations for Cleveland Browns and the AFC North ... Andrew Luck's retirement decision ... Denver Broncos and Vic Fangio ... New technology in NFL game telecasts ... ESPN's Texans-Saints MNF opener.

Transcript:

MODERATOR: Thanks to the members of the media who have joined us today. Welcome to our kickoff call for the 50th season of MNF. On the line we have Booger McFarland in his second MNF season and first as our solo analyst in the booth; John Parry, our new NFL officiating analyst, who joined ESPN after 19 seasons as an NFL official, including serving as the head referee for the Super Bowl in Atlanta in February; Lisa Salters, our MNF reporter now in her eighth season on the NFL sideline; and Jay Rothman, our MNF producer since 2000 and the producer of ESPN's primetime NFL game since 2001. I'll note Joe Tessitore, the other member of this team, is unable to join the call today. Tess is calling this weekend's Top Rank fight in London and is currently traveling, but if there are any follow-ups for him, please feel free to contact me or Allie Stoneberg in our department and we'll be happy to arrange what we can with Tess in advance of our opener. This group will kick off the NFL season September 9th with the Houston Texans versus New Orleans Saints at 7 p.m. ET. That game will be followed by Broncos versus Raiders in Oakland as part of our week one doubleheader. Steve Levy, Brian Griese, Louis Riddick and Laura Rutledge will call that game. Before we begin the media Q&A, I'll have Jay share a few opening remarks, followed by Booger, John and Lisa. Just a reminder we'll have a transcript and an audio replay of this call. Jay, I'll let you kick things off.

ROTHMAN: Thanks, Bill. Good morning, good afternoon, everyone. I'll just say real briefly we're energized and excited about our team, our schedule, being part of NFL 100, and certainly the 50th season of MNF. We've spent a lot of time in the offseason together doing a lot of self-scouting, scouting of other broadcasts and things of that nature, identifying who we want to be and what we want to be and where we want to go, and we just want to come in and do a great job of covering the games. We're focused on our preparation and working together as a team and letting the product we all produce speak for itself. Excited about Tess and Booger being together. Obviously they've had a relationship going back to the SEC Network. They're great friends. We did have a season together, albeit with Jason Witten last year, but we had a season together where Booger wound up in the booth for the last couple of games. As I said, a lot of hard prep in the offseason. We were able to do not only our two preseason games together but a rehearsal game, and just really excited about them and what they're going to produce for us this year. Bill mentioned the addition of John Parry. I call him our secret weapon. John is wonderful, outstanding referee in the league for over a decade, well over a decade with a few Super Bowls under his belt, and I think he's going to help us tremendously in not only adding clarity to what's become complex in terms of new rules and things of that nature but a great guy, great relationships, so well respected by the league teams, coaches, players, great anecdotes. I think he's going to be terrific for us, not only on Monday Night Football but across all of our studio programming at ESPN. So we're excited about that. And of course Lisa has been with us for quite some time. She's terrific in all of her work, and it's a great group. We're just excited to get going. Really thrilled about the schedule across the board, and yeah, anxious to get going.

McFARLAND: Yeah, I echo those same sentiments that Jay did. Looking forward to it. Really enjoyed last year, and our goal to be new and innovative, but very thrilled to be up in the booth this year. Looking forward to that, not only calling games but working with Joe, somebody who I've had a relationship with for a long time. Lisa was our rock last year. She'll continue to be kind of the glue that holds us together. But I think we're all looking forward to just getting to New Orleans and seeing what the Houston Texans are going to present to the New Orleans Saints. That should be a rocking environment. But truly excited, prepared and ready to go.

SALTERS: Always an exciting part of the year. Can't wait to get going. Can't wait to work with Jay and Boog and Tess and welcome John this year. It's a privilege to be a part of this team. Looking forward to it.

PARRY: As an official, I'm not used to all these nice things being said, so I'm hoping that there's a lot more conference calls forthcoming. 19 years in the field, 54 years old, I'm the new kid on the block, joining Jay and [MNF director] Jimmy

Platt, Joe, Booger, Lisa. Just a great team, and I hope I can complement them and support them, as Jay mentioned, try to provide some clarity in a highly criticized and complicated game, and I can't wait to get rolling in New Orleans.

Q. First, John, with the rule now allowing that replay can look at interference calls, how do you think that's going to affect the officiating in the game itself? And Booger, I'd like to know what you think it's going to do to the strategy of coaches using the challenge play.

PARRY: Well, I'll kick things off. We've had three weeks excluding a few plays, meaning two or three that I would say maybe the outcome should have been different. I would give the league very high marks as it pertains to the guidelines that they agreed on: With clear and obvious, visual evidence, significantly hinder. They're not really re-officiating the play. The outcome is totally determined on is there clear and obvious visual evidence that we can confirm it or we should reverse it. We've had limited reversals based on that concept. I'm cautiously optimistic. Preseason is preseason, but the rubber will meet the road here in about two weeks.

McFARLAND: You know, from a strategic standpoint, I think that's what the coaches have spent the preseason trying to figure out, like what can I challenge, when can I challenge it? How is Al [Riveron] going to use his subjectivity in New York to figure out what he's going to overturn? Are they going to put a flag down? I think the strategic part is still being worked out. Anytime you have new change or addition to the rules, I think the one thing we all want is to figure out how they work, when can we challenge, and I think we're lucky on our team that we have John Parry because some of the coaches don't even know all the rules, so you know our team is going to be leaning on him, somebody with Super Bowl experience. But from a coaching standpoint, I think the coaches are still trying to figure it out, and hopefully by the time we get to games that matter, not only late in the regular season but in the postseason, you'll start to see some strategic things being done, but I think they're still trying to figure it out.

Q. Booger, do you think maybe coaches will not be challenging say in the first half, maybe the spotting of the ball, things like that, when they might figure they need to save a challenge for later in the game where a big 40-yard interference play could happen?

McFARLAND: Well, I definitely do. I think coaches are always going to try to keep one in the holster just because they know at some point, and we saw in the preseason where we thought a guy made a great defensive play, but if you go back and look on replay, there was the inside arm pulling the receiver's arm down. I think the coaches are going to try and do their best, but also coaches have a lot of analytics people upstairs. They have rules guys upstairs. They're going to know by the time we get to the games that matter what they can challenge from a strategic standpoint, should they save a challenge, so on and so forth.

Q. John, going back to the NFC Championship game, with Saints-Rams in week two, I think it's going to be a big topic, but how does something like that non-call happen? What don't we see or understand, because it seems very easy watching the TV, but in a live situation it's probably much more difficult. And, Jay, do you have anything up your sleeve to further tell the story of this rules change?

PARRY: Well, I wish I had Booger's telestrator right now. It was a two-by-two formation with the back with the weak side that runs what we reference as a wheel route to the sideline. If an official were able to start and end with that running back, I'll guarantee we would actually have gotten both fouls. There's actually pass interference as well as helmet-to-helmet contact on a defenseless player. Mechanically it's not how it's officiated. With the two-by-two set towards the New Orleans sideline, the back judge actually starts in the middle of the field and has to first officiate defensive holding. Then it kicks out to the nearest receiver, who's running a go route right up the middle, so now he's got defensive holding there, illegal contact, potentially a rub route by the receiver. Gary Cavaletto, who is the deep side judge, has the widest receiver on that sideline to start with. There was a very suspect OPI, rub-route, that he had to clear first prior to getting out to the flat where the ball was thrown. The line of scrimmage official is dealing with offside, encroachment, false start, formation, and then he goes zone, and that running back then enters his zone, ball in the air. My guess is all three eyes, all three sets of eyes get there a little bit late, eyes are still moving; is the ball at the receiver, past the receiver? It's one or two frames. Was it pass interference? Absolutely. Was it helmet-to-helmet contact? Absolutely. Is it or was it as easy as we would all take a look at it with hindsight 20/20 vision? No, because nobody started there, nobody ended there.

ROTHMAN: I would just tell you a couple of new looks that we've added, we tested in the preseason, it was blessed by the league this past Monday, and have had success in college football were what we call the Line-To-Gain cameras and Marker Cams, so literally a pylon, a remote, if you will, wireless pylon camera on the near and far sideline at the 1st down marker and then a camera in the marker itself, we played with it in Arizona, in Denver, in Denver in particular had late looks, not just in picking up the 1st down but being able to pick up, again, interference and things of that nature.

You know, we recognize the onus is on us in a timely fashion to provide these looks with clarity as quickly as possible. We've had several conversations with the league, including when we've got to visit with them in New York in early August just about that. I hope that one day, and I believe the league wants it, as well, that they will take in these individual camera feeds into New York similar to what MLB, NBA and NHL do because it does put a lot of pressure on us in the moment to provide these looks. And I've had just -- I've had some casual conversations in the offseason with a couple of head

coaches to help them understand national games, primetime games versus when they're in a regional window per se, and I think that's another strategy that coaches have to take into consideration, understanding the hardware that each of the broadcast partners brings to them on a weekly basis and having confidence in throwing the flag or not throwing the flag. I think that will very much come into it. Obviously primetime national games we have multiple looks, high frame-rate cameras, specialty cameras where they can feel confident. That's kind of fascinating and interesting to me as it relates to the new rule.

Q. For Jay, how would you characterize management's commitment to the team of Joe and Booger long-term?

ROTHMAN: Big-time. Really big-time. Very comfortable with them. Two very talented guys who have a relationship and know each other, and they're terrific, and we recognized Booger's talents not only through his work on SEC and college football in his audition last year and certainly throughout the season. So we feel really good about it.

Q. Jay, as we continue to head towards more legalization of sports gambling in different states and as your network outside of MNF continues to delve more into sports gambling and sports gaming, will there be any either major or minor changes on your presentation of MNF as it relates to sports gambling information for the public?

ROTHMAN: Not really. Our approach is consistent with previous seasons. No plans to discuss gambling. The league is watching, obviously, carefully the industry and where that's going, and if there's changes in their policy, they'll let us know, and we'll act accordingly. But in terms of anything we do on screen or verbally, nothing has changed, at least for now.

Q. Jay, what did you learn from last year with the three-man team and with Booger on the sideline?

ROTHMAN: You know, it was a different approach, but we got better as the season went on. I feel really good about the product at the end of the year. We knew we'd be better in week 8 versus week 1 and week 16 versus week 8, and I really do believe we got there. I know Jason took a lot of heat, and that was unfortunate. I think there was a ton of good that Jason brought to the table, and we're happy for him and hope he has a great season with the Dallas Cowboys. At the same time, we're thrilled with Booger. Booger is super talented. What we learned last year with Booger is he has an incredible likability, incredible work ethic. His network within the league is awesome, and how he sees the game and the nuances of the game is awesome. So we're thrilled about that.

We're just looking forward to moving forward here. I do recognize that we have not had continuity in the booth. That doesn't get lost with me. And I also do recognize that with -- most importantly with viewers, continuity matters. There's a feel good with Buck and Aikman; there's a feel good with Al and Cris obviously; and there's a feel good now with Nantz and Romo, and this is year one of Tess and Booger and we need to get there, but we need to earn it. That's why I said at the top we need to let our work and product speak for itself and sort of lay in the weeds and slowly earn the respect of fans and viewers, and I think with that comes -- the comfort I should say comes with continuity, and we certainly -- we need to get there, and I believe we're going to get there with Tess and Booger and Lisa.

Q. Booger, what did you learn from your first year at Monday night that you feel that you can take into this year?

McFARLAND: Oh, man. I mean, everything. Coming from college football, the NFL is a different business, how it's viewed, how it's consumed, how the fans gravitate toward it, what the fans are looking for, and I think just to go through a year seeing the game from my vantage point really opened my eyes to that, number one. Number two, I learned a lot from Jason. Jason is a very dedicated, prepared individual when it comes to work, and just seeing the details and what he does in his job preparing kind of opened my eyes just from an offensive perspective because I play defense, so seeing the game and the little nuances differently, and then watching Lisa how she prepares for her job and the consistency with which she does it and has done it for a long time. You take all of that and you put it in perspective, you deal with the good, you deal with the bad, just like we do as players, and you go through the offseason and you go back and you watch the tape and you learn little nuances and you move forward, and I think that's where I am. And I think right now for me, it's in a really good spot having gone through last year. I don't think I would be where I am now without going through last year, whether that's the good part, the bad part or the in between. I think that prepared not only myself I think but all of us to get to where we are now.

Q. In your evaluation of the NFL teams, who do you think top to bottom has the best room of quarterbacks?

McFARLAND: The best room of quarterbacks? I mean, before the retirement of Andrew Luck, I would have said Luck and (Jacoby) Brissett because I think those two were both starting quarterbacks. You know, right now depending on how you want to play it, maybe in Chicago with (Mitch) Trubisky, Chase Daniel, how they play. It's all about system and fit. You're looking for your backup quarterback to come in, and he's not going to be the starter all year, otherwise he would probably be petitioning to get a starting job somewhere else. What I would say is you're looking for a guy that can come in and get you four or five starts if need be. Philadelphia was blessed to have two guys that could start an entire season. I don't think that that's the norm around the National Football League, to have two guys who could be starters, because the guy that's the backup is eventually going to want his opportunity. So I don't know if you're going to see a great situation.

I named a few, but because of Luck's retirement, I think Indy is a little weak now. I like what they do in Chicago because of the fit with Matt Nagy's offense and the way that they put that team together. I think that they have a really, really good

nucleus. And you could even go to Baltimore because I know that Lamar Jackson is catching a lot of flak based upon his ability in the pocket, but if you look at what they want to do running the football and how they want their quarterback to play their situation in Baltimore is pretty good with Lamar and Robert (Griffin III). So I think those would be a couple that jump out, but it's all about fit and scheme and how you want your guys to play.

Q. John did such a nice job breaking down that NFC championship non-call; how much was that play or the whole controversy around that the motivator for bringing him on board for the Monday night broadcast team? Also, Jay, if you could detail some of the camera differences between maybe the midday window games versus the primetime games that you referenced earlier.

ROTHMAN: Yeah, so John Parry, he's been on certainly my radar for quite some time, and had to wait until post Super Bowl to get after it. You know, we've had, I'll call it, help up in the booth over the last several years. Gerry Austin was with us for quite some time before he went on to Oakland with Jon Gruden to assist there. Jeff Triplette came aboard last year, great guy, and helped us more so off air than on air. But John is just a unique talent. He's a unique talent who I thought would be ideal, we thought would be ideal to help us, and we're just thrilled to have him. He's going to be, as I said, a secret weapon, not only for MNF but for shows like SportsCenter, Get Up, our NFL studio programming. I think you're going to see a lot of John this football season, and we're thrilled to have him on the team, and he's just a great guy and a great guy to be with.

And, as it relates to cameras, you'll see in mostly the 4 p.m. games, the national games, certainly on Thursday Night Football, Sunday Night Football, Monday Night Football, high-speed cameras placed at different parts of the field that provide higher frame rates, greater clarity. You'll see on those type of games pylon cameras that give definitive calls, whether crossing the goal line, feet-in, feet-out. Our pylon cameras have four cameras in each of them, looking down the sidelines, down the end lines, goal lines and even on top of the pylons. So those are the type of views. And then as I just shared, what we call the Line-To-Gain or Marker Cams, and these are wide-angle cameras with incredible clarity and ability to zoom. So on these games you'll see more of these cameras implemented as part of their normal complements, if you will, versus, again, a regional game, and I can't speak to the other broadcast partners once you get below their primary game or second game. But inevitably there's not as many cameras placed on the field, not as many looks, and you know, when it comes to let's just say pass interference or defensive pass interference, when it's not a star player who's typically isolated off the ball, when you're talking about secondary, third and fourth receivers who are interfered with, chances are those looks that the television trucks are able to provide to replay are very limited, wider looks from a game camera, not the detail or the lens power that you would with shows that have a multitude of cameras and looks and things of that nature. I do think in my opinion it's not an even playing field. It's not an even playing field, and I would hope one day -- I remember Bill Belichick was very vocal about it, and I agreed with him. I would love to see where the stadiums put in their own pylon cameras and provided those feeds to all broadcast partners and provided their own goal-line cameras, if you will, and down-the-line cameras. I hope that day and age comes, not only just to help the broadcast partners but from a team's perspective to even the playing field a little bit. I hope that made sense.

Q. Looking ahead to your week two match-up - Jets vs. Browns, how much you think Adam Gase can help Sam Darnold in year two?

McFARLAND: Well, I think he can do a ton for him. If you look around the league now and you look at all the young quarterbacks, you look at Trubisky in Chicago, he has Matt Nagy; if you go out west you look at Jared Goff, he's got Sean McVay. I mean, if you find a young quarterback, usually that young quarterback has an offensive head coach or a play caller or somebody that's kind of simpatico with him where they are talking the same, they are breathing the same, they are looking at football the same way, and therefore you're seeing those young guys flourish. Just look at Patrick Mahomes; Andy Reid, there was a point last year in our first Kansas City game where Andy Reid went and sat on the sidelines. Kind of the first time I've seen this, as a head coach who is supposed to be worrying about the game and controlling the entire team, while the defense was on the field he went and sat on the side line next to Patrick Mahomes and kind of put his arm around him and was like, okay, it's kind of me and you. And that's what you have to have with the young quarterbacks. And bringing that to New York, Sam Darnold is very talented. We sat and visited with Adam Gase, and I will tell you, I was like everyone else, man, you watch the press conference and you see how everybody reacts, but when you spend five minutes with Adam Gase, he's a football guy. I could talk football with him for hours, and I think Sam Darnold has a guy much like the other guys that I mentioned who is going to be in his ear. They are going to be in lockstep and he's going to build the offense around what Sam likes to do. So I fully expect Sam Darnold to not only flourish this year, I think he's going to have one of the better years in the National Football League, even though from a wide receiver standpoint he doesn't have the weapons that some of the other guys do. I still think it's going to be a really, really good year because he has a guy that's going to guide him along, and that really matters at that position.

Q. For Jay, although if Booger wants to jump in, too, that's fine. How will the telecast be affected by the fact you have one less analyst? Obviously you had only one other analyst in the booth, but in reality you had two analysts and an announcer. This year obviously just the two. What changes?

ROTHMAN: Just by nature, it's easier for all. You know, it wasn't only -- I'll start with Joe Tessitore, and again, his first year doing the NFL, not only integrating a rookie in Jason Witten and all of us working with Wit to bring him along, but at

the same time going somewhat blind down to Booger on the field. Even though we had three open mics, there's a choreography to that. Just a much simpler execution for Tess and for myself in terms of just letting these guys go, just by sheer numbers and clearly by Tess and Booger being side by side. It's just a hell of a lot easier.

Q. If it's easier, how come there's this movement to keep three people in the booth for so many sports, including last year with MNF?

ROTHMAN: Yeah, I think different points of view. Wit being fresh off the field -- not to defend it, but Wit being fresh off the field and having the mind of a quarterback and just being the type of person and player, the Hall of Famer that he is, Booger bringing a different perspective from a defensive point of view and giving him a vantage point, you know, that we haven't had before. We've made a mark at ESPN on risk taking and being bold, and that goes back to whether it's talent or whether it's technology, whether it's the yellow line, the SkyCam, the steadicam, the goal post cameras, all of this sort of stuff. We have a history of that. You know, we took a chance, have no regrets, learned from it, and just moving forward. And super excited about what Tess and Booger are going to do up in the booth.

Q. What do you think about the unrest the Texans have to a certain degree? They have no general manager; Bill O'Brien is apparently the sole power source at this point. And also they have some unrest with the uncertain nature of Jadeveon Clowney. Any thoughts on how they shape up going into your season opening game?

McFARLAND: Well, it's definitely tough to run a franchise when you don't have a guy that can charge, and I think when you look at the Texans having no GM in place, it makes you wonder who, when and if this Jadeveon Clowney deal is going to get done. I think there's a lot of unrest. The offensive line hasn't been good, and having seen what happened with Andrew Luck, him basically taking too many hits over the years and his body is beat up, which caused him to retire, I think if I'm Houston, I'm a bit concerned, because Watson has not only had an ACL but he's been hit a lot. I think the number one thing that I would be concerned about is, A, getting a general manager because that guy is going to work lockstep with the head coach to make sure that you can get the right personnel on the team around the quarterback. Let's be honest, that's what the NFL is. Everyone wants to make sure you get a quarterback, and when you get him, how do you surround him with weapons and complement to D him with a good defense. I don't know what the Clowney situation is going to bring. It sounds like they are way far apart, but I do know that -- just take your business or your company or the company that any of you guys or girls work for. Imagine trying to run a company when nobody is in charge. I mean, at some point you can talk about all the cohesiveness that you want to within and the synergy, but there has to be somebody at the top that's going to say, okay, hey, here's what we're going to do, here's how we're going to do it and here's when we're going to do it. Those are called leaders. Those are called people in charge. And I just have a hard time understanding how you run an organization when you don't have a guy or a girl in person that's going to do it and do it every day. To me that seems awfully tough to do.

Q. You have the Browns in week two, high expectations for Baker Mayfield, Odell Beckham Jr, the whole team. Just wanted to know your expectations for the Browns realistically and how you see the AFC North shaking out?

McFARLAND: I like continuity and consistency, man, and I think that's the same thing that excites me about MNF is what kind of excites me about the Pittsburgh Steelers. No, they don't have Le'Veon Bell, they don't have Antonio Brown, but they have Mike Tomlin and they have Ben Roethlisberger. They've infused some young talent on defense. The general manager Kevin Colbert is still there, so the consistency with those three, that kind of triumvirate there, gives me great confidence in Pittsburgh. From a talent standpoint, I get it. I understand what everybody sees. Cleveland is as talented as anybody. But there's a certain thing in life and in business as understanding how to do it. You can be the most talented writer to ever come out of college, but when you write your first article that's going to be published on a national paper, you've still got to go through those little nuances of how you do it and how do you frame it to make sure that everybody gets your point. Even though you're talented, you still have to know how to do it. And I think the same thing applies to football.

You can be very talented. You can have the best quarterback-receiver defense known to man, but if you don't understand how to win, and what I mean by how to win is this: Is that the National Football League is comprised of teams that all have the same amount of money to spend from a salary cap standpoint, so you can go out and spend as much money as the next team. So what separates the good teams from the bad teams and what separates them consistently? It's the nuances of the game and how many times you do those nuances, i.e., how many times are you going to step with the right foot over the course of a game. It sounds simple, right? It sounds like it's nothing, step with the right foot. If you go back and watch the Super Bowl, the New England Patriots didn't do anything fancy, they just lined up with a fullback and they hit the Rams in the mouth. Sounds simple, right? But they did it over and over and over, and they took away from the Rams did best. And I think you have to learn how to win as we bring it back to the Browns. The Browns have to learn that you can't pick and choose when you play. There are going to be 70 to 80 plays in every football game, give or take. The secret and the beauty of the game is we have no idea which plays are going to be the, quote-unquote, game-changing plays. So what do you have to do? You have to get young players to play every play like it's the last, and that's tough to do. And that's what I mean by learning how to win. Young players want to make the SportsCenter plays, the splash plays, the one-handed catches. They want to be on the national TV shows. What they don't want to do sometimes is just plays that go unnoticed. I think after talking to Freddie Kitchens last week when he was in Tampa with the Browns, I think that's

what he did all camp is to try to instill in his team, talent is one thing, but how do you get talent to perform consistently over time, over the course of a long season. That will determine how far the Browns go. But they're talented, and when you start with the division, as I said, I think Pittsburgh is one. I would probably put Cleveland right there. Baltimore and Cincinnati to me still have a lot to prove in some areas.

Q. Booger, about the Andrew Luck news. It seems like one of the biggest takeaways is how little viewers and fans maybe truly understand the physical and mental grind of playing in the NFL, recovering from injuries. What do you think about that? Also what do you feel like you and other media members can do to provide a more realistic perspective on what these guys are going through on a daily and annual basis?

McFARLAND: Yeah, let me paint a picture for you guys. Following a Hall of Famer, always being asked how you're going to live up to that Hall of Famer. When you get injured, you're continually asked, what's hurt now. And even when you're not hurt, when are you going to achieve the next thing, whether it's a Pro Bowl or an MVP or whatever, Defensive Player of the Year, and then you've got to do it over and over again every year. I'm not talking about Andrew Luck, I'm talking about myself now, see. It's the same thing that I did when I followed Warren Sapp.

The pain, the injury, the rehab, you couple that with the expectations when you follow a Hall of Famer. Now, Andrew Luck was way better of a player than I ever was, but I kind of get the point of relatability and the mindset because I think everyone is trying to understand, why would Andrew Luck do this? Everyone is trying to understand his mindset, and you've got a lot of hot-take guys around the country trying to give all these different things, he quit on his team, he did this, he did that. But the mindset is this: You get to a certain point in life where you have to make choices and decisions, and you've got to live with the consequences, and the choices that all football players make is how much wear and tear on my body do I want to endure, knowing it's going to happen, versus the love for the game versus the amount of money that I can secure. And I think for all of us there's a balance. And I think Andrew Luck just really opened a lot of eyes because he's 29 years old, he plays a position that he could have played -- what, Tom Brady is playing at 41, 42 years old. So he had over a decade.

Jim Irsay talked about another half a billion dollars he could have made, but what I look at is this, and I try to go back and learn from it, it was kind of funny because I kind of understand what he's going through. I mean, I played nine years, I had seven surgeries, and I was always asked, well, do you feel like you're snakebit, do you feel like you're going to be injured this year, are you going on IR. And then, okay, Warren Sapp had 12 sacks, are you going to get to double digits. Andrew Luck was kind of looked at in the same way. He's following Peyton Manning. Hey, you know what, you've gotten to the playoffs, but when can you get this team over the hump, and this was supposed to be that year. This was supposed to be the -- the Colts were the sexy pick for the Super Bowl, yet still he was hurt again. So I just think it's a mindset of a player who is tired of living to others' expectations, and for once I can relate to what he's doing. Now, I don't know if he's going to come back. That's up to him and his choice and his choice alone. I just think that we're going to start to see a lot of players follow the Patrick Willis, follow the Andrew Luck, follow guys where -- Calvin Johnson, guys that have made a ton of money, but they're tired of getting beat up. They are tired of waking up on a Monday morning and feeling like when I put my feet on the floor I have no idea what it's going to feel like. I don't know how many of you guys and girls have ever felt that. That's the feeling most players feel every single Monday, especially in the trenches. When you put your foot on the floor, you have no idea what it's going to feel like. Most of America takes that for granted, and I think we're going to see a lot more players start to value their health. I know it'll be sad for fans; I just think we're going to see a lot more of that over the next 5-10 years.

Q. John, you had 19 years on the field officiating. Were you anonymous early on do you think, and with high definition and more camera angles, I'm curious from your 19 years as an official, is it harder to walk around a grocery store at home? Are you more recognizable later in your career than you were early in your career, and did the technology kind of make the job more difficult in terms of off the field?

PARRY: Well, I grew up with officiating. I don't remember a world without officiating or without the NFL. And I was taught early on, old school by my father, that your job is to go unnoticed. When they notice you, you have worked a poor football game. Make the calls, make the calls correct, be expeditious with what you announce and how you enforce. Yeah, I think I did. I think I stayed under the radar. I wasn't enamored with wearing a white hat and spending 20, 30 seconds on television with an announcement. Normally bang those out pretty quickly. As you know, here in the Akron area, I live in a small little community 17,000 people, but man, I put the garbage out Tuesday morning just like everybody else.

Q. Booger, it looked like you and the crew got a pretty good look, a close look at the Broncos ahead of the 49ers game during the joint practices. What did you observe about the team, and what makes you think they'll be ready for their test on MNF?

McFARLAND: Well, I think, number one, it starts at the top. You know, when you look at Vic Fangio and having waited over three decades to become a head coach and what he brings, usually teams develop the personality of their coach, and if Denver continues to develop that of Vic Fangio, they're going to be a tough defensive football team that's going to be very, very, very well-coached. They're going to pay attention to the details, and I think that if you look at Joe Flacco coming from Baltimore to Denver, he understands how to play for a defensive team. And so Joe has to come in, take care

of the football, don't turn it over, don't try to be a hero, make sure you play to your defense, and then they have special players on defense. We get enamored with the quarterback position, and rightfully so, because they touch the ball every play. I think in order to be a championship team, you have to have two or three special players. It can be a great kicker, a quarterback, a defensive -- like you've got to have two or three, four special players. They've got a couple on defense when you look at Bradley Chubb, Von Miller, those are special guys. And if other guys around special players will do their job and not try to do everyone else's job, then you can start to build a football team that can stockpile wins. I like what Denver is doing. I love their leadership. I'm a fan of people that grind. You know, Vic Fangio has been grinding his whole life. Sometimes in life there are things based on your last name or the family you come from or based on the side of the tracks that you grew up on, things are given to you in life, and we've all seen that. Vic Fangio had to earn everything that he's gotten right now being the head coach, and I'm a real, real big fan of people that earn things because I had to live that life myself, man, and so I gravitate toward those people, so I am a huge fan, and I expect big things from Denver, and I understand everyone is waiting on Drew Lock. I would just say this: I don't think the book is closed yet on Joe Flacco, and I think he's the right person for that team.

Q. Lisa, in talking to players in Denver, do you want to add anything about the Broncos?

SALTERS: Well, I live in Baltimore, so as I was telling Joe Flacco on the sideline, it was odd seeing him in orange, but the one thing when I got back home to Baltimore, people kept telling me, wow, Joe Flacco looked really engaged, and he just seemed -- he seems different to me. Not that he isn't always very considerate and thoughtful with us, but he just seemed to have a little bit more, a little different juice this time around, and I think that he has a chip on his shoulder, too. He wants to prove, like Boog said, that the book hasn't closed on him, that he has a lot of football left. So I think that, coupled with the weapons that he does have, Phillip Lindsay, what that kid did last season, I can't wait to see what he does for an encore, and like Boog said, on defense, having Bradley Chubb and Von Miller, I think the Denver defense is going to be really special, and if Joe Flacco is motivated and goes out there and wants to show that he still can play football, I think Denver could have a really good team this year.

Q. Jay, Fred Gaudelli over at Sunday Night Football is tinkering again with that standard line of scrimmage camera angle and presentation, and he says he'll keep trying new things, but as you know for every improvement that angle brings, it seems to have a drawback, too, that upsets some fans or enough fans to keep them from diving in 100 percent on that. To what extent do you think that basic framework -- that standard presentation of football -- can be improved upon? Maybe the status quo is the status quo for a reason.

ROTHMAN: You're talking specifically about Freddie and the NBC crew trying the high sky game camera that they did the other night?

Q. A couple years ago they did the video game presentation from behind the quarterback, and they haven't gotten rid of those entirely, but they also haven't done that again from a full-game perspective. It's just an interesting question to me. How much improvement do you think there can be in just sort of that standard line of scrimmage presentation? Do you think there is an answer out there that will make everybody happy?

ROTHMAN: I think the fun of it is in working with new technologies, what's out there. We're all striving to improve our game coverage. I just think we need to be certainly rock solid when we're going to go for something, you know, and never compromise our coverage, and our coverage needs to be bulletproof. I applaud them for the high sky coverage and giving that a shot, but again, in that situation, you're talking about a robotic camera versus a manned camera and having full control of the camera. You know, a play downfield live, you never want to miss or not have it. So I think that's a great angle to supplement. It's a little bit of risk reward. Maybe you can take some more educated chances on a 3rd and goal or a 3rd and short or a 4th and something going for it type thing, but I do think you need to be rock solid.

Some of the technology that we're bringing in this year, as I was sharing earlier, being the Line-To-Gain or Marker cameras, those aren't live cameras per se, but they're definitive angles that can provide clarity instantaneously. You know, whether it's camera, whether it's graphics, we don't like to -- at least in our house, we don't like to do things just for the sake of doing it, doing it with a purpose, and providing meaning is really important. You know, we have that in playing around with our NextGen technology. When those chips came out on players, I was elated, ecstatic to sort of mine into what can we get out of that, what data can we provide. Now, there's a lot of data that at least in my mind in covering a live football game that viewers need to digest and be able to understand what is it and why should I care in a very short amount of time. So I just think we need to be careful of all of those things, but I applaud the efforts by -- I know Freddie very well. He's been a longtime colleague and brother of mine since his days back here, and we wine and dine together off-season, and I applaud his efforts and any broadcast partner's efforts for pushing it. But I do think you need to push it with a purpose and it needs to make sense and hopefully enhance your broadcast.

MODERATOR: I'll close our call here by giving our team the chance to just look immediately at the Saints-Texans game we have in New Orleans. Booger, your home state of Louisiana, what are your thoughts specifically about that game?

McFARLAND: I think it's going to be a really, really emotional game. If you look at the Saints in the last two years, the Minneapolis miracle, what happened last year against the Rams, I think they have to feel like they've been kind of snakebitten a little bit. It's going to be a lot of emotion in that building opening night because I think they feel like they have

something to prove. They feel like they could have been, and maybe we don't know, maybe the best team in football the last couple years, but they have nothing to show for it. And I think they have to go out and diligently try to do it, and not try to win the game or win the Super Bowl on opening night. They have to go out and just be a good football team and do the small things, realizing that they are good enough to be in position to have another shot, not only to get in the playoffs but to go on and play in the Super Bowl. So I do think it's going to be a fun night. If you look at the Texans, the Texans have to figure out how to protect Watson. Losing Lamar Miller to an ACL, no Clowney, young offensive line, the chips are going to be stacked against them a little bit. But it's game one, and I think that's the beauty of it is no one really knows what you're going to get when everybody has to play 70 or 80 plays. But I do think New Orleans is going to come out with a chip on their shoulder, as they should be, because they probably feel like they should have been playing in at least one of the last two Super Bowls.

MODERATOR: Lisa, you had the great moment with Drew Brees after he broke the NFL record a year ago on MNF. What are your thoughts going back to the Dome?

SALTERS: Yeah, I was going to say that any opportunity to cover Drew Brees, I'm looking forward to that, and just listening to Booger talk about the game, I'm getting fired up all over again, so I can't wait.

MODERATOR: John, your thoughts? It'll be your first official game in the Monday Night booth during the regular season.

PARRY: Yeah, after listening to everybody speak today, I'm ready, I'm excited. I would say from my perspective it's probably the toughest officiating assignment that I'm aware of in 20 years.

MODERATOR: Jay, we've obviously had many ESPN Monday night games in New Orleans, probably more there than just about any other venue. Your thoughts about going back?

ROTHMAN: Yeah, it's a special place. Our first MNF season we were fortunate to cover the reopening of the SuperDome and Gleason's blocked punt, and that moment and the resilience of the people and the region, and that was a career – certainly a career highlight for me in covering the NFL. And then fast forward to Drew Brees making the record last year on our air. It's a special place. The place is electric, the people are awesome, and Sean Payton and Drew Brees have something very special, and I'm always fascinated about how they continue to reinvent themselves and evolve. We're excited to kick off in New Orleans.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

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Contacts:

Bill Hofheimer (bill.hofheimer@espn.com) or Allie Stoneberg (allison.r.stoneberg@espn.com)