

## T ROMO HEADS LIST OF DECLINING NFL PLAYERS

**DALLAS:** Tony Romo followed the best season of his career in 2014 with one injury after another. The question no longer is whether Romo can duplicate the success he had just two years ago when he led the Dallas Cowboys to 12 wins and the NFC East title. Rather, people wonder if he can stay healthy to play at all. Romo missed 12 games in 2015 after he broke his left collarbone twice. He begins this year on the sideline after suffering a back injury in the preseason. The four-time Pro Bowl quarterback is clearly on the decline. Here are other players who could trend downward in 2016:

**Jason Peters, LT, Eagles:** He's an eight-time Pro Bowl pick and two-time All-Pro who has missed only two games in the past three seasons. But the 34-year-old Peters isn't the dominant blocker he used to be. He has 18 penalties and 12 sacks allowed over the last two seasons.

**Chris Johnson, RB, Cardinals:** Johnson was on his way to his seventh 1,000-yard season in eight years before getting hurt last season. He ran for 814 yards in 11 games. His injury gave David Johnson an opportunity to play more and he was dynamic. The Cardinals are in good hands with either Johnson, but expect David to get the ball more than Chris.

**Demaryius Thomas, WR, Broncos:** Thomas had 105 catches for 1,304 yards and six TDs in 2015 despite Peyton Manning's rapid decline. But the Broncos are a far more run-oriented offense under Gary Kubiak, who can emphasize his system in Year 2 now that Manning is gone and Trevor Siemian is the quarterback. Thomas will get the ball, but he's not going to catch triple-digit passes in this offense.

**Mario Williams, DE, Dolphins:** After racking up 38 sacks between 2012-14, Williams had just five sacks in 909 snaps last season. He was released by the Bills following a disappointing year playing linebacker in Rex Ryan's 3-4 system. Miami is banking on Williams being more comfortable in the 4-3, but Williams' best days could be in the past. **Arian Foster, RB, Dolphins:** Foster missed 23 games for the Texans over the past three seasons due to back, groin and Achilles tendon injuries. He's a 30-year-old running back who took a lot of hits and has suffered a lot of injuries. That adds up to less production. — AP



**SAN DIEGO:** San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, middle, kneels during the national anthem before the team's NFL preseason football game against the San Diego Chargers, Thursday, Sept 1, 2016. — AP

## NFL'S GOODSELL DOESN'T AGREE WITH KAEPERNICK'S ACTIONS

**NEW YORK:** NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell disagrees with Colin Kaepernick's choice to kneel during the national anthem, but recognizes the quarterback's right to protest. Asked by The Associated Press about Kaepernick's decision not to stand before games when the national anthem is played, Goodell said in an email Wednesday: "I don't necessarily agree with what he is doing."

"I support our players when they want to see change in society, and we don't live in a perfect society," Goodell added. "On the other hand, we believe very strongly in patriotism in the NFL. I personally believe very strongly in that." Goodell added that NFL players have a visible platform for their viewpoints. With that comes responsibility to use those platforms properly. "We have to choose respectful ways of doing that so that we can achieve the outcomes we ultimately want and do it with the values and ideals that make our country great," said Goodell, whose late father, Charles, was a US senator. "I think it's important to have respect for our country, for our flag, for the people who make our country better; for law enforcement; and for our military who are out fighting for our freedoms and our ideals."

Kaepernick wouldn't stand for the anthem at his team's preseason games, with San Francisco 49ers teammate Eric Reid and Seattle's Jeremy Lane doing the same. Kaepernick has cited racial injustice and police brutality among the many reasons for his actions and said he plans to continue to not stand for the anthem during the regular season. Kaepernick said Wednesday on his

Instagram account that he will donate all the money he receives from his jersey sales to charity to thank fans for their support. He said he's pleased his 49ers jersey has become the top seller in the NFL since his protest became public. The 49ers open their season at home against the Los Angeles Rams on Monday night.

### Will bench players who sit

Also in reaction to Kaepernick's actions: US hockey coach John Tortorella said he'd bench any player who stays seated during the national anthem. Tortorella, who will coach the United States at the upcoming World Cup of Hockey, told ESPN: "If any of my players sit on the bench for the national anthem, they will sit there the rest of the game." Tortorella, who also coaches the Columbus Blue Jackets, talked a bit more about his view Wednesday. "I feel very strongly of being able to say what you want to say in your way, about you're upset about things," he said. "You have your right to do that, but to bring that flag and anthem into it and drag that down, no way. So I feel strongly both ways."

Tortorella's son Nick is an Army Ranger and is deployed in the Middle East. "When there are men and women that give their lives for their flag, for their anthem, have given their lives, continue to put themselves on the line with our services for our flag, for our anthem, families that have been disrupted, traumatic physical injuries, traumatic mental injuries for these people that give us the opportunity to do the things we want to do," Tortorella said. "There's no chance an anthem and a

flag should come into any type of situation where you're trying to make a point."

New York Jets receiver Brandon Marshall spoke out on WFAN Radio, saying he disagreed with host Boomer Esiason, who had criticized Kaepernick. Marshall also discussed the issue a bit at practice Wednesday. "Like it or not, this is a civil rights movement. It's a civil rights issue," Marshall said. "Martin Luther King did an amazing job of making sure everyone was at the table. What I mean by that is, he never once went against America. He always said America was an amazing nation. Whether he believed that or not, I don't know, but I say that because if you want to get things done, you have to do it in a way where everyone's at the table."

Seahawks receiver Doug Baldwin said he has considered joining Seattle teammate Lane in not standing for the anthem. "I want to make sure I get all my ducks in a row before I do so," Baldwin said. "My grandfather being in the military it hit home for me as well. It's the veterans that have reached out and said that's what they fought for, that's what they sacrificed their lives for was to give people back home under the flag, under this country, the opportunity to stand up or sit for what they believe in. So that was very heartening for me to hear that." Teammate Bobby Wagner believes the Seahawks should act together because "that's that the world needs to see." "Anything we want to do, it's not going to be individual," he added. "It's going to be a team thing. The world needs to see people coming together versus being individuals." — AP

## COWBOYS' ELLIOTT SET FOR DEBUT, QUESTIONS LINGER

**FRISCO:** Days from his Dallas debut and cleared by prosecutors in Ohio in a domestic violence case, Ezekiel Elliott still had to answer questions Wednesday about conduct away from the field. The same report citing insufficient evidence to support a woman's claims against him included documents that had a text exchange between the two indicating concern over Elliott passing a drug test.

The report was released less than two weeks after video surfaced of Elliott in a legal marijuana shop in Seattle, which led to admonishments from owner and general manager Jerry Jones and coach Jason Garrett. "I feel like there have been some damages done, but the past is the past," said Elliott, the fourth overall pick of the draft out of Ohio State. "I'm focused on the now." Here's the now: Elliott is set to do something Hall of Famers Tony Dorsett and Emmitt Smith didn't by starting the opener as a rookie running back for the Cowboys on Sunday against the New York Giants. The last Dallas running back with that distinction is more trivia fodder than anything. It was Derrick Lassie in 1993, when Smith was holding out after helping the Cowboys win the Super Bowl following the 1992 season. The other two rookie starters for Dallas in their openers were Calvin Hill (1969) and Ron Springs (1979).

### Outrunning distractions

At the moment, though, Elliott is having a hard time outrunning distractions. His first training camp was clouded by the domestic violence investigation, although his father strongly denied the allegations in a statement the day they surfaced. While the outcome of the investigation matched the claims from Elliott's representatives, the text exchange raised more doubts. "Honestly I have no idea what you're talking about," Elliott said when asked about the texts. "I haven't seen those." Elliott also said he was confident he had done nothing wrong. "I'm a target, that's what I've realized from all of this," said Elliott, who rose to stardom in college with four rushing touchdowns when the Buckeyes won a national championship on the Cowboys' home field two years ago. "I've got to conduct myself that way so I cannot have any distractions and I can just focus on ball." — AP