

# Pats will pick up option on DT Branch

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The New England Patriots informed defensive tackle Alan Branch they are picking up the \$400,000 option bonus that is due Wednesday.

## NFL NOTEBOOK

The move locks Branch in for the 2016 season. Branch signed a two-year contract with the team last offseason that included the option bonus, which needed to be activated for him to remain with the team.

Branch, 31, started 15 games last season and had two forced fumbles and one sack.

Branch has played nine NFL seasons, the last two with the Patriots. He also played with the Arizona Cardinals, Seattle Seahawks and Buffalo Bills.

## Bills retain G Incognito with three-year deal

The Buffalo Bills and guard Richie Incognito agreed to a three-year contract on Tuesday.

The team confirmed the agreement with Incognito confirmed that the contract was for three years during a conference call with reporters.

Published reports say the deal is worth more than \$15 million.

Incognito, 32, started all 16 games at left guard for the Bills last season and played in his second Pro Bowl.

The productive season came after he missed the entire 2014 campaign, stemming from being disciplined for his part in the Miami Dolphins' bullying scandal involving former NFL offensive tackle Jonathan Martin.

Incognito said he felt like he owed the Bills for taking a chance on him.

"You know the biggest thing for me was they believed in me when no one else would," Incognito said on a conference call. "They gave me an opportunity to come in and re-establish (myself). That was it, you can't put a price tag on that."

"They believed in me, and I believe in them. I am really excited about where we are headed. I really think that we have all the pieces in place to take the next step. One of those keys pieces was keeping the offensive line together and the Buffalo Bills were able to do that."

Incognito was suspended for the final eight games of the 2013 season and was later released by the Dolphins.

Incognito, a third-round pick of the St. Louis Rams in 2005, also briefly played for the Bills in 2009.

## Cowboys' Romo undergoing collarbone surgery

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo was slated to undergo surgery on his left collarbone on Tuesday, according to multiple reports.

Romo, who turns 36 next month, broke the collarbone twice last season when he missed 12 games.

Romo will undergo what is called a "Mumford procedure," a surgery that shaves part of the clavicle to open up space near the shoulder joint.

The recovery period is expected to be 6-to-8 weeks.

Romo has broken the collarbone three times — the other occurring in 2010.

## Denver's DL Jackson eyes \$90M deal from Jacksonville

The Jacksonville Jaguars are on the verge of signing defensive end Malik Jackson away from the Super Bowl champion Denver Broncos.

Jackson confirmed Tuesday he agreed to a deal with the Jaguars

that could be worth \$90 million over six seasons. He can't officially sign the contract until Wednesday when the new league year begins.

The deal puts Jackson in the elite tax bracket of defensive players in the NFL, including Houston Texans defensive end J.J. Watt, Kansas City Chiefs outside linebacker Justin Houston and Miami Dolphins defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh.

Jackson considered an offer from the Broncos for approximately \$11 to 12 million per season recently before opting to pursue offers from other teams.

The Chicago Bears and Oakland Raiders also were pursuing Jackson, who played five defensive line positions in Denver's varied front the past three seasons, including both defensive end spots in a 4-3 and all three positions in the 3-4 front.

Jackson, 26, started every game for the first time in his career last season and was one of the key cogs on the stout Denver defense.

He had 5.5 sacks and broke up seven passes during the 2015 season while being used at both defensive end and defensive tackle. He

recovered a fumble for a touchdown in Super Bowl 50 after Von Miller forced Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton to fumble.

## Panthers re-sign versatile Joe Webb

Joe Webb can be a fifth wide receiver, cover punts and even serve as the emergency quarterback should the Carolina Panthers need him there.

For those reasons and more, the Panthers re-signed Webb to a two-year deal one day before unrestricted free agency invited other suitors.

Webb has been in the NFL for six seasons and was with the Minnesota Vikings for the first four.

Webb was a wide receiver and quarterback at UAB and the Vikings drafted him in the sixth round in 2010 after he posted a 42-inch vertical and 4.43 40 at his pro day at 6-4, 220 pounds. The Vikings tried him at quarterback under head coach Brad Childress but he moved around in 2013, his final season with Minnesota.

The Panthers signed Webb because of his dual-threat skills when quarterback Cam Newton underwent ankle surgery in 2014.

# LeBron discusses educated tweets

WIRE SERVICE REPORTS

CLEVELAND — Over the course of the last week, LeBron James has fired off cryptic tweets ranging from owning up to mistakes to chemistry definitions and striving for the same dreams.

He has referenced Theodore Roosevelt and Pat Riley, complimented his own beautiful mind and, perhaps most importantly, followed up a player of the month win in February with the first weekly honor in March.

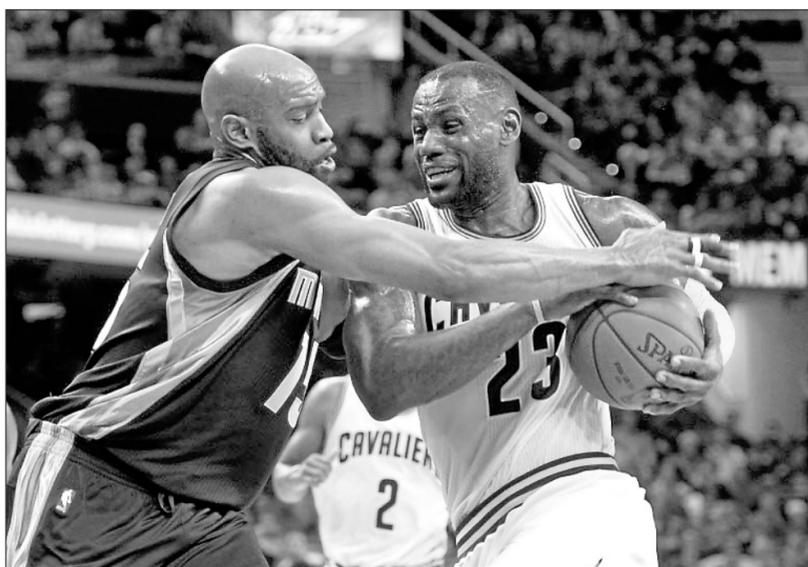
Indeed, James is playing some of his best basketball of the season while simultaneously leaving the media and those within the organization to wonder the same thing: what's it all mean?

"They're for the educated mind," James said of his tweets Monday. "If you have an educated mind, they hit home for you. ... It's nothing between the lines. It's just life."

When James was questioned about his quick trip to Miami last week, he said he understood why folks may get upset by it but responded bluntly, "I don't care." He expanded on that Monday, explaining he stopped caring what people thought of him during his second season with the Heat.

His move to Miami created such a stir that it made James into the league's top villain. He carried that with him throughout his first season in Miami before chucking it all after the Heat lost to the Dallas Mavericks in the NBA Finals.

"It became too much where I was worried about



Cleveland Cavaliers forward LeBron James (right) drives against Memphis Grizzlies guard Vince Carter in the third quarter Monday at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio.

what other people think instead of just making the main thing the main thing," James said, referencing one of Riley's truisms. "That's just playing the game of basketball that I love and being happy about being in this situation. I've got a beautiful family, beautiful teammates and this game of basketball has brought me so much, so the outside noises just really don't affect me."

There are those within the Cavaliers organization who have privately questioned James' motives and don't understand why he takes this approach, whether it has anything to do with his teammates or not.

For his part, Cavs coach

Tyronn Lue has avoided the Twitter nonsense. Lue does not have a Twitter account and is more concerned with his rotation than James' tweeting habits.

"My focus is on getting this team ready to get better every night and win games. I can't focus on the tweets," Lue said. "It's hard enough to win games in this league and for me to focus on that is not fair to our team. I've just got to focus on getting better each night and continue to try to win games."

**NBA NOTES:** The Phoenix Suns have signed forward Chase Budinger and also added forward/center Alan Williams to the roster on a 10-day contract. Buding-

er is in his seventh NBA season, and averaged 4.4 points and 2.5 rebounds in 49 games with the Indiana Pacers earlier this season. The 27-year-old has averaged 8.1 points and 3.1 rebounds in 390 career NBA games. Williams went undrafted out of UC Santa Barbara last summer, and most recently played for Qingdao DoubleStar of the Chinese Basketball Association, where he led the league with an average of 15.4 rebounds in 35 games this season while also averaging 20.8 points per game. The 6-foot-8 Williams also averaged 20.5 points and 11.8 rebounds in four games with the Houston Rockets in Las Vegas over the summer.

# Manning

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More recently a 20-year-old incident while Manning was at the University of Tennessee has resurfaced, unearthed in the media — fresh enough fodder that he was called upon to answer for it at his retirement news conference Monday in Denver.

"I did not do what has been alleged," he said. "And I'm not interested in re-litigating something that happened when I was 19 years old."

Manning admitted he "moonied" another male athlete for laughs in the athletic facility while in the company of a female athletic trainer, who filed a complaint and claimed Manning's buttocks and genitals had made contact with her face. Monday was the first time Manning

specifically has denied that happened. It made you feel sad he even had to, two decades later, on this day.

The NFL continues to investigate the HGH report. The training-room incident never was investigated by police and the university long ago reached a financial settlement with the trainer.

Neither allegation nor the two combined should amount to more than grains of sand on the beachhead of his monumental career. And I don't just mean the two championships and the all-time NFL records for most touchdown passes and most passing yards.

I mean the compartment, the class, the humor, his being a wonderful teammate and in many ways the face of the NFL.

Even if the two allegations are true, that he dabbled in HGH to help get his health back, or that he did some-

thing stupid he regrets at age 19, I don't think either rises to a level of permanent scandal that would override the good or weigh more than an obligatory mention in the assessing of his legacy.

He does not leave the game, en route to a certain role in broadcasting or as a football executive, as a perfect human being unflawed.

He does leave the game as arguably the greatest quarterback ever to play it, and with the overriding reputation as a good guy.

Well beyond Indianapolis and Denver, the popular Manning was an integral, intense yet affable part of America's NFL fixation for 18 seasons, and we'll miss him. It'll be awhile before I see any quarterback crouch at the line of scrimmage without imagining Manning yelling, "Omaha!"

For me the only greater QB, and he's still going

strong, is Tom Brady. I have not forgotten Marino, Brett Favre, Joe Montana, Drew Brees or what Aaron Rodgers may yet become. I have not discounted earlier greats from Otto Graham to Johnny Unitas to John Elway.

Of them all only the whole of Brady's resume might be bigger than Manning's.

Their rivalry was epic, too, and the NFL is poorer for the end of it.

"I'll miss that handshake with Tom Brady," Manning said eloquently on Monday.

Brady in turn said of Manning, to Peter King's Monday Morning Quarterback website: "Who has lived up to expectations year after year after year as well as Peyton? He's done it so gracefully, so admirably. He set the standard for how to play the quarterback position."

We'll leave it at that, because who would know better than Brady?

homer run to spark Simpson.

Casey Lopes led the Eagles with two hits, and Lyndsay Merrill and Alannah Healy each had one.

In the second game, Defiance struck early with two runs each in the first and second innings to take the win.

Kaity Kuhn paced Defiance with two RBI doubles, and Megan Warren had one.

Merrill and Mallory Conary led the Eagles with two hits each, and Kirsten Chipman and Alice Kennedy each had one.

# Miami baseball team hands UM 8th loss

CORAL GABLES, Florida — The Miami Hurricanes rallied for four runs in the seventh inning to beat the University of Maine Black Bears 6-2 in baseball action Tuesday night at Mark Light Stadium.

The Hurricanes took a **COLLEGE BASEBALL**

2-1 lead into the bottom of the seventh and then secured the win with the four runs, highlighted by Willie Abreu's two-run single to right. Brandon Lopez added an RBI double, and Jacob Heyward's infield single produced the other run.

UMaine slipped to 3-8, and Miami improved to 10-2.

UMaine sophomore right-hander Justin Courtney (1-1) turned in a solid effort in the loss as he gave up two runs (one unearned) and six hits. He struck out three and walked three while throwing 96 pitches.

Freshman Jeremy Pena put the Black Bears on the scoreboard in the first inning when he cranked a home run to left.

Freshman Colin Ridley's two-out single through the left side produced UMaine's other run in the eighth. Freshman Danny Casals scored the run after leading off the inning with a single.

Ridley finished with three hits to pace the Black Bears, and Pena had two.

Heyward and Christopher Barr each had three hits for the Hurricanes, and Randy Batista drove in two runs.

## Mt. St. Joseph 5, Husson 2

At Chain of Lakes Park in Winter Haven, Florida, the Mount St. Joseph Lions rallied for three runs in the top of the 14th inning to defeat the Husson Eagles of Bangor.

Zak Farmer singled home the winning run, and the Lions of Cincinnati added two more runs on Nathan Hunter's RBI double and Austin Richey's RBI single.

The Eagles took a 2-1 lead in the eighth when Mike Wong and Alex Chapman each scored on an outfield error.

Wong sparked Husson (0-3) with three hits.

On Monday at Lake Myrtle Park in Auburndale, Coe swept Husson 10-1 and 5-4.

Coe's Thomas Schaedel scattered seven hits while walking just two and striking out nine to earn the win in the first game.

J.T. Whitten recorded two singles, a double and an RBI to lead Husson and Alex Chapman singled twice.

In the second game, Ben Larison recorded three singles and two RBIs to lead Coe by Husson.

Chapman, Rebar, Whitten and Zach Sugar each had a single and an RBI for Husson.

# Lions star receiver Calvin Johnson retires from NFL

REUTERS

Detroit Lions wide receiver Calvin Johnson is walking away from the NFL and into retirement at age 30.

Johnson informed the Lions on Tuesday, one day before his \$24 million salary cap charge would have gone on the 2016 ledger for Detroit, he was ready to retire.

"After much prayer, thought and discussion with loved ones, I have made the difficult decision to retire from the Lions and pro football. I have played my last game of football," Johnson said in a statement.

"Let me assure you that this was not an easy or hasty decision. As I stated, I, along with those closest to me, have put a lot of time, deliberation and prayer into this decision and I truly am at peace with it.

"I also want you to know that I have the utmost respect and admiration for the game of football. It has provided so much for me and

my family and I will be forever grateful to the game."

While the Lions gain \$11.1 million in cap space with move, they subtract a vital cog to the offense.

The Lions announced that the two sides settled contractual issues, but no details were immediately available on the settlement. Johnson made \$107 million in football salary and bonuses with the Lions.

"A harsh reality of our business is that great players like Calvin Johnson do retire and we all understand that no one player could ever replace Calvin," general manager Bob Quinn said Tuesday. "But rather than dwell on that reality, we should, instead, truly appreciate what a remarkable talent we have had the privilege of watching."

Losing a star seemingly in his physical prime is not new to Detroit sports fans. Hall of Fame running back Barry Sanders walked away at age 31.

# Softball

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Pitcher Annie Kennedy then induced a pop-out to Harvey to secure the win. Kennedy (1-0) earned the victory after going 8a... innings while allowing six hits and three runs, but not walking a batter.

Meghan Royle sparked the UMaine offense with a three-run homer in the second inning and an RBI in the sixth.

Harvey, Derrick and Carlson each finished with three hits, including a double for Harvey. Derrick, Kirsten Niland and Maddie Decker each drove in a run.

Sam Pederson singled twice and drove in four runs to lead Penn. Sydne Krzmann added three singles, and Leah Allen smacked a bases-loaded triple.

In the second game, Penn right-hander Alexis Sargent (2-1) shut out the Black Bears to earn the win. She struck out seven and walked three.

Jurie Joyner broke a scoreless game with a two-run single in the sixth. Pederson had three hits.

Carlson, Janelle Bouchard, Chole Douglass and Royle each singled for the Black Bears.

## Husson drops two

At Kissimmee, Florida, Husson dropped two games on Monday, 3-0 to Simpson College and 4-0 to Defiance College.

In the first game, Rachel Guessford hit a three-run

# Dexter

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Bernatchez said it will take Dexter a while to adapt to Division I because it is a "huge jump."

"But I have no doubt she will adapt to their style of play and do what she has to do to be a strong contributor," she said.

"I have to work on my speed. The Division I level is so much faster. I have to do weight training year-round and work on my stickwork as much as I can," Dexter said.

Dexter coming to UMaine in fall of 2017 is contingent upon her being accepted into the institution and meeting NCAA eligibility requirements.