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Peyton Manning

Address Announcing Retirement from Professional Football

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In my very first NFL game, I completed my first pass to Hall of Fame running back Marshall Faulk.

I threw a touchdown in that same game to Marvin Harrison, who would be inducted into the Hall of Fame this August.

The quarterback for our opponent, the Miami Dolphins, was, after my dad, my favorite player -- Hall of Famer Dan Marino, who on the first third down of the game completed a 25-yard "skinny post." And it was the damndest throw I'd ever seen.

Later, I completed a pass to tight end Marcus Pollard down the middle and somebody hit me really hard and after I got up I told myself, "I know I can play in this league."



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Later in that struggling season, we played in and lost to Baltimore. It was the first time that the Colts had returned to Baltimore since they had moved back in 1984. We didn't exactly get a warm reception that day. [The] fans were screaming at me and I kept thinking, "Hey, I was only eight years old then. Get off of my back."

I had met him once before but when the game was over I had the chance to shake Johnny Unitas's hand. He told me, "Peyton, you stay at it. I'm pulling for you."

Well, I have stayed at it. I've stayed at it for 18 years and I hope that old Number 19 is up there, with his flat top and maybe his black high tops on, and I hope he knows that I have stayed at it and maybe he's even a little proud of me. There is just something about 18 years. Eighteen is a good number and today I retire from pro football.

I want to thank the people of New Orleans and south Louisiana. New Orleans is my hometown and of course they support their own team, the Saints, but they also support their own, and that city and state have backed me from the start.

Almost 19 years ago to the day, I announced my decision to forgo the draft and stay at the University of Tennessee for my senior year. It was one of the smartest decisions I've ever made. I cherished my time in Knoxville, especially my senior year. And I want Vol fans everywhere to know the unique role that you've played in my life.

Thank you to the Indianapolis Colts organization and all the fans across this country. You can't fathom how much I enjoyed my 14 years there or the warmth that my family feels for you. I'd be wrong not to mention Jim Irsay, Bill Polian, some great coaches, support staff and a host of wonderful Colts teammates, many of whom will be lifelong friends.

When I was drafted by the Colts, Indianapolis was a basketball and a car racing town. But it didn't take long for the Colts to convert the city and state of Indiana into football evangelists.



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We ended my rookie season 3-13 and in the process I set the NFL rookie record for interceptions, a record that I still hold today. Every year I pull for a rookie quarterback to break that record -- Andrew Luck, Matthew Stafford, Eli Manning, Cam Newton. I still kid Eli that he would have broken it if he would have started all 16 games.

In the beginning of my time in Indy, the team's struggles were agonizing. My grandfather would call me weekly to ask if his favorite announcers, John Madden and Pat Summerall, would be broadcasting our game. "Paw Paw," I'd say, "we're only 2-8 right now. We're playing the 3-7 Bengals. Madden and Summerall don't broadcast those kinds of games."

Fast-forward to my second year when we had gotten things going a little bit. We were playing the Dallas Cowboys and Troy Aikman Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin, and Deion Sanders. I called Paw Paw: "Guess what? Madden and Summerall are broadcasting the game." He said, "I can't believe it." He was elated and he was very proud and we beat the Cowboys that week, and we let the world know [that] the Colts had arrived.

Make no mistake about it. We were coming and we went on to do some phenomenal things, like winning at least 12 games seven years in a row; and of course winning Super Bowl XLI. And I was truly honored and proud to be a part of it.

There's a saying that goes: "Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he could be, and he will become what he should be."¹

When I visited Denver four years ago, if John Elway had sat me down and said:

"Peyton, here's what we're going to do. We're going to win over 50 games, win four straight division championships, lose only three division games in four years and none will be on the road. We'll beat the Patriots in two championship games. You're going to win NFL Comeback Player of the Year, another MVP; your offense will set single-season passing records; you'll break a couple more all-time records, and we'll go to a couple of Super Bowls."

-- I think I would have taken that deal.



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John, you did tell me that, didn't you?

Grateful is the word that comes to my mind when thinking of the Denver Broncos. I want to thank Pat Bowlen and his family, Joe Ellis, John Elway, John Fox, Gary Kubiak and their staffs for -- and all the support people in this great organization. To all of my Denver teammates: Thank you for what you've done for this old quarterback; and of course my gratitude to the Broncos fans everywhere.

Over my NFL career, I've had five head coaches who have helped me become better at my craft and helped me become a better human being: Jim Mora, Tony Dungy, Jim Caldwell, John Fox, Gary Kubiak.

While I've obviously changed teams, I've had the same football representation for almost two decades. I owe Tom Condon many thanks. He has represented me with class at every juncture and he'll always be a great friend.

I want to thank a tremendous group of friends who've supported my football career and been at my side at games from high school to Tennessee, Indy, and through that incredible Broncos' Super Bowl win last month. You know who you are and what you mean to me.

And there is no way to measure or properly express what a family like mine can mean. Mom, Dad, Cooper, Eli, extended family, you are the best. And Ashley, your support is as potent a motivator as any man can have.

Ashley's and my kids, Marshall and Mosley, have only been around for a couple of years but they have changed my life forever. A week before the Super Bowl our daughter Mosley asked me, 'Daddy, is this the last game?'

"Yes, Mosley, it's the last game of the season."

"I sure do want you to win that trophy."



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"I do, too, Mosley. And that's what we're going to try to do."

Then she asked, "Daddy, is this the last game ever?" And that's just when I shook my head in amazement because I was thinking, "Mort [Chris Mortensen] and Adam Schefter had gotten to my 5-year-old daughter to cultivate a new source."²

When someone thoroughly exhausts an experience they can't help but revere it. I revere football. I love the game. So you don't have to wonder if I'll miss it. Absolutely. Absolutely I will. Our children are small now, but as they grow up, we're going to teach them to enjoy the little things in life because one day they will look back and discover that those really were the big things. So here are the seemingly little things that when I look into my rearview mirror, have grown much bigger.

I'm going to miss a steak dinner at St. Elmo's in Indianapolis after a win; my battles with players named Lynch, Lewis, Thomas, Bruschi, Fletcher, Dawkins, Seau, Urlacher, Polamalu, Harrison, Woodson, and Reed; and with coaches like Fisher, Ryan, Belichick, Kiffin, Phillips, Rivera, LeBeau, Crennel, Capers, Lewis, the late Jim Johnson, and so many more. I always felt like I was playing against that middle linebacker or that safety or that defensive coach.

I'll miss figuring out blitzes with Jeff Saturday; Reggie sitting on top of the bench next to me; and perfecting a fake handoff to Edgerrin James. I'll miss Demaryius Thomas telling me that he loved me and thanking me for coming to Denver after every touchdown I threw to him.

I'll miss putting in a play with Tom Moore and Adam Gase that ends in a touchdown on Sunday. On Fridays I'll miss picking out the game balls with my equipment guys; and talking football with the broadcast crews before the game; and afterwards I'll miss recapping the game with my dad; and checking to see if the Giants won and calling Eli as we're both on our team buses.



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I'll miss that handshake with Tom Brady and I'll miss the plane rides after a big win with 53 teammates standing in the aisles, laughing, and celebrating during the whole flight. I'll miss playing in -- in front of so many great fans both at home and on the road. And I'll even miss the Patriots fans in Foxborough, and they should miss me because they sure did get a lot of wins off of me.

And this is important, football fans everywhere need to know how much they've meant to me over the years. Fans, you're at the core of what makes this game remarkable. I've received more letters from you than I can count -- fan letters that have touched me, made me think, laugh and moved me to act.

I've learned a lot through my mistakes, stumbles, and losses in football. I've also learned this game is a mighty platform that has given me a voice that can echo well beyond the game. Football has taught me not to be led by obstructions and setbacks but instead to be led by dreams. Due to some good genes, I'm smart enough to know that those lessons can enrich who I am and where I go from here.

I'm totally convinced that the end of my football career is just the beginning of something I haven't even discovered yet. Life is not shrinking for me -- it's morphing into a whole new world of possibilities.

Pundits will speculate that my effort and drive over the past 18 years were about mastery and about working to master every aspect of the NFL game. Well, don't believe them, because every moment, every drop of sweat, every bleary-eyed night of preparation, every note I took, and every frame of film I watched was about one thing: reverence for this game.

When I look back on my NFL career, I'll know without a doubt that I gave everything I had to help my teams walk away with a win. There were other players who were more talented, but there was no one could out-prepare me, and because of that I have no regrets.

There's a Scripture reading, 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."



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Well, I've fought a good fight.

I've finished my football race -- and after 18 years, it's time.

God bless all of you -- and God bless football.

¹ Attributed, perhaps incorrectly, to Ralph Waldo Emerson; also attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

² Relatedly, Mortensen was the first reporter to break the Manning retirement news.