

## Matt Ryan barked out a play

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[Womens Adam Humphries Jersey](#) , took the snap and zipped a pass to the receiver who played his college ball at Alabama. Nope, it wasn't Julio Jones. He's sitting out the team's voluntary offseason program. So it was Calvin Ridley — a first-round draft pick from the Crimson Tide — who got a chance to shine during a 90-minute practice Wednesday. But, for a team with Super Bowl aspirations, it was impossible to ignore the absence of No. 11. So, where's Julio? The Falcons say it's no big deal, even as they talk constantly about the importance building camaraderie and trust in each other during the voluntary offseason workouts, a big part of coach Dan Quinn's much-ballyhooed "Brotherhood." Jones said his absence has nothing to do with any hard feelings toward the only team he's played with in the NFL, but he's vague about his reasons for staying away and it seems fairly obvious that he's trying to send a message about his desire for a new contract. While Jones still has three seasons remaining on the last deal he signed — a five-year, \$71.3 million extension with \$47 million in guaranteed money — his average salary is now less than at least a half-dozen receivers around the league. Most tellingly, recent deals with Tampa Bay's Mike Evans and Cleveland's Jarvis Landry seemed to set a whole new financial bar for the NFL's top pass catchers, a list that certainly includes Jones. In addition, he surely took note when the Falcons made quarterback Matt Ryan the league's NFL's first \$100 million man , agreeing to a new deal that assures the quarterback of at least that much in guaranteed money and could average out to as much as \$30 million annually over five seasons. Rarely flustered, Ryan got a bit testy when asked about missing out on a chance to work with his favorite receiver during OTAs. "We'll have our chances to work together," the QB said. "I'm not going to go into it more than that. It's not really anybody else's business." Jones has gone silent on social media and hasn't spoken in months to the Atlanta media, but he did provide some reassuring words to Falcons fans when the gossip site TMZ caught up with him last weekend as he was leaving a swanky restaurant in West Hollywood. "Everyone wants a story right now. There's no story to be told," Jones insisted. "I'm just working on getting myself better. I'm just working on myself right now. That's all that is. There's no bad blood between me and the team or anything like that." Jones insisted that he plans to remain with the Falcons for the rest of his career, echoing a sentiment expressed by owner Arthur Blank. "Everybody on the outside (is) trying to look in and trying to destroy what we built there," Jones said. "I'm not going nowhere. I'll be there. I love the team. I love the organization. I love everybody there. I'm good." Still, Jones' decision to skip OTAs has been a major topic of conversation around Atlanta, with fans and sports talk radio weighing in almost daily on his future with a team that reached the Super Bowl during the 2016 season and the second round of the playoffs last season. Everyone can rest easy, Quinn insisted. Jones has assured his coach that he'll be at the team's mandatory minicamp, which is scheduled for June 12-14. "The guys who are really close to him, obviously they keep up," Quinn said outside the locker room after practice. "It's not like they don't hang out and talk on the phone and do stuff together. They may not be spending the amount of time here [Authentic Justin Evans Jersey](#) , in the building, that they normally do. But that doesn't mean they don't spend time away from here. So, no issues on our end. "I know he's working really hard. I've had contact with him, obviously. We can't wait to get him back, here, with the guys. But he's really putting good work in. I think we'll see the results of that work, hopefully soon." The 29-year-old Jones is a huge weapon in the Falcons' offense , using his rare combination of speed, size and power to shake off constant double-teams. Last season, he had 88 catches for 1,444 yards — his fourth straight season with at least 80 receptions and 1,400 receiving yards. In 2015, he had one of the greatest seasons ever by an NFL receiver — 136 catches (tied for the second most in league history behind Marvin Harrison's 143) and 1,871 yards (surpassed only by Calvin Johnson's record of 1,954) . Ryan certainly recognizes the bond he has with his favorite receiver. They've been together since 2011. They won't be any trouble getting back in sync, Ryan said confidently. As soon as Jones shows up, that is. "No concern," Ryan said. "He's always been extremely well

prepared coming into seasons, going into games. Talk about being on the same page: we've played together for a long time. When he's healthy and he feels good , like he does right now ... it's very easy to get on the same page. He's so talented. So, we're fine."Follow Paul Newberry on Twitter at [pnewberry1963](#) . His work can be found at [s://apnews/search/paul%20newberry](#) The NFL has been full of surprises this season, and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers may have pulled off one of the bigger staff moves by firing defensive coordinator following his team's loss to the Atlanta Falcons.Things are only going to heat up from here as we have a lot of good football to look forward to, but here are my observations after Week 6 of the NFL's regular season.OFFSIDES: The Chiefs are the Super Bowl favorites out of the AFC.Photo by Jim Rogash/Getty ImagesI'm not alone in saying this coming into the Sunday Night Football matchup between the Kansas City Chiefs and New England Patriots.In fact, I was so confident the Chiefs would win in Foxboro and stake their claim as the next challenger for the AFC throne I picked them in our weekly game picks.Alas, I was wrong. But man

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, I don't know if I've ever had more fun watching myself be wrong before in my life!However, I will say this. As happy as Patriots fans have to be coming out of Week 6 with the win, they cannot be comfortable.Granted, if New England gets their way, the next time they see this team it'll be a lot colder and there'll be slippery white stuff on the ground which will not help Mahomes' game whatsoever.Still, the younger and sexier Chiefs are coming for the crown Tom Brady. They may not have knocked it off completely just yet, but they're close.FALSE START: The AFC South is going to be much improved in 2018.Photo by Adam Glanzman/Getty ImagesAndrew Luck is coming back! Deshaun Watson is coming back! The Titans were a playoff team! The Jaguars almost - and should have - made it to the Super Bowl! The reign of the AFC South is about to begin!Not so fast.Six weeks in and the division leading Tennessee Titans have an impressive record of 3-3 and have lost two in a row. Oh, and Marcus Mariota looks worse than ever.Luck is back, and not having much of it as his Colts have wobbled their way to a 1-5 record.The Jags, well, just got smoked by the Dallas Cowboys and their elite offense consisting of Ezekiel Elliott, Dak Prescott and Connor McGregor?Houston has a lot of problems, but their the only team in the division not on a losing streak. In fact, they've won three in a row.This was the year the AFC North was supposed to unseat the AFC West as the conference's most competitive division from top to bottom. Nobody thought it'd be because they'd all play down to each other though.FREE PLAY: Mark Duffner takes over as Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive coordinator.Dale Zanine-USA TODAY SportsThere are 32 defensive coordinator positions in the NFL. Getting one is a rare opportunity. Getting another is even tougher.Mark Duffner is getting his third crack at being an NFL defensive coordinator seventeen seasons after his last chance when he was the DC for the Cincinnati Bengals from 2001-2002.So, what should we expect? We have no idea!It's been seventeen years since Duffner was a defensive coordinator. Seventeen years ago today, I was nineteen. I have forgotten more stuff I've learned about life in general than I knew at that stage of my life.However, for the fun of it, I did go back and watch Duffner's Bengals to see what his defense looked like back then. And it just so happened he played against an opponent near and dear to my heart. The 2001-2002 Tampa Bay Buccaneers.What I saw was plenty of blitzing coming out of the Bengals' four-man front. Plenty of zone and man coverage with the safeties playing a bit more aggressively than Bucs fans are used to seeing as of late.In 2001, Cincinnati had the 14th ranked team in the NFL in opponent scoring and allowed the twelfth fewest yards passing on the year.Had the Bengals not had one of the worst offenses that season, it's possible the team would have made the playoffs. Cincinnati was able to come out on top of the Bucs in their 2001 contest and we all know what happened the next season for Tampa Bay.The team site has more on Duffner as fans anxiously await the debut of what everyone hopes will be a more effective defensive unit. Football has changed quite a bit since the last time Duffner steered the ship for an NFL defense, but if his history is any indicator, we might expect to at least see a more aggressive scheme than we have up to this point.

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