

# Here's how the Broncos can bring home a win from Charlotte

Jeff Legwold

The Denver Post

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For nine seasons, John Fox was the Carolina Panthers coach. He took them to playoffs four times, to two NFC championship games and one Super Bowl (XXXVIII).

But after a roster reconstruction led to a 2-14 finish in 2010, Fox's contract was not renewed with the team. He has spent the past week saying Sunday's affair in Charlotte, N.C., was no big deal, that it was "just another game."

But his players don't really believe that nor do many people in the league who know him.

So, with a three-game winning streak in hand and Peyton Manning behind center, here's how Fox can bring the Broncos home with the win he wants too.

- **Keep the Panthers away from Manning.** Much like the Bengals, the Panthers haven't always looked efficient on defense, but they can get after the quarterback.

They are tied for seventh in the league in sacks with 24 — with the Broncos and Minnesota — and have done some of their best work against the better teams they have played. They sacked Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan seven times and got Chicago's Jay Cutler six times.

They usually rush four in most cases, but the offenses that haven't handled defensive tackle Dwan Edwards have allowed Greg Hardy and Charles Johnson too much room on the outside.

They also surrender some big plays. Ryan still threw for 369 yards and three touchdowns in a Falcons' win despite the pressure, while the Panthers held Cutler in check a little better until he threw for 104 of his 186 passing yards in the fourth quarter of the Bears' comeback win.

- **Throw out of the heavy formations.** The Panthers try to rotate their safeties, depending on down and distance, with Haruki Nakamura coming out on passing downs and Sherrod Martin going in on passing downs.

A team that can line up heavy — two tight ends or two backs — and throw the ball efficiently, as the Broncos can, could find itself throwing against formations built to stop the run, with the better coverage players on the sideline.

So, if the Broncos flip the script, throw some on early downs, get a little play action, they could find a big play or two down the middle of the field. The Panthers also start a rookie at cornerback in Josh Morgan, who figures to get some attention from Manning from time to time.

The Panthers do prefer plenty of zone coverages, so Manning will have to show a little patience along the way and take the underneath routes when available.

- **Keep Cam Newton in check.** The Panthers have used Newton out of a read-option look a little less in recent games, but the threat is there and the Broncos must play with discipline.

Especially linebacker Von Miller and defensive end Elvis Dumervil. They have to hold the edges and trust the players behind them will take the running back.

Newton had a 40-yard run against the Saints earlier this season when both Saints defenders went for the pitch man, which left Newton free to cut up the field for the big gain.

- **Take Steve Smith out of the mix.** Newton looks to Smith far more, especially if he's been put on the move by the rush, than any other receiver. Smith has been targeted 70 times this season, including 45 times in the last four games alone.

The Broncos figure to put Champ Bailey across from Smith much of the time, especially since the wide receiver Newton has targeted next most is Brandon LaFell, at 36 times.

When Newton can't get the ball to Smith, he's usually sending it tight end Greg Olsen's way — 53 targets this season.

# Broncos CB Tracy Porter hopes he's medically cleared soon to practice

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
November 10, 2012

## Porter ruled out for fourth straight game

Broncos cornerback Tracy Porter did not practice Friday and was formally ruled out for Sunday's game against the Panthers. He was scheduled for a doctor's appointment Friday as he continues to try to return to the practice field in hopes of regaining some playing time once he's been cleared medically.

"It's a coaches' decision," Porter said before leaving the Broncos' Dove Valley complex. "But I'm going now to get checked out. ... I feel good and hope to get back out there. But I think they feel pretty comfortable about the situation and the guys they have playing right now, and we're winning.

"I just want to get back and get to work and see how it goes."

The Panthers game will be the fourth consecutive Porter has missed since he experienced similar symptoms last month that he had before he suffered a seizure in August — rapid heartbeat, dizziness and lightheadedness.

Broncos coach John Fox said this week Porter had not suffered another seizure in recent weeks but had "just small symptoms."

Chris Harris has started the past three games at right cornerback for the Broncos and will start Sunday. Tony Carter has played in the nickel (five defensive backs) and dime (six defensive backs).

Porter signed a one-year deal with the Broncos and will be an unrestricted free agent at season's end.

**A tough go.** Fox had a good nine-year run as Panthers coach — four playoff appearances, including one Super Bowl trip — but his last season was forgettable. Fox's Panthers went 2-14 in 2010 in the midst of a massive roster makeover. Fox essentially knew he would not be back with the team the next year.

Carolina started 0-5 and had a seven-game losing streak as well.

Asked how tough that year was, Fox said: "Anytime you have a losing record, it's tough on you in this business. This game's only fun when you win, and like anybody that's ever experienced (losing), it's not a lot of fun."

**On a roll.** Broncos linebacker Von Miller has six of his nine sacks in the past four games. He got Patriots quarterback Tom Brady twice, Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers once and Bengals quarterback Andy Dalton three times Sunday.

Miller's 17 tackles for loss are tied for the NFL with the Texans' J.J. Watt.

"He's becoming more of a complete player," Fox said. "Some guys don't work on their weaknesses; they just kind of roll around on their strengths. I think in his case, he's worked on some of the things he didn't do as much in college — that is mostly coverage and how he fits in to the cover scheme."

Panthers quarterback Cam Newton has been sacked 17 times this season.

**Injuries.** The Broncos formally ruled guard Chris Kuper (ankle) out for Sunday's game. Kuper is expected to miss at least two to four games. Wide receiver Eric Decker (thigh), who had been limited in Wednesday's practice, went fully Thursday and Friday and will play.

**Footnotes.** The Broncos left for Charlotte, N.C., after Friday's practice and will practice Saturday in the Charlotte area. ... Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning has faced the Panthers three times in his career, including a one-touchdown, two-interception game in the season finale of his rookie year in 1998. He has thrown four touchdown passes and three interceptions combined in the four games and hasn't faced Carolina since 2007.

# Buccaneers RB Doug Martin gets a second look from Broncos fan

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
November 10, 2012

*Today's question about the Broncos comes from John B. in Idaho. To submit a question for consideration, send an e-mail to The Denver Post's Jeff Legwold.*

**Q:** Looking what a former (Boise St.) Bronco is doing, I'm wondering did the Broncos have interest in Doug Martin before the draft?

**A:** John, in however Martin's career turns out in the NFL he will always carry a little what-if for the Broncos along the way.

The Buccaneers took Martin in the first round of last April's draft — 31st overall — with a draft pick that came from the Broncos just minutes before they made the pick. Overall, the Broncos traded down twice in the first round of last April's draft, with the trade with the Buccaneers being the second one.

The Broncos traded the No. 31 pick and the No. 126 pick (a fourth-rounder) they had received from the New England Patriots to the Buccaneers and received the 36th pick (a second-rounder) and the 101st pick (a fourth-rounder).

They used the 36th pick to select Derek Wolfe, who has started every game this season — only Elvis Dumervil has played more snaps in the defensive line — and has three sacks (tied for third on the team) with 25 tackles.

With the 101st pick, they selected cornerback Omar Bolden, who has played largely on special teams, but did get his first snaps on defense of the season last week against the Bengals.

Using the draft chart most teams use, the Broncos likely didn't get quite enough value on the points system in the trade. But their logic was solid in that they were sticking to their board.

On their board they had just over 20 players graded as first-round picks. So to pick a player they didn't have graded in the opening round would have meant they didn't stick to the data they had compiled in their months of preparation.

That said they were very high on Martin as a prospect and had scouted him extensively.

I had Martin a little higher than most teams, but some of that is my own bias when I try to put together my draft rankings. At times, I will have some backs higher on the board than many teams because I do give a little bonus for players I believe can contribute immediately.

And running back is a position where a player can contribute immediately, especially college running backs with NFL size and speed that have averaged at least five yards a carry over a season or two. Martin weighed in at 223 pounds at the scouting combine and had legitimate 4.5 speed in the 40-yard dash.

He also averaged 5.9, 6.3 and 4.9 in seasons at Boise when he had over 100 carries. Martin was also a quality receiver in college (28 catches in '11), blocked well in blitz pick-up and played great on special teams. He was voted the team's most physical player on special teams in '08.

Martin also was a good enough tackler to have played some defensive back in '09 when his team had injuries and forced a fumble. So, he may have been one of the most well-rounded players on the board.

Martin was at No. 26 in my top 100 as the second running back on the board behind Alabama's Trent Richardson. David Wilson, who the Giants selected at No. 32, was the third running back in my top 100, at No. 39 overall.

Whenever a player like Martin has a game like he did last Sunday — he became the first player in NFL history with three touchdown runs of at least 40 yards in the same game and is now second in the league in yards from scrimmage with 1,039 — there will be some hindsight at work for every team that passed on him, including the Broncos. That's just the nature of the draft.

Personnel people around the league also believe the Broncos got a keeper in Wolfe, and Wolfe has had the kind of every-down impact the Broncos had hoped for.

The Broncos had him above Martin on the board and trusted their board when they made the pick. That approach will always lead to success over the long haul, despite some sting from time to time in the short term, for the teams that are proficient at setting the board.

It doesn't mean they won't wish they had another player or two along the way, but it does mean they didn't reach or stray too far from the work they put in during the months leading up to the draft.

And in the end, Wolfe and Martin will appear on plenty of all-rookie teams.

# Broncos' Danny Trevathan makes it all-Kentucky at nickel linebacker

Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post  
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With Peyton Manning taking over for running threat Tim Tebow at quarterback, the Broncos no longer need a wildcat offense. But Denver's "Wildcat-Wildcat" nickel defense is becoming a force behind linebackers Wesley Woodyard and Danny Trevathan.

Woodyard, a fifth-year pro, and the rookie Trevathan are proud Kentucky Wildcats. Both earned all-Southeastern Conference honors, which isn't easy when Alabama, LSU and other traditional powers seem to fill most of the spots.

"Danny was a great player at Kentucky, but I'm not sure he had as many tackles as I did," Woodyard said with a grin.

Trevathan came close. He finished with 374 stops, just shy of Woodyard's 395. Woodyard had completed his eligibility at Kentucky before Trevathan arrived in Lexington.

"But I remember coaches saying they were recruiting him to play the 'will' (weakside) linebacker spot that I played," Woodyard recalled. "At Kentucky, that position is going to have a lot of chances to make tackles."

Their ability to find the ball has carried over to the professional level.

Woodyard was named AFC defensive player of the week after recording 13 tackles, a sack and a forced fumble in the Oct. 28 victory over New Orleans. Trevathan had been used primarily on special teams until drawing more work on defense the past two weeks. He had a career-best six tackles and a sack last weekend at Cincinnati.

Woodyard, at 6-foot, 229 pounds, starts, with Trevathan, 6-1, 232, coming off the bench. Both play in the nickel package on passing downs, with Von Miller shifting from linebacker to a position that resembles a pass-rushing defensive end.

Trevathan has made the most of his opportunities.

"Danny is an instinctive football player," Broncos defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio said. "He's got some quickness, and he's done a nice job, whether it be covering a tight end, covering a back — he's shown the ability to get those things done and against some tough matchups."

The past two weeks, Trevathan has faced two of the NFL's most talented and athletic tight ends in New Orleans' Jimmy Graham and Cincinnati's Jermaine Gresham. Trevathan did not look out of place. His primary assignment on Sunday at Carolina is covering tight end Greg Olsen (6-5, 255), who ranks second among Panthers receivers in receptions this season with 34.

"Covering guys like that is something big to ask of a linebacker," said Broncos tight end Jacob Tamme, another Kentucky alumnus. "But Danny has stepped right in to accept the challenge and keep fighting. This is the time of year when a lot of rookies start to hit that 'wall' a little bit. But Danny is improving every week."

Trevathan said when he arrived at Kentucky he knew little about Woodyard but soon began trying to emulate him.

"I started watching a lot of film on him to try to get my game to his level," Trevathan said. "Our styles are a lot alike. That's why we can play off each other (in the nickel). Wesley is a great leader, a great player to be out there with, especially with his enthusiasm and the way he plays the game."

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### **Danny Trevathan file**

**Position:** Outside linebacker

**Height:** 6-foot-1

**Weight:** 232 pounds

**Hometown:** Leesburg, Fla.

**College:** Kentucky

**Draft:** Sixth round (no. 188 overall), 2012

**2012 stats:** Eight games, no starts, 16 tackles (eight solo), one sack, one pass defended

# Broncos' Peyton Manning appreciative of offensive line sack streak

Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post  
November 10, 2012

Nobody had to remind Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning on Wednesday that Denver has not allowed a sack during the past three games.

"I appreciate the effort," Manning said of Denver's offensive line. "Certainly every quarterback appreciates when you don't get sacked. And I really didn't get hit a whole lot against Cincinnati.

"I appreciate the effort those guys have made week after week. (Because of injuries) they've used some different guys. And whoever is in there has stepped up to the plate."

Manning said the hard work in practice has paid off.

"We spend a lot of time together in practice and in watching film together," he said. "The important thing between a quarterback and the offensive line is constant communication.

"So we treat practice like a game, meetings like a game. We talk and try to be on the same page, especially when you're going to play on the road (with the crowd noise)."

Denver's upcoming opponent, Carolina, ranks second in the NFC in sacks per play so it may be strength vs. strength on Sunday in Charlotte.

"They have active guys up front," Manning said. "And most of their sacks have come when they (just) rushed four, which tells you something. I think we have a real challenge up front running the ball and pass protecting."

# Healthy Decker reaching new heights with Manning

Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
November 9, 2012

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Eric Decker spent his first year in the NFL recovering from a foot injury that ended his college career and his second season catching an average of two passes a game from Tim Tebow.

Now, he's Peyton Manning's top target, and a busy one at that.

The Denver Broncos' third-year pro leads the team with 46 receptions and seven touchdown catches, all of which have come over the last five games as the Broncos have begun revving up under their resurgent quarterback.

That's roughly the same production Decker had all of last season, when he led the team with 44 catches but scored half of his eight touchdowns before Kyle Orton lost his starting job by Week 6.

With 583 yards so far, Decker is the biggest beneficiary of Manning's arrival in Denver. He's on pace for his first 1,000-yard season, a stark contrast to last year, when he caught just 14 passes once the Broncos dusted off the old read-option offense to fit Tebow's unusual skill set.

Manning and Decker wasted no time hooking up at local high school football fields to begin working on their timing this spring, and they've spent countless extra hours after practice honing that synergy.

"I think in any relationship, whether it's a significant other or a teammate, the more time you get the better it always develops," Decker said. "And I think the more we get on the same page, the more we understand nonverbal cues, certain routes and how to read defenses. All of those things, you can use to your advantage offensively. We're definitely clicking more as a unit offensively."

It's not quite the chemistry Manning built up with Reggie Wayne or Marvin Harrison in Indianapolis — or the comfort zone he maintains with Broncos slot receiver Brandon Stokley, a former teammate of his with the Colts, for that matter — but it's getting there.

"I see a big body, a good athlete, a good football player, a smart football player who understands what Peyton's looking for and what he's looking at," said Carolina coach Ron Rivera, whose Panthers (2-6) host the Broncos (5-3) Sunday.

Manning leads the league in passer rating and is smack dab in the middle of the conversation for another MVP trophy, and a big reason is Decker, his 6-foot-3, 218-pound wide receiver who was kept out of the end zone during the team's 1-2 start but who hasn't been denied a touchdown since the Houston Texans shut him out on Sept. 23.

Demaryius Thomas is also having a big year. His 45 catches for a team-leading 756 yards are already career highs and he's tied his career best with four TD receptions so far.

Decker, who's been targeted a team-high 69 times, and Thomas have combined for 1,339 yards receiving, most by any tandem in the NFL.

"Experience is your best teacher, so I think I do know more about my teammates and about what certain guys like, and how a guy's body moves and when he's going to come out of a break," Manning said. "The more repetitions you get, the better. I don't know them as well as I would if I would've played with a guy for five years. It's been a crash course and everybody's been cramming."

Thomas came into the league the same year as Decker, and both have hit their stride this season after dealing with injuries much of their first two years with the Broncos.

"Every day we push each other," Decker said. "That's the best thing about our relationship, is that we really respect one another. We're good friends — we used to be roommates — but we're also competitors at the same position."

Decker also is benefiting from his first full training camp this summer. Last year there was the lockout and his rookie year, he was still on the mend. He had missed the last half of his senior season at the University of Minnesota after tearing the ligament that holds the first two toes together in a game against Ohio State in October 2009.

Called a Lisfranc injury, it requires a long and arduous rehab with no guarantee of success.

His draft stock dropped after his injury, but the Broncos took him with the 87th overall pick and preached patience with him.

"It wasn't until my second year in Denver I started to feel good, feel like I had my strength, that I wasn't thinking about it and it wasn't hurting after practice," Decker said.

Decker, who only caught a half dozen passes his rookie year, when he was primarily a kick returner, received a call from Stokley right after he got hurt. Stokley had suffered the same ligament injury in 2002 and he shared his advice

about rehab and adjusting to the NFL. The two became fast friends, then teamed up together in Denver in 2009 and again this season.

"Man, I've had a ton of injuries, Achilles, knee, you name it, and that was by far the worst one," Stokley said. "It made me want to know if I really wanted to keep playing football. It was a beast. They did the surgery, you're on crutches, in a boot and then once you heal up, they have to operate again to take out the screws, and you're back on crutches, in a boot.

"Then, it just hurts every day. Every morning, it's killing you. The pain is so incredible," Stokley said. "But one day, I finally turned the corner."

Just like Decker.

He said that's the one thing that really resonated with him during his comeback: Stokley's admonition to stay on top of his rehab and his rest and to keep a positive attitude "because he said one day it's going to feel good."

"And it's funny, because that one day came and the pain just went away."

Notes: CB Tracy Porter (seizure symptoms) will miss his fourth straight game, coach John Fox said Friday. ... S Jim Leonhard, the Broncos' new player rep, said the NFL Players Association sent an email to all of the league's players this week reminding them that even though voters in Washington state and Colorado approved recreational use of marijuana on Tuesday that it's still prohibited by the league. "It was obviously directed at the Seahawks and Broncos, but it went out to everyone," Leonhard said. "They just wanted to remind everyone that our drug policy's still our drug policy. Nothing's changed."

# NFL offenses having another banner year

Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
November 9, 2012

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Take it from Denver Broncos defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio, there's no sense steering a kid to play linebacker if he can throw the ball like his son Luke can.

The senior at Valor Christian High School in suburban Denver is a Division I passing prospect who has committed to Oklahoma State with Oregon State and Alabama trying to change his mind.

"It's a good time to be a quarterback," Del Rio said with a hardy laugh.

That's true whether it's in the preps or the pros.

Passing-fueled offenses in the NFL are better than ever, and more than half of the league's QBs are on pace to throw for 4,000 yards. That would shatter the record of 10 set in 2009 and tied last year.

It's another banner year for offenses, particularly in the passing game. Consider these stats:

—Games are averaging 705.5 total net yards per game, on pace to surpass last year's record (693.7).

—Explosive passing offenses have fueled that trend, with an average of 476.7 net passing yards per game, also on pace for an all-time high (459.4 last season).

—Scoring averages 45.7 points per game, on pace to be the highest average since 1965 (46.1), five years before the AFL-NFL merger, which is considered the beginning of the modern game.

—Passers are on pace to set records with a combined 86.8 passer rating (84.3 in 2011) and 61.9 completion percentage (61.2 in 2007).

Teams are throwing more than ever to keep up, too. Minnesota's Adrian Peterson, the league's leading rusher, has more yards (957) on the ground than 21 teams.

"Everybody's throwing the ball more, we're seeing more open offense," Houston defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said. "They're open-it-up, college-type, everybody out wide and throw it. Now, we'll see if that works or not. That's not necessarily a formula to win. You have to be good at doing that."

That's just it: lots of teams are very good at it.

"I really don't care about stats. I just care about scoring more points than the other team," said New England coach Bill Belichick, whose Patriots (5-3) are averaging a league-best 33 points a game and have topped 350 yards of total offense in a record 17 straight games, one more than the St. Louis Rams had during their "Greatest Show on Earth" era.

Patriots quarterback Tom Brady might as well have been speaking for every other NFL offense when he explained the streak this way: "If you're not going backward and killing yourself with penalties and turnovers and really not beating yourself, you can usually put yourself in a good position to win."

With rules tilting more toward offense and players getting training at a younger age, that's pretty much the mantra of NFL offenses now: just don't stub your toe and you'll pile up the points.

It's not just the teams with Manning, Brady or Brees stitched across their leaders' backs who are putting up big numbers.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who scored 30 points just four times in the last three seasons, have even gotten into the act. They've scored 38, 28, 36 and 42 in their last four games, winning three of them. It's the first time in their history that they've scored 28 or more in four straight games.

"Well, that's the exciting part, right?" Bucs coach Greg Schiano said. "That's what people come to see, the long runs, the scoring. You have a scoreboard for a reason, right? It's not a yardage board. People like to see scores. I like to see it, too."

Isn't Schiano a defensive guy, one who cut his coaching chops on tackles and takeaways?

"I'm a winning guy," Schiano retorted. "That's what I want to do."

The rules and regulations that govern pro football have long tilted toward offense, resulting in an aerial fireworks show that's good for ratings — of both the television and quarterback variety.

Add to that an eruption this season of spread offenses and the no-huddle and you get panting pass-rushers and mismatches with smaller defenders trapped on the field to face towering tight ends and taller receivers who no longer think twice about going over the middle, certain they'll get the ball or the call.

Delivering those pinpoint passes are ever sharper quarterbacks.

"The rules are part of it," said 12-time Pro Bowl tight end Tony Gonzalez of the unbeaten Atlanta Falcons. "Defensive players can't do what they were allowed to do

before, which is good. It's keeping the players safe. I think it's given us a fair advantage where if you get a 5-yard check and that's it, you can't hold me all the way down the field. That shouldn't be allowed.

"But then also you look at the lower ranks of football, at least from what I've seen. I have an 11-year-old son, and he's already doing passing camps," Gonzalez said. "When I was in high school, I think we played in one passing camp tournament, and that was like the big thing during the summer, but now these guys are doing it week in and week out. You're growing up in that environment where you're throwing the ball, it's spread offenses, and you're seeing it carry over the NFL now. Guys are coming in and putting up huge numbers."

Four rookies, Indianapolis' Andrew Luck (four), Washington's Robert Griffin III (two), Cleveland's Brandon Weeden (two) and Miami's Ryan Tannehill (one) have combined for nine 300-yard passing games, already the most by rookie QBs in any NFL season.

In addition to the offensive-friendly rule book that leads to more touchdown celebrations than sack dances, the athletes coming out of college are better, QBs are readier, offensive linemen are sharper.

"The game has definitely evolved," Detroit defensive end Erik Coleman said. "Fans want to see more touchdowns."

After all, it helps their fantasy teams.

There have been 395 touchdown passes and 73 300-yard passing games, both of which are the most ever through Week 9. And the league-wide pass touchdown-interception ratio of 1.626 to 1 is well ahead of last season's record pace (1.472:1).

Peyton Manning leads a record six QBs on pace to finish with a 100-plus passer rating, along with Aaron Rodgers, Matt Ryan, Alex Smith, Ben Roethlisberger and Brady.

Rodgers has 25 TD passes in Green Bay's first nine games, the first player in NFL history to reach that mark that fast in two different seasons, and Stafford is on pace to throw 692 passes, which would best Drew Bledsoe's 1994 mark by one.

The only stat that tilts toward the defense is this: there's been 34 pick-6s, the most interceptions returned for touchdowns at this point of the season since 1970.

This, however, is largely a byproduct of having so many balls buzzing through the air.

"Adapt or perish," Del Rio said. "You have to understand where things are going and devise new ways to slow it down, and that's what we're all working hard to do."

But clearly, rules are in place to allow more of what we're seeing: more offensive production and balls in the air and yards and points."

That's one reason why he didn't steer his kid toward the position he played when he was in high school, at USC and then with the Saints, Chiefs, Cowboys and Vikings.

"Most coaches looked at him and said, 'Your dad's a linebacker. Play linebacker or D-end.' And so he did at first, and then he said, 'Hey, look, I want to play quarterback,'" Del Rio said.

"It's been fun to watch," he added, for once not cringing at the thought of a big-armed QB leading a high-octane offense down the field.

# Misfortune, luck can lead to right QB

**Week 10 provides intriguing examples of ways teams land elite signal-callers**

John Clayton  
ESPN.com  
November 9, 2012

The Indianapolis Colts got lucky in drafting Andrew Luck. **Peyton Manning missed 2011 because of four neck operations.** That misfortune led to a 2-14 season and the chance to draft Luck, who has the team competing for an AFC wild-card spot. Misfortune led to Luck.

Week 10 gives the NFL the chance to reflect on the acquisition of quarterbacks. **John Elway and the Denver Broncos gambled on Manning like the New Orleans Saints gambled on Drew Brees when he was coming off shoulder reconstruction.** On Sunday, Manning goes against Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton, the first pick in the 2011 draft.

The San Francisco 49ers face the St. Louis Rams in a game that features the top pick in the 2005 draft, Alex Smith, going against the top pick in 2010, Sam Bradford. Smith went through five offensive coordinators in five years and had a 19-31 record that almost led to his departure. Jim Harbaugh kept him around for continuity because of the NFL lockout, leading to the 49ers' winning 19 of their past 24 regular-season games and having one trip to the NFC title game.

Bradford has the look of an elite quarterback, but he has been on teams constantly being torn up. He is 11-23 as a starter and still trying to claim elite status on a team trying to turn around under first-year coach Jeff Fisher.

**Here are the 10 trends to look at in Week 10:**

## ***Heavyweight Matchup***

When the Texans travel to Chicago this weekend, it will mark just the fifth time since the 1970 merger that teams with one or fewer losses will be playing each other this late into the season.

### ***Matchups of teams with 1 or fewer losses, Week 10 or later***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Matchup</b>	<b>Week</b>
2012	Texans at Bears	10

<b>Year</b>	<b>Matchup</b>	<b>Week</b>
2007	Cowboys def. Packers	13
1991	Redskins def. Oilers	10
1990	49ers def. Giants	13
1977	Broncos def. Colts	11

-- *Elias Sports Bureau*

**1. Bear of a challenge:** On paper, you'd favor the Houston Texans over the Chicago Bears. The Texans have been rock solid in the first half of the season. They run the ball consistently well and play great defense. They've stumbled only in their home loss to the Green Bay Packers.

The Bears have been consistently exceptional on defense. With seven interceptions returned for touchdowns, the Bears' defense is keeping up with Jay Cutler, who has thrown for 12 touchdowns. But the Bears haven't been consistent on offense. Cutler has been good but not spectacular. He has completed under 60 percent of his passes for the same 7.4-yard average per attempt as last season. The offensive line still remains an issue, but the fact the Bears are at home gives them a decent chance of winning. Their Cover 2 could limit Matt Schaub from hitting on his play-action passes.

As long as Chicago's defense doesn't get run over by Arian Foster and the Texans' running attack, this game should go to the fourth quarter, where Cutler and Schaub can see who makes the last scoring play to win. Is this a Super Bowl preview? Maybe. You don't often see one-loss teams meeting this late in the season.

**2. Saints' last stand:** Thanks to the solidarity of the players and the return of interim coach Joe Vitt, the Saints are on a two-game winning streak. At 3-5, they are still a loss or two out of being wiped out of the playoff race, but Sunday's game against the Atlanta Falcons brings clearly defines where their season is. This is a must-win for the Saints. If they lose, the Falcons would be 9-0 and the Saints 3-6, putting them one week away from possibly losing their shot to repeat as NFC South champs.

Desperate teams are dangerous, and the Falcons know it. Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan has done a great job of closing games, and he knows he can close out the Saints as a threat if he can pull out the win.

The game is at the Superdome, and the Falcons know winning won't be easy. The Saints know the Falcons too well, and no one wants this game more than linebacker Curtis Lofton, who left the Falcons to join New Orleans. The Saints are missing

halfback Darren Sproles, who is out because of hand surgery. Tight end Jimmy Graham and Sproles have done a lot to help Brees beat the Falcons' Cover 2 looks. Without Sproles, the Saints have to be more vertical with their passing attack.

**3. Falling stars of NFC East:** Either the Dallas Cowboys or the Philadelphia Eagles are going to leave Sunday's game with a 3-6 record. That's amazing when you think about it.

The Eagles have proved not to be a Dream Team over the past two years, but they have too much talent to be this far out of the race. Their offensive line is a mess. Michael Vick has lost his touch for touchdown drives in the red zone. The defense, despite a defensive coordinator change, has lost its way. It's becoming more and more apparent Andy Reid is losing his impact with this team, which is a shame because he has maintained a high standard with this franchise.

The Cowboys simply frustrate you. Former Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson talks about a country club atmosphere with the team. This may not be a country club, but the Cowboys clearly can't sink the last putt. They let too many games slip away in the fourth quarter with mistakes, bad play calls, fumbles, interceptions or penalties. This might be a game in which the team that makes the last mistake is the loser.

**4. Sanchez or Tebow?** The Jets have had a bye week to rethink their strategy that resulted in a 3-5 start. The question facing Rex Ryan is whether he will expand the role of Tim Tebow, who is lucky to be on the field as an offensive player five plays a game. The threat of Tebow's passing has been almost nonexistent. When he's in, he has been more runner than Wildcat quarterback, and he has been on the field for only 55 offensive plays. Call it the Mildcat.

Mark Sanchez comes to Seattle so far under the radar that no one mentions anymore the criticism of the Seahawks for not drafting him. The Seahawks drafted linebacker Aaron Curry, who turned out to be a bust and is now on Oakland's roster. If Sanchez loses to Russell Wilson, who is more accurate than Sanchez and is getting better each week, it would drop his status lower in league circles.

Wilson is growing, and Sanchez is regressing. His 52.9 percent completion percentage after eight games is the lowest for a quarterback with a minimum of 250 attempts this late in the season since 2005. Defensively, the Jets have struggled against the run, and they figure to get a lot of attempts from Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch.

**5. Vikings need some home magic:** When the Lions and Vikings meet in Minnesota on Sunday, everyone will see two teams going in different directions. The Lions have won three of their past four. The Vikings' 4-1 start has been spoiled by three losses over the past four games.

Matthew Stafford is getting hotter for the Lions. Christian Ponder is getting colder than a January day in Minneapolis. The past three games, his completion

percentages have been 47.1, 54.3 and 50.0. He has had 63 or fewer yards in two of those three games. Stafford can get that in a drive.

A Lions' win would allow them to swap spots with the Vikings, moving into third place and in position to catch the Packers for the No. 2 spot in the division.

**6. It's VJ day for Chargers:** The Chargers elected not to keep Vincent Jackson this season. Losing to Jackson and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Sunday could be the type of problem that leads to more people in San Diego losing their jobs.

Both teams are 4-4 and on the fringe of playoff contention. The impact of Jackson has been felt on both teams. Without Jackson, Philip Rivers is losing his ability to get the ball downfield. With Jackson last year, Rivers averaged 14.1 yards an attempt on throws that went at least 21 yards in the air. Without Jackson, Rivers' yards per attempt on those passes has fallen to 9.7, according to ESPN Stats & Information.

It has taken a few weeks, but Bucs quarterback Josh Freeman is getting more comfortable throwing to Jackson. Jackson's big-play ability and Doug Martin's running have the Bucs trying to move into contention for a wild-card spot in the NFC.

**7. Haley's revenge:** Being let go as head coach of the Kansas City Chiefs hurt Todd Haley. The year before, he had the Chiefs in the playoffs. After 13 games last year, his services were no longer needed. Haley landed comfortably in Pittsburgh as offensive coordinator.

The Steelers are getting hot at the right time. The Chiefs are moving in a direction that will probably lead to another coaching change. Romeo Crennel and the organization are making desperate moves. Crennel let Gary Gibbs take his defensive coordinator duties to get a different set of eyes looking at the defense. General manager Scott Pioli released cornerback Stanford Routt, who was signed as a cheaper replacement for Brandon Carr, whom the Cowboys signed for \$10 million a year. At 1-7, the Chiefs are a disaster.

Haley may have circled the date for this game, but he never could have figured things could get this bad for the Chiefs without him.

**8. Can Titans keep owner at game?** Tennessee owner Bud Adams was so mad during the Titans' 51-20 loss to the Chicago Bears that he left in third quarter. Titans coach Mike Munchak has his hands full going against the Miami Dolphins on Sunday.

Jake Locker's left shoulder has healed well enough that he's taking back the starting job from Matt Hasselbeck. Young quarterbacks on the road have a hard time winning, particularly on teams that give up 34.2 points a game. Locker has little room for error. He knows the Dolphins will tighten up a third-down pass

defense that was shredded last week by Andrew Luck. Going into that game, the Dolphins had the best third-down pass defense in football.

The Dolphins will probably put Ryan Tannehill in his no-huddle mode and go at a defense that isn't stopping anyone.

**9. Two home tests in AFC North:** Marvin Lewis knows the Bengals' season is on the line Sunday. After a 3-1 start, the Bengals have lost four in a row. Andy Dalton is struggling. The running game is nonexistent. And Lewis knows no lead is safe against New York Giants quarterback Eli Manning.

Manning will come to Cincinnati with a mission. His offense is settling for too many field goals. He'll send his receivers at cornerbacks Terence Newman, Leon Hall, Adam Jones and others with the idea of getting big plays and big scores.

The Ravens, meanwhile, return home hoping to get back to the no-huddle offense that works well at home and poorly on the road. The Ravens host the Oakland Raiders and former longtime adversary Carson Palmer, whom they played twice a year when he was a Bengal.

**10. Schedule favors two leaders:** Division leaders New England and San Francisco clearly have winnable games to firm up their positions. Both are coming off bye weeks. The Patriots face a Buffalo Bills defense that has been one of the most disappointing in football. The 49ers host the Rams, whom they have beaten in eight of the past 10 matchups. The Patriots have won 22 of the past 24 against the Bills. Not a lot of mystery in these games.

# Giving back a way of life for Mike Adams

Neal Reid  
ESPN.com  
November 9, 2012

Growing up in Paterson, N.J., trouble was never far away for kids like Mike Adams.

Many children were unable to avoid it, falling into the wrong crowds and wandering down dark paths with no futures. But not Adams. He and best friend Gerald Hayes not only dodged the undesirables who funneled kids toward dead-end lives, but they excelled, rising to the heights of the National Football League.

"Where we grew up in Paterson was rough," said Adams, 31. "We didn't have a place that was a safe haven where we could go get on a computer or play basketball and be OK. Nowadays, everybody's all into gangs and violence back home, and we've decided we wanted to get a community center set up back home. It's something we didn't have and wanted."

Adams, a nine-year safety now in his first season with the Denver Broncos after stints in Cleveland (2007-11) and San Francisco (2004-06), and Hayes are using their status to give back to their community in a big way. Adams and Hayes, a linebacker who played for Arizona and San Diego until his release by the Chargers last year, created the Rising Stars Foundation in 2006 to benefit underprivileged children in their hometown.

With the motto of "Reaching back, while moving forward," the foundation is dedicated to providing academic, learning, social, cultural and life skills instruction to kids who often get left behind and are forgotten. It's a program that is near and dear to Adams' heart.

"When I go back home and do things, and all the kids get involved, they see all the bad things happen, but then see me come out of it," he said. "It gives them hope. Just to see the smile on the kids' faces is the best part."

Adams and Hayes host a free football camp each June, with more than 250 children participating this summer. A number of NFL players show up to help teach the kids football skills, put them through a series of fun and challenging noncontact drills and lead them in other football- and team-related activities. Leadership is the theme of the camp, with participants required to write about what leadership means to them and learn ways to become more involved in their local community as active leaders.

"We've had a great reaction," Adams said. "A lot of [NFL] guys come out to the camp, and the kids never get a chance to see NFL players, so it's a great thing. Just for them to be able to get away for a couple hours and see what life [can be] like and that it's fun is wonderful."

Adams recently started a T-shirt company called Around the Clock that provides football camp participants with free T-shirts to commemorate their experience. After the camp concludes, Adams hosts a block party that's complete with bounce houses, Xbox, PlayStation and Wii games, basketball and volleyball courts, popcorn, cotton candy and free food for everyone in an effort to build and deepen a sense of community in the area.

Kids at the block party even get to see Barney and Elmo, who make appearances at the festivities.

"I end up wearing the costumes," the 5-11, 200-pound Adams said. "[Gerald] doesn't want to get into [the costumes] though."

The foundation has made quite an impact in the community and has done so in a number of ways. From providing inner-city children with school supplies and educational scholarships to collecting nonperishable food items and raising money to help alleviate hunger in Passaic County, Rising Stars' initiatives can be seen far and wide.

"We also gave 100 boys and 100 girls free haircuts to go back to school," said Adams, who graduated from Passaic Tech High School, where he has been inducted into the hall of fame and had his number retired. "We handed out more than 750 book bags packed with everything they can use in school."

Adams said the foundation plans a Thanksgiving turkey drive and will also take part in a holiday gift program to provide presents to at-risk children in the area.

For his dedication to helping others, Adams received the 2011 Dino Lucarelli Good Guy Award from the Cleveland Chapter of the Professional Football Writers' Association and has also received a community service award from the New Jersey House of Representatives and the State Senate for his community service and volunteer work.

With New Jersey residents still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Sandy, organizations like the Rising Stars Foundation are more important than ever.

"The storm and the power outage didn't make things any better, I'll tell you that," Adams said. "We actually just moved our headquarters from one spot to another out of a flood zone to a better facility. Thank God we just moved there."

Giving back has always been close to Adams' heart, and being able to use his status to help others is a blessing he is not about to squander.

"It's a little bit of wanting to help and also about not having anything growing up," Adams said of his desire to make a difference. "When I grew up, there were seven kids and three adults in one little apartment. Going outside and not having anything to do, I just felt a responsibility to [help]."

# Final Word: AFC West

Bill Williamson  
ESPN.com  
November 9, 2012

*Five nuggets of knowledge about Week 10:*

**Audition time for Mike McCoy?** Denver coach John Fox clearly is going to be motivated to win Sunday at Carolina. He was the Panthers' coach for nine years before getting fired after the 2010 season. And he isn't the only Denver coach with something to prove. Offensive coordinator Mike McCoy was an assistant in Carolina from 2000 to 2008. He likely is going to be a head coaching candidate in a couple of months. If the Panthers fire Ron Rivera, I'd think McCoy would be on their short list. He could impress ownership with a good showing by his unit Sunday.

**Chargers hope for three-receiver success:** San Diego quarterback Philip Rivers had great success (10-for-10 passing for 143 yards) in the three-receiver set in Week 9 against Kansas City. It was his best effort using the set in 16 weeks. In the first seven games of the year, according to ESPN Stats & Information, Rivers completed 63.5 percent of his passes and averaged 6.8 yards per completion using three receivers. In Week 9, Rivers averaged 14.3 yards per completion. Expect the Chargers to have a lot of confidence using the set against the Buccaneers.

**Raiders try for rare win in Baltimore:** The Raiders have not beaten the Ravens in Baltimore in four tries. The previous time the Raiders won in Baltimore (when it was the Colts) was in the 1977 postseason in the famous "Ghost to the Post" playoff game. The Raiders won on Christmas Eve in double overtime. (I remember it like it was 35 years ago.) Will things change for Oakland? It won't be easy. The Ravens have won 14 straight home games, the longest current home streak in the NFL.

**Chiefs going down easy:** If the Chiefs are going to pull off a massive upset at Pittsburgh Monday night, their running backs must be tougher. According to ESPN Stats & Information, the Chiefs have gained an average of 3.3 yards per rush before first contact this season. It is the fourth-best rate in the league. However, the Chiefs have gained an average of just 1.4 yards per rush after first contact. That is tied for the sixth-lowest in the league. Perhaps getting bigger back Peyton Hillis back after he missed several weeks with an ankle injury will help. Hillis had some decent runs in Week 9. He was brought in for his toughness, and the Chiefs are still looking for it.

**The power of Manning:** We've all seen several statistics showing the impact Peyton Manning has made on Denver's offense in the first half of the season. But this one is stunning: Denver has punted 31 times this season and is on pace for 62. Last season, Denver punted 101 times. Anyone in Denver miss all of those Tim Tebow-led three-and-outs? Didn't think so.

# AFC West second-quarter checkpoint

Bill Williamson  
ESPN.com  
November 9, 2012

The second quarter of the AFC West season is complete. Let's look at some key developments for the second quarter as we did for the season's first quarter:

**Story of the quarter:** The Kansas City Chiefs' implosion. The Chiefs are 1-7 and widely considered the worst team in the NFL. They have been No. 32 in ESPN.com's NFL Power Rankings for nearly a month. They went 0-4 in the second quarter of the season and have lost five consecutive games. It is getting ugly. Fans are calling for the firing of general manager Scott Pioli and coach Romeo Crennel -- and ownership might have a difficult time ignoring those calls if the Chiefs' season gets any worse. Early last month, right tackle Eric Winston called out some fans for what he felt was them cheering when quarterback Matt Cassel suffered a concussion. It became a national story. Cassel was replaced by Brady Quinn. Crennel fired himself as defensive coordinator and replaced himself with linebackers coach Gary Gibbs. The team released starting cornerback Stanford Routt after eight games after signing him to a big-money free-agent deal before the season.

**MVP of the quarter: Denver quarterback Peyton Manning.** There is no doubt, and Manning is very much in the race to be the NFL MVP. He has been stunningly good for much of the season, and particularly so in the past four games. The Broncos went 3-1 in the quarter and lead the AFC West with a 5-3 record, due in large part to Manning's success. His lowest yardage outing in the past quarter-season was 291 yards. He has thrown a total of 12 touchdown passes (three in each game) and three interceptions in the past four games.

**Defensive player of the quarter: Denver linebacker Wesley Woodyard.** I was tempted to go with fellow Broncos linebacker Von Miller, who has six sacks in the past four games. But Woodyard has been tremendous in the past quarter. He has 49 tackles in that span, with 11 being his lowest output -- remarkable for a player who was considered a liability going into the season. Now, with D.J. Williams set to return next week from a nine-game NFL suspension, there appears to be no doubt Woodyard will remain the starting weakside linebacker ahead of Williams.

**Rookie of the quarter:** Oakland linebacker Miles Burris. The fourth-round pick has been a solid, steady starter and looks like he has a good future ahead of him. He seems to play with a mean streak and is around the ball a lot. He is a nice building

block for the Raiders' defense.

**Coach of the quarter: Denver coach John Fox.** His team went 3-1 in the second quarter and is alone in first place. His team has improved around Manning on both sides of the ball and is poised for a strong second half of the season.

**Disappointment of the quarter (team):** San Diego Chargers. The Chargers went 1-3 in the quarter, and now stand at 4-4 overall. And those three losses were terrible: San Diego lost a double-digit lead in the second half in New Orleans, then saw a 24-0 halftime lead over Denver turn into a shocking 35-24 home loss. The following week, San Diego lost 7-6 at downtrodden Cleveland. If the Chargers don't make the playoffs, that three-game disaster will be long remembered.

**Disappointment of the quarter (player):** San Diego quarterback Philip Rivers. He struggled during those blowout losses to New Orleans and Denver and couldn't do much against Cleveland. Rivers committed nine turnovers in the past quarter. He was very good in Week 9 against Kansas City, so perhaps he is ready to put his trouble behind him.

**Biggest unanswered question of the quarter: Can San Diego (4-4) or Oakland (3-5) make up ground against Denver in the next four games? The Broncos look like the best team in the division and have the NFL's easiest remaining schedule. Denver could pull away in the next four games.** The Chargers and the Raiders will be challenged to stay in the race.

**Fearless prediction for the second quarter:** Kansas City -- currently tied with Jacksonville for the league's worst record -- will stay in the race for the No. 1 overall draft pick. I don't see the Chiefs -- who badly need a good young quarterback -- suddenly putting it together in the next four games and taking themselves out of the race. Of course, the bad news for Kansas City is that there doesn't appear to be a prize like Andrew Luck or Robert Griffin III in the 2013 draft. The top pick will be very valuable, but there might not be a sure thing at quarterback.

# Jaws: Peyton Manning a top-3 QB

Bill Williamson  
ESPN.com  
November 9, 2012

Ron Jaworski has revisited his NFL quarterback rankings at the midpoint of the season in an Insider piece. Let's take a look at where he puts AFC West signal-callers:

## **Peyton Manning, Denver**

**Ranking:** 3

**Comment:** A legitimate argument could be made for Manning being No. 1.

## **Philip Rivers, San Diego**

**Ranking:** 11

**Comment:** Rivers didn't have a great second quarter of the season, so this ranking is fair.

## **Carson Palmer, Oakland**

**Ranking:** 22

**Comment:** Palmer has stayed at No. 22 on Jaws' list. Some times, he looks like a top-15 quarterback, and others times he really struggles.

## **Matt Cassel, Kansas City**

**Ranking:** 30

**Comment:** It's difficult to make an argument that Cassel should be ranked higher. He's in his final days with the Chiefs.

# AFC West injury update

Bill Williamson  
ESPN.com  
November 9, 2012

It appears San Diego might be without left tackle Jared Gaither (groin), defensive end Corey Liuget (hamstring) and linebacker Antwan Barnes (leg). They were not practicing Friday once again.

**UPDATE:** Gaither and Liguette are questionable on the injury report. Barnes is listed as doubtful.

As expected, Denver guard Chris Kuper (ankle) and cornerback Tracy Porter (illness) are out for Sunday's game at Carolina. They didn't practice all week. Kuper was hurt Sunday at Cincinnati, and this will be Porter's fourth straight game he has missed because of complications after having a seizure in August.

Kansas City defensive end Glenn Dorsey remained out Friday with a calf. He is not expected to play Monday night at Pittsburgh. Left tackle Branden Albert remained limited with a back injury.

We'll have an update on Oakland later Friday. But running back Darren McFadden is expected to be out with a high ankle sprain. He missed practice all week.

In other AFC West news:

Denver linebacker Von Miller has a plan if he sacks Carolina quarterback Cam Newton on Sunday in a matchup of the No. 1 and No. 2 overall draft picks of the 2011 draft.

Former Kansas City cornerback Stanford Routt is reportedly visiting the Lions on Friday. He was cut by the Chiefs on Monday.

There are some familiar AFC West names on this Sporting News list of overrated players.

# Week 10 battles to watch: Newton vs. Miller should be fun

Pete Prisco  
CBSsports.com  
November 9, 2012

**Panthers QB Cam Newton vs. Broncos OLB Von Miller:** This matches the top overall pick from last year's draft (Newton) vs. the second pick (Miller). Newton has tailed off some this season, but Miller continues to play at a high level. Miller will have to get pressure off the edge to help contain Newton, who did play well last week at Washington.

**Bears DE Julius Peppers vs. Texans LT Duane Brown:** Peppers moves up and down the line, but he will spend time against Brown, who is one of the best in the league. Peppers can win with speed or power, which makes him a tough opponent. But Brown is a fighter and has really improved in pass protection.

**Vikings C John Sullivan vs. Lions DT Ndamukong Suh:** Sullivan is having a heck of a year in the middle for the Vikings and is a big reason why Adrian Peterson has run so well. Suh is not having a good year and is underachieving. He needs to get it going.

**Giants RG Chris Snee vs. Bengals DT Geno Atkins:** Snee has battled some ankle injuries this week, but he is expected to play. Atkins is a tough player to handle when you are healthy, let alone dinged. He will be key to getting pressure inside against Eli Manning. If Snee can't go, the Giants will likely move tackle David Diehl inside to guard.

**Buccaneers WR Vincent Jackson vs. Chargers CB Quentin Jammer:** Jackson gets a chance to make his former team pay for letting him leave. He is averaging over 20 yards per catch, so he will be the big-play guy. Jammer has trouble at times in man coverage, so look for the Bucs to attack him.

**Ravens OLB Terrell Suggs vs. Raiders OT Jared Veldheer:** Suggs is back and that's huge for the Ravens' defense. He can set the edge, and he can rush the passer. Veldheer is a solid left tackle who has had some good games against some good pass rushers.

**Cowboys WR Dez Bryant vs. Eagles CB Nnamdi Asomugha:** Asomugha has really struggled this season and now must face Bryant in man coverage. The problem is Bryant tends to disappear at times. The Cowboys need to get him more involved in this game.

**Eagles LT King Dunlap and RT Demetress Bell vs. Cowboys OLB DeMarcus Ware:** Dunlap and Bell had big problems last week against the Saints, a team

without much of a pass rush. Ware has to be licking his chops. I would imagine he might spend a lot of time with Michael Vick. Would five sacks be a surprise?

**Bills DE Mario Williams vs. Patriots RT Sebastian Vollmer:** Vollmer has played well this season. Williams has not. But Williams has the ability to turn it on with his talent. He has to get pressure on Tom Brady if Buffalo is to have a chance.

**Chiefs WR Dwayne Bowe vs. Steelers CB Ike Taylor:** Bowe is the big-play threat in Kansas City, but he is playing with limited talent at quarterback. Even so, I expect them to try and get Bowe going here. Taylor is up and down. He is beatable.

# Peek at the Week: Revenge games abound; Texans face true test against Bears

Clark Judge  
CBSSports.com  
November 9, 2012

## Five best matchups

**2. Denver coach John Fox vs. Carolina:** Fox was the Panthers' head coach for nine years and took them to their only Super Bowl, but he was canned following a 2-14 season in 2010 and landed on his feet in Denver -- where he has the Broncos on track to win their second division title. He still owns a home in Charlotte, has plenty of friends there and knows a lot of the players he'll see Sunday, but he's not owning up to anything close to a revenge factor. "It's a business trip, and we're getting our team ready," he said. Oh. So no hard feelings, right? "I have a philosophy that sometimes setbacks are setups for better things to come," he said. "I tend to approach things as the glass half full."

# Week 10 Sunday Picks: Revenge games for coaches among key matchups

Doug Farrar  
Shutdown Corner  
November 9, 2012

## Denver Broncos at Carolina Panthers

In his last five games, Peyton Manning has thrown for at least 300 yards every time, he's thrown just three picks, and he's been sacked just twice. Carolina's pass rush has been very solid of late, but that was against the offensive lines of the Chicago Bears and Washington Redskins. Manning is almost impossible to bring down when he's in tune with receivers, and he's got a couple of winners in Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker. Manning isn't the only comeback kid on the Broncos in this game -- head coach John Fox returns to the team that fired him after the 2010 season.

"I've got a lot of respect for [Fox], but it's not me versus him or the Panthers versus him," Panthers center Geoff Hangartner said this week. "I'm going to play against the guys on the Broncos team whether they're coached by John Fox or whoever. I think you guys are making more of it than it really is."

"Us guys" disagree. The Broncos love Fox, and they realize how important this game is to him. Expect another classic game from Manning, and a superior effort from Denver's defense, which is definitely trending up.

**Pick: Broncos 29, Panthers 13**

# Arian Foster vs. Bears linebackers leads Week 10 matchups

Daniel Jeremiah  
NFL.com  
November 9, 2012

The NFL features dozens of young, exciting players, but it is also home to several reliable, productive veterans. This week's top matchups offer a good mixture of both groups. There's a battle between an accomplished, future Hall of Fame quarterback and a hotshot young safety. There's also a clash between a 26-year old, All-Pro running back and two All-Pro linebackers with a combined 23 years of NFL experience. So, who has the edge in these matchups? I've provided my answers below.

## **Champ Bailey vs. Steve Smith**

This matchup features two outstanding veterans of the National Football League. Bailey is 34 years old and playing in his 14th season. The Denver Broncos stalwart doesn't quite have the same top-end speed as he did a few years ago, but he makes up for it with flawless technique and instincts. He excels at using his hands to re-route receivers at the line of scrimmage and he has impeccable timing to play the ball in the air.

Bailey will spend most of his day lining up opposite the Carolina Panthers' top receiving weapon, Steve Smith. Smith is 33 years old and playing in his 12th season. He has seen a dip in his production this year, but he still has big-play ability, averaging a robust 16.6 yards per catch. Smith relies on his quickness to defeat press coverage and still has the juice to pull away from defenders when the ball is in the air.

**EDGE: Bailey.** The Broncos stud will give up a few catches underneath, but he won't let Smith run by him for big plays.

# Broncos' Porter remains sidelined

Lindsay H. Jones

USA TODAY Sports

November 9, 2012

ENGLEWOOD Colo. – As his teammates put on their suits and packed their bags and got ready to fly to Charlotte, N.C., on Friday afternoon, Denver Broncos cornerback Tracy Porter put on a track jacket and a Detroit Red Wings baseball cap and headed off to yet another doctor's appointment.

Porter, who did not practice all week, will miss his third consecutive game Sunday when the Broncos face the Carolina Panthers, while dealing with the aftermath of a seizure.

Porter said he feels healthy enough to play, and that his doctors have advised him to be careful as he makes his return to the field.

But Porter said that even when he is fully cleared to practice and play in games, he does not expect to get his starting job back.

Second-year player Chris Harris has started in Porter's place at right corner, with Tony Carter seeing significant time as the third cornerback in the team's nickel package.

The Broncos have won each of the games without him.

"Coach is good with the chemistry they've got going on right now," Porter told USA TODAY Sports. "Even if they clear me, I don't know if I'll be out there. They've got their guys."

Porter signed a one-year, \$4 million contract with the Broncos in March and immediately became the starter at right corner, the same position he played for the New Orleans Saints. He had an impressive debut for the Broncos, and was named the AFC's defensive player of the week after making eight tackles, five pass breakups and a 45-yard interception return for a touchdown against the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sept. 9.

But he struggled at times in games later in September, especially against the Texans on Sept. 23, when he was in coverage on two long touchdowns.

Last month, the Broncos disclosed that Porter had suffered a seizure in August – he missed about a week of training camp and a preseason game with what the team called an "illness" at the time – and similar symptoms returned the day the Broncos traveled to San Diego last month. Porter, experiencing dizziness and a rapid heart rate, was left behind. He has barely practiced since.

"It's a medical issue that we're not taking lightly at all," coach John Fox said. "He's not an accountant. He's out here running into people, quite a bit of exercise, so it's something we're not taking lightly. Before we put him out here full speed, we want to make sure we've got that under wraps."

# Broncos can joke ... but can't toké

Lindsay H. Jones  
USA TODAY Sports  
November 9, 2012

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. – Joel Dreessen could only laugh when he heard the jokes that swirled around the Internet and radio airwaves in the days since Colorado voters approved an amendment to legalize recreational marijuana.

Suddenly, the jokesters proclaimed, Colorado would become the most desired destination for weed-smoking pro athletes. Finally, the University of Colorado and Colorado State would have a recruiting advantage to help bolster their struggling football programs.

"That's kind of funny. Oh, yeah, come play football here because you can smoke weed and play football," Dreessen said, laughing.

Dreessen, one of two Colorado natives on the Broncos' roster, said it was still hard to believe that Amendment 64 passed. The new state law will allow adults to possess up to one ounce of marijuana for private use. The drug will be sold legally in specialty shops, and taxed at up to 15 percent.

A similar measure was approved by voters in Washington State.

"It's not going to change anything for me. I've never used it, never will. I can't," said Dreessen, who was raised in Fort Morgan and graduated from Colorado State. "But I had a lot of friends growing up that did, so good for them, I guess."

Though Broncos players who are Colorado residents were allowed to vote on the measure on Tuesday, the NFL quickly said the state law won't change the league's stance that marijuana is an illegal substance. League spokesman Greg Aiello told USA TODAY Sports that players are prohibited from both using and possessing the drug.

Marijuana use is easy enough to prove through league-mandated drug tests.

Possession, at least in Colorado and Washington, may be harder to prove. The league usually becomes aware of drug possession issues when a player is arrested or involved in some sort of incident.

Aiello said that if the league had reason to believe a player possessed the drug, he would be subject to further evaluation under the NFL's substance abuse policy.

Denver-based agent Peter Schaffer, whose clients include Broncos safety Mike Adams and Seahawks players Russell Okung and Brandon Browner, said in light of

the new laws, he's advising all of his clients to "extra careful to not run afoul of the league."

"I would be advocating with the union for a restructuring of league policies. How does NFL make something that's legal in Colorado illegal?" Schaffer said. "The league has to adapt to the changing social norms."

The issue very well could come up in union conversations about the league's drug policy.

"I'm sure it will be discussed. It will have to be. It will be interesting to see if something changes," said Broncos safety Jim Leonhard, who recently became the team's player representative to the union.

"It's part of the CBA, it's league policy, so I don't see any reason why that wouldn't be the case. It'll just be like any other business that's going to have their drug tests and stuff. You still have your drug testing program and still have to follow that."

# Broncos Game Preview vs. Panthers: Analysis, prediction, TV info

Andrew Mason  
CBSSports.com  
November 9, 2012

## **Broncos at Panthers -- Week 10**

**Where:** Bank of America Stadium, Charlotte, N.C. (grass, outdoors)

**When:** Sunday, 1 p.m. EST (CBS)

**Spread:** Broncos by 4

**Forecast:** Mostly sunny, 68-70 degrees.

**2012 records:** Broncos (5-3); Panthers (2-6)

**Past results:** Two most recent meetings -- Dec. 14, 2008: Panthers 30, Broncos 10; Oct. 10, 2004: Broncos 20, Panthers 17. **Series record:** Broncos hold a 2-1 edge.

**What matters:** Both teams are among the league's best in the pass rush; the Panthers have received 8.5 sacks from their defensive end duo of Greg Hardy and Charles Johnson in the last two games, while Denver is on pace for its highest sack total since 1999 and has received 15 sacks from Von Miller (9) and Elvis Dumervil (6). But the Panthers can take the edge off the Broncos' pass rush by going heavy on zone-read option looks with QB Cam Newton, although the Broncos know how to diagnose that tactic from their experience with Tim Tebow last year and will likely be disciplined enough to stay at home and not get caught out of position. Their success will be determined by how well they contain Newton and how often they force errant throws, rather than how many sacks they amass.

Peyton Manning's quick throws also could take Johnson and Hardy out of their comfort zone. Their best bet to impact plays will likely rest on getting their hands up in the air, since Manning has proven adept at checking down and avoiding sacks. He hasn't been brought down since Oct. 7 at New England.

**Who matters:** Carolina CBs Josh Norman and Captain Munnerlyn aren't big; Norman is 6-feet and 195 pounds while Munnerlyn is 5-foot-8 and 190 pounds. They'll have to be quick to make plays against Broncos WRs Eric Decker and Demaryius Thomas, who at 6-foot-3 and 218 and 229 pounds, respectively, could overpower the Panthers' cornerbacks.

Defending tight ends continues to be an issue for the Broncos, who have put rookie LB Danny Trevathan on the Saints' Jimmy Graham and the Bengals' Jermaine Gresham the last two weeks. He faces another challenge in Carolina's Greg Olsen this week; how Trevathan fares could determine whether he keeps playing as one of the Broncos' two nickel linebackers after D.J. Williams returns from nine games on suspension next week.

**Key matchup:** For a second consecutive week, Broncos CB Champ Bailey is at the center of attention, but this time, the challenge is different; Panthers WR Steve Smith is seven inches shorter than Cincinnati's A.J. Green.

"When the ball's up, he goes up like he's 6-4," Bailey said.

And the ball might go up to Smith often. Once again, he's the Panthers' leading receiver. But he'll face a cornerback who was successfully targeted by the Bengals last week, with Green amassing 99 yards on seven catches with a touchdown. Bailey did manage an interception, but he knows that after last week, teams might see a window to throw at him, which would be a dramatic change from the usual avoid-Bailey-at-all-costs tactic employed by most opponents.

"I hope they always get confident by plays people make against me," Bailey said. "They've got to pick their battles wisely. I'm sure they will."

**Injury of note:** CB Tracy Porter was ruled out for a fourth consecutive game after not practicing all week. RG Chris Kuper will not play after spraining his left ankle last week; he'll miss two to four games.

**Inside stuff:** Carolina's tactics have changed drastically since John Fox's contract wasn't renewed after the 2010 season, but half of its starters were with the Panthers for the final season under Fox, who has eight assistant coaches who served on Carolina's staff at some point between 2002 and 2010. If the Broncos can utilize that knowledge, Carolina might be left without its most reliable weapons.

**Connections:** Broncos head coach John Fox held the same position on Carolina's staff from 2002-10. ... Eight Broncos assistants coached with Fox in Carolina: defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio (2002), offensive coordinator Mike McCoy (2000-01 with George Seifert, 2002-08 with Fox), special teams coordinator Jeff Rodgers (2009-10), assistant secondary coach Sam Garnes (2010), offensive line coach Dave Magazu (2003-10), secondary coach Ron Milus (2009-10), linebackers coach Richard Smith (2009-10) and receivers coach Tyke Tolbert (2010). ... Broncos reserve OL C.J. Davis was with the Panthers from 2009-10 before being cut in the preseason of 2011 ... Panthers OL Jeff Byers was on the Broncos' active roster for the last two games of the 2010 season.

**Stat you should know:** Five of Carolina's six losses have come by six points or less, including a pair of defeats at Atlanta and Chicago -- two of the league's three best teams -- by a combined three points. If the Broncos overlook Carolina, they could pay a heavy price.

**Bulletin board quote:** "I'm hoping I can do my little Superman thing too, a chance to rub it in, too. I'm sure it's gonna be a tough game. Just hope we have one more point than those guys Sunday." -- Broncos LB Von Miller, talking celebrations relative to Newton's Superman pass.

**Record watch:** With one more touchdown pass, Manning will tie Dan Marino for second all-time in league history with 420.

**Looking ahead:** Next week's game against San Diego could effectively mean the end of the AFC West race -- or it could revive the Chargers and create a sprint for the finish. Even if the Broncos lose and San Diego wins this week, the Chargers would only be tied with the Broncos, who could effectively take at least a two-game lead (thanks to a tiebreaker advantage) should they complete a season sweep of the Chargers in Week 11.

**Prediction:** Broncos 31, Panthers 20.

# MHS Mailbag: Broncos writer Andrew Mason

Andrew Mason

Mile High Sports

November 9, 2012

## **Where does this Broncos team compare to other Broncos teams of years past? Are they as good as the Super Bowl teams of the late 90's? – Herb, Commerce City**

Whoa, whoa, whoa ... ease up there. From a point-scoring perspective, yes, it resembles the teams of the late 1990's. But the defense is only now rounding into form and the offense would like its running game to become more consistent. Sticking with the ground game even when it struggles is part of building that aspect of the offense; we've seen against San Diego and Cincinnati how a willingness to keep probing with Willis McGahee runs — even as he struggles to get beyond the line of scrimmage through a thicket of blockers and defenders — helped set up play-action and some double-digit gains in the fourth quarter.

The next few weeks represent the chance for this Broncos team to start resembling those vintage 1997 and 1998 squads; they play teams they should beat, and perhaps convincingly. Denver's mistakes let the Bengals hang around a bit longer last Sunday than the Broncos would have preferred. What the Broncos need are more performances like they had against Oakland in Week 4: land an early punch, gradually pull out in front and then pull away for a convincing win. If we see that in Carolina on Sunday and at least twice more against San Diego, Kansas City, Tampa Bay and Oakland in the weeks that follow, then you can start making the comparison. But I'd hold off for now.

## **Nobody seems to talk about the Broncos' run defense anymore, is that because it's so good, or has it been overlooked by Peyton Manning? – Sam,**

## **Denver**

Everything's overshadowed by Manning, including the run defense. But it shouldn't be, for two reasons:

1. It's the area that has improved the most as a result of the lineup tweaks made at linebacker, when Keith Brooking was inserted at the middle slot for Joe Mays, which moved Wesley Woodyard to the weak side on an every-down basis. In the games the Broncos have used a Woodyard-Brooking-Miller combination as the base linebacker package, Denver has allowed fewer rushing yards per game (72.0), yards per carry (3.39) and has permitted first downs at a lower rate (one per 6.54 rushes) than in the games that Mays started at middle linebacker (136.3 yards per game, 3.83 yards per carry and one first down per 4.73 rushes).

2. Von Miller's improvement. While his pass-rushing skills are the first to be noted — he's on pace for what would be a franchise-record 18 sacks — he also already has 17 tackles for losses, which is 12 more than anyone else on the Broncos. His progress as a run defender in 12 months has been profound; remember, last year, he was benched a few times for Mario Haggan when the Broncos were in their base 4-3 package preparing to defend the run. If the Broncos did that now, they'd remove their best run defender among the back two lines from the defense.

## **You've watched football for years, is this the best that you've ever seen Peyton Manning? His numbers seem to say so! Go Broncos! – Amy, Denver**

Not quite; his numbers reveal that his 2004 season, in which he threw a then-league-record 49 touchdown passes, was better — in part because the Colts' wide-receiver group was at its zenith. Marvin Harrison was still in his prime; Reggie Wayne had emerged as a legitimate No. 2 threat who was better than most No. 1 receivers — as he demonstrated when he exposed Denver's lack of secondary depth in that year's wild-card playoff game — and Brandon Stokley had the only 1,000-yard season of his career before a series of injuries began to shorten his seasons more often than not.

What is significant is that Manning has returned to his 2009 form, when he led the

Colts to their second AFC championship in four seasons. He struggled at times in 2010, particularly in the second half of the season, when at one point he had three consecutive games with at least three interceptions before he got back on track. Manning had surgery on a pinched nerve in his neck in March 2010 and played all 16 games that year, but his numbers were off. Multiple surgeries later, he's back to his old form.

This may not be the absolute best Manning we've ever seen, but he's on pace for one of the 10 best seasons any quarterback has ever had — and the best in Broncos history.

**Derek Wolfe had a lot of hype coming into the season, but I haven't heard much from him lately, how has he done in his rookie year? – Justin, Thornton**

Fine, all things considered. Remember, he was a second-round pick — by no means a sure thing — and he's learning how to play two positions (left defensive end and defensive tackle). The inside slot, in particular, requires a steep learning curve that usually precludes a solid rookie season. (This is one of the reasons that went into the Broncos' decision to take Von Miller over Marcell Dareus with the No. 2 pick last year; Miller was more likely to have a profound, transformative impact right away — and of course, he did.) But Wolfe plays with a high motor, is on pace for six sacks and is improving as a run defender. It's hard to see his rookie season as anything other than a success that offers a hint of better days in the future.

**Do you buy the Tracy Porter story? We've heard that his demotion is performance-based, yet the seizure condition is also being cited. What exactly is going on with him? -Josh, Glendale**

Reality is probably a combination of both. If you'd been through a seizure — and if you'd also seen Jeremy Shockey have one in New Orleans, as Porter did — you'd be freaked out to the point where it might impact your play, since there's bigger issues to deal with than just covering a cornerback.

If/when Porter comes back, he'll provide some nice depth, but given that Chris Harris and Tony Carter have played well in Porter's absence, there's no reason to change the regular lineup. That sentiment is heightened by the fact that Porter is on a one-year deal; their play means that Porter might not be in the Broncos' long-range plans as Carter and Harris appear to be.

# Broncos notes: A homecoming for McCoy

Andrew Mason

Mile High Sports

November 9, 2012

**ENGLEWOOD** – Last winter, Broncos offensive coordinator Mike McCoy saw his name pop up in head-coaching searches. Ten months later, it appears McCoy is still on a head-coaching fast track; his offense, tailored for QB Peyton Manning, is an increasingly efficient machine, and at the age of 40, he is only starting to enter his coaching prime.

But it took nine seasons of lessons on the staffs of George Seifert and John Fox in Carolina for him to begin finding his way.

McCoy broke into the league with the Panthers as an offensive assistant in 2000, Seifert's second year with the club, then kept his place on the staff through the transition to John Fox two years later, surviving a 1-15 season in 2001.

Struggle taught him some lessons — but so did the veteran coaches around him.

"I was very fortunate under Coach Seifert with a gentleman by the name of Richard Williamson and Dan Henning after Coach Seifert had left, John Fox had hired Dan Henning as a coordinator, but Richard was with George, and those were two guys that I spent a ton of time with and really learned the NFL game," McCoy said. "I've been fortunate in my time in coaching, being a young coach, being surrounded by good mentors. And that's the No. 1 thing."

Williamson spent 15 years with the Panthers under three different head coaches before retiring last year. McCoy has shown a similar ability to withstand transition, having now been retained through two head-coaching changes in a dozen years in the NFL.

The next head coaching change involving McCoy might be his own. He is expected to be on many short lists for head-coaching jobs, as he was last year after re-designing the Broncos' offense on the fly for Tim Tebow. But he turned down the opportunity to interview with the Jaguars and Raiders last January, only pursuing the Dolphins job, for which he interviewed twice before losing out to Joe Philbin.

McCoy was choosy before, staying in Carolina nine seasons before joining the Broncos in 2009. He'll be equally judicious in the future.

"in this profession, my wife and I have always said that we're not going to move just to move," he said.

**NOTES:** Right guard Chris Kuper (left ankle) and cornerback Tracy Porter (seizure symptoms) did not practice and were ruled out for Sunday. Everyone else is no worse than probable and practiced fully ... The Broncos left two days before kickoff for a second consecutive week, continuing the practice instituted by John Fox last year for East Coast afternoon games or any game played at 11 a.m. MST.

# Former Bronco star abandons Grand Junction business without notice

Will C. Holden  
KDVR.com  
November 9, 2012

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. — According to employees, who may now be former employees, former Denver Broncos wide receiver Vance Johnson abruptly closed his restaurant in Grand Junction Friday.

According to KJCT, there was a note posted on the front door to Vance's Epicurious, which just opened a few months earlier, informing patrons that the restaurant was closed.

"We at Epic regretfully will be closing our doors," the message reads. "We want to thank you for your support and patronage (sic). We are being led in another direction. God bless."

The sign gave little advice to all of the restaurant's employees.

"So does that mean we're unemployed?" server Jessica Jenkins asked in an interview with KJCT. "He's just going to tell us on a sign? That's it?"

Jenkins told KJCT that Johnson isn't returning calls from his employees, and that many of them haven't been paid for their past work.

Johnson has not returned calls from FOX31 Denver seeking comment, but he is scheduled to appear at — ironically enough — a grand re-opening celebration at a Sports Authority store in Glendale on Saturday.

The former Broncos wide receiver rose to fame as one of the "Three Amigos," a group that also included Ricky Nattiel and Mark Jackson. They received the nickname for being the favorite targets of John Elway from 1987 to 1992, and they helped the team to a Super Bowl appearance in 1989.

With this being the 25th anniversary of the trio's playing days, they have been doing some Broncos-sanctioned traveling to celebrate their legacy with fans in recent months.

After football, Johnson tearfully admitted to spousal abuse on "Oprah." He also owns a barbecue restaurant in Parachute called VJ's Outlaw Ribbs. There is no word on whether or not that restaurant, which opened in 2007, has been closed as well.

# Broncos at Panthers a matchup of Supermen

## Denver LB Von Miller seeks to sack Panthers QB Cam Newton

Jonathan Jones  
The Charlotte Observer  
November 9, 2012

Ron Rivera was quick to point out he and John Fox wouldn't be playing against each other on Sunday.

The same can be said for Cam Newton and Peyton Manning, who won't be on the field at the same time even though they'll be the most talked-about players.

The matchup between Newton and Denver linebacker Von Miller – No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, in the 2011 NFL draft – befits reality more than coaching or quarterback duels. It's the reigning Offensive Rookie of the Year and Pro Bowl quarterback vs. the reigning Defensive Rookie of the Year and Pro Bowl linebacker. And they're pretty friendly.

"I am Cam's biggest fan," Miller said. "Coming out with him last year and watching him fight all the adversity that he had in college and come into the league and perform at a high level, not just being able to run the ball but throw the ball, overall being the great superstar he is. If I had sons that play quarterback, I would tell them to watch Cam Newton."

Newton wasn't as effusive with his praise of Miller, but his compliments rank among his highest for a defensive opponent all season.

"Von is a very elusive defender," Newton said. "He's not very big in stature, but he still (wreaks) havoc with the things he brings to the table. He plays linebacker. He plays defensive end. He can cover. He can pressure the quarterback.

"He's about as all-around a defensive player as you can have."

Going into the draft, it was clear the Panthers would select Newton first overall. The team didn't hold a workout for Miller because his position wasn't one of Carolina's many pressing needs following a 2-14 season.

Still, Rivera said Miller ended up being No. 2 on their board, in the mix with standout wide receivers A.J. Green and Julio Jones.

"We had to react to what Carolina did in front of us, but we felt like we were going to get a good player at that No. 2 pick," Fox said. "And we're really pleased with who we took."

Though Miller had to adjust to the team's 4-3 defense in a lockout-shortened offseason, his 64 tackles and 11.5 sacks were good enough to get him All-Pro honors last year. In 23 games with the Broncos, Miller has 97 tackles and 20.5 sacks, with nine already this season.

"He's an explosive linebacker," Rivera said. "They play him as 4-3 linebacker and move him and use him as a pass rush guy and move him around there. He's versatile.

"He could have easily, if that was your desire, been the first pick in the draft. He's got that kind of ability."

Miller and the Broncos have yet to face a dual-threat quarterback through eight games this season.

"Every week there's a new set of challenges," Broncos defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio said, "and certainly some of the things they do with Cam and some of the abilities that he has as a player, they're unique and you have to account for that."

A centerpiece to the Broncos' scheme is Miller, who told USA Today earlier this week that if he can sack Newton he'll celebrate by doing the Superman pose.

"That would be great," Miller said. "I hope I get a chance to do it."

And it'd be something he could show his future son, too.

# Carolina Panthers A Whole Different Animal For Denver's Defense

Rich Kurtzman  
CBS Denver  
November 9, 2012

Through their first eight games, the Broncos have faced a bevy of high-powered passing offenses. Of course, that's the trend of the NFL in the 21st century, with the game being tilted in favor of the teams that pass proficiently. Denver's defense has developed into a dominant unit as of late, but this week will be much different. That's because Denver's opponent this weekend, Carolina, is old-school in their approach.

The Panthers run the rock with reckless abandon, be it with a traditional tailback or with their quarterback, bruising opponents while imposing their physical will.

In Carolina, the offense begins with Cam Newton. The second-year quarterback not only passes the ball—sometimes very well—but he also easily leads the team in rushing. Newton is a new generation's "Superman", at 6'5" 245-pounds, he's a load to try to take down, able to run over wannabe tacklers on a whim. He's also quick as lightning, a smooth runner, gaining 347 yards and four touchdowns on the season. Newton is able to drop back and take off when he needs to, or run it in the option offense, which the Panthers call at times.

When Newton's not running, DeAngelo Williams or Jonathan Stewart are. Williams is in his seventh year, running as strong as ever. Stewart is still skilled as well, battling through injuries this season and continuing to run tough. Together, they've run for 482 yards and three touchdowns—all by Williams—and are each vital pieces to the Panthers' seventh-best rushing offense.

What it means for the Broncos' defense is differences on how they have to play up front and in the box. Von Miller and Elvis Dumervil are usually pass-rushing specialists, and while they will still be asked push their way up field to rush Newton when he looks to pass, they will also have to make sure and set the edge when Carolina undoubtedly runs the rock. It means linebacker Wesley Woodyard will have to key in on the run much more too, and interior linemen Derek Wolfe and the many others that rotate in will need to play disciplined in their assignments.

The Panthers may be a predominantly running team, but they do pass the ball too, the third-least of any team in the NFL to be exact. Newton lit up the sky as a rookie last season, and although he's dropped off from a production standpoint this year, he's still an effective passer. He's thrown for 1,900 yards and six touchdowns compared to eight interceptions, connecting most often with Steve Smith. Smith is still a stellar receiver, small and speedy, reeling in 38 footballs for a team-leading

630 yards and one score. Tight end Greg Olson is second with 395 yards, while youngster Brandon LaFell leads the team with two receiving touchdowns.

On defense, the Panthers have a host of playmakers. Middle linebacker Luke Kuechly leads with 78 tackles, while starting cornerbacks Josh Norman and Captain Munnerlyn have combined for 11 passes defended and two interceptions. Right defensive end Charles Johnson leads with 7.5 sacks, and Carolina also has Greg Hardy with 6.5 and Dwan Edwards with five sacks all on their defensive line. Simply, the Panthers know how to get after the quarterback and they understand how to tackle with discipline. Earning easy yards won't be a possibility for the Broncos this week; they'll have to fight for every inch. But Denver should be up to the task on the road again this Sunday.

# Hey Panthers, The Broncos Are Coming, The Broncos Are Coming (And So Are John Fox And Peyton Manning)

Ted Fleming  
CBS Charlotte  
November 9, 2012

## Denver Broncos by the numbers

2012 Record: 5-3, (1<sup>st</sup> AFC West)

Record vs. Panthers: 2-1

Streak vs. Panthers: L1

Last Meeting: Panthers 30, Broncos 10 (December 12, 2008)

Next Game: Sunday at Bank of America Stadium, Charlotte NC (73,504)

The word is not exactly an inviting one, but Carolina will “welcome” back John Fox, the man who roamed the Panthers’ sidelines for nine years, this Sunday. His departure from Charlotte came after a 2-14 season which, in a way, helped the team get the first overall pick in the 2011 NFL Draft where they took someone with a Heisman Trophy under one arm and a national championship under the other.

Fox had an up and down career with the Panthers, getting them to the playoffs three times including their only Super Bowl appearance. And if you take away that final, ugly season, he was 71-57. The now 57-year old and his entire staff was let go by owner Jerry Richardson after an alleged rift between the two became public. A number of those coaches followed him to Denver.

The focus on Fox will be brief because after the initial cheers or more likely boos rain down on him, it will all be forgotten as uniform #18 trots out on the Bank of America Stadium turf for the first, and possibly only time as member of the Denver Broncos.

Peyton Manning and that guy from Auburn with all the hardware, Cam Newton, will do battle with the former having an eye on the postseason while the latter is just trying to survive against the future Hall of Famer.

Manning has had a remarkable recovery from neck issues that sidelined him for an entire year. Many skeptics didn’t think he would have the kind of success he is enjoying now, at least not this soon. Nevertheless, the numbers are striking – a 106.8 passer rating (first in the NFL), 20 TD passes (3<sup>rd</sup>) and 2,404 passing yards

(T-4<sup>th</sup>). In eight games he has been picked off just six times, and despite being generally considered a sitting duck in the pocket, defenses have sacked him just 10 times. By comparison, Aaron Rogers, Jay Cutler, Michael Vick and Kevin Kolb have been dropped at *least* 27.

The Panthers' defense is in the upper half of the league against the pass-13<sup>th</sup>-but they will definitely have their hands full with Manning, who leads the 4<sup>th</sup> best passing offense throwing for more than 292-yards a game. And if Willis McGahee starts to run wild, the Broncos are capable of throwing up some big numbers on the board.

Cam Newton has a herculean task in front of him, especially if Carolina falls behind early. If the 23-year old quarterback tries to match Manning step for step it will backfire – big time. Newton needs to repeat what he did against the Redskins, stick with the game plan and play with confidence. If he does that and still loses he will have nothing to hang his head about.

### **Statistical comparisons:**

- Both teams rank at the bottom of the league in turnover margin (DEN minus 4 – 23<sup>rd</sup>, CAR minus 5 – T24<sup>th</sup>),
- The Panthers hold a slight edge in the ground game, 116.3 to 106.9, despite Cam Newton being the team's top rusher with 347-yards. Willis McGahee tops the Broncos with 620,
- Denver punter Britton Colquitt is averaging 46.8 yards (43.1 net) outkicking Carolina's Brad Nortman who is at 40.7 gross and 35.9 net,

### **Connections:**

#### ***Broncos***

- Head coach John Fox spent nine seasons (2002-10) as the Panthers head coach.
- Defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio was the Panthers defensive coordinator in 2002.
- Offensive coordinator Mike McCoy spent several seasons on the Panthers coaching staff, serving as an offensive assistant in 2000, wide receivers coach in 2001, quarterbacks/ offensive assistant in 2002, quarterbacks coach from 2003-06, and as the passing game coordinator/quarterbacks.
- Special teams coordinator Jeff Rodgers spent 2009 with the Panthers as a special teams assistant before serving as the Panther special teams coordinator in 2010.
- Secondary assistant Sam Garnes spent the 2010 season as the Panthers special teams assistant.
- Offensive line coach Dave Magazu coached tight ends with the Panthers from 2003-06 before coaching the Panthers offensive line from 2007-10.
- Secondary coach Ron Milus coached the Panthers secondary from 2009-10.

- Linebackers coach Richard Smith spent 2009-10 with the Panthers where he also served as the linebackers coach.
- Wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert was the Panthers wide receivers coach in 2010.

### ***Panthers***

- Center Jeff Byers spent the 2010 season with the Broncos, competing on the club's practice squad before being elevated to the active roster for the final two games of the season.

# Peyton Manning, Andrew Luck have been NFL first-half sensations

Vic Tafur  
The San Francisco Chronicle  
November 9, 2012

SAN FRANCISCO — Don't get caught up in the MVP hype surrounding Matt Ryan or even Texans pass-blocker J.J. Watt. In my mind, it's a two-man race between someone coming off four neck surgeries who was run out of town by the Indianapolis Colts, and the kid they picked to replace him.

**Midseason MVP:** Peyton Manning has been ridiculously productive this season and has thrown three touchdown passes in five straight games. I didn't think he would be anywhere close to as good as he used to be (and neither did Indianapolis), and he has been even better.

Manning is on pace to set career highs in yards (4,808) and completion percentage (69.5), and the touchdowns (40) and passer rating (108.6) would be second-best numbers in his Hall of Fame career.

The Denver Broncos are 5-3, and though talk of them running the table is laughable, they are definitely a Super Bowl contender. Thanks to Manning.

**Midseason Rookie of the Year:** The Colts drafted Andrew Luck with the No. 1 overall pick, and the somewhat goofy kid from Stanford has made Indianapolis fans forget Manning. I thought he was the best quarterback prospect in the NFL draft since John Elway, and I was wrong -- he's better.

He threw for 433 yards, breaking the NFL rookie record for a single game, Sunday, and then Thursday night he ran for two touchdowns against the Jacksonville Jaguars as the Colts won 27-10 to improve to 6-3. In that win over the Miami Dolphins on Sunday, Luck connected on third-down passes of 10, 11, 12, 14, 16 and 20 yards against the best third-down defense in the NFL.

Not only is Luck, with his accuracy, toughness and mastery of the no-huddle offense, going to be the first No. 1 overall quarterback to have a winning record his rookie season, but he is going to the playoffs. With a team most experts thought was terrible (and its defense is still not very good).

**Midseason Defensive MVP:** In just a couple of years, Watt -- a 6-foot-6 defensive end -- has come out of nowhere and this season has 10 1/2 sacks, 28 tackles for loss, 21 quarterback hits and 10 pass deflections.

Chicago Bears right tackle Gabe Carimi gets to face Watt, his old college teammate, Sunday.

You have "to hit him low, so he doesn't want to jump up high," Carimi said. "That's the only way. That's what offensive linemen are taught across the league."

**Coach of the Year:** Atlanta's Mike Smith hired two new coordinators to help figure out why his talented bunch looked so feeble last year in the playoffs. Ryan is improved and might win the actual MVP award, but the Falcons' 8-0 start won't mean anything until they scare and dismiss some teams in the postseason.

**Best moment:** Colts head coach Chuck Pagano left the hospital and his treatments for leukemia Sunday to be with his team. And after the Colts won, he gave an emotional speech about fighting and how someday he will dance at his two daughters' weddings and lift a Lombardi Trophy with these players.

**Worst moment:** Commissioner Roger Goodell's stubborn handling of the officials' lockout led to the replacement officials blowing a call and a game on national television. Goodell tarnished the integrity of the game, in Scott Fujita's words, and still owes the Green Bay Packers and fans an apology.

**Worst Super Bowl pick:** That would be me, with the Philadelphia Eagles over the New England Patriots. I am afraid Jim Harbaugh's head is going to explode one day with all the brash self-confidence, but give me the San Francisco 49ers over the Patriots now.

# **COLUMN: So is Manning the Man or what?**

Haskel Burns  
The Hattiesburg American  
November 9, 2012

Well, I hate to say I told you, but I told you so. All the NFL Network and ESPN analysts busted out every excuse they could think of to doubt Peyton Manning at the beginning of the season.

His neck still isn't healed.

He doesn't have the arm strength he used to possess.

His age has caught up to him.

Turns out they were wrong, because the old man is back, and in a big way. Manning has the Denver Broncos sitting at 5-3 right now and in prime position for the playoffs, which is a huge improvement over last year for Denver.

And I don't want to hear about Tim Tebow's seven "miracle" wins for the Broncos last season. Stumbling over the goal line at the last minute does not a great quarterback make.

The master of his craft

No sir, if you want to see how the quarterback position should be played, just watch Manning on any given Sunday. He is the master of reading defenses and then picking them apart.

When Peyton plays, there is no senseless scrambling. There is no running with the ball before he even looks down field. Every throw he makes is precise and calculating; he knows where he wants to go with the ball before it's even snapped.

Sure, it took him a little while to return to form, but he is back with a vengeance. He had to get used to playing in a new system, with new players, in a new city. After being in the Colts' offense for 14 years, I'm sure it took a lot of adjusting to fit in with the Broncos' scheme.

And of course he makes mistakes; just go back and watch his three interceptions in the Week 2 game against Atlanta. But what sets Manning and the other great ones apart is that he learns from his mistakes. He rebounded from that Falcons loss and set Oakland's secondary on fire. Rarely, if ever, will you see Peyton have two bad games in a row.

There's a reason defenses have to adjust their game plans specifically for Manning: In his 15-year career, there's nothing he hasn't seen. There are no defensive packages he can't slice apart, no audibles he can't turn right back at you. No quarterback has done it better for a longer period of time.

Yeah, I suppose you could present the Favre argument, but if you remember, the ol' gunslinger wasn't always at the top of his game. Favre, as legendary as he is, had his fair share of not-so-great seasons, but Manning has been consistently great year after year.

What's next?

It's safe to say that Manning is still going strong, and I don't see him slowing down any time soon. He's already thrown for 2,404 yards this season. If he keeps this pace up, he'll surpass his 2004 total of 4,557 yards, which most people consider to be his finest season.

Also, it seems pretty likely that the Broncos will make the playoffs. The rest of Denver's schedule is pretty weak, being filled with the likes of Kansas City, Oakland, and Cleveland. I wouldn't bet against Manning and the Broncos coasting pretty easy through the rest of the season.

Of course, it's too early to start thinking about the Super Bowl, but don't be surprised if the old man makes a serious push for another ring. He's been far too good for far too long to start doubting him now.

# Broncos Blog Scoring Contest: Week 10

Gray Caldwell

DenverBroncos.com

November 9, 2012

Thanks for your comments, everyone. Let's keep this thing going!

A lot of great guesses this week, and apparently great minds think alike, because five people guessed 31-20 and six went with 31-17.

But for a refresher, the Broncos defeated the Bengals in Week 9 by a score of 31-23, so one blogger stood alone at the top of the leaderboard this week — Thomas P, who predicted a final score of 31-21.

In second place were Dbroncos82, strandoftds82, still1972, footballMANIAC and The Dane. Third-place points go to TicoBroncoFan, Miller Time 58, broncsbomber66, BroncoBoogie, Ginandy2009 and baylinorcrush.

Predictions for this week's game in Carolina are already being accepted, and will be up until kickoff on Sunday. They can be submitted here.

Below is the top of the standings entering Week 10:

<b>RANK</b>	<b>BLOGGER</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
1	The Dane	19
2	strandoftds82	17
3	baylinorcrush	13
3	still1972	13
5	Dbroncos82	12
6	Bud Buecher	8
6	TicoBroncoFan	8
6	footballMANIAC	8
9	Nine bloggers tied	7

# Hit the Road with the Broncos

Stuart Zaas  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 9, 2012

Ever wondered what an NFL road trip looks like? Now fans have a chance to go behind the scenes on the Broncos' trip to Charlotte for Sunday's game against the Panthers.

Be sure to follow the Broncos on Twitter (@denver\_broncos) and Instagram (denverbroncos) for exclusive photos from the team's trip using the official hashtag #BroncosRoadTrip.

Follow the team from the time it leaves the Dove Valley practice facility until it returns Sunday evening.

Along the way, we'll take you on the team busses, on the plane and in the hotel to see what life is like on the road for an NFL team.

# Miller Seeing Sophomore Success

Stuart Zaas  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 9, 2012

In his second NFL season, linebacker Von Miller has picked up right where he left off as a rookie when he earned the Associated Press' Defensive Rookie of the Year Award.

In 2011, Miller finished with 11.5 sacks, tying the Broncos rookie record. Through half the season in 2012, Miller already has nine quarterback takedowns, which ties for second in the NFL.

During the offseason, Miller focused on cutting down on mental errors that he saw on tape from his rookie campaign. That work has paid off as he has emerged as a complete linebacker that can apply pressure on the quarterback on one play, then drop back in coverage on the next.

"I want to be a linebacker, not a rush guy, not a pass specialist or a run specialist," Miller said. "I want to be the linebacker for this Broncos organization and my teammates. I think if I just take it one day at a time, I can achieve that goal of being a true linebacker that can play all four downs if it goes four downs."

Miller joins Texans defensive end J.J. Watt as the only players in the NFL to post nine sacks and double digit tackles for a loss through Week 9. Of Miller's 33 tackles, 17 have come behind the scrimmage, which ties for tops in the league.

Between Miller and defensive end Elvis Dumervil, opposing offensive linemen have had their hands full trying to keep the Broncos out of the backfield. Miller and Dumervil have combined for 15 sacks, the most by any pass-rush duo in football this season.

Miller's continued growth has been fueled by the coaching he's received from Linebackers Coach Richard Smith and Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio, who was an NFL linebacker himself.

"Coach Smith, he's more of a technician," Miller said. "Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. He stays on top of me on everything. Coach Del Rio, from a player's point of view, he says, 'You'll be OK with those movements if you just get this done.' You combine them both, we have a great defensive coaching staff here at the Denver Broncos."

Though Miller has found success early, he knows there are still improvements to be made – and his position coach makes sure to remind him of that as well.

"I think it's OK, but Coach Smith, my position coach, he'll tell you, I have a long way to go," Miller said. "I don't think I've been taking strides or huge bounds on reaching that goal, but I think I have taken steps. And as long as I've got some positive progress, I think I'll be alright at the end of the day. Just keep on working, taking it one day at a time."

# Looking For Four in a Row

Eric Decker  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 9, 2012

So we've got three in a row, and like Coach Fox says, 4-0 is better than 3-0. This week we're in Carolina.

I think you see offensively we're just cutting down on mistakes that we made at the beginning of the year, the turnovers. We're more efficient on third down and in the red area. That's something that's really keeping us on the field and creating positive drives with touchdowns. That's just hard work and little details we've been putting in since April — it's starting to pay off. We're starting to find that groove, find that rhythm.

The Panthers are a team that on the defensive side of the ball has improved from the beginning of the year. They pose a lot of challenge for us because their front seven is very active. They've got more than 20 sacks on the year, so you know they get to the quarterback. That's something that we've got to really pay attention to this week. Then we've just got to take care of ourselves as far as technique work and getting open, because it's going to be a challenge.

We know Coach Fox spent a lot of time there. I think he was very well appreciated in Carolina. But it's definitely good to always win against the team you just left. But we're focused on what we can do. Obviously Coach Fox understands what it means to go home, but it's us versus Carolina, so we've got to make sure we do everything possible to win.

We head to the airport in a few hours, so talk to you next week.