

# Paige: Broncos DB Chris Harris making plays, name for himself

Woody Paige  
The Denver Post  
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Between plays of the Broncos-Chargers game last November in San Diego, Chris Harris crossed paths with notorious garbage-gabber Philip Rivers.

"I didn't think he had any idea who I was," a grinning Harris told me during the offseason.

"Then he yelled at me, 'Go back to Arkansas, you (reeking) rookie.' Then I was sure he didn't know who I was."

Harris grew up in Oklahoma and played college football at Kansas. Rivers obviously didn't think the Broncos' nickel back was worth two bits.

With 2:05 remaining in the fourth quarter of the Broncos-Chargers game this year in San Diego, the Broncos, after a mercurial comeback, were clinging to a precarious 28-24 lead when Harris intercepted a Rivers pass and returned the ball 46 yards for the clinching touchdown.

Harris picked off Rivers twice — each time right in front of former Broncos teammate Eddie Royal — in the fourth quarter.

Rivers presumably knows who Harris is now.

Since the second half of that earlier confrontation, Harris and the Broncos have been riding high, and Rivers and the Chargers barely are hanging on. The two meet Sunday.

Mr. Rivers, say hello again to Mr. Harris.

The Broncos have won four straight with Harris as a starter at cornerback in place of Tracy Porter and across from Champ Bailey. During that stretch, Harris has the two interceptions, one sack, 16 tackles and five deflected passes.

In the past 14 quarters, the defense has shown 51 shades of orange — allowing an average of just 3.6 points per period, and playing like your father's Orange Crush.

In the past four games, the Chargers have lost three. Rivers had seven touchdowns and seven interceptions. Harris became Rivers' Orange Curse.

Everybody in the NFL should know Chris Harris Jr. He proved everybody in the NFL wrong.

And Chris has been forced to prove himself twice with the Broncos.

He's a quality football player and a quality young man.

In his hometown of Bixby, Okla., a suburb of Tulsa, Harris earned all-state honors for football, basketball and academics (twice). Yet, the universities of Oklahoma and Tulsa and Oklahoma State were not particularly interested.

So he accepted a scholarship to Kansas and started at cornerback as a freshman — and intercepted a pass in the Orange Bowl.

But a funny thing happened on the way to Chris Harris becoming an honorable-mention All-American and a potential high draft choice. Before Harris' senior season in 2010, coach Mark Mangino was replaced by Turner Gill.

The new staff didn't care much for Harris, and moved him to safety. Even though he was a team captain and an accomplished Big 12 athlete, Kansas coaches "told scouts I wouldn't be a pro player. I heard it from the scouts," Harris said. "Why would they do that? That really hurt."

Harris wasn't drafted. (Meanwhile, Gill and his staff were fired.)

But the Broncos' new regime led by John Elway saw Harris as a possible practice squad player, and signed him to a contract, if he made the team, for \$375,000 and — get this — a bonus of \$1,000.

A funny thing happened on the way to the practice squad.

Harris became the only undrafted and unknown player to make the Broncos' roster in 2011. Only 12 other free agents had been kept by the Broncos into the regular season since 1997.

He began last season as a special-teams player and occasional dime back. Then, about the same time Tim Tebow took over as quarterback, Harris was inserted as a nickel back, making two, then nine, then 11 tackles — and an interception in a victory at Oakland. Chris Harris was as dependable as a Ford pickup, as rock-solid as a Freddie Mercury hit.

With 65 tackles, Chris earned a place on the NFL all-rookie team.

A funny thing happened on the way to the 2012 season.

The Broncos kept bringing in more cornerbacks, which I found somewhat weird. It was as if they weren't sure about Harris. Porter, Drayton Florence

and Ramzee Robinson were signed as veteran free agents, and Omar Bolden was drafted. I asked Harris if he felt slighted.

"No, I've have to prove myself every year since I was a kid," he said. "I just worked harder."

Florence and Robinson were released, and Porter was named a starter.

Then, Porter continued to have seizure symptoms.

Harris was elevated to starter.

All he's done is make a name for himself. Quarterbacks keep picking on him, and Harris keeps making plays.

Rivers' salary this year is \$11.4 million, plus a \$3.91 million bonus; Harris is making \$465,000, plus another \$1,000 bonus.

But Rivers won't be trash-talking Harris on Sunday.

Harris has shut up the Chargers quarterback ... and shut down the Chargers' receivers.

And the Broncos will win again, 30-20.

# Kickin' it with Kiz: Broncos fans debate merits of D.J. Williams

Mark Kiszla  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

**Doggone it.** We may not like the off-field antics of linebacker D.J. Williams. But we all really want one goal: to see the Broncos win a Super Bowl. Geez, Michael Vick took part in the killing of dogs and gets a pass? Can we do less for D.J.? He is, without a doubt, a top-notch football player. Cheer him when he comes on the field. Are we so perfect we haven't screwed up?

## **David, *backing the LB***

**Kiz:** Here at Kickin' It Headquarters, football might be religion, but it's not a test of human decency. So we have zero problem with Williams being back in a Broncos uniform. But it might be a stretch to compare D.J. to Vick. The only pass Vick received for his cruelty to animals was a card that sent him directly to prison for 21 months.

**Bye-bye, D.J.** You guys in the media have overrated Williams too long. He's so stupid, he gave away plays with his iPad and you want to forgive him. We have the linebacking crew the Broncos need. Cut Williams and let's move on.

## **Todd, *Fort Worth***

**Kiz:** If I'm known for anything, it's being too generous with my praise for Denver athletes. So on that note, let me add: Cast a vote on behalf of Wesley Wood-yard for the Pro Bowl. Wood is good.

**Jets' mess.** As I watched Tim Tebow being interviewed from the New York Jets locker room on television, I was reminded how happy I am he's out of Denver. Tebow is (unintentionally) a distraction for his team. Broncos executive John Elway, among many others at Dove Valley, saw it. If the Jets aren't careful, Tebow will (again, unintentionally) become more than a distraction; he'll become a virus. Mark Sanchez has become the new Kyle Orton. The guy is a mental mess. Although Tebow says all the right things, New York players know the real story. Tebow is a wedge in the middle of the team. Perhaps we can pray the Jets send Tebow off to Pittsburgh, Baltimore, New England or, even better, Houston. These successful, well-run organizations could use a little pot-stirring to make the Broncos' road to the Super Bowl a bit easier.

## **R.D., *Littleton***

**Kiz:** The Jets invited the circus to town and now complain about getting run over by the clown car. Why did players criticize Tebow? Because it takes far less guts than declaring your general manager a knucklehead.

**Know way.** With Willis McGahee's case of fumble-itis, perhaps it's time to give Knowshon Moreno a shot at running back. Moreno is fresh. Maybe sitting on the pine will give McGahee the wake-up call he needs.

**Mike, Portland**

**Kiz:** No. 'Nuff said.

# Klis: N.Y. Jets should show some guts by starting Tim Tebow at QB

Mike Klis  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

Demaryius Thomas reached out to his fellow first-round draft mate this past week.

He sent a text of encouragement to Tim Tebow.

"I was disappointed that players would say something like that about him in public," said Thomas, a receiver who was taken with the No. 22 overall pick by the Broncos in the 2010 draft, three spots ahead of Tebow. "Because he didn't do anything to anybody. I don't know. ... It was sad when I heard about it."

Champ Bailey heard something about a story in which Tebow was ripped by his New York Jets teammates. A left guard, Matt Slauson, slammed Tebow in the New York Daily News account

Know what Bailey, a quality of cornerback that the Jets' Darrelle Revis can only hope to become someday, said of Tebow?

"He was one of my all-time favorite teammates," Bailey said. "One of the best teammates I've ever had. Just because of the way he handled everything. It's not easy being him. Still not, obviously. He might not be able to stand back there and throw that ball like some, but he plays with a *lot* of heart. You can't knock a guy who tries that hard and puts that much into it."

And then Bailey paused and asked the \$64,000 question.

"Are they going to play him or not?"

No, Champ, they're not going to play Tebow because Jets coach Rex Ryan has about as much guts as the anonymous player he blasted as "cowardly."

Ryan should summon the courage from his diminishing poundage and play Tebow for one and only one reason: The Jets would win.

Tebow might leave the Jets scratching their heads at how they won. He might not have a completion through the second half of one game or the first half of another. The Jets might win 17-13 on a final minute, 20-yard, quarterback scramble past a blitzing safety. Or they might win 18-15 in overtime despite trailing 15-0 with less than 3 minutes to go.

They might win thanks to a recovered onside kick, or a 59-yard field goal three ticks from the buzzer, or because the opposing running back runs out of bounds to stop the clock.

"But if you're within a score in the fourth quarter, he'd find a way," Broncos receiver Eric Decker said.

The Jets might even win six in a row if they played Tebow.

"Tell ya what, their situation is not a lot different from where we were last year," Bailey said.

The Jets are 3-6 in part because their quarterback, Mark Sanchez, can't pass or run. At least Tebow can run. The Broncos were 26th in rushing in 2010, the year before Tebow got his chance beyond a few "Wild Horse" plays. They are 22nd in rushing this year.

In 2011, the Year of Tebow, the Broncos ranked No. 1 in rushing. And he didn't take control until the Broncos were 1-4. Doesn't Ryan, a defensive coach by trade, want to lead the league in rushing?

Tebow can't pass like Peyton Manning. Or Kyle Orton or Mark Sanchez, for that matter. Tebow doesn't have Tom Brady's composure in the pocket, or Drew Brees' ability to read defenses.

Tebow might even rank 33rd in the 32-team NFL in all of those prototypical quarterback characteristics.

But Tebow wins because he's the No. 1 NFL quarterback at bringing energy to an entire team.

Manning may bring a team confidence. Manning, Brees and Aaron Rodgers may bring lethal execution.

Tebow brings infectious energy. And if that sounds corny, think about the barbaric behavior that is required to play in the seven-man defensive box or five-man offensive front.

Corny energy works in football.

"I'm not going to lie to you. He did rub off on people," Bailey said. "He is an inspiring dude, and I think that's why his fan base is so big. He's passionate about everything he does."

Fans know what the pundits don't. Pundits point out Tebow's elongated delivery, his poor footwork, his inaccurate passing and inability to decipher a cover 2 from quarters coverage and blah, blah, blah.

Like they're so smart. Tebow fans see this, too. The difference is, Tebow's pronounced flaws are a big reason they love him. Besides, Tebow is not "terrible" on the crossing patterns or skinny posts. He may throw sideline patterns into the band and dump checkdowns into the dirt.

But give him one playoff throw in overtime and he'll hit Thomas in stride across the middle and send an entire city into a state of delirium.

"Obviously, everybody has opinions on the guy," Decker said. "Mine was, I respected the guy. His passion for the game, what he did on Sundays — it wasn't always the most conventional way, but it was a win. A lot of guys bought in and trusted more."

Come on, Rex. Show your players what guts look like.

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## Spotlight on ...

### Josh Freeman, QB, Buccaneers

**When:** 11 a.m. Sunday at Carolina's Bank of America Stadium vs. Cam Newton and the Panthers. And then in Dec. 2 against the Broncos at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

**What's up:** This is the NFL's hottest QB. In his past five games, Freeman has had QB ratings of 137.5, 108.6, 104.2, 115.2 and 124.7. He has had 13 TD passes with one interception while averaging 293.4 passing yards during that stretch while leading the Bucs to a 4-1 mark, including wins in their past three games.

**Background:** Born and raised in Kansas City, Mo. Attended Kansas State, where he was a three-year starter and broke many school passing records. Entered the draft before his senior year. The Bucs traded up from No. 19 to No. 17 in the first round of the 2009 draft to take Freeman because they thought the Broncos would take him at No. 18. The Broncos had no such intentions and took defensive end Robert Ayers at No. 18.

**Klis' take:** Let's begin with Freeman's enormous measurements of 6-foot-6 and somewhere north of 250 pounds. He had a rough rookie year (10 TDs, 18 interceptions) but then seemed to be on his way in his second year (25 TDs, six picks). He regressed in his third season of 2011 (16 TDs, 22 interceptions), but he's playing at a Pro Bowl level this year (18 TDs, five interceptions) to put Tampa Bay in the playoff hunt. With rookie running back Doug Martin on pace for 1,500 yards rushing and rookie head coach Greg Schiano adding toughness, the Bucs could be the next San Francisco 49ers of this league.

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### **THREE UP**

**1. Colts:** Only team among 14 with a negative point margin (minus-15) that has a winning record. The Colts might be fool's gold, but their rookie QB is the real deal.

**2. Titans:** Threats from an angry owner turns team around.

**3. Texans:** Got a big-time win in game played in Bears weather.

### **THREE DOWN**

**1. Jets:** Not only have they lost three in a row, cowardly players are anonymously ripping their own.

**2. Giants:** Eli Manning: one TD pass, six picks in last four games.

**3. Dolphins:** So much for surprise team of the year. Thursday's loss to Buffalo was third in a row.

# Trindon Holliday on fast track to Denver fame as Broncos kick returner

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
November 17, 2012

It could be any gathering, any group, any day-in-the-life moment where people try to get to know each other. And Trindon Holliday, all 5-foot-5 of him, knows what's coming. It will be *the* question. "So, what do you do ... ?"

"And I tell them right away, just matter of fact," the Broncos kick returner said.

And do they believe him?

"No, they always look at me right away, look down from my feet up to my head and it's always the same. They never believe me. Never, ever," Holliday said with a smile. "I tell them I play football, they always look back at me like I'm crazy. And tell them I play professional football? They look at me like 'No, no, you're not for real.'

"But I've always loved football. I've always wanted to play it. I guess it helps if you can run, helps if you're fast."

Oh, it helps all right. And in a profession chock full of some of the fastest athletes in pro sports, Holliday is overdrive fast. The next gear, the top end.

This is a football player who was an eight-time track All-American at LSU, who won the 2009 NCAA 100-meters title by leaving a field full of fast guys that included current Oakland Raiders wide receiver Jacoby Ford looking at his back — from a distance.

He has run an electronically timed 9.98 seconds at the USA Outdoor Track and Field Championships.

"Look, some guys are fast," said Broncos cornerback Champ Bailey. "Some guys are really fast, you see that in this league. But some guys are like Trindon. I mean, 9.98, he is definitely, without question, the fastest guy I've ever played with. You watch him and he's just so smooth. He looks like he's jogging and he's running away from some of the fastest guys in the league.

"Those are the real fast track guys. Guys who know how to sprint, how to get the most out of what they're doing. Their neck veins aren't all sticking out, head going all over the place. They just run. And Trindon's got heart. I love the guy."

**Waiver wire works for Denver** Holliday represents good scouting and a bit of good fortune. He was waived by Houston last month because the Texans had lost Pro Bowl linebacker Brian Cushing for the season to a knee injury.

Caught in the roster squeeze, it was the fourth time the Texans had released Holliday in his NFL career with the team that made him a sixth-round pick in the 2010 draft. The Broncos put in a waiver claim, as did the Indianapolis Colts.

If Holliday's release had been a week earlier, he would be in Indianapolis. The waiver rules, where teams that have made a claim on a player are awarded that player on the basis of record, moved to this season's records the week of Holliday's release instead of the previous season's records.

The Colts were 2-2 at the time. The Broncos were 2-3, having just lost to the New England Patriots. So Holliday came to Denver.

"I'm glad," Holliday said. "I just wanted to contribute as soon as I could, to help out. I wanted to find a role, to show them I could play this game. I always want to show people I can play this game."

So far, Holliday has been a hold-on-tight, thrill-a-kick player. He has returned a total of 20 punts and kickoffs for the Broncos and already put two in the end zone — a 105-yard kickoff return against the Bengals, the longest play of any kind in franchise history, and a 76-yard punt return against Carolina.

He's also lost a fumble, misplayed a ball the Broncos had to recover at their 1-yard line and dropped the ball too soon on the scoring play against the Panthers, a play the NFL later said should have been ruled a touchback.

"We liked what we saw from him. We thought he could help us," said Broncos coach John Fox. "He's explosive. We just see him as a football player and I think that's how Trindon sees himself."

**Football came first** Holliday said he played football long before he ran track — "My football coach in seventh grade was the track coach and thought maybe it would work out," he said — and stopped thinking a long time ago about the first impression people have of him.

"I don't even think about my height, not at all," Holliday said. "I ran track at first just because it was something to do after school. Football was what I loved. Now, I do both."

The Broncos believe in the football side of the equation enough to have already tried Holliday in the offense — he had two receptions, including a 15-yarder, against the Panthers last Sunday. "I just want to help and if they

think I can help on offense, I'll do it," he said. "I mean, that's Peyton Manning throwing you the ball. You always want to catch that and go. And I'll catch it and try to go as fast as I can."

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### **Thrill ride**

*Trindon Holliday has been with the Broncos for only four games but has provided memorable moments:*

#### **THE HIGHS**

Returned a kickoff against Cincinnati for a team-record 105-yard touchdown.

Returned a punt 76 yards for a touchdown against Carolina.

#### **THE LOWS**

Fumbled his first punt return for the Broncos; the Chargers recovered.

On the punt return for a touchdown, he flipped the ball in the air before crossing the goal line. It was ruled a touchdown, but the NFL eventually said the play should have been ruled a touchback.

# Broncos' Trindon Holliday has brought sprinter speed to NFL

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

In a profession that covets speed and searches far and wide for those who can run faster than the rest, there still is a bottom line.

"And that's there are a lot of fast guys home on the couch who can't find a place in the game," Broncos wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert said. "Not everybody who plays football at the skill positions could run track, and not everybody who can run track can play football."

Through the years, likely from the time the Dallas Cowboys signed Bob Hayes in 1965, NFL teams have tried to find track athletes who could make the transition. Hayes was an Olympic gold medal winner in the 100 meters who went on to enshrinement in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Some work out, like Willie Gault, a member of the 1980 U.S. Olympic team as a hurdler who had an 11-year career as an NFL wide receiver, but most do not.

Trindon Holliday, an eight-time track All-American at LSU, was the NCAA champion in the 100 meters in 2009 and qualified for the world championships. The Broncos have him returning punts and kickoffs and used him at wide receiver last weekend at Carolina.

Holliday, at just 5-foot-5, 170 pounds, has made the transition better than some bigger, stronger sprinters.

"I would say Trindon has to be the smallest guy to run that fast in history," Broncos cornerback Champ Bailey said. "That's what is so amazing about him. You just don't see that. Usually sprinters are bigger, with longer strides."

The difference, Holliday said, is football instincts and a history with the game that dates to grade school, years before a middle-school coach asked him to try track.

"Just knowing how to play the game, that's a big difference, maybe," Holliday said. "How to play in an offense or whatever you have to do, coming out and learning how to use that speed in the game."

Usually, teams will try the crossover athletes at wide receiver. Hayes, Renaldo Nehemiah, James Jett, Sam Graddy and Jerry Tarr are just some high-profile sprinters who were tried at wide receiver through the decades.

Beyond Hayes, Jett had the most success of that group with 256 catches in a 10-year NFL career.

# Chargers at Broncos: Game plan

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

## **When the Broncos run.**

The Chargers have been stout against the run, holding four opponents, including the Broncos, to 56 yards rushing or fewer. But opponents have had some success running the ball over the center and around the weakside defensive end. Opponents have averaged just over 4 yards per carry over the center against the Chargers and just over 6 yards per carry outside of the offense's left tackle. Including last week's win at Carolina, the Broncos line up in heavier formations early but quickly bail on them to go with three wide receivers if they don't get fast results running the ball. **Edge: Chargers.**

## **When the Chargers run.**

San Diego ranks 18th in the NFL in rushing attempts and has had three games with 20 or fewer carries. Injuries in the offensive line have affected this part of the Chargers' offense the most. So they try to run the ball early but end up leaning on veteran quarterback Philip Rivers to bail them out. **Edge: Broncos.**

## **When the Broncos pass.**

Denver's first five opponents saw glimpses of what Peyton Manning can do. But the Chargers saw the bright lights go on for the Denver offense with Manning's three second-half touchdown passes in the Broncos' remarkable comeback win at San Diego. Quarterbacks still prefer to challenge Antoine Cason in the passing game. Given the problems the Chargers have had covering slot receivers, look for Denver's Brandon Stokley to have some opportunities. **Edge: Broncos.**

## **When the Chargers pass.**

This season, Rivers has been as dominant as anybody in the first three quarters of games — 13 touchdown passes, six interceptions. But in the fourth quarter, he has two touchdown passes and six interceptions. Without Vincent Jackson in the offense — the former Northern Colorado star signed with Tampa Bay as a free agent — Rivers has targeted the Chargers' running backs and tight ends 51.7 percent of the time in the passing game. That means the Denver linebackers will be busy. **Edge: Broncos.**

## **Special teams.**

In four games with the Broncos, Trindon Holliday has two touchdown returns. He has brought back a total of 20 punts and kickoffs and scored on two. That's a testament to his breathtaking speed and the Broncos' ability to make the 5-foot-5, 170-pounder a crease in the coverage. **Edge: Broncos.**

# Chargers at Broncos: Five things to watch

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
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## **1. Keep pressure on Philip Rivers.**

It's the kind of daily double the Chargers don't want. There are eight quarterbacks in the NFL who have been sacked more times than Rivers this season, but none of those eight have thrown as many interceptions as Rivers. Rivers has been sacked 22 times and has thrown 12 interceptions, including two in the fourth quarter of San Diego's loss to the Buccaneers last Sunday and seven in the last four games. Opposing defensive coordinators believe Rivers is pressing to make up for other offensive deficiencies and is dragging his own game down because of it.

## **2. Don't allow San Diego to rev its run game.**

The Chargers haven't had a 100-yard game from any of their running backs this season, but veteran coach Norv Turner prefers to settle things down on offense with some early-down running plays if he can do that. During the first Denver-San Diego game this season, the Broncos were in their base defense for most first- and second-down plays — especially as the Chargers built a 24-0 halftime lead. The Broncos have to take that off the table and not allow the Chargers to have that kind of offensive rhythm.

## **3. Don't let him become Alexander the great.**

Tampa Bay apparently didn't get the memo about the Chargers wanting to use wide receiver Danario Alexander more in their offense. Alexander has been with the Chargers for only three games. He went from zero catches in his first game to three catches for 61 yards in his second game — and to five catches for 134 yards and a touchdown in his third game, against the Bucs. Alexander, whose draft stock was hampered in 2010 by a long list of knee surgeries, was inserted into San Diego's offense last weekend in place of Robert Meachem, the Chargers' big free-agent acquisition. Meachem made only one reception against the Bucs.

## **4. Try to regain some offensive balance.**

No one is saying any offense with Peyton Manning at quarterback should bust out the read option. But as the weather turns cold and the season wears on, the Broncos need more production from their running game. It would help slow the pass rushers who take aim at Manning. The Broncos rank 15th in the league in rushing attempts and 22nd in yards rushing per game. If they

improve those numbers, even a bit, their offense will become more dangerous.

### **5. Keep their word and slam the door.**

Year after year, since they were 13-3 in 2005 and played in the AFC championship game that season, the Broncos have talked about their playoff worthiness. But since the start of the 2006 season, they are 22-32 in regular-season games played in November, December and January. The Broncos have an opportunity Sunday in Denver to put the AFC West title out of reach for the Chargers. If the Broncos are the team they believe they are, that's exactly what they will do.

# Sunday's NFL games: Home is where wins are for Ryan, Brady and Flacco

Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

When he was playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Hall of Fame quarterback Terry Bradshaw was the NFL's master chef for home cooking.

Bradshaw had a 67-12 record in regular-season home games, an .848 winning percentage. At the time, ranking second in that category was another Hall of Fame QB from the same era, former Dallas Cowboys star Roger Staubach. Staubach was 49-10 in regular-season home games, an .831 winning percentage. Now Bradshaw and Staubach are looking up at three active quarterbacks whose success in home games borders on improbable.

Matt Ryan, whose Falcons host Arizona in the Georgia Dome, is 30-4 at home. That winning percentage (.882) is the best all time for QBs with a minimum 25 starts. Joe Flacco, whose Ravens meet the Steelers in Pittsburgh, is 32-5 (.865) at home. Tom Brady, whose Patriots host the Colts in Foxborough, Mass., is 72-12 (.857) at home.

## Must-see game of the week

### Colts at Patriots 2:25 p.m.

**The skinny:** Every rookie quarterback goes through various football exams, and the Colts' Andrew Luck gets a big one here. Patriots coach Bill Belichick is a proven defensive tactician whose coverages have forced plenty of mistakes from passers with Hall of Fame résumés. Belichick has had a lot of practice against the Indianapolis offense; this is the 10th consecutive season the teams have met. The Patriots have won three of the past five meetings, but the Luck-led Colts are hot.

**The difference will be:** If the Colts can take care of the ball well enough to give themselves a chance. They are minus-nine in turnover margin. The Patriots are the league leaders at plus-16. Luck needs one more 300-yard passing game this season — he already has four — to set a rookie record. Peyton Manning had four 300-yard games as a rookie in 1998.

**The call:** Patriots 31-21.

**Catch 'em if you can**

**Buccaneers at Panthers 11 a.m.**

The Bucs have scrapped their way back into the NFC's wild-card race with an offense that has scored at least 28 points in five consecutive games, a franchise record. In those five games, Josh Freeman has thrown 12 touchdown passes and only one interception. The Bucs have won three of their past five games against the Panthers, who have lost six of their past seven games this season.

**The call:** Buccaneers 28-24.

**Packers at Lions 11 a.m., KDVR-31**

This longtime rivalry has been a one-sided affair for more than a decade. The Packers have won 20 of the past 23 meetings, including a season sweep in 2011. Packers star Aaron Rodgers leads the NFL with 25 touchdown passes. He is the first quarterback in league history to throw at least 25 touchdown passes in the first nine games of two seasons.

**The call:** Packers 35-31.

**Cardinals at Falcons 11 a.m.**

The Cardinals haven't won since Sept. 30, their fourth victory in a 4-0 start. The Falcons are a tall order anywhere this season, but are particularly tough to beat at home, where they are 5-0 at the Georgia Dome. They're also tough to beat if you get them in a close game. Under coach Mike Smith, the Falcons are 27-11 in games decided by one score — including a victory over the Broncos in Atlanta this season.

**The call:** Falcons 33-23.

**Ravens at Steelers 6:20 p.m., KUSA-9**

The Steelers will be playing for a while without star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, who has rib and shoulder injuries. If defense decides this game, the Steelers will have the upper hand. Pittsburgh leads the league in defense, allowing only 267.7 total yards per game. The Ravens have allowed at least 400 total yards four times this year and have allowed at least 180 yards rushing three times.

**The call:** Steelers 24-17.

**Quick hitters****Bengals at Chiefs 11 a.m.**

The Bengals have won four of their past six games against the Chiefs. For a struggling team such as the Chiefs, it can be extremely difficult to play in front of disgruntled fans

**The call:** Bengals 27-10.

**Eagles at Redskins 11 a.m.**

Redskins rookie Robert Griffin III is tied with Patriots star Tom Brady for fewest interceptions (three) among quarterbacks who have thrown at least 200 passes this season.

**The call:** Redskins 24-21.

**Jaguars at Texans 11 a.m.**

If the Texans are interested, motivated and handle their business, this game will get ugly. The Texans have the league's second-ranked defense. The Jaguars? They have the league's worst offense.

**The call:** Texans 33-10.

**Jets at Rams 11 a.m.**

The Rams are the team nobody wants to play, especially in St. Louis. The Jets have a divided locker room, and coach Rex Ryan has called some of his players "cowards" for ripping backup quarterback Tim Tebow.

**The call:** Rams 17-13.

**Browns at Cowboys 11 a.m., KCNC-4**

The Cowboys, despite their losing record, still have designs on getting back into the NFC East race. But they need more production from Tony Romo and somebody other than tight end Jason Witten to catch passes.

**The call:** Cowboys 27-12.

**Saints at Raiders 2:25 p.m.**

Since their 0-4 start, the Saints have won four of five games. But they have a defense that still ranks among the league's worst. The Saints are giving up an average of 469.3 yards per game. Drew Brees is 6-0 in starts against the Raiders.

**The call:** Saints 35-21.

# Broncos Q&A: Wide receiver Andre Caldwell

Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

A backup wide receiver in his first year with the Broncos, Andre Caldwell should not be confused with those wide-eyed youngsters just feeling their way around after being promoted from the practice squad. Caldwell knows the territory.

Caldwell was signed during the offseason as an unrestricted free agent after catching 124 passes in four seasons with the Cincinnati Bengals.

Not drawing much playing time this season has been an adjustment for the native Floridian.

"It's tough, because I want to be out there in games battling with the guys I go to work with every day," Caldwell said. "But this is the NFL, and you never know what's going to happen with injuries and things. Whenever I get a chance, I want to prove to these coaches that I can play, and I never want to go back to the bench again."

Q: Which was the bigger thrill — catching a touchdown pass for Florida against Ohio State in the 2006 national championship game or recording 51 receptions in 2009, your second year in the NFL?

A: I'd have to say the national championship game. That's something that as a kid you dream about. To be able to do that, it was the best feeling I've had in football.

Q: How about having Tim Tebow as a Gators teammate?

A: Tim is a great guy. He was the hardest-working player I've ever been around. I hope he has nothing but success in the future.

Q: Your older brother, Reche Caldwell, played six seasons in the NFL as a wide receiver for San Diego (2002-05), New England (2006) and Washington (2007). Did he make it easier for you to adapt and adjust to playing at this level?

A: That was a big plus for me, understanding how to go into a season and what to expect. He helped me understand how to read defenses and prepare for games. He worked with me during the offseason, so I think I had an

advantage over some guys that didn't have that when they were growing up. Before I even got to the NFL, I'd been around NFL players, so I knew how to act. I knew how to act like a man.

Q: You're 6-foot, 190 pounds and have the nickname "Bubba." Usually, Bubbas are big guys. How did you get that nickname?

A: When I was a little kid, I was a fat baby. I was like that until I was 4 years old. My brother called me that and I've been called Bubba ever since. Just about everybody calls me Bubba — except my wife, she hates it, hates it.

Q: How is it to catch passes from Peyton Manning?

A: It's great. He makes the game a lot easier. He puts the ball on the money. He puts you in the right place. He definitely throws a catchable ball. It's soft. It lands right in your hands. You just have to put your hands there.

Q: Enjoying living in Denver?

A: Denver's been great. I enjoy it a lot more than living in Cincinnati. There's a lot of things to do. There's a great fan base. They support you all the way. That's a great plus to have.

Q: Anything you want to experience in Colorado that you haven't had a chance yet?

A: I want to go into the mountains and see how it is up there. I have a lot of friends that talk about being in the mountains and hanging out. I look forward to doing that in the offseason.

Q: Had you heard the Chamber of Commerce pitch that Denver has more days of sunshine than Miami?

A: The team was telling me that during free agency. I didn't believe it at all. But it's true, there is a lot of sun out here.

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## **Andre Caldwell file**

**Position:** Wide receiver

**Height:** 6-foot

**Weight:** 190 pounds

**Hometown:** Tampa, Fla.

**College:** Florida

**Draft:** Third round (No. 97 overall) by Cincinnati in 2008

**Career stats:** 124 catches for 1,172 yards and six touchdowns, all with the Bengals

**2012 stats:** five games, no catches

# **D.J. Williams to get his first \$1 million of 2012**

Mike Klis  
The Denver Post  
November 18, 2012

He has a \$950,000 base salary guaranteed. Now Broncos linebacker D.J. Williams can go after those \$100,000 bonuses for each game he is on the 46-man active roster.

Williams was formally added to the Broncos' 53-man roster and he is expected to play Sunday against the San Diego Chargers. Besides his base salary – reduced by the club following his two suspensions — Williams can make \$700,000 in bonuses if he is active for each of the Broncos' final seven games.

Even if he does play in the final seven games, Williams will have lost \$3.35 million this year in forfeiture and restructure of salary.

# **D.J. Williams returns to Broncos' 53-man roster**

Arnie Stapleton  
Associated Press  
November 17, 2012

DENVER (AP) — Linebacker D.J. Williams is on track to make his 2012 debut Sunday against San Diego after the Denver Broncos put him on their 53-man roster Saturday.

Williams returned to practice this week after serving two NFL-mandated suspensions that cost him nine games and about \$4 million.

On Friday, coach John Fox said Williams had looked good in practice all week "and he's a guy we would definitely consider to be active for the game."

If he plays Sunday, he'll likely play in sub packages and on special teams.

Williams was suspended six games for violating the league's policy on performance-enhancing drugs and three games for an alcohol-related arrest. The Broncos had a roster exemption for Williams but already had a spot open after waiving safety Duke Ihenacho on Tuesday.

# Mailbag: O-line Rivers' big problem?

Bill Williamson  
ESPN.com  
November 17, 2012

Weekend mail call:

**Craig from Singapore wants to know if I think Denver linebacker Wesley Woodyard will make the Pro Bowl.**

**Bill Williamson:** He is currently second in fan voting. So, he has a nice start. Usually, big-name linebackers with big sack numbers get voted into the Pro Bowl. Woodyard is a lesser-known player, but he is a tackling machine and he is certainly deserving of serious consideration.

**Jack from Great Falls, Mont., wants to know** why the Chiefs' defense was penalized for celebrating a touchdown that was nullified by review.

**BW:** Rules are rules. Yes, it was hard for the Chiefs' to swallow. But they initiated an illegal celebration and they were flagged for it. It doesn't matter that they didn't get the touchdown. It is a good lesson to the Chiefs that there are consequences for silly decisions.

**Ray from San Diego wants to know** if I think some of Philip Rivers' problems have been caused by offensive line issues.

**BW:** There have been injuries on the offensive line in the past two years in San Diego and that is certainly a reason why the Chargers' offense isn't as strong as it can be. But Rivers' biggest problem is making silly interceptions and I think that is more on him than any other issue going on with this offense.

# Denver-bound

Bill Williamson

ESPN.com

November 17, 2012

I am on my way to Denver to cover the Broncos' game against San Diego in a critical AFC West game.

Please join me for pre, in and post-game coverage in addition with the other AFC West action.

# NFL Week 11 storylines: Andrew Luck's arrival revives Colts-Patriots rivalry

Chris Burke  
Sports Illustrated  
November 17, 2012

For years and years the Colts-Patriots rivalry was one of the NFL's best, with Tom Brady and Peyton Manning dueling on an annual basis. Last season, the ninth straight in which those two AFC foes met, the luster lacked. The Colts entered the early December contest at 0-11 and with Dan Orlovsky running the show at quarterback.

Indianapolis still made a game of it, scoring 21 points in the fourth quarter to lose by seven, but the national excitement waned.

Eleven months later, it's back.

We can thank Andrew Luck and the resurgent 2012 version of the Colts for that. As Luck churns his way toward Rookie of the Year honors, the Colts are one of the NFL's biggest surprises — their 6-3 record has them firmly in wild-card position and matches New England's start to the 2012 season.

On Sunday Luck leads his team into Foxboro for his first meeting with Brady and the Patriots. The start time of the game was bumped from 1 p.m. ET to the less-crowded 4:25 slot, a nod to the interest in the first Luck-Brady showdown.

If the AFC continues to play out as it has so far, though, the second meeting of those quarterbacks could come in the postseason. Of course, as the

playoff picture stands right now, it would not be the Patriots that Luck's Colts would draw in Round 1.

It would be the Denver Broncos ... and Manning.

- **Checking in on the quarterback infirmary**

Week 10 was none too kind to the NFL's signal-callers. Three of them (Alex Smith, Jay Cutler, Michael Vick) exited their games in the first half with concussions, then Ben Roethlisberger suffered an extremely unusual and serious injury in the Monday night game.

Of the four, only Alex Smith is in line to play in Week 11. That's bad news for the Bears, San Francisco's Monday opponent, who announced Friday that they'll hold Cutler and start Jason Campbell. The Eagles also declared Michael Vick out for their game Sunday in Washington, turning things over to the backup — Nick Foles, in this case.

Roethlisberger's timetable, meanwhile, remains very much up in the air. At the least his injury will sideline him for Sunday night's crucial AFC North showdown against Baltimore, giving Byron Leftwich his first start since 2009. The Ravens and Steelers meet again in Week 11; will Roethlisberger be available for the rematch? It is possible. Unfortunately for the Steelers, it is also possible that Big Ben has to shut it down until next season.

- **Here come the Saints (and Buccaneers)**

The NFC South race remains relatively drama-free for now, with the 8-1 Falcons still in cruise control, despite a loss to New Orleans last week. A visit from Arizona this Sunday should not cause Atlanta too much consternation.

Below the Falcons in the standings, though, are a pair of teams rapidly making up for lost time. The Saints, thanks partially to that emphatic win over Atlanta, have won four of five to get back within a game of .500; the Buccaneers have reeled off three straight wins to improve to 5-4, placing them just a half-game back in the NFC wild-card race.

New Orleans heads to Oakland this Sunday, while Tampa Bay visits Carolina. Should both teams win, we may have to start talking about the NFC South as a potential three-playoff-team division.

### • **San Diego's last shot in the AFC West**

Technically, the earliest the Broncos can clinch the AFC West is in Week 13. Ostensibly, however, they can put a bow on the division race Sunday afternoon.

That's if the Broncos can take down San Diego for a second time this season. Manning's team already did just that back in Week 6, rallying from a 24-0 halftime deficit to send the Chargers spiraling. If Denver repeats that outcome Sunday, it will push its AFC West lead out to three games and hold the head-to-head tiebreaker over San Diego. In other words, one divisional race will be over.

### • **Does Detroit have any fight left?**

The Lions have spent the past two weeks batting off insults from anonymous sources — first, center Dominic Raiola was in the crosshairs, then Ndamukong Suh endured his turn this week. Just the latest in a long string of unwelcome distractions for Jim Schwartz's club.

The on-field product has not been much better. Coming off a playoff appearance in 2011, the Lions have failed to meet expectations thus far in 2012, slumping to a 4-5 start. Their fading hopes are on the line Sunday, when the Packers visit Motown. The Lions have knocked off the Packers just once in the past six seasons — and that win came in a game that saw Aaron Rodgers leave with an injury.

- **The Tim Tebow saga refuses to go away**

The Jets are 3-6, barely with a pulse in the playoff race. And yet, more of the NFL news cycle has been devoted to their backup quarterback than maybe any other topic this season.

Suffice it to say, Tebow's arrival in New York has not exactly sparked the Jets as they hoped it might. He has seen the field only sporadically (unless you count his work as a blocker on punts), and now this week, several of his teammates ripped Tebow in the press.

All the while, Mark Sanchez has wallowed in underachievement as New York's starting quarterback, unable to get the offense going with a shaky line and depleted receiving corps at his service.

The Rams could put a dagger in the Jets' season on Sunday by knocking them off in St. Louis. The downside of that? Once the Jets are eliminated officially from contention, the cries for Tebow to play will grow only louder.

# Broncos will win with Chargers' best behind them

Paul Klee  
Colorado Springs Gazette  
November 17, 2012

DENVER • The best and the worst part about Philip Rivers is how much good he does.

Take Rivers of Hope, for example. His foundation has raised and donated more than \$1 million to care for foster children in San Diego County. Who does that?

The Chargers' hotheaded quarterback does.

That's the best.

"He's cool, man. Real cool," said Broncos defensive end Elvis Dumervil, further clouding our state's view of Rivers as a football villain.

For Broncos fans who prefer Rivers as the nemesis of a generation, that's the worst.

With that unfortunate dose of reality out of the way, can we please get back to treating Rivers like who he is on football Sundays — Broncos Public Enemy No. 1?

This is professional sports, don't forget, and the notion of goodwill being more important than good football has no place in the arena.

"But you put on that helmet and he's a different guy," Dumervil added.

Sunday at Sports Authority Field, Rivers will be booed like he stole our mountains.

And the Broncos will flatten his Chargers like beach sand.

Nevermind that a locker room full of Broncos spent last week propping up the Chargers leader with kind words. It's not as if Champ Bailey (7-10 vs. San Diego), D.J. Williams (5-10), Wesley Woodyard (3-5) and Dumervil (4-7) have forgotten the painful defeats Rivers and the Chargers have inflicted through their Broncos careers.

When the Chargers beat the Broncos, they rub it in with lime juice.

Rivers is 9-4 against Denver as the starting quarterback. That includes blowout wins by scores of 35-14, 32-3, 41-3, 21-3 and 52-21. The last one was the worst.

Rivers routinely has been a step ahead of the Broncos, even in identifying Jay Cutler's true colors while yapping at the Denver sideline.

"I don't expect him to come in here and throw us the ball," Bailey said of critics who suggest Rivers isn't the player he used to be.

"When I first came in, he was pretty much dominating this conference," Dumervil said. "I know what he's capable of and what coach Norv Turner can do. So you can never take him lightly."

San Diego's won three straight in Denver. The Broncos haven't even won three straight in Denver.

There were numerous culprits within the organization to blame for the Broncos' slide from the elite over the past decade.

From the outside, there is one that stands with its chest puffed out: San Diego.

But times are changing.

Sunday in the trenches, where coaches say games are won, the mismatch is severe. Denver has drafted and developed the fiercest pass rush in the NFL. It's about to get better.

Dumervil left the Carolina game with a shoulder injury. He practiced Friday. Doom has four sacks in his past two games against the Chargers.

Williams was suspended for the first nine games. He returns today with a body that hasn't been beaten up and a reputation that needs a makeover.

"He's been looking good in practice," Von Miller said.

Miller spent Thursday night watching LeBron James and the Heat from a seat behind the Nuggets bench at Pepsi Center. With 10 sacks in nine games, he's on pace to become Denver's sack king and trump Dumervil's single-season franchise record of 17.

The Broncos have more than twice as many sacks (31) as the Chargers (14). Their target Sunday is Rivers, whose mobility is that of a taco stand on Mission Beach.

There's more. The Chargers starting left tackle didn't practice Friday. Jared Gaither is listed as doubtful. Miller, Dumervil, Williams, Woodyard are listed as drooling.

"We're a decent football team right now," Bailey said. "But we could be so much better."

A win Sunday gives the Broncos a three-game lead in the AFC West and the head-to-head tiebreaker against the only division rival capable of challenging them, the Chargers.

The Broncos will close in on their first back-to-back AFC West titles since 1986 and '87.

The Chargers will see their window close.

In 2008, the worst, San Diego ended Denver's season with a 52-21 win in the finale. It brought change to Denver. Mike Shanahan was fired as coach.

Denver can end San Diego's season Sunday. It would bring change to San Diego. After the season Turner probably would be fired as coach.

Since Peyton Manning's magic in a 35-24 win at San Diego in Week 6, the Broncos have been the best — in the NFL.

"There was actually trip wire in San Diego," said Eric Decker, whose open-field stumble at Qualcomm Stadium has been about their only wobble.

By tripping up Rivers, the Broncos can make it official.

The best of the Chargers is behind them.

# **Bersch: Broncos are on a roll, and it all started with Chargers game**

Jeff Bersch  
The Coloradoan  
November 17, 2012

There still are seven games remaining in the regular season and more than likely the postseason to look forward to for the Denver Broncos.

There's no telling how far the Broncos might go this season. At this point, I say it's the Super Bowl or bust. And if something crazy like that were to happen, you can go back about a month to when it all started.

The Broncos host the San Diego Chargers on Sunday at Sports Authority Field at Mile High in Denver and with a win could all but wrap up a division title. It's a crazy thought considering where Denver was halfway through the teams' first matchup.

The Chargers led 24-0 at halftime. The Broncos appeared to be headed to a 2-4 record. San Diego looked like it would take a two-game lead in the division. Then the season truly started for the Broncos. A touchdown pass from Peyton Manning to Demaryius Thomas got it started and a fumble return for a touchdown by Tony Carter got Denver back in the game. A touchdown to Eric Decker had them within striking distance and a remarkable catch by Brandon Stokley finally gave the Broncos the lead.

Just for good measure, Chris Harris added an interception return for a touchdown and the Broncos won 35-24. It was a comeback for the ages and one that got the Broncos rolling.

Fast forward a month. That was the first of four consecutive wins for Denver, which is 6-3 and now has a two-game lead in the division. San Diego, meanwhile, has won only once since then. The Chargers are 4-5 and struggling.

The Broncos play the easiest schedule in the NFL over the next seven weeks. They face only one team, the Baltimore Ravens, with a winning record. This game against the Chargers may be the next toughest on the schedule.

Denver needs to come out this week and prove the first matchup wasn't a fluke. They need to continue to show they are indeed the team that came alive in the second half in San Diego.

The past four games have been fun to watch if you're a Broncos fan. They routed the Saints, who now look like they might just be a playoff contender. They won on the road at Cincinnati, which bounced back last week by routing the New York Giants and Manning's brother, Eli.

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# Broncos WR Decker detects red-cell advantage

Tom Krasovic  
U-T San Diego  
November 17, 2012

Eddie Royal inhaled and exhaled, while his opponents huffed and puffed.

The fourth quarter had arrived, and Royal wondered what the fuss was because he was feeling spry.

Royal and his fellow Denver Broncos had come down from the Rocky mountains to play a road game, and it was as if they had an extra lung.

"You're not as tired," Royal said. "During the fourth quarter, I think you really notice it a lot. You don't feel like you had played a whole game because you were still pretty fresh."

The Broncos are the Sherpas of the NFL. Mountain people. Alpine athletes. They live a mile up. Everyone else in the NFL looks up at them.

Rarefied air is their friend. The fourth quarter is their domain.

It's often thought the Broncos have an advantage at home, where they'll face the Chargers on Sunday, because opponents must adjust to the thin air. Exertion at altitude can cause headaches and shortness of breath.

Cris Collinsworth, a former Cincinnati Bengals receiver, now a football analyst for NBC, said he had to lie on the sideline during a game in Denver, so exhausted was he by the piercing air.

Less considered is the advantage the Broncos may enjoy on the road as the NFL's only altitude-conditioned team. (The Arizona Cardinals train for about four weeks at Flagstaff, elevation 7,000 feet, before returning to Phoenix).

Royal, now a Charger, isn't the only receiver to report the bliss of having more stamina than the home team.

Broncos receiver Eric Decker says he has reaped a perceived red-blood-cell bonanza, both home and away.

"If you live here year-round like I do," Decker said on Wednesday from Denver, "I do believe that it's an advantage because scientifically, you produce more red blood cells than you do at sea level. When you go down to

sea level, those red blood cells give you more oxygen and give you the endurance and stamina.”

Whatever conditioning edge the Broncos may enjoy, however, is in their mind, not their lungs.

That is the view of one expert on high-altitude training.

“The only advantage the Denver Broncos have is psychological,” said Sean Anthony, director of HYPO2 Sports, a Flagstaff-based company that matches endurance athletes and sports teams with high-altitude training sites.

Anthony said that training at altitude can stimulate red-cell production. He disagrees that football players run continuously long enough during games for it to be a factor.

If a football play lasted at least two minutes, the Broncos may have an edge, he said. But a typical play is over in a matter of seconds.

“If you think about it, you’re talking about a very, very short duration for plays,” he said. “That’s why you can have a guy who is 350 pounds playing. Because he only has to do it for only a few seconds, he’s not depending on the oxygen-carrying capacity of red cells to do it for him.”

Decker said Broncos coach John Fox, in his second season on the job, has instilled a finish-the-game mentality in his team.

The results are impressive. In their first season under Fox, the Broncos won all four of their games that went into overtime, including a wild-card playoff match against the Steelers.

This year with Peyton Manning directing their offense, the Broncos (6-3) are dominating the second half. They have outscored opponents 70-44 in the third quarter and an NFL-best 115-30 in the final quarter, during which Manning has nine touchdowns and no interceptions.

Two of those touchdown passes came in the fourth quarter of the Week 6 game at San Diego, where the Broncos fired back from a 24-0 halftime deficit to win 35-24.

“Coach Fox structures his practices in a way that portrays the attitude that we have to be able to finish,” said Decker, who has seven catches for touchdowns. “A lot of times at the beginning of the season, we struggled to start the game, but we always knew how to finish.

"That was always a strength for us because it comes down to an attitude, the way you train, and the way you do everything as far as meetings, lifting and practice."

Some of the most striking comebacks in NFL history are part of Broncos lore. Many of them were directed by John Elway, a Hall of Famer who two years ago became the club's top football executive.

It was one thing for Elway to rally his team to victory by throwing passes that other mortals were incapable of throwing.

It was quite another for the Broncos to be outscored in only two of 13 fourth quarters with Tebow as their quarterback. A deft, tireless and punishing runner with an under-appreciated ability to avoid fumbling, Tebow completed only 46.5 percent of his passes last year.

But in all four overtime games, Tebow and teammates were the last ones to celebrate. Tebow is now a backup to Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez.

"I think their defense was very good," said Chargers tight end Antonio Gates. "They deserved a lot of credit."

Manning is a master of the no-huddle offense, which would seem to accentuate any extra benefits the Broncos may have in conditioning.

The Chargers will go into Denver on run of high-altitude success unprecedented in their NFL history.

They're 6-1 in Denver since 2006, including a 5-1 mark under Norv Turner. The one loss doesn't count in the minds of most Chargers fans, for Ed Hochuli's infamous blown call rescued the home team.

Leading up to 2006, the Chargers had lost their previous six games at Denver, not to mention 10 of 11 and 21 of 23.

Royal said Turner and the team's conditioning coaches have the Chargers (4-5) prepared to go the distance, even if they've scored only three fourth-quarter points in their five defeats.

"I think practicing, and work, and doing extra conditioning for us is good, just so come the fourth quarter in different games, we're prepared," he said.

As for the greater stamina he experienced as a Bronco, Royal said some of it was in my mind, "but some of it was not because I did notice it in away games.

"I think other people make it more of a big deal more than the players do," he said. "At the end of the day, you've still got to play ball."

# WHO IS THE BETTER QB: PEYTON MANNING OR TOM BRADY?

Todd Adams  
U-T San Diego  
November 18, 2012

SCOTT KAPLAN: Peyton Manning is the greatest quarterback of his generation. And he is proving that more this season with the Broncos than he did in an incredible career with the Colts.

Manning has what all great quarterbacks must have — leadership ability. He is proving that after spending a year away from the game with a neck injury and moving to a new team. He is the leader of his group.

Last Sunday, NFL Films, from the sideline of Denver's win over Carolina, caught Manning talking to his entire offense, encouraging them to move on from a mistake and concentrate on the next series. You could tell by watching, Manning is in total control of his team.

The Broncos knew they were getting a legend to quarterback their team, but they didn't know if he was the same guy who, before last season, had never missed a start in 13 years.

They had no idea if Peyton Manning would be trying to revive his own career and pad his stats, or a guy who would fit in and pursue a title.

All the key stats say Manning is the superior player, other than Super Bowl rings, where Brady leads 3-1.

But ask yourself this question, in the fourth quarter, as the clock is winding down, who would you rather have leading your team?

Manning is the all-time leader in fourth-quarter comebacks, surpassing Dan Marino earlier this season, with 37 for his career. For that reason, I will take Manning.

BILLY RAY SMITH: When confronted with a question of this nature, you're going to do your best to point out the qualities that Peyton possesses in a greater quantity than Tom — or vice versa. Then this starts to sound like a couple of guys sitting at the bar, ordering another round, passing the peanuts, and never really saying anything that would change the opinion of the other.

I'm not going to go there.

What I will note is that Thomas Edward Patrick "Tom" Brady, Jr. has more "bling" than Peyton Williams Manning.

Bling as in T.S.B.R. (Total Super Bowl Rings).

I won't start harping over quarterback rating points, completion percentages, or even whose wife is hotter. I will let the "bling" do the talking.

Peyton has a ring from Super Bowl 41 (I hate roman numerals).

Tom has three rings, from Super Bowls 36, 38 and 39.

It is the ultimate question for a super star NFL quarterback: How many Super Bowls did you win?

Since NFL quarterback greatness is the perfect combination of leadership and pure football skill, the deciding factor will always be the number of rings that you have amassed during your career.

The difference between Peyton and Tom is infinitesimal, until you start counting rings.

The fact that Tom also doubled up on Super Bowl MVP awards should be pointed out. Along with the fact that Tom Brady has played in five, count 'em five total Super Bowls.

Order another round, and pass the peanuts.

Scott vs. B.R.

# Mark Gaughan's Inside the NFL: Peyton's stock up

Mark Gaughan  
The Buffalo News  
November 18, 2012

Two quarterbacks speeding in opposite directions meet today in Denver.

Peyton Manning has the Broncos on a four-game winning streak and in position to put a stranglehold on the AFC West with a win over slumping San Diego. A win by Denver (6-3) gives the Broncos what amounts to a four-game lead with six to play.

Manning's comeback from neck surgery is one of the feel-good stories of the year in the NFL. Philip Rivers' struggles for the Chargers is one of the confounding stories of the year.

Rivers is an elite quarterback who is capable of leading the Chargers to the Super Bowl. He has elite accuracy, great instincts in the pocket and fantastic intangibles.

Yet Rivers has been burdened with what San Diego media have taken to calling a case of the "yips," the golfing term used to describe a jerking motion that causes the missing of easy putts.

A case in point came last week in Tampa. Rivers was 22 of 26 for 271 yards early in the fourth quarter before he threw a terrible interception along the sideline. The Bucs' Leonard Johnson returned it 83 yards for a game-breaking touchdown.

Rivers has 15 TD passes and 12 interceptions this year. His interception rate is the highest in the league. Last season Rivers ranked third in the NFL in interceptions with 20, part of the reason the Chargers finished 8-8.

In his first five seasons as a starter, Rivers had 136 TDs and 58 interceptions, which at the time was the second best TD-to-INT ratio of all time. His career passer rating of 97.2 entering last season was the highest in the league for QBs with more than 2,000 passes.

The problem is Rivers' supporting cast has deteriorated and he keeps pressing to compensate. Last season Rivers lost the left side of his offensive line. Left tackle Marcus McNeill had to retire because of neck problems. Left guard Kris Dielman had to retire because of concussions. Replacement left tackle Jared Gaither hasn't been able to stay healthy enough to play at a

high level.

Meanwhile, tight end Antonio Gates has gotten older. The Chargers lost starting wideout Vincent Jackson in free agency, and his replacement, Robert Meachem, so far has been a disappointment. The Chargers outbid the Bills for Meachem, who has just 13 catches.

The Chargers defense was a big disappointment last season, slumping to 22nd in the league in points allowed. Rivers last season played like a guy who thought he had to make every play in order to carry the defense on his back. The Chargers defense actually is much better this year. It's seventh in yards allowed, second against the run and 11th in points allowed. But Rivers still seems to be trying to make plays when nothing is available.

"He's obviously trying as hard as he can to go win," Chargers coach Norv Turner said this week. "In a couple of cases, he's trying to do too much. As I said, it's not 20 plays. It's one or two plays in two or three of the games."

It's Turner's job, as an offensive-minded coach, to get Rivers to stop putting too much pressure on himself.

"It's frustrating," Turner said. "It's frustrating for him and it's frustrating for all of us. We're spending a lot of time working on it. We handle the things that we need to handle and we're coaching. As I said, he's working hard at it."

If the Chargers don't catch the Broncos, Rivers will have somebody else trying to get him to play more relaxed next season.

### **Poor Garrett**

The pressure meter never leaves the red zone for the coach of the Dallas Cowboys. Jason Garrett already is a marked man with his Cowboys (4-5) at the back end of the playoff race. There's speculation that suspended Saints coach Sean Payton, the former Dallas aide and Dallas resident, would be a logical replacement for Garrett since Payton is due to become a free agent at the end of the season.

This week Dallas owner Jerry Jones added more gasoline to the fire after a rumor floated that lame-duck Browns president Mike Holmgren would be interested in the Dallas job. Jones initially expressed his respect for Holmgren and said he was flattered if Holmgren were interested. Then Jones moved to dismiss the talk by telling a Dallas radio station he is "fired up about" Garrett and his future. Jones and Holmgren get to exchange greetings when their teams meet today.

Garrett has one big factor in his favor in his effort to keep his job. Jones would have to relinquish a significant amount of power in making football decisions if he were to turn to Holmgren or Payton.

## **Dancing Machines**

The Chiefs performed a public service in the loss to Pittsburgh by showing young athletes how ridiculous it looks to celebrate when you're on a losing team. Team captains Eric Berry and Derrick Johnson, among others, got an excessive celebration penalty when the Chiefs returned an apparent fumble for a TD. But the fumble was ruled an incomplete pass on review. Chiefs Tamba Hali and Justin Houston did the "Kid 'n Play dance" after a sack on Ben Roethlisberger.

"It was a surprise to me to see some of those celebrations, per se," KC coach Romeo Crennel told the Kansas City Star. "The rules are explicit about no celebrating, particularly group celebrations. You cannot have those. ... With the record we have, we really can't afford to be dancing."

## **Wilson's food drive**

Bills safety George Wilson will host the third annual Thanksgiving Food Drive for Buffalo families from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday at the Northwest Community Center. Wilson will help distribute more than 2,000 pounds of food to 150 families in need. Wilson's SAFETY Foundation works with the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County to select families for the drive. The foundation stands for Saving Adolescents from the Everyday Trials of Youth.

## **Winning close ones**

San Francisco's showdown with Chicago pits the top two ranked defenses in the league. Niners coach Jim Harbaugh has the best winning percentage in the league in games decided by one score.

"It's because of the heart of the players," says Harbaugh. "Just down after down, to never tire mentally and to keep fighting."

The active head coaches with the best records in one-score games (minimum 10 such games): San Francisco's Jim Harbaugh 10-2-1, Atlanta's Mike Smith 27-11, Tennessee's Mike Munchak 8-5, Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin 29-20, Baltimore's John Harbaugh 21-15.

## **Onside kicks**

- The Buffalo Bills Booster Club elected its officers at a meeting last week. Dick Zolnowski is president, and Don Bartz vice president. The other officers: Josie Nola, treasurer; Donna Cutrona, secretary; Tom Nola, Bill O'Hara, Brian Hapeman, Cathy Nathan, trustees. Call 685-3247 to join.
- The Steelers have had more passing yards than their opponent for 16 straight games at Heinz Field. You'd think Dan Marino or Joe Montana might have done that. But no. It's tied for the longest such streak in NFL history. The Rams did it in their Greatest Show on Turf era.
- Atlanta's Matt Ryan is 30-4 at home in the regular season.
- Tampa rookie running back Doug Martin has 858 yards from scrimmage the past five games, the most since Edgerrin James had 914 in a five-game span in 1999.

# Broncos vs. Chargers: Final Preview

Sam Davis  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 17, 2012

**DenverBroncos.com takes an in-depth look at the matchup with the San Diego Chargers on Sunday afternoon at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.**

**ENGLEWOOD, Colo.** -- The Denver Broncos (6-3) will look for their first season sweep of the San Diego Chargers (4-5) since 2005 as they host their AFC West counterpart at Sports Authority Field at Mile High. Kickoff for the game is set for 2:25 p.m. MST. Below is a preview of the game, including important matchups on each side of the ball, a key to victory for Denver and some noteworthy facts to keep in mind.

**WHEN THE BRONCOS HAVE THE BALL:** Last week's performance against Carolina was a hiccup in a hot streak for the Denver offense. It struggled to maintain drives, going three-of-13 on third downs. Still, the unit ranks fourth in the NFL in third-down efficiency and has also been able to finish possessions with touchdowns, ranking second in red zone touchdown percentage.

Against San Diego, the offense will look to straighten out the issues it had in Charlotte against a San Diego defense that has earned the respect of quarterback Peyton Manning.

"These guys are flying around," Manning said. "I really see the unit as a whole. I think they play well together. They feed off of each other. You see them communicating. They're well-coached. You don't see guys busting assignments, by (receivers) running wide open. That's why it's a challenge against these guys."

Manning also complimented a savvy secondary in which each starting corner and safety has at least six years of experience, led by safety Eric Weddle, who tied for the league lead last year with seven interceptions.

"Don't give up big play and make the offense earn everything they get," Weddle said of the San Diego defense's plan. "Peyton's on a roll right now with that offense so we've got our hands full. We're excited. We like to match up and just keep everything in front of us is the biggest thing."

With the Chargers secondary looking to keep Denver's skill players from finding the open field, its primary focus will likely rest on wideout Demaryius Thomas. The third-year receiver leads the NFL with 14 receptions of more than 25 yards.

**WHEN THE CHARGERS HAVE THE BALL:** While the Denver offense struggled on third downs last week, the Denver defense was perfect in that area, keeping the Panthers from picking up a single first down on 12 third-down opportunities.

Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio credits his players' consistent tackling for limiting opponents to a league-best 4.7 yards per play in 2012.

"We've been a pretty sure-tackling defense thus far," Del Rio said. "That's the only way you can be any good on defense, so it's a must. It's something we work on. We work on it every week. It's going to continue to be important."

Del Rio said the defense will continue to emphasize the importance of wrapping up, while another point of emphasis in preparing for Sunday's game is Chargers tight end Antonio Gates.

In the first matchup between Denver and San Diego back in Week 6, Gates had his best game of the season, catching six passes for 81 yards and two touchdowns. All three numbers remain season-highs for the tight end.

"He's one of their primary weapons and we'll do our best," Del Rio said. "We had every intention of slowing him down in the first game and he got loose a couple times and did some damage. It'll be important that we limit that - limit his effectiveness, kind of put a lid on things. He's a heck of a player."

Just as Gates has been a staple of the San Diego offense - and a constant challenge to opposing defenses - for nearly a decade, so has quarterback Philip Rivers.

Denver's defensive players spoke all week about the respect they have for Rivers, his competitiveness and his leadership.

Defensive end Elvis Dumervil has recorded three multi-sack games against Rivers, and in Week 6 he forced a pair of Rivers fumbles that helped fuel the comeback. But the seventh-year pro recalls a time when the Rivers-led Chargers had a stranglehold on the division.

"Philip Rivers is a fired-up type of leader," Dumervil said. "He is a fierce competitor and you know you have to bring your 'A' game, and that's what I try to do. There's been a time, when I first came in; he was pretty dominating in this conference. I know what he is capable of."

### **KEY TO THE GAME: Rattle Rivers**

Pressure on Rivers, combined with a few poor decisions on the quarterback's end, allowed the Broncos to come roaring back in the second half of Week 6 with 35 straight points.

Rivers has been highly accurate as of late, completing 47-of-57 passes in his last two games. Still, turnovers continue to bug the ninth-year pro, as a pair of late-game interceptions last week cost San Diego a win in Tampa.

In the Week 6 comeback, Dumervil forced both of Rivers' fumbles. The defensive end is listed as questionable for Sunday, so the rest of the defensive line will have to be ready to step up if he doesn't suit up.

### **SERIES HISTORY: Denver looks to turn the tables in the AFC West**

The Broncos-Chargers rivalry dates back to 1960, when the Los Angeles Chargers defeated the Denver Broncos 23-19 in their first ever matchup.

More than five decades and 105 games later, the Broncos lead the all-time regular-season series by a count of 56-48-1, including a 35-16-1 mark at home.

But recently, the Broncos haven't had as much success when hosting San Diego. The Chargers have won the last three games in Denver and four of the last five. When the two teams met at Sports Authority Field at Mile High last season, San Diego left with a 29-24 victory.

With a win on Sunday, Denver will complete a season-sweep of the Chargers for the first time since 2005.

It would be a huge step towards locking up the AFC West, as the Broncos would hold a three-game lead over San Diego in addition to the tiebreaker.

Denver aims to win the AFC West for the second consecutive year after San Diego had taken the division title in five of the previous seven years.

### **NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS**

- The Broncos rank in the top three in the NFL in three major offensive categories: yards per game (395.1, 3rd), yards per play (6.1, 2nd) and points per game (30.1, 2nd).
- The Chargers rank third in the league in time of possession, holding the ball for 32:27 per game. The Broncos rank below the league average at 29:13.
- Both teams rank in the top five in third-down percentage and are nearly identical in that statistic. Denver converts on 44.3 percent (4th) of its third downs, while San Diego converts on 44.2 percent (5th) of its third downs.

- Denver scores a touchdown on 69 percent (2nd) of its trips to the red zone, while San Diego scores a touchdown on 51.5 percent of its trips to the red zone (17th).
- Both teams are very close in a couple of defensive stats. Denver allows its opponents to gain an average of 316.8 yards per game (6th), while San Diego surrenders 317 yards per game (7th).
- The Broncos give up an average of 21 points per game (10th) and the Chargers give up an average of 21.2 points per game (11th).

### **ANY-MINUTE MILESTONES**

- Cornerback Champ Bailey needs one interception to tie Tyrone Braxton (34) for the fourth-most in franchise history.
- Wide receiver Eric Decker is on the brink of several accomplishments. With 98 career receptions, he is two shy of becoming the 37th Bronco to reach the 100-catch mark.
- Another 14 receiving yards will match the third-year receiver's career high of 612 set in 2011. If he catches a touchdown pass, it will be his eighth of the season, which would also tie a career high and make him the third player in team history with at least eight touchdown catches in back-to-back seasons.
- Quarterback Peyton Manning tied Dan Marino last week in touchdown passes and victories by a starting quarterback. With a touchdown pass against San Diego, he will pass Marino and move into second behind only Brett Favre in NFL history, with 421 career touchdown tosses.
- If the Broncos get the win, Manning will move into a tie with John Elway with 148 victories, the second-most wins by a starting quarterback in league history.
- If he passes for 295 yards, he'll pass Marino for the second-most 3,000-yard passing seasons in NFL history (13).
- Linebacker Von Miller is a half-sack shy of the league lead, one sack shy of becoming the fourth player since 1982 with at least 11 sacks in each of his first two seasons, and two sacks shy of eclipsing his career high of 11.5 set as a rookie in 2011.
- Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas needs 109 receiving yards to post his first career 1,000-yard season and the 31st 1,000-yard receiving campaign in team history.
-

- With a win and a New York Giants loss, Head Coach John Fox will move into second place for the most wins by any active coach (94).

## **CONNECTIONS**

Two Chargers, tight end Dante Rosario and wide receiver Eddie Royal, were with Denver in 2011.

Head Coach John Fox spent the 1992-93 seasons leading the secondary for San Diego.

Tight Ends Coach Clancy Barone spent two years 2007-08 in San Diego before coming to Denver.

## **BROADCAST INFORMATION**

The game will be televised on CBS, with Kevin Harlan (play-by-play) and Solomon Wilcotts (color commentary) calling the game.

Locally, KOA Radio (850 AM) will feature Dave Logan (play-by-play) and Ed McCaffrey (color commentary) with Andy Lindahl reporting from the sidelines.

# Gameday Spotlights Champ Bailey

Gray Caldwell  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 17, 2012

When the Broncos take on the San Diego Chargers this Sunday, fans in attendance at Sports Authority Field at Mile High will receive a Gameday program featuring cornerback Champ Bailey on the cover.

The cover story, titled "Still the Standard," looks at Bailey's decade-plus of dominance in the NFL, beginning with his first game in the league.

Every Hall-of-Fame career has to start somewhere.

It just so happened cornerback Champ Bailey's started with an interception off a Hall of Fame quarterback.

In the very first game of his career, Bailey – then a Washington Redskin – was matched up against another legend in Michael Irvin for the majority of the day against the Dallas Cowboys.

"You've got to think, since I was little, Troy Aikman, Michael Irvin, Emmitt Smith, I'd looked up to them," Bailey said. "That was a surreal moment. You don't get an opportunity like that to play against guys you really watched and liked growing up."

He had mixed results in the contest, as Irvin notched five catches for 122 yards and two touchdowns.

But Bailey, ever the competitor, wanted to make sure it was known that those scores weren't against him – he was on the sideline late in the game with cramps. And in addition to five tackles in his first-ever game, he snared the Aikman interception – a fitting start for the now 11-time Pro Bowler.

"I felt like I belonged at that moment," he said. "You pick a Hall of Fame quarterback – not a lot of people can say they did that. It was a special moment for me."

The program also features Q&As with tight end Joel Dreessen and Secondary Coach Ron Milus.

The cover story will be published on DenverBroncos.com in its entirety next week. Below is an early look at the cover.

# Honoring the Military

Von Miller  
DenverBroncos.com  
November 17, 2012

We're recognizing a special cause this week with our military appreciation game at Sports Authority Field.

It means a lot to me to support our troops. A lot of guys put their lives on the line and go out and fight for us. Some football players look at playing football like a battle, but if we lose, we just go home. If they lose, they lose their lives.

We have a lot of appreciation for those guys. It'll be great to honor them this weekend.

We were only allowed to put one branch's decal on the outside of our helmet, but each branch is important for us, so I put the Marines sticker on the outside and the other four inside my helmet.

We have a tough division matchup this week versus San Diego. We watch the whole game film from the last time we played, but that was a special game. They're going to come in and play 60 minutes this game. They're going to play us different and we're going to play them different from the first time we played so it's tough to take too much from the tape.

We added one of my fellow linebacker back this week in D.J. Williams. It's great to get a veteran like him back. He's got fresh legs so he can come out there and help us continue to make progress as a defense.

Gig em!