

Free agent Rashard Mendenhall, Denver Broncos could be perfect fit

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 11, 2013

When shopping for free agents, the Broncos would prefer young to old.

Running back Rashard Mendenhall is among the youngest free agents at age 25.

The Broncos also lean toward production rather than potential when putting together their list of potential free-agent acquisitions.

Mendenhall averaged 1,103 yards rushing for the Pittsburgh Steelers in a three-season span (2009-11).

Then there are players who precisely fit the Broncos' needs. The Broncos would like a larger back to possibly replace Willis McGahee, who is 31 and coming off a season-ending leg injury, while complementing the smaller Knowshon Moreno and Ronnie Hillman.

Mendenhall is a 225-pound tailback who has fewer NFL carries in five seasons (864) than draft prospect Montee Ball had in four seasons at Wisconsin (924).

And so the Broncos have put Mendenhall on their free-agent wish list. They also have interest in Arizona Cardinals cornerback Greg Toler.

The level of the Broncos' interest in those players is difficult to gauge. Mendenhall is not the only running back on the Broncos' free-agent wish list and Toler is not the only cornerback.

But the Broncos hope to pick up a starting right cornerback and possibly a running back as they prepare for the opening of free agency Tuesday.

Meanwhile, they appear to be closing in on re-signing special-teams standout David Bruton while continuing discussions with defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson on a new contract.

But the cost-cutting contract talks with defensive end Elvis Dumervil seem to have encountered a slight problem — talk. There has been no communication between the sides since Dumervil's agent, Marty Magid, sent in his restructuring proposal Friday.

"Elvis has been working out. He's healthy, he feels great," Magid said. "He wants to stay with the Broncos. Right now, we're waiting to hear back from them."

Dumervil and the Broncos are midway through a six-year, \$61.5 million contract extension negotiated by former Denver coach Josh McDaniels after Dumervil led the NFL with 17 sacks in 2009. The Broncos paid the Louisville product \$3.168 million in 2010 (a season he missed because of a torn pectoral injury suffered in training camp), \$14 million in 2011 (when he had 9½ sacks) and \$14 million in 2012 (11 sacks).

Dumervil, 29, is scheduled to make \$12 million this season. That salary becomes guaranteed if he is still on the team Saturday. The Broncos have asked Dumervil to take a pay cut. He also is scheduled to make \$10 million in 2014 and \$8 million in 2015.

With contract talks seemingly at an impasse, the chances increase that Dumervil will be playing elsewhere in the NFL in 2013. Dumervil would like a resolution by 2 p.m. MDT on Tuesday, when the league's free-agent market opens.

If the Broncos ultimately decide to trade or release Dumervil, they are expected to give some of his playing time to Robert Ayers, a first-round pick in the 2009 draft, while also pursuing another pass-rushing defensive end in free agency.

Among those who figure to be available on the market come Tuesday are the Bucs' Michael Bennett, the Giants' Osi Umenyiora, the Ravens' Paul Kruger, the Browns' Juqua Parker, the Colts' Dwight Freeney, the Chargers' Antwan Barnes, the Bears' Israel Idonije and the Falcons' John Abraham.

Along with their attempt to trim Dumervil's salary, the Broncos are expected to soon part ways with veteran linebacker D.J. Williams and the \$6 million salary he is scheduled to make in 2013.

Elvis Dumervil's talks with Broncos show business of NFL has many forms

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
March 11, 2013

Today's question about the Broncos comes from Stephen Hartlaub in Cumberland, Md.:

Q: In the reporting regarding the Broncos' request that Elvis Dumervil restructure his contract, it mentioned the Broncos talking to Dumervil's agent at the scouting combine. It seems disrespectful to me that you would not talk to the player first rather than his agent. Do most players prefer to leave all business decisions to their agents? And can they separate business out and not take it personally?

A: Stephen, like in most things on the business side of football, there is a variety of approaches from players and agents in off-the-field matters.

Some take the full I-let-my-agent-handle-that approach. In this case the player trusts his agent to be the tough guy in negotiations, to handle the direction, the tactics and the public discussion.

Those players simply want to know when the deal is done and don't much care for updates along the way, other than a general timetable about the progress of things.

He does surrender plenty of control, but it allows the player to step away from something that can be difficult for players to deal with in the public domain. Their financial concerns, especially when dealing with the dollar figures they are dealing with, are not really the concerns of most folks in the workaday world.

So, when a player publicly discusses trying to get a "fair" deal, or what he "deserves," it can put him in a tough spot in a wired world where commentary is everywhere, because most folks are simply trying to make ends meet. Any public discussions about the inequities of deals worth millions of dollars are simply going to ring hollow to most people, no matter if the player has a legitimate argument in the league.

And some agents shop their services as do-it-all, everything from contracts, to tax returns, to helping with investments and other day-to-day, off-the-field issues. And agents will always say some clients are simply more work than others in both big and day-to-day issues that come up.

Other players, however, take a far more active role in their business matters. They're more forceful in the direction of contract talks, of what they're looking for in the deal and in some cases even what they would take financially to play for certain teams — so-called "hometown" discounts or a different type of incentive-laden contract, with less guaranteed money, to play with a potential playoff team.

And some players — though this is far more rare now than it was 20 years ago — handle their own negotiations and then have an attorney look over the paperwork when the framework of any deal is done, before it is signed.

Overall, though, the scouting combine is the place where plenty of business gets done in this regard.

The agents are there, for an annual meeting and often they are meeting with the prospects they have signed for the draft who were invited to Indianapolis as well.

The executives for the NFL Players Association are there to meet with the draft prospects each day as well as speak to the agents at those meetings.

And virtually every football decision-maker in the league is there — general manager, team president, head coach and in some cases even the team owner. So it's the best opportunity for everybody to sit down and do some business face-to-face.

In terms of Dumervil, certainly both he and his representatives are hoping it's a re-negotiation, were some money gets moved around, the team gets some salary cap relief and he doesn't lose any money off what is a signed contract.

The team looks to be approaching this, however, as a pay-cut situation, that the current regime doesn't much like the construction of a deal done before they were on the job. All indications are they would look at releasing Dumervil if they don't like the potential solution Dumervil and his representative can come up with.

So, the possibility of hard feelings is always there if people don't handle it properly. But basically it will likely come down to whether Dumervil wants to stay badly enough to take less money or if he believes he could get something more than the Broncos want to pay him in the open market.

Players hold out when they have signed contracts they don't like any more and teams do the take-the-pay-cut-or-else dance when they have signed contracts they don't like any more.

It is just part of free agency these days and most everybody involved understands that.

Elvis Dumervil's contract talks with Broncos appear to have reached an impasse

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 10, 2013

Elvis Dumervil kneels on the field after the Broncos' loss to Baltimore last season.

Contract talks between the Broncos and defensive end Elvis Dumervil are lacking talk.

There has been no communication between the two sides since Dumervil's agent Marty Magid sent in his restructuring proposal Friday.

"Elvis has been working out, he's healthy, he feels great," Magid said. "He wants to stay with the Broncos. Right now, we're waiting to hear back from them."

The Broncos and Dumervil are midway through a six-year, \$61.5 million contract extension that was negotiated by former coach Josh McDaniels following Dumervil's NFL-leading 17 sack season of 2009. The team paid him \$3.168 million in 2010, a season he missed because of a torn pectoral injury suffered in training camp, \$14 million in 2011 when he had 9 1/2 sacks, and \$14 million in 2012, when he had 11 sacks.

He is scheduled to make \$12 million this season — a salary that becomes guaranteed if he is still on the team by Saturday. The Broncos have asked Dumervil to take a pay cut. He is also scheduled to make \$10 million in 2014 and \$8 million in 2015.

With contract talks seemingly at an impasse, the chances increase that Dumervil will be playing elsewhere in 2013 after he spent his first seven NFL seasons in Denver. Dumervil, 29, would like a resolution by 2 p.m. MDT Tuesday, when the free agent market opens.

If the Broncos ultimately decide to trade or release Dumervil, the team is expected to give some of his playing time to Robert Ayers, a first-round pick in 2009, while also pursuing another pass-rushing defensive end from free-agency.

Among those who figure to be available on the market come Tuesday are Tampa Bay's Michael Bennett, the Giants' Osi Umenyiora, the Ravens' Paul Kruger, the

Browns' Juqua Parker, the Colts' Dwight Freeney, the Chargers' Antwan Barnes, the Bears' Israel Idonije and the Falcons' John Abraham.

Top NFL defense prospects Star Lotulelei, Jarvis Jones have health answers

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
March 11, 2013

After making the rounds in recent days, it's clear two high-profile defensive players on draft boards around the league have told teams they have answers to major medical questions and both plan to take part fully in their coming on-campus pro days.

Several scouts have said they have been informed Utah defensive tackle Star Lotulelei, who did not work out at the scouting combine because of a previously-undiagnosed heart condition that was discovered during the player's physical in Indianapolis, will do everything March 20 in his on-campus workout.

Lotulelei is considered a top 10 player by many teams, but there were some in the league who had him placed between 15 and 20 on the board even before the heart condition was revealed. So, depending on the medical reports and what Lotulelei shows in his pro day workout, he could conceivably be in play when the Broncos pick on the bottom end of the first round.

Not likely, but with the draft so deep in the defensive line, those highly-rated players with any questions, medical or otherwise, could be the ones who slip through in a year when there are far more highly-graded prospects in the offensive and defensive lines than at some of the skill positions.

When the reaches come in the first round, they often come at skill positions, so some linemen with quality grades could slide this time around and patience could be rewarded at the bottom of the round.

Teams were informed Lotulelei was found to have an abnormally low "ejection fraction" in the left ventricle of his heart during his exam at the combine. Ejection fraction is the amount of blood pumped out of each ventricle.

Normally between 55 and 70 percent of the blood should be pumped out of the left ventricle and teams were told Lotulelei was at 44 percent during his physical. The potential reasons for that vary, everything from a viral infection to more serious long-term concerns.

By all accounts Lotulelei has continued to train for his pro day since the combine, but his workout, in addition to the medical reports each team reviews in the coming weeks, will have a lot to say about where he lands on the draft weekend.

Then there is Georgia linebacker Jarvis Jones, who has a narrowing of the spinal canal — spinal stenosis — and transferred to Georgia from USC in the wake of a "stinger" he suffered in his lone season with the Trojans, as a true freshman in 2009.

Jones then played three seasons at Georgia. He did not work out at the combine, saying he preferred to wait for his pro day.

Some teams were not happy with that choice, but since the combine, Jones and his representatives have forwarded a letter written by Dr. Craig Brigham, to every team, Broncos included, that says Jones is "cleared to play without restriction."

That is just one medical opinion, albeit a highly-respected one, but each team has a vast medical staff that may agree or disagree with that assessment.

At the combine, Jones said he believed the concerns about his neck may have actually been fostered by teams hoping he would drop to them later in the first round and beyond. He also said he had no concerns about his future NFL playing career.

"Not at all, anybody who steps on that field has a chance of getting hurt," Jones said at the combine. "If you think about it like that, nobody would ever play football. For me, I'm just taking advantage of the opportunity. I love this game. I'm passionate about it.

"I know that I've got to be careful about my technique and how I play this game. Therefore, I do the extra stuff to protect my neck, to protect my shoulders."

Jones has informed teams he's ready to get to work at his pro day workout on March 21. Teams looking for help at linebacker will be anxious to see what he shows there before they seek their own second opinions.

Broncos express interest in RB Rashard Mendenhall

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 10 2013

Rashard Mendenhall.

Rashard Mendendall, who at 25 years old and with two 1,000-yard rushing seasons will be one of the youngest and most accomplished running backs to hit the free-agent market Tuesday, has drawn interest from the Broncos.

The level of the Broncos' interest in Mendenhall is difficult to gauge. They have a menu of 12 to 15 free agent players who they believe could fit their roster under the right circumstances and for the right price. While contacting agents of these free-agent players, the Broncos to date have said little more than they have some interest and they'll back to them later.

Free-agent discussions figure to intensify Monday with the market officially opening at 2 p.m. MDT Tuesday.

The Broncos are interested in signing a cornerback and running back. They may also seek depth at safety, receiver, defensive tackle, offensive line and possibly defensive end if they can't work out a reduced contract with Elvis Dumervil.

Mendenhall makes sense for the Broncos because at 225 pounds he's the type of larger-sized back the team needs to replace Willis McGahee, who remains under contract but is 31 and coming off a season-ending leg injury.

Mendenhall was selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the first round of the 2008 draft out of Illinois, where he was a one-year starter. He averaged 1,103 yards in the three-year period from 2009-11, but he suffered a torn ACL in the final game of the 2011 season.

He did not rebound well from knee surgery last season as he was ineffective, then had a fumbling problem, then was benched, then was suspended for the way he handled his benching. Then again if Mendenhall was coming off another productive 2012 season, he would have commanded a top-of-the-market contract.

Mendenhall is entering the market with 864 carries in his five NFL seasons — 60 fewer than the 924 carries Montee Ball had in his four seasons at Wisconsin.

Dusty Saunders: Fox serious about competing with ESPN

By Dusty Saunders
Special to The Denver Post
March 10, 2013

That familiar adage "crazy like a fox" will take on important sports relevance beginning Aug. 17.

Is the Fox entertainment empire crazy to launch Fox Sports 1, a cable sports network with the aim of competing directly with ESPN?

Or will the Fox empire, which introduced Fox Sports on network television 20 years ago, have the programming sense and cents to actually compete?

At least David Hill, Fox Sports chairman, didn't make an initial grandiose prediction when announcing the project.

"It's going to take us awhile," Hill said regarding any battle with ESPN, which premiered in 1979.

Then, in a masterful understatement, Hill added, "We're not expecting to knock off ESPN in the first week or two."

Look for Major League Baseball, NASCAR, mixed martial arts events, college basketball and ancillary college football and NFL coverage on Fox, including lots of programming next February during the Fox network broadcast of the Super Bowl in New York.

FS1 also plans studio shows that often will go head to head with ESPN's popular "SportsCenter."

Already set is a weekday series featuring Regis Philbin and a variety of sports commentators. Kathie Lee Gifford, Philbin's former daytime co-host, probably won't be aboard. How about her retired husband, Frank?

Incidentally, Denver sports fans with long memories may recall that Philbin filled in as a nighttime sports anchor on Channel 9 (then KBTV) for several weeks during the summer of 1974 when the late Lynn Sanner, the regular sports guy, was hospitalized.

Look for high-profile Erin Andrews, who moved from ESPN to Fox several months ago, to be a key FS1 figure.

A prediction: FS1 and Keith Olbermann will work out some sort of a deal.

Lots of dribbles. It's called March Madness. But it obviously has become even more than that.

The Post's Saturday sports section listed the TV times of 46 college basketball games — a schedule that began at 10 a.m. and ended around midnight. And 17 more games were aired Sunday.

Such coverage reflects the rise of the ESPN dynasty, the recent premieres of the CBS Sports Network and NBC Sports Network and the growth of regional cable outlets such as Root Sports and Altitude.

Personal memory lane. I was a fair (maybe mediocre) hoopster for Fort Lewis Junior College way, way, way back when the team couldn't even get much live coverage on Durango radio. Altitude2 on Saturday aired live Metro State's last-second, 61-60 win over Fort Lewis to win the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference Tournament title.

This bouncing-ball deluge is just beginning with men's college tournament play starting at midweek — games that will partially determine entries in the NCAA Tournament field.

ESPN's coverage on four cable channels, which began last week with women's tournaments, will total 124 games by the time tournament play ends Sunday.

And remember that Saturday is a big day on the Colorado high school scene as Root Sports will cover, live, the 5A and 4A boys and girls finals from CU's Coors Events Center.

And then bracket fever hits NCAA Tournament fans.

Anyone have a better title than March Madness?

The Eagle has landed. While one game doesn't make a broadcasting all-star, Ian Eagle proved again Thursday night he's in the upper echelon of TV play-by-play men.

He and analyst Steve Kerr provided superior coverage during the Nuggets' key home win over the Clippers. Their TNT work was informative and even-handed, far removed from the gee-whiz attitude displayed by some national announcers.

Eagle, who regularly covers the Brooklyn Nets, also teams with Dan Fouts on CBS's NFL games. The duo drew praise after announcing the Broncos' victory over the Browns in December.

Remember when? Was that a rerun of an Avalanche victory from the glory days Friday night?

It looked like Patrick Roy were tending goal and Joe Sakic and Peter Forsberg were dominating the ice. And the joyful Pepsi Center crowd was really into it.

The Avs, of course, got national TV coverage — just as in the glory days — for the smashing victory that ended the Blackhawks' remarkable run.

Longtime Denver journalist Dusty Saunders writes about sports media Monday in The Denver Post. Contact him at tvtime@comcast.net

Ravens' Jones take moves to TV screen

Broncos and San Francisco 49ers fans are well aware of the agility of Baltimore Ravens wide receiver Jacoby Jones, whose touchdown catches ruined Super Bowl dreams for both teams.

Jones will display his ability on the dance floor on ABC's "Dancing With the Stars," which premieres a new season next Monday.

Two other notable sports figures also will be in competition — skating legend Dorothy Hamill and Olympics gymnast Aly Raisman.

Report: Broncos show interest in Revis

By Bill Williamson

ESPN.com

March 10, 2013

ESPNNewYork.com has reported the Denver Broncos have expressed interest in trading for New York Jets' star cornerback Darrelle Revis.

However, the Denver Post has strongly debunked the notion of the Broncos making a run at Revis.

We have often discussed the idea of Revis. If the Broncos were to show interest, I could see why.

The team believes it has a Super Bowl window with Peyton Manning in the next couple of years. Getting a defensive stalwart such as Revis would improve the team. The Broncos are also looking for cornerbacks, so why not consider the best player available?

Still, Revis would be expensive and the Broncos have some other needs that could cause the team to be leery of a Revis pursuit. This is not the first time Revis has been connected to Denver. As the trade talk heats up, it will be interesting to see if the talk continues.

Update: The Broncos reportedly have interest in Pittsburgh free agent Rashard Mendenhall. He'd be part of the rotation in Denver if signed. Mendenhall, 25, has two 1,000-plus yard rushing seasons in his career.

The Denver Post reports the Broncos and the agent for defensive end Elvis Dumervil have not talked since Friday. The team wants Dumervil to take a pay cut, while Dumervil is more interested in restructuring without a pay cut. If an agreement is not made in the coming days, Dumervil will likely be cut or traded. If so, Dumervil will be popular on the open market and Denver will be shopping for a pass-rusher.

Darrelle Revis drawing interest from Denver Broncos?

By Chris Wesseling

NFL.com

March 10, 2013

While reports of the San Francisco 49ers and Atlanta Falcons being hot on Darrelle Revis' trail have been raised and subsequently denied, the Denver Broncos have been flying low on the radar screen.

No longer. One source tells ESPNNewYork.com that the Broncos have expressed interest in a trade for Revis.

The news should come as no surprise. In a window to contend for the Super Bowl, the Broncos are built to win now. As evidenced by the multiple blown coverages during the Broncos' playoff loss to the Baltimore Ravens, Revis might be just the player to put Denver over the top.

The Broncos visited with Dunta Robinson on Friday before he signed a three-year contract with the Kansas City Chiefs, so we know the team's brass is on the hunt for a veteran cornerback to play opposite Champ Bailey.

One team that might give the Broncos a run for their Revis money is the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who have more than \$30 million in salary-cap space. The Bucs' pass defense was horrendous enough that they finished 31st in total defense despite boasting the NFL's top-ranked run defense.

If a Revis trade is going to go down, there's a good chance it will happen early in free agency. His "camp" is pushing for a quick resolution out of fear that the cornerback market could dry up if potential suitors land an alternative such as Sean Smith, Aqib Talib or Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie.

UPDATE: Jeff Legwold of The Denver Post strongly disputes the ESPNNewYork.com report, insisting the Broncos "have NO intention of acquiring Revis." ESPN's Ed Werder backed that up, saying the Broncos "are not interested" in a Revis trade.

Denver Broncos reportedly interested in free agent RB Rashard Mendenhall

SportsIllustrated.com

March 10, 2013

Signing a running back in free agency is one of the Denver Broncos' top priorities, and they could find a fit in former Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rashard Mendenhall, according to The Denver Post's Mike Klis.

The 25-year-old two-time 1,000-yard rusher is one of 12 to 15 free agents the Broncos have identified as a potential fit at the right price, Klis is reporting. Their current backfield consists of starter Willis McGahee, who is recovering from knee surgery and a broken leg at 32 years old, and backups Knowshon Moreno and Ronnie Hillman.

Denver, which went 13-3 and lost in the AFC divisional playoffs last season, is seeking a back with size like Mendenhall's, 225 pounds, and the 2008 first-round pick has experienced success as a starter before, totaling 3,549 yards and 29 touchdowns in his five-year career.

But Mendenhall struggled to bounce back from a torn ACL and was limited to just six games and 3.6 yards per carry last season, fumbling three times.

The Broncos' level of interest in him is unknown, and the team is also looking to fill several other needs, according to Klis.

While contacting agents of these free-agent players, the Broncos to date have said little more than they have some interest and they'll talk to them later.

Free-agent discussions figure to intensify Monday with the market officially opening at 2 p.m. MDT Tuesday.

The Broncos are interested in signing a cornerback and running back. They may also seek depth at safety, receiver, defensive tackle, offensive line and possibly defensive end if they can't work out a reduced contract with Elvis Dumervil.

Broncos reportedly interested in Rashard Mendenhall

By Evan Hilbert
CBSSports.com
March 10, 2013

The Denver Broncos are interested in free-agent running back Rashard Mendenhall, according to the Denver Post. The Dolphins are also reportedly interested in the back, who is heading into his fifth year as a pro.

Mendenhall, 25, would fit as an ideal replacement for the aging Willis McGahee, who missed the latter part of the 2012 season after fracturing his right leg and tearing a ligament in the same knee.

For his part, Mendenhall, too, is coming off knee surgery after tearing his left anterior cruciate ligament late in the 2011 season. Mendenhall never came around in 2012, rushing only 51 times for 182 yards in six games.

CBSSports.com's Jason La Canfora reported last month that Mendenhall was unlikely to re-sign with the Steelers.

The Broncos have other needs -- namely at cornerback and, depending on what happens with Elvis Dumervil, defensive line -- but Mendenhall would be an ideal back to complement the likes of Ronnie Hillman.

Before his injury-plagued 2012 season, Mendenhall was one of the premier backs in the league, averaging better than 1,100 yards a season over a three-year span.