

Kiszla: Elvis Dumervil's clock is ticking, but Broncos aren't budging

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

The clock is ticking, John Elway's stomach is churning and Elvis Dumervil has a tough decision to make. By no later than 1:59 p.m. Friday, Dumervil will either take a pay cut or be gone from the Broncos.

"These are the deals that wrench your gut," Elway said Thursday. Elway stood in team headquarters, one floor above the Denver locker room, in the executive offices where he must make tough decisions that impact the lives of athletes.

Dumervil can take the offer. Or leave.

"As an ex-player, I hate to see that. I hated to see that happen to a teammate. And I hate having to do it, in the position I'm in. But I've got to do what's best for this football team," Elway said.

Question is: Would you take a 35 percent pay cut to keep a job you loved? So should Dumervil? It appears to be his only choice, if he wants to remain in Denver.

The Broncos have determined it would be foolhardy to pay Dumervil \$12 million per year, a salary the team obviously thinks is extravagant.

"It's not all about dollars. But when it's way out of whack? Then it's so out of whack that you've got to say: That (salary) can't be it. Especially when you look at the market and what's out there now," Elway told me. "It's so far out of whack. Hopefully, he realizes that."

In the NFL, a soft heart can't get in the way of a tough negotiating stance.

The Broncos made splashy headlines by signing Pro Bowl receiver Wes Welker off the New England Patriots roster. Denver also fortified its offensive line, defensive line and secondary through free agency, leaving very little wiggle room under the salary cap to talk turkey with Dumervil.

Sure, Dumervil could look at remaining in Denver as his best shot to win a Super Bowl.

But who could blame him, though, if Dumervil felt as if every day he showed up to work at Dove Valley would serve as a reminder of all his money the team handed over to free agents, players who have not donated blood, sweat and 63½ career sacks to the Broncos' cause?

The going rate for pass-rushing defensive ends is in the range of \$7.5-8 million per year. You do the math, and it's pretty obvious how big of a salary rollback Dumervil is going to have to take from the \$12 million he was originally slated to be paid for the upcoming season.

Ouch.

"We want to get something done with Elvis," Elway stressed. "That's the perfect world."

This situation stinks. For Doom. For the Broncos. For everybody.

"It isn't just about the money. We also know what Elvis brings to the team and what his leadership means," Elway said. "But, at a certain point, you have to make a decision, one way or another. Is it worth doing X and losing Y?"

It doesn't sound as if the Broncos are willing or able to budge. It will be on Dumervil to capitulate. Is that fair? No. Is that life in pro football? Yes.

Dumervil is a better football player than 33-year-old free agent Dwight Freeney. While Freeney is a down-and-distance specialist at this point in his career, he fits the Denver budget.

This is the flip side to all the fist pumps in celebration of landing shiny new talent during NFL free agency.

Hey, Doom.

Stay.

Denver is where you belong. Quarterback Peyton Manning needs you. Broncos Country doesn't want you to leave.

But that's easy for me to say. It's not my money, or my career.

In the NFL, the toughest part of taking a hefty pay cut is never the reduction in dollars. The real pain for any man is in choking down his pride.

Denver Broncos have Wes Welker slotted for stardom as Peyton Manning's new target

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

As Wes Welker was introduced as the Broncos' new star, he stood dwarfed next to John Elway, his two hands stuffed in his front pants pockets.

Dressed casually in a lavender-checked shirt, dark slacks, with sporty sideburns and short hair parted from left to right, the 5-foot-9, 185-pound Welker more resembled the computer nerd next door than a football player.

Maybe a handsome, dark-haired, blue-eyed computer nerd. But not a guy who catches passes over the middle and just beyond the line of scrimmage, where 250-pound linebackers snort and muscular safeties roam.

"When you get out there on that game field, you kind of flip a switch and be ready to go," Welker said.

There is a rhythm to Welker on the field and a cadence to his off-field delivery. He was asked 19 questions during his introductory news conference Thursday at Dove Valley team headquarters and he answered them all in short sound bites.

Did he feel like the Patriots undervalued him?

"I think that's all relative," Welker said. "I'm a Denver Bronco now and I'm excited about it. I'm really not looking in the past, just looking forward."

It's OK to loosen up, Wes. Bill Belichick isn't your boss anymore, although he probably will continue to read your newspaper clips.

It was no ordinary journey that brought Welker from Tom Brady's favorite target the previous six seasons with the New England Patriots to Peyton Manning's new slot receiver with the Broncos.

"That was definitely the hardest part, leaving Tom," Welker said.

"They have a great quarterback," Welker said first when asked why he chose Denver.

Through Welker's first three NFL seasons, he may as well have been a computer nerd. He was undrafted out of college, then cut by the San Diego Chargers. After catching on with the Miami Dolphins, Welker had zero catches as a rookie. But he turned heads in one game when he returned a kickoff and punt, kicked an extra point and a field goal, and made a tackle.

Remember that "whatever it takes" performance and move to the 2007 offseason when a smitten, hoodie-wearing Belichick traded two draft picks to Miami in exchange for Welker.

His first season in New England, Welker led the NFL with 112 catches and the Patriots captivated the world with a 16-0 record, thanks largely to the most prolific scoring offense (589 points) in league history.

He stayed six seasons in New England, where he averaged 112 catches and his Patriots averaged 12.6 wins. Although Welker's contract expired after last season, the expectation was he would return to New England on a multiyear deal worth about \$8 million per year.

Instead, the Patriots offered only \$5 million a year — two years and \$10 million.

The Broncos wanted a slot man to add to their fine receiver duo of Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker. They offered Welker a two-year, \$12 million contract Tuesday night, a few hours after free agency opened.

Had Welker returned to New England, the Broncos would have made a move on Danny Amendola or Julius Edelman. The Patriots didn't budge from their offer and Welker headed for the Rocky Mountains.

"It was probably two teams that I was interested in playing for," Welker said. "This was definitely one of them."

Although the shock value in this acquisition was Welker leaving New England, it was mildly surprising the Broncos pursued him. They passed the ball well without him last year.

Without Welker, the Broncos went 13-3 and finished second in the league, to New England, in scoring. Didn't the Broncos need a running back more?

"You look for a guy with skins on the wall," said coach John Fox. "This guy has been as productive a receiver as there's been in the league.

"And this game is about matchups. He's a tough cover for one person."

Welker got married to Anna in Aspen last summer, so Colorado already had been a part of his lifestyle change. Now this state marks a career change.

As Welker put it, it wasn't so much Broncos front-office boss Elway pitching the Broncos to him.

"I was probably the one pitching to (Elway), trying to make this happen," Welker said.

Wes Welker explains jump to Broncos from New England Patriots

The Denver Post
March 14, 2013

The league's most productive wide receiver over the past six seasons — with 672 catches in the regular season, including at least 11 touchdown catches in five of those seasons — arrived in Denver on Thursday hoping to add plenty more victories to a career filled with them.

Former Patriots wide receiver Wes Welker was formally introduced as the newest piece in the Broncos' high-powered offense, and Welker said he is happy to be in his new football home.

"Denver, I felt, would be a great fit for me," Welker said. "They're a great team and I want to win."

The Broncos secured Welker for two years with a \$12 million deal. Broncos executive vice president of football operations John Elway said Welker's top-tier production in the Patriots' offense as well as his extensive playoff experience made him an important acquisition for the team.

In the days after the Broncos' playoff loss to the Ravens, Elway spoke of the need for the team to learn the difference between regular-season football and postseason play. Elway sees Welker as part of that equation.

"So many things that make it just right for us," Elway said, adding that Welker is "a tremendous fit for us."

With Eric Decker and Demaryius Thomas each topping 1,000 yards receiving this past season, Welker in the slot in the Broncos' three-wide receiver look gives the team the ability to stress opposing defenses all over the field.

Toss in the fact that the Broncos' top two tight ends — Jacob Tamme and Joel Dreessen — each topped 40 receptions this past season, and the potential headaches for opposing defensive coaches are easy to see.

This past season, 72 of Welker's 118 receptions went for first downs — a staggering 61 percent. Over the past three seasons, no receiver in the league had more yards after the catch than Welker — just more than 1,800 yards worth of work once he had the ball in his hands.

Welker said coming to Denver was important to him, and that "I was the one pitching to him" when he was asked what Elway said to close the deal.

His pitch to Elway?

"That I want to win, that above everything."

Welker's five 100-catch seasons are the most in NFL history, and his 18 career games with 10 or more receptions are tied for first in league history.

Elvis Dumervil contract impasse: Denver Broncos working on Plan B

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

There is a Plan B to Elvis Dumervil.

If the Broncos and their pass-rushing defensive end can't agree on a pay cut/restructured contract by 1:59 p.m. Friday, Dumervil is likely to be released.

At that point, the Broncos could sign free agent Dwight Freeney. Or they could use their savings on Dumervil's \$12 million salary and pick up a running back and safety and see what backup defensive end Robert Ayers can do in the final year of his contract.

"Yeah, but we really want to get something done with Elvis," John Elway, the Broncos' executive vice president of football operations, said Thursday. "It would make this offseason very successful. I don't want to lose Elvis. But those are some of the tough choices you have to make."

Dumervil is scheduled to make \$12 million this season, after he made \$14 million in each of the past two seasons. That \$12 million would become guaranteed on the fifth day of the league year.

"It's so far out of whack. Hopefully, he realizes that," Elway said.

Although the league year officially started at 2 p.m. Tuesday, the NFL keeps a different calendar than everybody else. The fifth day of the league technically starts at 2 p.m. Friday. So the Dumervil deadline is 1:59 p.m. Friday.

The Broncos want him to take a pay cut to a salary more in line with the adjusted pass-rusher market. Paul Kruger's new deal averages \$8 million a year. He has only 15½ sacks in his career. Dumervil had 17 in 2009 alone. Yet, Cliff Avril had 20½ sacks the past two seasons, the same number Dumervil had in that period. Avril got \$7.5 million a year.

Broncos aggressive start to free agency gobbles room under salary cap

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

For the most part, the Broncos are finished with phase one of free agency.

Getting a newly restructured/reduced contract with pass-rushing defensive end Elvis Dumervil is their final piece of business before owner Pat Bowlen, president Joe Ellis, front-office boss John Elway and coach John Fox take off Sunday for the NFL owners meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Otherwise, the Broncos as they stand now are pretty much tapped out of salary-cap room, according to two NFL sources. They are roughly \$50,000 to \$52,000 below league-imposed \$123 million payroll limit.

This is not a surprise given their furious attack on the open market through the first two days.

The Broncos signed a starting right guard (Louis Vasquez), starting receiver (Wes Welker), starting right cornerback (Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie), starting defensive tackle (Terrance Knighton) and backup middle linebacker (Stewart Bradley).

Add in the re-signings of special-teams standout David Bruton and starting defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson, plus the franchise tag placed on starting left tackle Ryan Clady, and the Broncos have made \$63.5 million worth of financial commitments to eight free-agent players.

Those eight players will be paid a collective \$30 million this year.

The Broncos are likely to use the draft to select a running back, probably within the first three rounds. Maybe even in the first round.

They wanted to add a safety to compete with Rahim Moore, Mike Adams and Quinton Carter. Maybe later.

They will have to pick up a No. 3 and No. 4 quarterback by training camp. This team is solid at the first two spots with Peyton Manning, who will turn 37 in 10 days, and Brock Osweiler, who is barely 22.

Otherwise, the Broncos want to make sure they are not left with a gaping hole opposite Von Miller at right end. Dumervil is scheduled to make \$12 million this year, after he made \$14 million in each of the past two years.

The Broncos want him to take a pay cut to a salary more in line with the adjusted pass-rusher market. Paul Kruger's new deal averaged \$8 million a year. He has only 15 ½ sacks in his career. Dumervil had 17 in 2009 alone.

Yet, Cliff Avril had 20 ½ sacks the past two seasons, the number Dumervil has had. He got \$7.5 million a year. There is a case that can be argued for both sides.

The Broncos are willing to add back some of their proposed reduction in the form of guaranteed dollars in the later years of Dumervil's contract. His current deal calls for a non-guaranteed \$10 million in 2014 and \$8 million in 2015.

In some ways, the Broncos and Dumervil's agent Marty Magid are not far apart. In other ways, they are not close. The Broncos have a backup plan if they can't work out a deal with Dumervil by Friday, the day before his \$12 million salary would become fully guaranteed. Dwight Freeney is one possibility, but there are other defensive-end candidates the Broncos would consider.

The team's first choice, though, is to secure Dumervil.

Denver Broncos now feeling a draft at the running back position

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

Think draft with running back. Heal up, Eddie Lacy. Wait a minute. On second thought, keep limping around on that sore hammy and troublesome toe until it's time for the Broncos to make the No. 28 selection in the first round of the April 25-27 draft.

Seriously, it's way too early, and the Broncos are picking way too late, to determine whom John Elway and John Fox will select with their first-round draft pick.

But now that Elway, the team's front-office boss, and Fox, the players' boss, have finished adding major pieces through free agency, running back has to be near the top of the Broncos' positional draft needs.

The Broncos thought about signing free agent Rashard Mendenhall. But when no promises were made, he signed with the Arizona Cardinals. There have been discussions about veteran Michael Turner. But the former Atlanta Falcons tailback must first recover from a high ankle sprain suffered during the NFC championship game.

Running backs are best when they're young anyway. In this year's draft, Alabama's Lacy is the only consensus first-round talent among running backs. He would probably be gone by the time the Broncos' first pick comes around — unless Lacy's stock drops because of health concerns.

Others who would fit the Broncos' big back mold would be Michigan State's Le'Veon Bell, Texas A&M's Christine Michael and Stanford's Stepfan Taylor.

Bye-bye, cap room. It's an exaggeration to say the Broncos spent every last dollar on acquiring new talent in free agency. They still have about \$50,000 to spend before hitting the NFL-imposed \$123 million payroll limit.

The Broncos allocated \$36 million in 2013 spending to eight free agents: Louis Vasquez (\$7 million), Wes Welker (\$6 million), Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie (\$5 million), Terrance Knighton (\$2.5 million) and Stewart Bradley (\$1.2 million), and their own Ryan Clady (\$9.8 million), Kevin Vickerson (\$3 million) and David Bruton (\$1.5 million).

Doggone it. Vasquez, a four-year starting guard with the San Diego Chargers, was asked to recall when it all changed for his team (for the worse) and the Broncos (for the better). In Game 6 of the 2012 season, Vasquez's Chargers were ahead 24-0 at halftime. They wound up losing to Vasquez's future team 35-24.

"We had it all sewn up," Vasquez said at his news conference Thursday. "Then at the end of it all, it was witnessing your dog die."

Louis Vasquez says signing with Denver Broncos 'a no brainer'

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

In the brave new world that is the Broncos' offense with Peyton Manning at quarterback, the first player off their board in free agency wasn't a running back, wide receiver or a tight end. It was a guard. A really big guard.

"As you can tell, he has great size, (and is) very athletic," John Elway, the Broncos' executive vice president of football operations, said Thursday with Vasquez standing close by.

"He's going to be a great addition for us in the offensive line, especially when you look at the health of our offensive line. Louis was a priority for us."

Vasquez is the Broncos' biggest free agent in size — 6-foot-5 and 335 pounds — and in contract. His four-year, \$23.5 million deal includes \$13 million guaranteed.

Vasquez projects as the starter at right guard, and the Broncos believe they acquired the physical presence inside to protect Manning and crank up their power in the running game.

Four starters on the Denver offensive line have had surgery in the past six months. Also, the Broncos allowed too much pass pressure in the middle of the field and struggled in short-yardage situations in the running game, often failing to keep drives going.

"For guards it's keeping the depth of the pocket cleaned out," said Vasquez, a third-round San Diego draft choice in 2009. "(At 335 pounds) you're able to anchor more weight and guys have a harder time pushing the pocket. That's definitely a plus."

After his four seasons with the Chargers, leaving San Diego was a difficult decision, Vasquez said. But the combination of joining Manning and the opportunity to chase a Super Bowl title eventually made the decision "a no-brainer," he said.

Vasquez said he spoke to former Chargers guard Kris Dielman, who retired before the 2012 season, and quarterback Philip Rivers as he approached free agency to get advice about the process.

"They told me to do what's best for me," Vasquez said, "that you don't owe anybody anything. They said, 'We know you're a loyal guy.' At the end of the day, you have to do what's best for you."

Vasquez chose the Broncos before visiting team headquarters.

"I knew what I was going into. It was a pretty easy decision," Vasquez said.

Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie looks for fresh start with Broncos

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

Take an opportunity for a fresh start, add in the chance to do that with a Super Bowl favorite, and it was enough to tip the scales in free agency for Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie.

Rodgers-Cromartie, a Pro Bowl selection in 2009 with the Cardinals, arrived at the Broncos' Dove Valley complex Thursday morning. He said he chose the Broncos as his landing spot because of the team's potential, as well as a no-frills approach in recruiting.

"The one thing that stood out in talking to everybody, they weren't just talking about what I could do as a player, but they pointed out flaws and told me how they could get them better," Rodgers-Cromartie said.

Rodgers-Cromartie is a unique catch on the market for Denver's decision-makers.

He is a 27-year-old cornerback with speed. And at 6-foot-2, 182 pounds, he has the size the Broncos want opposite Champ Bailey in the defense.

Rodgers-Cromartie is banking on the ability to play a short-term deal into a bigger contract if the Broncos go as deep into the postseason in the coming year as they hope to. Rodgers-Cromartie signed a one-year deal for \$5 million.

The sixth-year player is coming off two frustrating years in Philadelphia when his play slipped some from his time with the Cardinals. He arrived in the Eagles' free agency/trade binge in 2011 that ultimately saw Philadelphia miss the playoffs twice and led to longtime coach Andy Reid being fired.

Asked what the difference will be with the Broncos, who have been one of the most active participants in free agency this time around, Rodgers-Cromartie said: "Here they already believe in something and that's just winning.

"Talking with everybody, the main thing is about winning games and coming in to work."

Rodgers-Cromartie has made 16 career interceptions, including three this past season. He has returned four of those interceptions for touchdowns.

Louis Vasquez signing by Broncos to shake up makeup of offensive line

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

Today's question about the Broncos comes from Elliot Lewis. To submit a question for consideration, send an e-mail to The Denver Post's Jeff Legwold.

Q: Now that the Broncos have signed Louis Vasquez and are rumored to be signing (a running back), what are their plans for Chris Kuper and Willis McGahee?

A: Elliot, Vasquez's signing is certainly an attention grabber if you play in the offensive line for the Broncos.

By the timing of the agreement — Vasquez agreed to the deal in the opening hours of free agency — the Broncos had obviously made the position among the highest of priorities in their offseason plan.

Vasquez, who just turned 26 this past Sunday, is a player who is in his prime and considered one of the best at his position on the open market. The Broncos also gave him the longest deal — four years — of any of the free agents they have signed so far.

They also gave him upper-tier money at the position (close to among the top 10 deals among guard league-wide), \$23.5 million over the four years that includes \$13 million in guaranteed money. That's a large commitment to a player who is in the starting lineup from the moment the team makes it.

Initially this affects Kuper the most, simply because Vasquez is slotted to play right guard, the position Kuper has played in his career with the Broncos.

But the Broncos want more power in the middle of the line, both in the run game and when protecting their \$96 million investment at quarterback in Peyton Manning. Last season, all but a handful of sacks the Broncos surrendered in the regular season came in games Kuper did not play.

So, when Kuper played he had a significant impact on how the Broncos played up front, but his health is a long-term concern. He is currently coming back from ankle surgery — to repair a fracture in his lower left fibula — and is not expected to participate in the team's offseason program. He is still a question mark for the start of training camp.

Kuper has now had multiple surgeries on the ankle since suffering a severe dislocation in the 2011 regular-season finale.

He has also had some difficulty since with the metal plate and screws that were inserted to repair the initial injury, which was also the reason for the most recent surgery. The Broncos have previously discussed the possibility of moving Kuper to left guard in the future, the weakside guard in most of the run game.

They had talked about moving Kuper to left guard at some point in the future last year when they had talked about moving Orlando Franklin to guard. Many personnel executives in the league believe that would be Franklin's more natural position.

But they haven't found a better option at right tackle. And after working for a few snaps at guard in training camp last season, Franklin stayed at tackle.

Overall, though, Vasquez is getting one of the starting guard spots. When Kuper is ready to go, the Broncos see him as the other starter. But Kuper's return is still a question mark, so Zane Beadles figures to open the offseason workouts in the left guard spot.

The Broncos like how Kuper played when he was in the lineup, but his ability to stay healthy over the long term is something they have to consider in how they construct their roster.

As far as McGahee, the Broncos are looking for another running back and had scheduled a visit from Rashard Mendenhall before Mendenhall signed with the Cardinals.

The Broncos also reviewed Shonn Greene plenty as well before he signed a multi-year deal with the Titans. McGahee has two years left on his deal, but the Broncos are going to add a player to the mix in the backfield.

There are some bigger backs in the draft the Broncos have looked at and figure to draft one if the board falls right during the draft weekend. McGahee finished the season on injured reserve and was tied for the league lead among running backs in lost fumbles — four — at the time of his injury.

So, they want more depth at the position. And if they get the right guy, McGahee's carries would take a significant dip. But with Knowshon Moreno's knee a concern — he had a stem-cell procedure this offseason — McGahee is expected to remain on the roster at this point.

Former CU Buffs QB Tyler Hansen still working for one more NFL chance

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
March 15, 2013

There will always be a little what-if swirling around Tyler Hansen, a little question mark hanging in the balance as he continues to chase a spot on an NFL depth chart.

The former University of Colorado quarterback has been back in Boulder recently, working toward another audition for NFL scouts, which came Wednesday on CU's campus. Hansen was not selected in the 2012 draft, was signed by the Bengals as an undrafted free agent and thought he was on track for a roster spot until he injured a hamstring in last summer's training camp.

"I had a great minicamp," Hansen said. "And I thought I had a shot to compete for a No. 2, definitely a No. 3 spot, but then my hamstring really hurt me. I wasn't myself after that.

"I was always worried, 'If I make this throw will my hamstring cave in.' I wasn't really throwing right. It wasn't good."

Hansen was released in late August and has had a smattering of workouts since, including one in recent weeks with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats of the Canadian Football League. This week he wanted just to throw for any and all of the NFL's personnel evaluators who came to Boulder, as a reminder CU's fourth-leading passer all-time would like another chance to hear opportunity knock at least one more time.

"What's good for me is it gets my name back out there," Hansen said. "So if teams are looking at the draft, looking at quarterbacks, maybe they think 'there was a guy who went to Colorado and he was Colorado's pro day and he showed some arm.' And now I'm back on a list somewhere.

"So that's what I wanted to accomplish here. Maybe re-ignite something, get back on someone's board, get back on someone's mind."

And this is right about the time where the what-if comes in. Because in a perfect world, Wednesday's pro day would have been the one that followed Hansen's senior season, the one that followed another year as a starter, that followed another year of gameday experiences for the NFL to decipher.

Instead, he's been out a year, trying to get another swing as a professional quarterback.

For many in the league Hansen will always be more than a little under-sized, at 6-foot and 220 or so pounds. But to the scouts who roam the nation's western states during college football Saturdays he will also be the guy who lost a shot at not one, but two redshirt seasons as Dan Hawkins juggled Cody Hawkins — Dan's son — and Hansen at quarterback.

Hansen also suffered a ruptured spleen in the 2010 season, so his year was over after seven starts, but he likely could have played in a bowl game had the Buffs found a way to earn a berth that year.

But in 2009 Hawkins juggled to two quarterbacks when one of them could have had a redshirt year along the way. And in Hansen's freshman season Hawkins burned a potential redshirt year when he put Hansen into the lineup in the seventh game of the season.

So, when all was said and done, 2011 was Hansen's only full year as a starter, the only one where he started more than eight games, and had there been a 2012 season for him in Boulder, it may have helped his NFL cause.

These days he works with high school quarterbacks as he tries to earn a living and keep himself prepared for another pro football opportunity. He said he'd certainly consider the CFL if invited — "the field's huge and they throw every down" — and ironically Hamilton plays in the same division as the Montreal Alouettes, now coached by Dan Hawkins.

But Hansen also yearns for at least one more crack at the NFL, one more full healthy training camp to make his case.

"I do honestly think I can play in that league," Hansen said. "I do think I have the right amount of arm strength. That I can move around make plays, move around, work in the pocket. I've said I think I can make a living in the NFL, and I really still believe that. And I believe if I keep myself ready, keep working and do the things I need to, I think that I will get another chance, another shot, at it."

Chris Harris tops Broncos' performance bonus payouts

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
March 14, 2013

NFL teams are distributing \$3.4 million worth of performance-based bonuses from the 2012 season. The Broncos gave bonuses to 59 players who were with them on their roster at some point in 2012. The bonus distribution to each player is based on formula involving playing time and salary they made. The more a guy played, and the less he was paid computed to larger bonuses.

For a guy like cornerback Chris Harris, the bonus was substantial — 53.9 percent of his salary. The bonus in fact, bumped Harris over Eric Decker and Zane Beadles in total compensation. For a guy like Peyton Manning, the performance bonus is walking around money.

The \$3.4 million payouts per team is part of the NFL benefit program. When players look at the salary cap, they only see the \$123 million in payroll. When management views the salary cap, they see \$147 million — \$123 million in salary and another \$24 million per team in benefits. The \$3.4 million is part of the \$24 million in benefits.

The individual performance bonus checks are to go out in the mail Friday. A look at the top 10 Broncos bonuses in 2012 and the bottom 10:

Top 10 bonuses

Player	Bonus	Salary	Total
Chris Harris, CB	\$250,625	\$465,000	\$715,625
Eric Decker, WR	\$170,719	\$490,000	\$660,719
Manny Rameriz, RG	\$152,103	\$700,000	\$852,103
Zane Beadles, LG	\$148,287	\$490,000	\$638,287
Tony Carter, CB	\$145,221	\$615,000	\$760,221
Danny Trevathan, LB	\$145,162	\$494,000	\$609,162
Orlando Franklin, RT	\$144,126	\$573,000	\$717,126
Mitch Unrein, DT	\$132,874	\$465,000	\$597,874
Dan Koppen, C	\$128,975	\$776,000	\$904,975
Brandon Stokley, WR	\$128,696	\$925,000	\$1,053,696

Lowest 10 bonuses

1. Ty Warren, DT	\$216	\$1.5 mil	\$1,500,216
2. Sealver Siliga, DT	\$1,248	\$390,000	\$391,248
3. DJ Williams, LB	\$2,875	\$1.65 mil	\$1,652,875
4. Julius Thomas, TE	\$3,325	\$465,000	\$468,325
5. Duke Ihenacho, S	\$4,630	\$181,400	\$186,030
6. Mike Mohamed, LB	\$4,711	\$465,000	\$469,711
7. Brock Osweiler, QB	\$6,061	\$1.39 mil	\$1,396,061
8. Peyton Manning, QB	\$7,240	\$18 mil	\$18,007,240
9. Elvis Dumervil, DE	\$7,929	\$14 mil	\$14,007,929
10. Tracy Porter, CB	\$9,952	\$4 mil	\$4,009,952

Welker: No hard feelings toward Patriots

By Eddie Pells
Associated Press
March 14, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Two days, \$56 million. Yes, John Elway can handle the checkbook almost as nimbly as he once threw the football.

For the second straight offseason, the Broncos quarterback-turned-front office chief made as big a splash as anyone in NFL free agency. In the span of 48 hours, he added receiver Wes Welker and four more players — all with the single goal of getting Peyton Manning and the Broncos to the Super Bowl as soon as possible.

“I was probably the one pitching to him, trying to make this happen and everything else,” Welker said Thursday about his discussions with Elway.

The subtext: At 31 and entering his 10th year in the league, Welker wants to win Super Bowls more than cash huge checks. He signed a two-year, \$12 million contract — relatively modest for the most productive receiver in the league over the past six years.

And anyone who thought Elway would stand pat after a 13-3 season: “They don’t know John Elway,” said former Bronco safety John Lynch.

“I love it,” Lynch said. “They’re in it to win it. I think they’re doing it prudently, too. Welker was a bargain.”

Many players, of course, are more willing to let a few million slide if they can play with a teammate of Manning’s caliber.

Elway’s successful pursuit of the four-time MVP ended up as the story of last offseason. Manning lived up to the hype, throwing for 37 touchdowns and 4,659 yards. But Denver lost to Baltimore in the divisional round of the playoffs. That, plus the reality that no roster remains the same from year to year in the NFL, put Elway on the clock again this year.

He treated free agency like one of his patented two-minute drills.

“It was quick,” said guard Louis Vasquez, who had a contract with Denver only hours after the signing period began Tuesday. “I didn’t expect it to go as fast as it did.”

Welker, who has 768 career receptions for 8,580 yards and 38 touchdowns, was Denver’s biggest signing. The former New England slot receiver is moving to Denver after his former team, the Patriots, offered him \$10 million over the same timeframe.

No umbrage taken, Welker insisted, though he made a point of saying he’ll miss Tom Brady.

“I’d definitely like to thank New England for the six years there, all the trust and everything they put in me,” Welker said. “As free agency kind of went on, I kind of got the feeling that

it was time to start looking for other opportunities. Denver, I felt, would be a great fit for me.”

The other Bronco signings this week:

—Vazquez, four years, \$23.5 million.

—Defensive tackle Terrance Knighton, two years, \$4.5 million.

—Linebacker Stewart Bradley, one year, \$1.2 million.

—Cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, one year, \$5 million.

Also in their free agent flurry, the Broncos brought back safety David Bruton (three years, \$4.5 million) and defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson (two years, \$5 million). Add the franchise tag the Broncos put on tackle Ryan Clady for \$9.8 million and the team has spent \$65.5 million this offseason.

For many of the free agents, the temptation of winning a Super Bowl, combined with the Elway-Manning connection, was too good to pass up.

“You grow up watching these guys and then you actually have a chance to play for one of the greats and play under one of the top ones, too,” Vasquez said. “It’s like a childhood dream. If somebody would have told me 10 years ago, ‘Hey, you’re going to be a Denver Bronco playing for John Elway and Peyton Manning,’ I would’ve said, ‘You’re out of your mind.’”

Elway’s most delicate task of free agency still remains. The Broncos have asked defensive end Elvis Dumervil to take a cut from the \$12 million owed to him this season. If no move is made before the weekend, Denver will likely release him.

That decision will help shape the team’s preparation for the draft.

The Broncos are still in the market for a big running back and possibly a safety, along with more depth on both lines.

Regardless of how the draft pans out, the Broncos and Elway came out of the early stages of free agency looking very much like winners.

“None of it’s easy when you’re dealing with people and the selection of human talent,” coach John Fox said. “I think it’s like anything else — the harder you work at it, the better you usually do.”

Welker says he called Broncos looking for a job

Lindsay H. Jones
USA Today
March 15, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. – From thousands of miles away, over the connection of a telephone line, Wes Welker made his sales pitch to Denver Broncos boss John Elway.

Yes, Welker was trying to convince the Broncos to sign him, not the other way around.

Of course, the Broncos – Elway and head coach John Fox in particular – were thrilled when Welker officially became a free agent on Tuesday after contract talks with the New England Patriots broke down.

Welker knew just the right words to win over Elway, who treats his job as an executive with the same competitive drive as he had as quarterback.

"I want to win. That above everything," Welker said Thursday as he was introduced in Denver. "We'd figure out the money part and all that stuff later, but that winning was a big thing for me."

Welker signed a two-year contract worth \$12 million on Thursday, seemingly a bargain for a five-time all-pro.

"We're thrilled that Wes wanted to come to Denver," Elway said. "There were just so many things that mixed just right for us."

The Broncos wanted Welker because they believed he would be an upgrade at the slot receiver, and a nice complement, Elway said, to outside receivers Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker. All three had more than 1,000 receiving yards in 2012, and Welker and Thomas made the Pro Bowl.

"They were another big part of me wanting to come here, just their styles and watching them on film and how good of young receivers they are," Welker said. "I think it's a good starting point for all of us."

Signing Welker could signal a shift from Denver's preferred two-tight-end, two-receiver base offense as the Broncos spend the off-season finding new ways to use Welker. After watching him catch 23 passes for 200 yards and two touchdowns in three games against the Broncos in the past two seasons, Fox is happy to plan for Welker, instead of against him.

"This game is about matchups, and he's a tough cover for one person," Fox said. "He's a tough matchup, and that makes everyone else better."

Welker exchanged text messages with his new quarterback Peyton Manning before and after agreeing to the contract, and said Manning was part of the reason Denver was an attractive spot. He said he had no contact with Patriots head coach Bill Belichick since negotiations with the Patriots broke down earlier in the week.

In his eight-minute press conference, Welker tried to dodge questions about why he is no longer a Patriot, but did admit leaving will be hard, because he's leaving behind a close friend in Tom Brady.

"That was definitely the hardest part, leaving Tom," Welker said. "He's a great competitor, great player, great friend across the board. I wish the best for him."

Welker was the final of the Broncos' new free agents to be introduced in Denver this week, part of a group that includes four potential starters – guard Louis Vasquez, defensive tackle Terrance Knighton, cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie and Welker.

Denver also re-signed starting defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson and special teamer David Bruton and franchised Ryan Clady, leaving almost no room left under the salary cap for additional movement.

Denver signed no players on Thursday, and Elway, Fox and director of player personnel Matt Russell spent time with Welker, Rodgers-Cromartie and Vasquez, who were each at the team's head quarters to formally sign their deals.

Denver has until 4 p.m. Eastern on Friday to make a decision on whether to keep or release defensive end Elvis Dumervil, whom the team has asked to slash several million off his 2013 salary of \$12 million. The market for the top free agent defensive ends has ended up being in the range of \$6 million to \$7.5 million per year, numbers that could help convince Dumervil to stay in Denver.

Regardless of the outcome of the Dumervil saga, the Broncos closed the first few days of free agency believing the team is better, and more prepared to win in the postseason. Welker played in two Super Bowls with the Patriots, though New England lost those games to the New York Giants.

"It's a completely different season," Welker said. "The hits are a little harder, the throws are a little tighter."

Business end bites Wes Welker

If new Bronco read free-agency landscape better, would he still be a Patriot?

By Mike Reiss
ESPNBoston.com
March 15, 2013

At his introductory news conference as a Denver Bronco on Thursday, receiver Wes Welker said there were two teams he was interested in playing for, and it wasn't hard to figure them out -- Denver and New England.

He spoke fondly about his six years with the New England Patriots in his opening remarks, thanking the organization for its trust and the opportunities provided to him. He said he was on good terms with coach Bill Belichick and later added that the hardest part of making this transition, Patriot to Bronco, was leaving quarterback Tom Brady.

"He's a great competitor, a great player, a great friend across the board," Welker said. "I wish the best to him."

There was a sense of sadness in watching it all unfold, mainly for Welker, because while he has landed on his feet in Denver -- and he said all the right things in terms of being "excited about the opportunity" -- it was clear that the way the process unfolded wasn't the way it was drawn up in his negotiating playbook.

The market that Welker and his representatives David Dunn and Brian Murphy of Athletes First thought would materialize never truly did. It has been a leaguewide issue for many players. Prices are down seemingly across the board this offseason.

And to see a truly good guy like Welker, whom Brady called the heart and soul of the Patriots in 2012, get caught up in that was disheartening. A part of him looked hurt Thursday.

Make no mistake, Welker won't be scraping together pennies, and he'll still be catching footballs from a great quarterback with a chance to win a Super Bowl. He'll probably become a fan favorite in Denver because of the reckless, selfless way he plays the game. But here's a question to ponder: If Welker knew the offers from both teams before free agency began, would he still make the same decision?

The last proposal from the Patriots was a two-year, \$10 million pact that could have been worth up to \$16 million with incentives (although in Welker's eyes a good chunk of those would have been tough to reach). Meanwhile, the deal he signed with the Broncos was two years and \$12 million. A third offer from a different team, two years for \$15 million, wasn't considered because Welker had narrowed his list to the Broncos and Patriots.

The market spoke, and if Welker had that information beforehand, perhaps he still would have decided that the Broncos represented the best choice for him. But we're not so sure, because one aspect that has been overlooked in some circles is the element of timing in how this unfolded.

Talks between the Patriots and Welker's representatives broke off in the hours before free agency began Tuesday at 4 p.m. ET. At that point, after a year of discussions that didn't produce an extension, the Patriots had a decision to make: Risk losing backup target Danny Amendola by waiting on Welker, or moving on.

They decided to move on.

Should they have waited? Should it have even reached that point? Those are fair questions, and maybe Welker, after everything he'd done for the organization, deserved another 24-48 hours from the team.

But what if the Patriots waited and got burned by losing both Welker and Amendola? Then what?

This is the cold part of the business, and it's where the greatest empathy for Welker resides. Right or wrong, the Patriots moved on, and when Welker attempted to do the same, the market wasn't overwhelming. It had to be a disappointment, as when Welker went back to the Patriots after the Broncos made their proposal, it was too late because they had committed to Amendola, who had other suitors on deck.

This wasn't the way it was supposed to be for Welker, who was an unrestricted veteran free agent for the first time in his career. When asked Thursday what Broncos executive vice president of football operations John Elway said to him to close the deal, Welker told reporters he was actually the one doing the "pitching."

So more than anything, this was about Welker thinking that market would be kinder to him, while the Patriots were fighting the early free-agency clock.

As for the temptation to think that the club's move away from Welker is reflective of a shifting of their offensive philosophy, it isn't. The offense naturally evolves each season, but that had nothing to do with the decision. In fact, part of the reason the Patriots felt like a quick decision had to be made was that if there was one player on the market who most closely resembled Welker as a potent option in the slot, it was Amendola. There was really no one else.

As for Welker, he ultimately found himself in a tough spot. He's a player whose expertise is reading coverages and adjusting accordingly; reading the free-agent market and relying on the professional advice of others to help guide him is something altogether different.

Maybe it all works out for the best and the move to Denver is the best thing to happen to him. But on Thursday, it seemed like everything was still too fresh, part of his heart with his new team, the other part still back in New England.

How Wes Welker shifts balance of power

Adam Schefter
ESPN.com
March 15, 2013

Q: *Adam, are the Miami Dolphins the clear winner in free agency? I feel like they did well, but also lost Sean Smith and Jake Long.* -- Kelly (Florida)

A: If it means something that the Dolphins "won" the first week of free agency, Kelly, then so be it. It's wise not to make definitive judgments of free-agency winners. How many times have we seen teams like the Washington Redskins, Philadelphia Eagles or Carolina Panthers win free agency only to go out and have a poor season. The Dolphins made some aggressive moves that should improve this team. It's fair and deserved to be excited about wide receiver Mike Wallace, and their new linebackers Dannell Ellerbe and Philip Wheeler. What will be more significant to Miami is the draft, when the Dolphins are scheduled to have an extra second- and third-rounder. Let's see how Miami does then as well.

Q: *Does the Wes Welker signing change the balance of power in the AFC? Has that been the most influential free-agent signing so far?* -- Jason (Pennsylvania)

A: I believe so, Jason. You're taking Tom Brady's favorite wide receiver on one of the AFC's best teams and giving him to Peyton Manning on another of the AFC's best teams. New England takes a hit, Denver gets a boost and those are two of the best teams in the conference. So on paper, it's a shift in the balance of power. But then Denver has to take advantage of it. The Broncos went into this offseason with a ton of salary-cap flexibility and still are enjoying the fruits of it. New England was a bit more challenged, but the Patriots still are expected to be active in free agency, even after the Danny Amendola signing, just not with the pricey players at the outset of the market.

Q: *Adam, who are a couple under-the-radar players who are still out there and could really help teams?* -- Devin (Texas)

A: There are a bunch of them, Devin. How about Bears defensive end Israel Idonije, Patriots cornerback Kyle Arrington or Giants running back Ahmad Bradshaw. Those are just three of many, many players available. Just take a look at the players released this week who suddenly are a part of this free-agent class: Antoine Winfield, James Harrison, Karlos Dansby, John Abraham, Willie Colon. There are plenty of good players and plenty of good deals to be had for teams.

Q: *Do you have any more news on where Darrelle Revis could end up? Is Tampa Bay his most likely destination right now?* -- Rachel (Delaware)

A: If the Jets trade Revis, Tampa Bay would appear to be the most likely destination at this time, Rachel. It's hard to see many teams interested in Revis that could satisfy the Jets' asking price and Revis' contract demands. Tampa has explored the possibility, at least, but the Jets could decide to balk at trading Revis. And then he would be free to leave after next season if he wasn't re-signed. So it's a complicated situation. Many teams in the league have no interest in trading for him -- not because he's not a great player, but there's just too much involved in compensation.

Q: *The Minnesota Vikings have been busy -- trading Percy Harvin, signing Matt Cassel and courting Greg Jennings. Do you think they'll go after a cornerback, or another wideout if they don't get Jennings?? Or are the Patriots likely to sign him? Who else is interested? Thanks! -- Paul (Minnesota)*

A: Absolutely, Paul. This team is going to be busy trying to upgrade its roster. For starters, it has two first-round picks, so help will be on the way there, no doubt. But once this free-agent market settles, there will be plenty of deals to be had. And the Vikings know where they need help, no matter what happens with Jennings.

Wes Welker's pitch to Broncos

By Bill Williamson

ESPN.com

March 14, 2013

Wes Welker met the Denver media Thursday, and he made it clear he wanted the Broncos as much they wanted him.

Asked what John Elway, Denver's executive vice president of football operations, pitched to him, Welker said: "I was probably the one pitching to him, trying to make this happen. Finally, we were able to kind of get together and get a deal done ... That I want to win. That above everything. We'd figure out the money part and all that stuff later, but that winning was a big thing for me."

Many league observers think the addition of Welker will make Denver a winner. Welker loves the idea of playing with fellow Denver receivers Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker. The receivers give quarterback Peyton Manning a tremendous group to throw to.

"I think they were another big part of me wanting to come here, just their styles and watching them on film and how good of young receivers they are," Welker said. "I think it's a good starting point for all of us. They did a great job last year, and hopefully I can just come in and try and help out."

Broncos' signing of Wes Welker puts even more pressure on Peyton Manning

By Jason Cole
Yahoo!
March 14, 2013

As the angst in New England simmers down in the aftermath of Wes Welker getting spurned by the Patriots, a related issue surfaces:

Will the Denver Broncos' newest offensive toy be enough to get Peyton Manning over the top again?

Manning's amazing comeback last season (he posted the second-best statistical season of his career after missing all of 2011) was obscured by the way it ended with a thud. More precisely, the *latest* thud of his otherwise illustrious career.

Manning is 9-11 in the playoffs, the worst record of any of the five quarterbacks in NFL history to start 20 postseason games. Brett Favre was a tad better at 13-11 (they are tied for the most playoff losses in league history), but Brady (17-7), Joe Montana (16-7) and Manning's boss, John Elway (14-8), are all better.

Now, it's not fair to call Manning anything close to a failure for that record. After all, making the playoffs 12 times in 14 years is no small feat. Favre is the only other quarterback to make it that many times and he played 20 years. Montana made it 11 times and both Brady and Dan Marino made it 10 times. Not even Elway made it to double digits.

Ultimately though, even with his Super Bowl title from the 2006 season, Manning has put together a body of work that makes it hard to call him the best to ever play the position. Among the top 10? Certainly. Among the top 5? Probably.

No. 1, 2 or even 3? Probably not. Those spots are reserved for the father (Montana), the son (Brady) and the holy spirit (Johnny Unitas), in whatever order you like.

Manning is in that next group, a situation that no doubt bugs him because, well, everything bugs him. Manning is a guy who takes every slight, every bit of indignation and uses it as fuel. Tell him that he can't do something and he works hard. Tell him that his career is in jeopardy from a neck injury and he works at a maniacal level to get back to form.

Or, in another way, tell him that something looked good at practice as he's coming back from all his neck surgeries – the way this reporter did last July at training camp – and Manning bats it away with a bit of Southern sarcasm.

"That makes me feel a lot better to know you feel that way," Manning said with a sly grin and a wink after I tried to lob a compliment his way.

And there is no doubt that Manning is taking the latest series of insults from the end of last season and using those as fuel as well. Many people called him a choker for his ugly interception that set up the game-winning field goal in the Broncos' divisional-round overtime loss to the Baltimore Ravens. Plenty of Denver fans who still worship Tim Tebow

made snide remarks about how the Broncos were really no better with Manning than they were in 2011 with Tebow (both teams lost in the playoffs' second round, although the defeats were decidedly different).

And, as much as it's obvious to anyone who watches football that the 2012 Broncos were a lot better than the 2011 version, there's a point at which the Tebowites aren't altogether wrong. Just as there is a point for the most ardent Manning fans when they can't say that their hero is the greatest of all time. There have been too many failures at critical times. Manning has led his team to the No. 1 or 2 seed five times in his career, only to lose four of those in the first game and one in the Super Bowl.

Now, he gets the advantage of stealing Tom Brady's favorite receiver, a double dose of both improving his own team and hurting his greatest rival. For now, the pressure is on the Patriots to prove that the move to let go of Welker wasn't some penurious brain fart. But soon, plenty of people are going to start looking at Manning and admiring a receiving corps that now has Welker, Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker. When they're done admiring they will then start to ask a simple question:

You got enough yet, Peyton?

Wes Welker: Leaving Tom Brady for Broncos was hard

By Gregg Rosenthal
Around The League Editor
March 14, 2013

Anyone expecting a scorched Earth approach from Wes Welker on his way out of New England can keep waiting. The wide receiver had only nice things to say about the Patriots during his introductory news conference with the Denver Broncos.

The first thing out of Welker's mouth Thursday was a thank-you to the Patriots for everything they did for him in his six seasons. He made it clear it wasn't easy to leave New England.

"Yeah, that was definitely the hardest part was leaving Tom (Brady)," Welker said. "He's a great competitor, great player, great friend across the board. So I wish the best to him."

Welker said he only wanted to play for two teams, presumably the Broncos or Patriots. (This supports a report that he turned down more money from the Tennessee Titans.) Welker was asked at one point how John Elway, the Broncos' executive vice president of football operations, sold him on Denver.

"I was probably the one pitching to (Elway)," Welker said. "Trying to make this happen and everything."

It was a strange, surreal news conference. Despite the countless reports about the lack of respect he felt from the Patriots, Welker didn't publicly convey any animosity.

"Everything was on good terms," Welker said about his relationship with Patriots coach Bill Belichick. "I feel like everything was good. Any time you are a competitor, you are going to clash at times. But overall we always had a great relationship. Everything's on good terms. I have no ill feelings or anything else."

Welker said he's "looking forward" to playing the Patriots in New England next season. I'm looking forward to watching that. From Patriots-Ravens to Patriots-Broncos and Ravens-Steelers, the AFC suddenly is loaded with meaningful rivalries.

Peyton Manning vs. Tom Brady is annually great. Now we get a delicious subplot.

Wes Welker still Pats-like

Plays good soldier after leaving Brady, teammates

By Karen Guregian

The Boston Herald

March 15, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Perhaps when there's a little more distance between his days bleeding Patriots colors and settling in as a Bronco, we'll hear more about how Wes Welker truly feels about what went down during the past year with his contract negotiation, and specifically the past few days leading up to free agency.

During his introductory press conference yesterday at Dove Valley, the team headquarters for the Broncos, Welker was still very much in character. It's the one expected after signing on to play for Bill Belichick in Foxboro.

He didn't let on about feeling bitter, or being made to feel unwanted, unloved, undervalued or unappreciated by Belichick. He didn't cast his former coach or team in any kind of negative light.

As usual, Welker played the good soldier, although you know in his heart of hearts, leaving the Patriots wasn't his first choice. In fact, watching Welker attempt to warm up to the prospects of a new team was incredibly odd. This is a man who, after all, represented the hard-working, underdog fabric of the first championship team, and whose toughness was symbolic of the region.

Now he's playing in Denver?

Broncos coach John Fox was over the moon, doing knuckle-bumps with public relations people shortly after the press conference began. And John Elway, the executive vice president of football operations, wore the look of someone who had just gotten away with grand theft.

Welker?

He was Patriot-like, answering questions. He was in the room, but it's almost like he wasn't there. He talked about being excited about the opportunity to play for the Broncos and catch passes from Peyton Manning, but this was not an easy day for Welker.

There were a few moments where his guard dropped, both during the press conference, and later, when we talked for a few minutes alone before he was whisked to the airport to catch a flight back to Florida.

The topic that made him initially crack was Tom Brady. That really shouldn't come as a surprise. Welker almost couldn't get the words out, talking about the man he formed such a magic connection with on the field.

"That was definitely probably the hardest part, leaving Tom," Welker said, fighting back his emotions. "He's a great competitor, great player, great friend across the board. I wish the best for him."

Later, during our private session, I asked if he had spoken with Brady. Welker said they had exchanged emails. He indicated the Pats quarterback was "surprised" by how things turned out.

"I think he's just a little bummed out about it," Welker said. "It was tough for him."

And what about the other half of the duo? How about Welker? Was it tough for him to walk away?

"A little bit," he finally acknowledged. "You spend so long there. But it is what it is. You understand it, and just move on."

That was Belichick mode. It's almost like he didn't want to give in and show the hurt. Because he's still not too bad off with the Broncos, who are legitimate contenders.

There's been a lot said and written about a sour relationship between Welker and Belichick, with the latter supposedly paving the way for Welker's exit.

There have been a few times when Welker has fallen out of line. During a press conference prior to a playoff game, Welker craftily poked fun at Jets coach Rex Ryan by using foot references in his answers. That didn't go over well with Belichick. He's also made a crack about "sticking it to Bill" after having a good game in wake of his early season lack of playing time.

Asked if he wondered if his exit out of Foxboro may have had something to do with Belichick, Welker answered in the negative.

"We've always left things on good terms. I feel like we're on good terms," he said. "I appreciate him for where my career's at and how far I've been able to come."

He did, however, acknowledge the rough patches.

"I think that happens anywhere," Welker said. "But a lot of that was my fault."

After his clever joke on Ryan several years back, Welker, who was benched by Belichick for the first series of that playoff game, took responsibility, saying he had put the coach in a bad spot.

That's Welker. Always accountable.

Welker also claimed a published report saying he was unhappy about a lack of playing time early in the season wasn't true.

"As a competitor, you want to be out there, but I didn't have the greatest camp," Welker said. "I needed to get out there and refocus myself. I did that and it worked out for me."

It worked out so well, he's now a Bronco.

Welker said he was "flattered" Patriots owner Robert Kraft hoped he'd be a Patriot for life, but the now ex-Pats receiver did not believe that turn of phrase from the boss would seal the deal. Welker, in fact, knew one day later it was over at the start of free agency when there was no movement on the Pats offer.

How did he want fans to remember him?

"Just hardworking, gave everything I had every single day. Practice, games, everything else," Welker said. "And I appreciated all of them."

When Belichick lets go of players, most of the time, he's right. It's hard believing that's the case this time.

"We make a great living doing what we love," Welker said. "I was happy to be in the position I was in . . . I think everything has worked out OK."

It was a lukewarm "OK." But in time, perhaps, it'll get better for Welker.

Wes Welker knew his number was up, spies reveal

By Gayle Fee
The Boston Herald
March 15, 2013

Don't breathe a word of this. Because nobody's supposed to know. But Wes Welker's departure from the New England Patriots did not come as a surprise to No. 83.

Because, according to our locker room spies, Wes was told at the beginning of last season that the Pats were going to look to move him out and use Julian Edelman as the regular slot receiver.

"Things didn't go too well after that," said our snitch.

You may recall that during the first two games of the season, Welker's number wasn't being called all that often — Bill Belichick actually started Edelman instead of Wes in Game 2. But when Aaron Hernandez went down with an ankle injury and Edelman went out for the season with a bum foot, Welker returned to his regular role as Tom Brady's go-to guy.

After a 13-catch game in early October, Welker even went off the Patriot reservation and publicly quipped that it was "kind of nice to stick it in Bill's face once in a while."

Around that same time, Welker stepped up his efforts to sell his Back Bay condo, dropping the price from \$2.7 million to \$2.5 million. He and new wife Anna moved into a rental home in the 'burbs and weren't house-hunting anywhere within driving distance of Gillette Stadium.

The decision to move to Denver was not all that agonizing — and not just because Peyton Manning personally called Wes to encourage him to sign. Anna, a native of North Carolina, reportedly prefers Colorado to Massachusetts. The two were married in Aspen last summer.

BTW, just in time for his departure, Wes found a buyer for his three-bedroom Commonwealth Avenue penthouse, which went under agreement Feb. 1. The renovated duplex features a custom kitchen with granite, a master bedroom suite with balcony, sitting room with wet bar, roof deck, views of the mall and — most importantly — a parking space.

And we don't have to tell you that \$2.5 million buys a whole lot more in downtown Denver than it does in the Back Bay!

File Under: Movin' Out.

Wes Welker happy now in Denver

By Shalise Manza Young
The Boston Globe
March 15, 2013

On Thursday, the Denver Broncos introduced their newest receiver, Wes Welker, and the former Patriot talked about his new job with another AFC powerhouse.

"I'm definitely excited about the opportunity," Welker said at a press conference in Denver. "I'd definitely like to thank New England for the six years there and all the trust and everything they put in me and the opportunities I got.

"But I'm looking forward to being a Denver Bronco and really trying to help this team win. Getting to play with Peyton [Manning] and a good group of receivers and a good offense, I'm definitely looking forward to it."

Welker signed a two-year, \$12 million contract with Denver, not much more than the two-year, \$10 million New England put on the table as its last offer, but the Patriots' franchise leader in receptions felt it was time to move on.

"As free agency kind of went on, you kind of got the feel that you start looking for other opportunities," he said. "Denver, I felt, would be a great fit for me with their offense and how they run things and everything else. So it worked out."

As free agency drew closer, reports on the status of talks between the Patriots and Welker's agents varied greatly. But in the end, the Patriots' offer made it clear that they didn't really want Welker back. Even a call from Robert Kraft — who on Monday said he wanted Welker to be a Patriot for life — didn't sway Welker.

He was asked if he felt undervalued by New England, but Welker didn't take the bait, saying, "I think that's all relative. I'm a Denver Bronco now and I'm excited about it. I'm really not looking in the past, just looking forward."

John Elway, the Broncos executive vice president of football operations, said the team is proud that Welker is with them.

"Once we got into talks, we were able to get it done relatively quickly and we're thrilled that Wes wanted to come to Denver," Elway said. "If you look at Wes's career up to this point, the production he's had, and really the bottom line is what type of guy he is, the competitor that he is — we talked about it on the phone that he brings great experience playing in the playoffs.

"He's been there so many times with the Patriots that he's got an extreme amount of experience in the playoffs, and that's also going to help us.

"There were just so many things that mixed just right for us. He'll get to do what he does best inside and play with a guy in Peyton . . . We just feel like he's a tremendous fit for us."

The Broncos have two receivers who are threats more on the outside of the field in Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker, and Welker will now patrol the middle of the field. Manning has had great success with slot receivers over the years, and the 31-year-old Welker will be in that role.

Even though their relationship had its ups and downs, Welker said he and Bill Belichick "wished each other the best and everything else." He said they were on good terms, but that he hasn't heard from Belichick since signing with Denver.

Though Elway talked about how happy Denver was to have Welker in the fold, the receiver said it was he who was doing the selling on the potential marriage, not the other way around.

"I was probably the one pitching to him, trying to make this happen," Welker said. "Finally we were able to kind of get together and get a deal done."

His pitch to Elway went something like this: "I want to win. That above everything. We'd figure out the money part and all of that stuff later, but that winning was a big thing for me."

The Broncos were 13-3 last year and the top seed in the AFC playoffs but lost to eventual Super Bowl champion Baltimore in overtime in the divisional round.

While Welker will still be playing with a future Hall of Fame quarterback, not being with Tom Brady will be tough.

"That was definitely probably the hardest part, leaving Tom," Welker said. "He's a great competitor, great player, great friend, across the board. I wish the best for him."

An NFL Player Making a Difference Helping Children

March is National Nutrition Month

Len Saunders
Yahoo! Contributor Network

An NFL Player Making a Difference Helping Children

Date of Interview: 02/10/2013

In a day and age where we look for heroes and role models, it is difficult to find that special person who can make a difference - who is passionate about helping children. Childhood obesity is on the rise all over the world, and many children suffer from obese related illnesses including heart disease, cancers, type 2 diabetes, and weak joints. On top of all this, many of these same children get bullied, and have low self-esteem.

Then, once in a while, someone special comes into the picture, someone who children admire and respect, and someone who could be that role model who sets an example of healthy lifestyle. Eric Decker, the standout wide receiver for the Denver Broncos may be that person. Eric has taken a strong stance against childhood obesity, helping many children get on a path to good health.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Eric to get his thoughts on childhood obesity, about what worries him, solutions, and his thoughts on the health of children in the future. Eric states, "When poor lifestyle habits which can lead to obesity start early in life, I worry those will be carried into adulthood because it's easy for that to happen. It's important to instill in kids, at an early age, how to eat healthy and have an active lifestyle. Its important children develop these good habits early on and learn that it can be fun too."

What are the solutions to help children eat nutritiously and exercise daily? So many children today are very sedentary, engaged in technology, always in a rush. Physical activity and nutrition always seem to take a back seat to video games and computers. Eric believes you should "Make exercise fun and not a chore. When it comes to eating healthy, I think it's important to show kids that a healthy diet doesn't have to mean boring or bland food. My favorite healthy snack is a protein shake with low-fat or fat-free milk and fresh fruit."

Eric Decker recently teamed up with the Fuel Up to Play 60 program, an in-school program founded by National Dairy Council and the National Football League, in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture. The program empowers youth to make positive changes to improve nutrition and physical activity at their school and for their own health. "I was excited at the opportunity to motivate kids to be at their best by being healthier. There are a lot of obstacles and distractions that can take away from exercising daily and eating a balanced diet. I was excited to be a part of the Fuel Up to Play 60 program and help teach kids at school how to be your best self so they can get to the places they want go in life and feel good about themselves."

My final question to Eric...if he had one message to tell children about healthy lifestyle, what would it be? "A healthy lifestyle is a strong foundation to achieving your dreams. You can be unstoppable with a healthy body and mind." This is great advice from a great role

model. Children need to understand that their health habits during youth have a large impact on their future. Eating nutritiously each day along with 60 minutes of physical activity is a smart health investment into the future!

Broncos safety Quinton Carter facing Vegas cheating charges

By Ken Ritter
Associated Press
March 15, 2013

LAS VEGAS—Denver Broncos safety Quinton Carter is facing felony charges in Nevada alleging that he cheated at a craps game last weekend at a Las Vegas-area casino, authorities said Thursday.

Carter, 24, was arrested late Saturday at the Texas Station casino in North Las Vegas. Security officials reported he was videotaped adding a \$5 chip to three bets after the dice already rolled, according to a police report. Carter denied wrongdoing when police arrived.

Carter faces three counts of committing a fraudulent act in a gaming establishment, a felony in Nevada that carries a possible sentence of one to six years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. He provided a North Las Vegas address when he was booked at the Clark County jail in Las Vegas and released with a Monday court date.

Carter also faces a warrant charging him with failure to complete counseling after pleading guilty in a 2011 misdemeanor marijuana possession case, according to court records.

Carter posted a message on his Twitter account saying he was "truly sorry for any negative attention this has brought to the Broncos, our fans and the league." He said he was confident he will be cleared.

It wasn't clear if Carter posted bail or if he had a lawyer.

A Broncos spokesman, Patrick Smyth, said in Denver that the team was aware of the matter involving Quinton Carter and was gathering more information.

Carter, who attended Cheyenne High School in North Las Vegas, was an All-American at the University of Oklahoma and was drafted in the fourth round in 2011 by the Broncos.

He started at free safety his rookie year in 2011, but injured a knee last summer and missed most of the 2012 season.

Welker Wants to Win 'Above Everything'

By Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2013

Wide receiver Wes Welker said he didn't have to be sold on Denver, he knew what a good opportunity to win it presented.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- With his penchant for securing big-name free agents -- Peyton Manning in 2012 and Wes Welker in 2013 to name a few -- Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway has earned a reputation as a closer.

So what was his big pitch to put Welker in orange and blue?

"I was probably the one pitching to him, trying to make this happen," Welker said. "Finally we were able to kind of get together and get a deal done."

Welker, a New England Patriot for the past six seasons, said he got the feeling as free agency ticked by that he needed to look for a new opportunity. And he didn't want to look any further than Denver.

The opportunity to move from three-time Super Bowl-champion quarterback Tom Brady to four-time NFL MVP quarterback Peyton Manning was too good to pass up, as was the chance to win.

That's what Welker said he pitched to Elway.

"That I want to win. That above everything," he said. "We'd figure out the money part and all that stuff later, but that winning was a big thing for me."

Welker and the Broncos did figure out the two-year contract on Wednesday "relatively quickly," Elway said, as "there were just so many things that mixed just right." One of those factors is how Welker will fit in on the offense.

The Broncos now have three wideouts that topped the 1,000-yard receiving mark in 2012 - Welker, Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker.

That fact wasn't lost on the 10th-year veteran. Not only does he get to work with quarterback Manning in Denver, he gets to team up with Thomas and Decker.

"They were another big part of me wanting to come here, just their styles and watching them on film and how good of young receivers they are," Welker said. "With DT and Decker outside, the things that we can do with those big guys, he'll just be a tremendous complement to them and also make them better," Elway said. "He'll get to do what he does best inside."

What Welker does best is catch the football -- and do something with it.

His 672 catches during his six seasons with New England are 80 catches more than any other receiver over that stretch, and mark the most productive six-season stretch by a pass-catcher in NFL history.

But Welker is about more than just catches -- he led the league in yards after catch in 2008, '11 and '12, and led all receivers in the same category in 2007 and '09.

For his career, Welker has played in 140 games, catching 768 passes for 8,580 yards and 38 touchdowns.

That's not to mention his nine career playoff games in which he has caught 69 more passes for 686 yards and four touchdowns.

That postseason production, Elway said, is one of the most important traits Welker brings to the Broncos.

"We talked about it on the phone that he brings great experience playing in the playoffs," Elway said. "He's been there so many times with the Patriots that he's got an extreme amount of experience in the playoffs, and that's also going to help us."

Head Coach John Fox agreed that the team's newest addition could help come playoff time, when, as Welker put it, it's "a completely different ballgame." The team wants to move even further than last year's 13-3 season that earned the AFC's No. 1 seed.

"We accomplished a lot, and we're trying to accomplish more," Head Coach John Fox said. "I think you look for a guy with skins on the wall. This guy has been as productive a receiver as there's been in the league."

"This game's about matchups," he continued. "He's a tough cover for one person. We've got three good ones out there, and having been a defensive coach for nearly a quarter of a century in this league, and playing against him three times just in the last two years, he's a tough matchup, and that makes everybody else better."

Right now, Fox said, the Broncos have gotten better "on paper," and he noted that there's a lot of work to be done before the team can win between the lines on Sundays next season.

In the meantime, the club is happy with how the free agency period has developed.

"It's really a pleasure," Elway said, "to be able to call Wes Welker now a Denver Bronco."

Vasquez 'Happy To Be On The Other Side'

By Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2013

Quick hits from new Broncos guard Louis Vasquez, including his recollection of Denver's comeback win at San Diego on Monday Night Football.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- In four NFL seasons, guard Louis Vasquez has put together some impressive statistics.

He has started all 54 games he has played and shined last season, allowing just two sacks and one other quarterback hit in 584 pass-blocking snaps. He graded out as the Chargers' "best offensive lineman" in 2012, according to ProFootballFocus.com.

But the number Vasquez is most proud of is one -- as in the number of penalties he has committed in 3,435 career snaps.

"I do take pride in it," he said at his introductory press conference Thursday. "It just becomes part of growing as a football player and knowing what you can and can't do. It's just going out and playing clean, hard-nosed football."

So what was the lone penalty?

It came on a field goal his rookie season.

"We had a new snapper come in because the old one went down," said Vasquez, who ventured that he committed just one penalty in college at Texas Tech, as well. "I was just trying to get a feel for a guy. You see a little twitch in the heat of the game — it was one of those sudden little twitches, and that's what happened."

SAME TEAM

Vasquez said he chose to sign with Denver because provides "a great location, great team and a chance to go to the Super Bowl and win it all."

But there's an added benefit to joining the Broncos -- he doesn't have to block defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson anymore.

"I'm eventually going to have to butt heads with him in practice, but as far as in a game, it's a good deal not to have to gameplan for him," laughed Vasquez, who named Vickerson as the player he's most excited to no longer block.

He said his battles with Vickerson when the Broncos and Chargers met up were very competitive.

"He's had good plays, I've had good plays," he said. "Now we get the best of both worlds — we're teammates."

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The most memorable regular-season game of the Broncos' 2012 campaign just so happened to come against Vasquez's division-rival San Diego Chargers.

On Monday Night Football, the Chargers jumped out to a 24-0 halftime lead, and the locker room was feeling confident.

"At the time, we felt like we were rolling pretty well," Vasquez recalled. "We had it sewn up, we just had to go out and finish."

But the Broncos did all the finishing, closing out the second half with 35 unanswered points for the biggest comeback win in Monday Night Football history.

"At the end of it all it was like witnessing your dog die," Vasquez said. "It was just a bad feeling, a bad taste in your mouth."

Denver's victory spurred on what would become 11 consecutive wins en route to the AFC's No. 1 seed. Vasquez said that memory didn't play into him signing with the Broncos – "Other factors played into why I'm here today," he said.

But it doesn't hurt that he's now part of the winners.

"Going back to that game, I'm happy to be on the other side," he smiled.

QUOTABLE

"I texted him yesterday and congratulated him. He did the same to me. I told him that I'm pretty stoked to be his teammate."

-Vasquez on fellow Texas Tech Red Raider and current Broncos wide receiver Wes Welker

Welker's Transition Tough, Even with Smooth Landing

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2013

Wide receiver Wes Welker made sure to thank the New England Patriots in his first press conference as a Denver Bronco.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- It would have been in poor taste for Wes Welker to have been giddy at his press conference Thursday.

Yes, his arrival simultaneously strengthened the Broncos and weakened the Patriots, one of their primary rivals for the AFC title. But Welker had given six splendid seasons to New England and had become nearly as identifiable with the team as Tom Brady, the lighthouse behind the end zone and the "Flying Elvis" helmet logo.

Brady flourished without Welker and likely will again, but for most of the last six years, you couldn't say one name without thinking of the other, which is why their parting is more sorrow than sweet.

"That was definitely probably the hardest part, leaving Tom," Welker said. "He's a great competitor, great player, great friend across the board. I wish the best for him."

Eventually, Welker will embrace the new chapter of his career, and a new jersey color -- although perhaps not a new number, because 83 is available. But until just days before John Elway's 233-word introduction, there was a chance Welker's career in New England would continue, allowing him to post franchise standards that would be difficult to match.

Perhaps that's why Welker's first statement as a Bronco was to thank the Patriots -- who he mentioned before saying "Broncos." New England gambled on Welker as a restricted free agent in 2007 when many felt he was too small to be an every-down receiver and was more suited to third-down and punt-return work. The Patriots saw something more, and he seized the chance -- but he also knew he owed them gratitude.

"I'd definitely like to thank New England for the six years there and all the trust and everything they put in me and the opportunities I got," Welker said. "But I'm looking forward to being a Denver Bronco and really trying to help this team win."

New England always has a backup plan; you don't have 12 consecutive winning seasons without one. So when news of Welker's departure rattled the league, it was barely an hour before former Rams wide receiver Danny Amendola was signed as his replacement, paralleling their college days, when Amendola helped replace Welker at Texas Tech.

But Amendola is a relatively unproven commodity, has missed 20 games to injuries the last two years and sat out more regular-season games last season (five) than Welker has missed in his career (four). Even their former position coach at Texas Tech, Dana Holgorsen, told CBSSports.com that comparing the two was unfair.

New England is gambling on potential, as they did with Welker in 2007. The Broncos are betting on performance, that a receiver who flourished with Brady can do the same in a similar offense with the equally accomplished Peyton Manning.

"I think you look for a guy with skins on the wall. This guy has been as productive a receiver as there's been in the league," said Broncos Head Coach John Fox. "Forget about just as a slot, just in general, whether it be number of catches, yardage -- like I said, this guy's got skins on the wall, he's got great production -- maybe as much production as anybody over the last three years -- and this game's about matchups."

And the matchup with the Patriots next season -- in Foxborough, Mass., time and date to be determined -- just got even more fascinating.

"We've got a lot of work ahead of us and a lot of games before that," Welker said, "but I'm definitely looking forward to that one."

But don't expect a trail of bitterness between the two sides. Leaving isn't easy for Welker, even when his destination represents the smoothest possible landing spot.

Denver Best Fit for Vasquez

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2013

Guard Louis Vasquez said that after seeking advice from former teammates, coaches and his agent, Denver was the right place for him.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- For almost every day of an NFL player's career, collective achievement is prized above all. The only moments that are about the individual are the ones taking place right now.

Louis Vasquez had never known what that was like until the last few days, so he turned to two of his former San Diego teammates for advice -- ex-Chargers guard Kris Dielman and quarterback Philip Rivers. Dielman, now retired, had tested free agency in 2007 and received a massive offer from the Seahawks but opted to take \$9 million less to stay with San Diego; Rivers signed a contract extension in 2009 with one year left on his rookie deal.

Their message? Don't feel guilty about leaving your team; this is the moment when you have to do what's right for your career.

"They both told me that at the end of the day, I've got to do what's best for me," Vasquez recalled. "They said, 'You don't owe anybody anything. We know you're a loyal guy, but when it comes down to it, at the end of the day, you've got to do what's best for you.'"

Vasquez didn't join the Broncos sight unseen; two games a year against them, including the annual game in Denver, gave him a brief feel for the team and the area.

"I think my agent (Rob Sheets) said it best: It was the location, the team and as far as the comfort, I didn't really have to do too much thinking," he said.

Negotiations with the Chargers didn't progress the way Vasquez and Sheets had hoped -- "we didn't feel we were on the same page," Vasquez admitted -- and that helped lead him to Denver.

His former position coach, Hal Hunter, now with the Colts, gave him a push.

"He just threw out a couple places that would be a good fit for me. At this point it was a no-brainer," Vasquez said. "It had a great location, great team and a chance to go to the Super Bowl and win it all."

The people involved helped seal the deal, starting with Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway.

"He knows how the game works in and out," Vasquez. "He knows the ins and outs. It makes complete sense why he's so good in the office -- as he was on the field."

But the one who made Vasquez feel at home was Offensive Line Coach Dave Magazu, with whom he felt an instant rapport.

"Coach Magazu, he said he was excited. (Head) Coach (John) Fox actually mentioned something: 'I've never seen (Magazu) smile from ear to ear this long,' and Magazu was talking about having a new toy to play with, fit in and get this thing back on track," Vasquez said.

"Right off the bat, he asked me a few questions, and then he's like, 'All right, now we're going to get to ball.'"

And with that, Vasquez, like so many free agents around the league, once again became all about a team, and not about himself.

Rodgers-Cromartie Appreciates Broncos' Approach

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2013

Cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie said the fact that the Broncos addressed his flaws and told him how he could get better impressed him.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- In the process of wooing a potential free agent, teams will sometimes tell a player what they want to hear, overwhelming the prospect with platitudes and plaudits.

Cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie said the Broncos took the opposite approach. "The one thing that stood out when talking to everybody, they didn't really just talk about what I can do as a player, they pointed out my flaws and told me how they can help me get better," he said.

What stood out to the newest Broncos cornerback, who agreed to terms Wednesday after visiting team headquarters, was their desire for him to avoid the ups and downs that have occasionally plagued his play during his five previous seasons with Arizona and Philadelphia.

"The main thing is just about the consistency, playing and just being hungry to go out there and play," said Rodgers-Cromartie, who played nickel cornerback with the Eagles in 2011 before moving outside to right cornerback in 2012.

The Broncos' sentiments might have come at the proper time. Like many associated with the Philadelphia Eagles of the last two years, Rodgers-Cromartie appeared a bit chastened by the experience. In 16 months from August 2011 to the end of last season, the Eagles gradually devolved from a "Dream Team" assemblage -- in the words of Vince Young, signed to be Michael Vick's backup before the 2011 season -- to one that endured the Eagles' longest losing streak (eight games) since 1968.

"When you have a lot of talented guys like that, a lot of things are expected from you," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "The main thing is to just go out and play football and play consistently. Don't get caught up in the hype of names and people on the roster, and really, just grind it out."

The Broncos stole headlines nationwide with their acquisitions this week, but Rodgers-Cromartie doesn't place the pickups of himself, Wes Welker, Louis Vasquez, Terrance Knighton and Stewart Bradley in the same category as the Eagles' 2011 haul of himself, Young, cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha, defensive end Jason Babin, running back Ronnie Brown and guard Evan Mathis.

"Basically, they're bringing in not a lot of guys, as the Eagles did, and the organization, the people that are here, already believe in something -- and that's winning," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "You just walk around this building on the day that I've been here, talking with everybody, and you see the main thing is about winning games and coming in here and just working."

Where he fits with the Broncos will depend on how he fares in the expected competition with Chris Harris and exclusive rights free agent Tony Carter; Harris is a more natural fit working inside at nickel corner, but also excelled at right cornerback when the Broncos used four defensive backs in their base package last season.

Both Harris and Rodgers-Cromartie can move inside and outside, which adds intrigue to their competition.

"I'm really here just to compete, and however they use me, they use me," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "I played both inside and out, but I'm more comfortable playing out."

Broncos Draft History: Defensive Linemen

By Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
March 14, 2013

A look back at the defensive linemen the Broncos have selected in the NFL Draft.
As we begin to wrap up our week's preview of the defensive linemen available in the 2013 NFL Draft, let's take a look back at who the Broncos have drafted at that position.

Player: Derek Wolfe
Year Drafted: 2012
Round: 2a - 36 Overall
College: Cincinnati

Broncos Career: Wolfe joined Barney Chavous as the only defensive linemen in Broncos history to start every game during their rookie seasons. He finished third on the team with six sacks in 2012 and led the club's rookies with 40 tackles. He also became just the sixth Broncos rookie to register a sack in the season-opener when he took down Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger in a win.

Player: Elvis Dumervil
Year Drafted: 2006
Round: 4b - 126 Overall
College: Louisville

Broncos Career: Dumervil made his impact felt his rookie year as he grabbed 8.5 sacks and was a menace to offensive tackles. He kept those menacing ways in his second season, grabbing 12.5 sacks. In 2009, Dumervil was moved to outside linebacker, but that didn't stop him from getting to the quarterback, as he became the first Bronco in team history to lead the league in sacks with 17. He also earned his first Pro Bowl berth that season and earned All-Pro recognition as he set the team record for sacks in a season. In 2011 and 2012, he made back-to-back Pro Bowls and now ranks seventh in franchise history with 63.5 career sacks.

Player: Trevor Pryce
Year Drafted: 1997
Round: 1 - 28 Overall
College: Clemson

Broncos Career: As a rookie on a team headed to a World Championship, Pryce didn't see much action as a rookie. But he let nothing get in his way his second season starting 15 out of 16 games with 8.5 sacks helping the Broncos to their second consecutive Super Bowl victory. His sack totals went up from there and over his Broncos career he was named to four Pro Bowls and was named All Pro two times. Pryce signed with the Baltimore Ravens in 2006 and is currently playing for the New York Jets. In 2009, he was named to the Broncos' 50th Anniversary team.

Player: Simon Fletcher

Year Drafted: 1985

Round: 2b - 54 Overall

College: Houston

Broncos Career: Drafted as a defensive lineman, Fletcher was converted to outside linebacker in the Broncos 3-4 scheme. After only starting three games his first two seasons, Fletcher started every game he appeared the next nine seasons. Over his 11-year career, Fletcher grabbed a franchise record 97.5 sacks; two interceptions and 10 fumble recoveries. He shares the NFL record for most consecutive games with a sack with 10.

Player: Karl Mecklenburg

Year Drafted: 1983

Round: 12 - 310 Overall

College: Minnesota

Broncos Career: From 1983 to 1994, Mecklenburg was the face of the Broncos defense. During the time he was voted to play in six Pro Bowls, a total that ties for fifth highest by a player in team history. He was named All-AFC and All-NFL four times and was tabbed the 1986 AFC Player of the Year by *Football News*. Mecklenburg helped Denver to seven postseason appearances, five division titles and three Super Bowl berths. He finished his career with 1,145 tackles as well as 79 sacks.

Player: Lyle Alzado

Year Drafted: 1971

Round: 4a - 79 Overall

College: Yankton College

Broncos Career: One of the most colorful players in NFL history, Alzado was a force on the field for his eight seasons in Denver. His impact was felt immediately, as a rookie Alzado nabbed 60 tackles and eight sacks and added 10.5 sacks and 91 tackles the following year. One of his best seasons came in 1974, when Alzado grabbed 13 sacks along with 80 tackles. A contract dispute ended his time in Denver in 1979 and Alzado wrapped up his career as a Raider. Alzado passed away in 1992 after battling a brain tumor.

Here are some other defensive linemen drafted:

Year	Rd.	No.	Name	College
2012	5	137	Malik Jackson	Tennessee
2011	7	247	Jeremy Beal	Oklahoma
2008	5b	148	Carlton Powell	Virginia Tech
2007	1	17	Jarvis Moss	Florida
2007	2	56	Tim Crowder	Texas
2007	4	121	Marcus Thomas	Florida
2003	4b	114	Nick Eason	Clemson
2003	4c	128	Bryant McNeal	Clemson
2003	6	194	Aaron Hunt	Texas Tech
2003	7a	227	Clint Mitchell	Florida
2002	3	96	Dorsett Davis	Mississippi State
2002	7b	231	Monsanto Pope	Virginia
2001	2	51	Paul Toviessi	Marshall
2001	3	87	Reggie Hayward	Iowa State
2000	4a	101	Jerry Johnson	Florida State
1992	2	54	Shane Dronett	Texas
1984	2	46	Andre Townsend	Mississippi
1980	2	42	Rulon Jones	Utah State
1975	5b	121	Rubin Carter	Miami (Fla.)
1973	2	36	Barney Chavous	South Carolina State