John Fox hopes to be back on sideline as Broncos coach by season's end

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
November 12, 2013

John Fox walked out the back door of his Charlotte, N.C., home Tuesday and returned to the scene of a crime on his heart.

When the Broncos' head coach plays golf on his home course, it means literally that. As part of his rehabilitation from heart surgery last week, Fox walked to the hole where his episode happened on Nov. 2 during the Broncos' bye week.

"You're getting ready to go down," Fox said Tuesday in a conference call with Denver media. "I don't know if you've ever passed out before, but you feel it overcoming you. Basically you get tunnel vision and you try to fight it off. I hit two shots, a chip shot and a putt that I can truly tell you I don't remember every little part of it. Then I had to sit on the ground and actually lay on the ground. I never really passed out, but you're fighting passing out. And I hit two golf shots in the middle of it."

Fox was taken to a Charlotte hospital where he got the news he had been dreading since he first learned of his heart condition in 1997: He needed aortic valve replacement surgery.

The procedure was performed Monday, Nov. 4. By Friday he was out of the hospital and back in his Charlotte home to continue his recovery.

Once he's cleared to fly he will return to Denver. He is confident he will be back on the Broncos' sideline coaching before season's end.

"Oh yeah, I don't think there's any question — there's always a question — but my goal and dream is to be out there before the conclusion of this season," Fox said.

Fox watched the Broncos' 28-20 victory against the San Diego Chargers on Sunday from his Charlotte home.

"I've got to admit there were parts of it I had to quit watching," he said. "It got a little tense. That wasn't the best thing for me."

Was the hit Chargers defensive end Corey Liuget delivered to the lower extremities of Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning one of those tension-filled moments?
"I don't want to get into any specifics," Fox said. "I can leave you with the thought there was a few, and that could have been one of them."

Asked if it was Fox who called the NFL about the hit, Fox said he did have communication with the league office.

Fox, 58, also wanted it known his heart condition was genetic and not related to lifestyle or pressures of coaching.

"Sure there's a lot of pressure and stress involved in coaching," Fox said. "But I think a lot of people out there in Denver and around the country and around the globe have pressure-packed jobs. Our military comes to mind that I don't think coaching compares to.

"It wasn't the pressure of coaching or that kind of thing. It was what they call a bicuspid aortic valve where there's two flaps inside that valve and most people have three flaps. It was something I was born with."

Fox said his condition had been monitored for the past 17 years, but it became "progressively worse a year ago. They thought it would last another year. We didn't make it quite to that point."

Fox thanked all the well-wishers from the Broncos' community, and said he talks on a daily basis to interim head coach Jack Del Rio.

The Broncos will play Sunday night against the Kansas City Chiefs at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.
Broncos Mailbag: Peyton Manning to Brock Osweiler, what changes at QB?

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
November 13, 2013

Denver Post sports writer Mike Klis posts his Broncos Mailbag on Wednesdays during the regular season.

Pose a Broncos- or NFL-related question for the Broncos Mailbag.

Dear Mike, love your stuff. We all want Peyton Manning around, but how close would Brock Osweiler come to temporarily filling Manning's shoes (I guess we could say ankles)? Realistically, what would be the drop-off, statistically?
--Kims Sifers, Riga, Latvia

Peyton Manning's painful high ankle sprain, coupled with the Packers losing two home games since Aaron Rodgers suffered a fractured collarbone, has pushed the backup quarterback to the forefront of Broncos fan concerns.

Let's start by using an example that encapsulates the primary difference between how Brock Osweiler would play compared to Manning.

Eric Decker takes off from the left slot and as he cuts from the left seam, Manning can tell by the positioning of the defender and how Decker plants and explodes off the cut whether or not his receiver will be open by right hash.

Manning could then throw while Decker is still covered and time it so the ball arrives while he's open on the right seam.

It's called "throw 'em open" and Manning can do this because he's been doing it play after play after play for 15 NFL active seasons.

Osweiler hasn't played and so he's more likely to wait until Decker comes open before deciding to throw. Osweiler has a strong arm so he can still zip in that completion. But the defense is also more likely to close by the time Osweiler throws.

Then again, so long as Decker, Demaryius Thomas, Julius Thomas and Wes Welker are out there with him, Osweiler can move the team for touchdowns. Maybe the Broncos would slow the tempo a tad, but Osweiler knows how to run the offense. There would still be plenty of passing.
Hey Klis, What happened to the penalty for hitting a QB at or below the knees? Seems like Peyton Manning is taking a lot of "late" hits and the other team is not getting the penalty for it -- or is it just me? John Elway used to take a lot and the opposing defense never or rarely got flagged for it. Now it's Manning and the trend seems to continue!
--Rod Huffman, Oakley, Kan.

There is a Tom Brady Rule where sackers can't hit below the knees with force. It is not supposed to be a penalty if it's been determined the pass rusher was blocked into quarterback's lower limbs or if there isn't much force.

Von Miller swiping to trip up Philip Rivers for a sack, for instance, was not a penalty. I talked to someone from the NFL and the league's finding was Corey Liuget delivered a legal hit on Manning because his initial contact was above the quarterback's knee. Even though Liuget wrapped two arms around Manning below the legs, his helmet did hit first at the thigh.

What in the world is it going to take for Eric Decker to get a pass interference call? Every week it seems he gets mugged and nothing happens. Against San Diego it was ridiculous. Call me a homer, but c'mon. Blow the whistle.
--Tim, Las Vegas

Hold on. Read the next letter, first.

Eric Decker is way too obvious fishing for interference calls. Have the refs gotten wise to his ploy? Maybe if he didn't try so hard waving his arms after a no-call, they'd be more inclined to throw the flag. But if I were a zebra, and Decker started whining to me about a P.I. no-call, I'd safely assume I made the right decision.
--Brady, Denver

Tim and Brady - two Broncos fans. Two ways to view Decker and the lack of pass interference calls. My take: In the last year or so, back judges could call pass interference on almost every play. Defensive backs are getting tired of getting burned in 7-on-7-type passing contests and are starting to become more physical.

It's kind of like the paint in an NBA game. Ever watch one of the classic games from the 1970s? It's incredible how uncontested drives were then compared to now.

The field is shrinking in the NFL too. I used to think the officials called too many pass interference penalties. I do think the officials have become more judicious and I applaud that.

I hate the pass interference or defensive holding call on third-and long because it unfairly rewards the weaker team. Within reason, I say let them play.
Shaun Phillips has certainly been a great addition to the Broncos. But I still don't understand how we got him for so cheap?
--Bill Kutscher, Broomfield

He was 32 and coming off an injury plagued season in 2012. Elvis Dumervil is having a terrific season. His 8 sacks are tied for ninth in the NFL. But he was scheduled to make $12 million this year. He and the Broncos settled for $8 million before the tardy fax exchange of documents made him a free agent.

Phillips is getting $1 million with another $2 million in sack-based incentives. He already has 7 ½ sacks so he'll be making more than $1 million. Still, dollar for dollar, the Broncos did a nice job of turning a negative into a positive.

A tale of two running backs! I know you have talked about Knowshon Moreno before. But he seems like a man possessed. I don't ever remember such a dramatic turn around in ability, style and personality. He's running with fire and his fumble problems are gone. What did he take to turn his confidence around like that and where can I get some?
--Deborah, Ventura, Calif.

This tremendous story of redemption has been written and told many times. I don't think it was a coincidence that Moreno flipped after he was benched without getting a game jersey for eight consecutive weeks last year.

In the 15 games since his return -- the final 7 of last season, first 9 of this year -- Moreno has rushed for 1,031 yards and 12 touchdowns and caught 57 passes for another 491 yards and a touchdown.

What's up with J.D. Walton? He was supposed to be back at the end of October, but I haven't heard anything. The O-line could sure use more healthy bodies.
--Steve Canon, Canon City

Walton was activated onto the Broncos' 53-man roster last week. He was inactive for the game against the Chargers. He will compete every week for a 46-man game-day roster spot but the Broncos plan on sticking with Manny Ramirez as their starting center.

John Fox is still the official head coach of the Broncos. Does he get credit in official statistics for wins and losses during his absence or will they be credited to Jack Del Rio?
--Jim Pearson, Southwest Virginia

The Broncos say Elias be damned: They both get credit. Both deserve credit.
Here's the deal: Elias Sports Bureau says that in the event the official coach returns during the season, as is expected in the case of Fox, the official coach would get credit for the win.

And I agree with this because winning football games starts in May with OTAs, June with minicamps and August with training camp.

The Broncos, though, are going to also give credit to Del Rio. And I agree with this. Del Rio did all the game planning and set the mood of the team under difficult circumstances.

Interestingly, I did a story last week on past interim coach situations and my research showed that Rich Brooks got credit from Pro Football Reference for going 2-0 as an interim coach for Dan Reeves with the Atlanta Falcons in 1998 but Vince Tobin did not get 2-0 credit for replacing Mike Ditka as the Chicago Bears' coach in 1988.

So the answer is: Credit goes to whomever you want.
What are the five most important body parts in American sports?

By Joan Niesen
The Denver Post
November 12, 2013

On Sunday afternoon, all of Colorado realized it — heck, all of football realized it.

This is the ankle that can sink a million playoff dreams. Peyton Manning is fallible, and everything the Broncos hope to do come February hinges upon him. It's part expectations, part Manning's long, respected career, part the devotion of the Broncos fan. And because of all that, the quarterback's ankle is the most important in football.

But you've heard enough about Manning's injury that didn't turn out to be much of an injury. You'll keep hearing about it, too, on autotuned repeat during Sunday's broadcast. As such, I'll spare you. Let's shift the conversation and take a look at what I consider the five most important body parts in American sports:

1. Manning's ankle. Maybe I'm too close to see the forest for the trees, but when one of football's most beloved players, one of its most storied teams and the Super Bowl are all involved, this has to trump all else. Plus, no sport in America matters more in terms of attention and money than the NFL.

2. LeBron James' knee. Knees are the murderers of basketball careers. James doesn't have such problems, but if something's going to put a stop to his quest to be unequivocally known as the best of all time, it's that one small joint. James ranks this high not because of his team or its championship hopes — he could be gone next year, for all we know — but because he's such a transcendent player within basketball.

3. Nick Saban's brain. The discussion has moved past whether Saban is the best coach in college football; talking heads now question if he is the best active coach in any sport. Just look what he's done: four national championships split between two different schools, four SEC championships, two recognitions as the AP coach of the year. Oh, and he could bolt for Texas tomorrow, for all we know. This man has no allegiances, and his mind makes champions in college football.

4. Yasiel Puig's arm. Puig rubs me the wrong way. I'll put that out there. I lived in Los Angeles during his summer-long, coming-out party, and something about his approach just aggravated me. (Yes, I grew up a Cardinals fan. I know, I know.) Regardless, baseball doesn't have young fans, particularly, and Puig is the way to
get them back. He needs to be good — great, even — and thus he needs to be healthy.

5. Andrew Luck’s arm. In my opinion, Luck has the best chance to be the next Manning or Tom Brady in terms of holding the role of football’s consummate quarterback. It doesn’t necessarily have to be his arm — it could just as well be a knee, an ankle, a brain — but his health is vital to the game in that respect.

You probably don’t agree with all of these. It’s a tough list to narrow, and I too was debating where exactly to place Brady’s perfect mop of hair. Regardless, it’s a fun game to play, so enjoy your agreements — and your disagreements.
Broncos Q&A: Which player besides Wes Welker can we expect to sport a “sick Movember ‘stache”?

By Joan Niesen
The Denver Post
November 12, 2013

This question comes from @DenverBroncosID via Twitter, and you know what, I’m going to run with it. After two weeks of heart surgery and ankle injuries, this blog needs something slightly less serious.

I’ve given the question some extensive thought. You see, I’m a huge facial hair enthusiast. And though I can’t expect to perfectly predict the whisker-growing propensity of these Broncos, I would like to nominate a few players who I think would look stupendous with a dignified little ‘stache — or something of the 2011-12 Wes Welker variety.

1. Peyton Manning: He could solidify his status as the curmudgeonly old man on of the team with a well-groomed mustache. One of my journalism professors in grad school used to clean his mustache scrupulously after eating. I would like to see Peyton do this.

2. Champ Bailey: Same idea. He’s old, at least in football terms, and pretty much as dignified as a football player can get.

3. Terrance Knighton: I’m nominating Knighton because he’s one of the more happy-go-lucky Broncos, and he usually sports a goatee-type thing that could easily be altered into a great Movember mustache.

4. Eric Decker: Decker always has some kind of whisker situation going, so this would be easy.

5. Louis Vasquez: A lot of the time, Vasquez has this bushy, bushy beard and a thin little ‘stache, and I think he should switch things up. Lose the beard, augment the ‘stache. It’s time for a change of pace.

Okay, I’m finished being ridiculous. Back to football. At least Movember is for a good cause, which I think justifies this detour.
Brock Osweiler remains the loyal understudy to Peyton Manning ... for now.

The memory of star quarterback Peyton Manning limping off the field in the closing minutes of Sunday's 28-20 victory against the Chargers in San Diego is still on the minds of many. A few minutes before Osweiler chatted in front of his locker Monday, interim coach Jack Del Rio announced that a magnetic resonance imaging exam revealed no structural damage to Manning's right ankle. Manning's practice time this week is yet to be determined, but he will play Sunday night against the Kansas City Chiefs. And Osweiler will continue to be his backup until further notice.

"My job as a backup quarterback is always to be prepared," Osweiler said. "I have to know the game plan inside and out. That's how I look at it every week. I'll always be ready."

Manning is heralded as the man who will lead the Broncos to the Super Bowl, and playing time for Osweiler, 22, has been scant since he was a second-round pick from Arizona State in 2012. He has completed only 2-of-3 passes for 10 yards this season. Is he in the wrong place at the wrong time?

"Absolutely not," Osweiler said without hesitation. "There's no situation in the NFL on any other team that I'd be able to learn the things I've learned in Denver. Between Peyton and the coaches who are here, the education I'm getting as far as playing the quarterback position, being a leader and a professional, there's no better place to learn those things."

Osweiler noted he has been an understudy before in high school and early in his college career. He knows the drill.

"A lot of times, you're just not going to know when you're going to play or when you're going to practice," Osweiler said. "I'm getting more practice time than last year. A couple of weeks when Peyton has been banged up, I've gotten more reps in practice."

Del Rio wouldn't commit Monday to how much practice time each quarterback will get this week.
"Manning will practice," Del Rio said. "We'll wait and see how much practice time each guy gets."

Manning aggravated a high ankle sprain on the Broncos' final possession against San Diego on Sunday. Would Del Rio be inclined to get Manning out of the game in the closing minutes if the circumstances were right?

"Depending on the situation, certainly," Del Rio said. "That wasn't a thought based on the way Sunday's game unfolded. I'd love to have those kinds of situations — being ahead and contemplating that with a big lead late.

"But we're just going to worry about getting that lead right now. We're on high alert right now trying to protect our quarterback."

Manning was hit five times and sacked twice against the Chargers.

Do the coaches have confidence Osweiler is ready if Manning takes a hit from the Chiefs that knocks him out of the game Sunday night?

"I would hope so," Osweiler said. "The one thing I can say is I've made progress. I've gotten better."

Said Del Rio: "Brock's a good young player. He's better in his second year and continues to develop."
Broncos-Chiefs kickoff at Kansas City on Dec. 1 moved to later in day

By The Denver Post
November 12, 2013

The Broncos-Chiefs game originally scheduled for 11 a.m. on Dec. 1 in Kansas City has been switched to a 2:25 p.m. kickoff, the NFL announced Tuesday, while a game between the Patriots and Texans at Houston will take the 11 a.m. time slot. Both games will be televised on CBS.

The Broncos first will play the Chiefs at Sports Authority Field at Mile High this Sunday night at 6:20 p.m. in a game that was switched to the prime-time spot for television. Both contests are sure to draw huge TV ratings. Denver will come into Sunday's game with an 8-1 record, while the Chiefs are the only undefeated team in the NFL at 9-0.

Denver will play another Sunday night game next week at New England before playing at Kansas City the week after that.
Fox says he'll be back by season's end

By Arnie Stapleton
The Associated Press
November 12, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Broncos coach John Fox says the only change he plans to make following open-heart surgery is his vantage point.

"My goal and dream is to be there (on the sideline) before the conclusion of the season," Fox told Denver media during a conference call Tuesday from his Charlotte, N.C., home where he's convalescing from surgery to fix a genetic heart defect.

Fox said he was born with a bicuspid aortic valve, one that has only two leaflets instead of the usual three. The aortic valve regulates blood flow from the heart into the aorta, the major blood vessel that brings blood into the body.

He said it was discovered in 1997 when a murmur showed up in a physical while he was the Giants defensive coordinator. He was told earlier this year that surgery was necessary, but he had hoped to delay the operation until after the Super Bowl.

That changed when he almost passed out Nov. 2 while golfing in Charlotte, two days after he'd visited his cardiologist in Raleigh.

Less than 48 hours later, he had surgery and was released from the hospital Friday. He'll soon begin his cardio rehab in North Carolina and won't be back in Denver until he's strong enough to fly back.

Fox said after he became dizzy on the golf course, he chipped within 2 feet for par, then lay down on the grass before being taken to a hospital where a CT scan showed "my valve was almost completely closed. I was receiving very little blood to my body."

Fox seemed to bristle when asked if any lifestyle changes were in the offing.

"I'm very, very healthy," he said, noting that normal hospital stays following this type of surgery is five to seven days and "I was out in four. So, this isn't due to poor lifestyle, not being healthy, too much stress, not enough stress. This is basically something I was born with that I needed fixed. I think the quick recovery speaks to what great shape I'm in.

"This is really not a lifestyle problem. It's just, let's call it a birth defect. I'm not really sure what you call it. But I just came up a little short in that department."
Fox said he'd have needed this operation even if he weren't an NFL coach.

"Sure, there is some pressure and stress involved in coaching, but I think a lot of people out there in Denver, in this country, really around the globe, have very pressure-packed jobs.

"I think our military comes to mind maybe as one of those that I don't think coaching compares to," Fox said. "So, it wasn't the pressure of coaching or any kind of thing."

Fox’s voice sounded good during his 16-minute call, he also displayed his usual sense of humor, quick wit and charisma that players and coaches alike say they miss around team headquarters.

Fox said he was relaxing Tuesday and "just getting around to seeing the San Diego game from Sunday." That's the coaches' copy. He watched the broadcast live, although he admitted there were times he had to stop watching lest his blood pressure skyrocket.

One of those moments surely was when Peyton Manning came up limping after Corey Liuget dived at his ankles in the closing minutes of Denver's 28-20 win. The Broncos (8-1) asked the league to look at the hit, but the NFL determined it was a clean tackle.

Fox declined to confirm it was he who raised the issue with the NFL: "Well, we're not really allowed to discuss anything to do with officiating. I can say that I did communicate with somebody at the league office," Fox said.

Aside from his concern over his quarterback, Fox said he was feeling good and thanked everyone for their well wishes and the Broncos for allowing him "this time to get my health back, and that process is going very well. It's been helped by everybody there in Denver, and probably first and foremost my wife, Robin."

Fox and interim head coach Jack Del Rio speak every day by phone and Fox said he's texted and talked with some of his players, too.

Famous for saying every injured player is "day to day," Fox was just as coy about the timeline for his own recovery.

"I can just tell you that I'm working very hard to get better and I feel like my doctors are pleased that I've improved every day," he said. "So things are going great. I like where I'm at right now and we'll see where that leaves us."
Broncos shun ploy of max protection for Manning

By Arnie Stapleton
The Associated Press
November 12, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Peyton Manning is taking a beating.

The Broncos' offensive line is battered and his right ankle is throbbing.

And now here come the unbeaten Kansas City Chiefs, leading the league in sacks.

Fans in Denver would love to put a Brink's truck around their hobbled quarterback for Sunday night's showdown pitting the divisional rivals who have combined to go 17-1.

They might be surprised, however, to hear Jack Del Rio doesn't share their affinity for the concept known as "max protect."

That's where a tight end and a running back are kept in the backfield to help the five offensive linemen keep defenders from reaching the quarterback. The strategy sacrifices options in the passing game to deny the defense pressure on the passer.

In Denver's case, it could keep two of their most productive players in tight end Julius Thomas and tailback Knowshon Moreno from doing what they do best.

Adding another tight end to the mix would sideline Wes Welker. Like both Thomas and Moreno, Welker has nine touchdowns so far.

Moreover, heavy doses of "max protect" could actually lead to more hits on Manning.

"Ironically, that's the natural way to start (thinking) is to pack more in," said Del Rio, Denver's interim head coach.

"But quarterbacks are actually hit more often when you pack them in. And they're hit far more often in maximum protection. In fact, one of the times he was hit Sunday was on a max protection and the tight end got beat."

When a team packs players in to provide the QB more security, linebackers occupy the rushing lanes and are closer to the quarterback.

Keeping extra protectors in the backfield also opens the possibility of more defenders crashing the quarterback's pocket of protection, disrupting his throws.
So, the high-scoring Broncos will stick with their spread offense, which in turn spreads the defense.

"More people doesn't ensure that he's not going to get hit. I mean, he's going to get hit some in the flow of the game. That's just how it is," Del Rio said. "And I think we do a very good job. I think our guy gets hit less than most, and that's going to remain a focal point for us."

Manning has taken some nasty hits over the past month, beginning with one from Jacksonville's Jason Babin, who wasn't whistled for a low hit on Oct. 13.

The following week, former teammate Robert Mathis put two big hits on him, and Manning missed some practice time with a sore right ankle that next week.

Manning might be limited Wednesday or even miss practice altogether after aggravating his high ankle sprain Sunday when defensive end Corey Liuget dived at his ankles in the closing minutes of Denver's 28-20 win at San Diego.

Manning limped through the closing minutes after that hit.

The Broncos asked the league to look at that hit, contending it was late and low and should have drawn a flag. An NFL spokesman, however, told The Associated Press on Tuesday the league determined the hit was clean.

In a conference call with Denver media on Tuesday, coach John Fox declined to confirm that he brought up the issue with the league himself while he recovers from heart surgery in North Carolina.

"Well, we're not really allowed to discuss anything to do with officiating. I can say that I did communicate with somebody at the league office," Fox said.

Fox said he watched the game from his home, but had to turn away at some points lest his blood pressure get too high.

Surely, Liuget's hit was one of those moments.

"Yeah, I don't know that I want to get into specifics," Fox said. "I'll just leave you with the thought that there was a few and that could have been one of them."

He wasn't alone in his concern.

"Of course, I hold my breath," teammate Shaun Phillips said of seeing Manning so slow to get up. "He's our breadwinner."

So far, Manning has fumbled seven times and lost five of them, in large part due to the loss of three-time Pro Bowler and two-time All-Pro left tackle Ryan Clady to left foot surgery in September.
Clady allowed just one sack in more than 1,100 snaps last season, which he parlayed into a $57.2 million contract on the eve of training camp.

His replacement, journeyman Chris Clark, whose only career starts before this season came at jumbo tight end during Denver's short-lived Tim Tebow era, stepped in as Manning's new blind-side protector in Week 3.

Since then, Manning has been sacked a dozen times and hit 27, and in three straight games, Clark has allowed Manning to be sacked and stripped from the blind side.

"I hate these fumbles, but they are all when I'm throwing," Manning said. "I'm conscious of protecting it when I'm in the pocket but all of them have been while I'm throwing. I haven't quite figured out how to not fumble when they hit you while you're throwing, that's a tough one."

Figuring out how to keep the Chiefs, who have collected 36 sacks, from getting to the quarterback has proved a difficult task for Kansas City's opponents.

One way or another, the Broncos will have to tighten things up Sunday night.

"We're definitely on high alert wanting to protect our quarterback," Del Rio said. "We didn't do as well as we can (at San Diego). We've got an even greater challenge coming up this week with a team that's sacked quarterbacks more than anybody in this league. So, I'm sure that will get plenty of attention."
NFL switches time of Broncos-Chiefs II

By The Associated Press
November 12, 2013

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL has switched Denver's game at Kansas City on Dec. 1 from early afternoon to a 4:25 ET kickoff.

Moving to the 1 p.m. ET slot will be New England at Houston.

The Broncos-Chiefs matchup will be the second for the AFC West powers in three weeks. They meet this Sunday in Denver, a game that was flexed to prime time, replacing Green Bay at the New York Giants. Packers-Giants was moved to 4:25 p.m. ET.

The Giants and Redskins are scheduled to meet in the Dec. 1 night game, and that still could be moved to daytime. A decision will be announced no later than next Tuesday.
Chiefs remain atop tight AP Pro 32 power rankings

By Dave Skretta
The Associated Press
November 12, 2013

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The Kansas City Chiefs will have a chance to prove they belong atop the AP Pro32 power rankings when they face the Denver Broncos on Sunday.

The unbeaten Chiefs barely held onto the top spot Tuesday in voting by a 12-member media panel that regularly covers the league. Kansas City, off last week, earned 374 points and five first-place votes, while the second-place Seahawks had 373 points and five No. 1 nods.

The Broncos were third with 369 points and two first-place votes.

"Now we see whether the NFL's last unbeaten team is as good as the record indicates," wrote Newsday's Bob Glauber, who had the Chiefs third behind Denver and Seattle. "Two of their next three are against the Broncos, and the outcomes could decide the divisional race."

The Patriots were fourth in the tightly bunched AP Pro32 with 341 points, followed by the Saints with 340. The Panthers, Lions, Colts, 49ers and Bengals rounded out the top 10.

Still, the focus this week will be squarely on the Chiefs and Broncos.

Kansas City could be playing its biggest game of the season without wide receiver Dwayne Bowe, who is facing a potential suspension after he was arrested for speeding and possession of marijuana on their bye weekend. The Chiefs were aware of the situation but had no comment.

Meanwhile, the Broncos will be playing again without coach John Fox, who is recovering from heart surgery. But they will have quarterback Peyton Manning under center, even though he hurt his already ailing ankles so much in last week's win over San Diego that he underwent a precautionary MRI exam that came back negative.

"The hits just keep on coming for the Broncos — unfortunately, for Peyton Manning, too," Glauber said. "He's been taking a pounding the last few weeks. Not a good way to head into the first of two meetings in a three-week span against the well-
rested Chiefs' defense, but at least Manning will be in the lineup despite continued ankle problems."

Former NFL coach Tony Dungy said the biggest question will be whether the Broncos can protect Manning. As for the Chiefs, Dungy said, "we'll find out this week who they are."

The Seahawks did little to hurt their claim on No. 1 with a 33-10 rout of the Falcons over the weekend. Winners of five straight, they host Minnesota on Sunday.

"Seattle is 8-2 in their last 10 road games and they don't lose at home, wrote Pat Kirwan, an analyst for Sirius XM satellite radio and CBSSports.com. "Missing three of their starting offensive linemen, the Seahawks went into Atlanta and put 33 points on the board."

In this week's other marquee showdown, the Patriots visit the Panthers on Monday night. New England is coming off a blowout of Pittsburgh that solidified its place in the AP Pro32's top 5, while the Panthers vaulted into sixth place with a 10-9 win over the 49ers.

"The Panthers have allowed an NFC-low 115 points this season, an average of just 12.7 per game," observed Rick Gosselin of the Dallas Morning News. "That's an improvement of better than 10 points per game from a year ago."

The Panthers have won five straight after a 1-3 start.

"This surging defense is built in Ron Rivera's image — tough, physical and aggressive," wrote Ira Kauffman of the Tampa Tribune.

The Bears started off the second 10, followed by the Jets, Packers, Eagles and Cardinals. The Cowboys were No. 16, followed by the Ravens, Chargers, Browns and Rams.

Despite winning its first game of the season, Jacksonville remained No. 32.

"My hat's off to the Jaguars for never giving up and getting a win on the road this week," Kirwan said. "They still may be the team with the first pick in the draft."
ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- For one week the Broncos showed they are intent on getting things done while head coach John Fox is away, recovering from open heart surgery.

The Broncos moved to 8-1 with their 28-20 victory over the San Diego Chargers, they continued to show flashes of a team that is historically dominant on offense with a fast and aggressive defense that can change games.

But they also flashed lulls on both sides of the ball, enough of those the Chargers made it a game before all was said and done.

With that in mind, and a long look at the video, here are some thoughts on the Broncos defense and special teams:

- In a three-play span of Sunday's third quarter the Broncos showed the potential for their defensive front to return to last season's disruptive best. But if the Broncos are going to crank up the heat on opposing passers with more frequency out of the four-man rush or disrupt the action at the line of scrimmage in the run game, Von Miller and Shaun Phillips have to make that happen. On a first-and-10 play from the Chargers' 34-yard line with 5 minutes, 1 second to play in the third quarter, Miller crashed the middle of the Chargers formation to get Chargers running back Ryan Mathews for a 1-yard loss. Two plays later, on a first-and-10 from the Chargers' 46, Phillips made San Diego pay for trying to block him with a tight end, working to the inside and catching San Diego quarterback Philip Rivers almost as soon as Rivers finished his drop. Miller then arrived to finish things off. Both plays came with the Broncos in the nickel, with three down linemen and Miller lined up, standing, along the line of scrimmage. Earlier in the game defensive end Robert Ayers also showed a quality inside move on a pass rush, the kind he has flashed previously and the kind if he used more would increase his sack numbers. Overall with quarterbacks looking to get rid of the ball more quickly, the more quality work the Broncos' best pass-rushers can do working to the inside, the more success they will have getting those quarterbacks on the ground.
• Rookie cornerback Kayvon Webster keeps answering the challenges put in front of him. Webster played 45 snaps on defense Sunday, his highest output of the season as interim head coach Jack Del Rio used all nine defensive backs in uniform in a variety of personnel groupings, including several different combinations in the nickel (five defensive backs). Quarterbacks have taken their shot at the rookie, hoping to capitalize on his inexperience. One of the things that has earned Webster so much playing time is his ability to match up in 1-on-1 situations and to play with don't-back-down confidence in those situations. Rivers often tried to pick away at Webster, especially on slants when the Chargers receivers beat him to the spot for some short gains. But Webster was usually up to the challenge when Rivers tried to drop one over him down the field, including a pass breakup by Webster in the end zone against Vincent Brown.

• It is an odd sight, but the Broncos played 10 snaps on defense without Miller in the game Sunday, including four in the first quarter. The Broncos took Miller out in both the base defense at times, as well in some of their work in one of their nickel packages. The total included some pass-rush situations in the nickel in the second quarter, when Miller was out for five consecutive plays, including a second-and-9, when Rivers hit tight end Antonio Gates for a 22-yard gain. In the end Chris Harris and Rahim Moore were the only players to remain on the field for all 73 snaps on defense. Linebacker Wesley Woodyard played 71 plays, missing two after re-aggravating a neck injury.

• Peyton Manning's presence in an offense does things to people. Rams coach Jeff Fisher once tried to onside kick the first three times the Titans kicked off against the Colts and Bill Belichick's fourth-down gamble that didn't pay off against Manning on "Monday Night Football" is still talked about any time another coach gets in a similar situation against Manning. It's why two of the Broncos last four opponents, including the Chargers this past Sunday, have used fake punts in their first possession of the game as they search for some momentum. The Chargers converted a fourth-and-1 when safety Eric Weddle took a direct snap for a 2-yard gain. The Broncos did force a punt six plays later and took the following possession for a touchdown.
John Fox wants to return this season

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
November 12, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Just a week after open heart surgery, Denver Broncos coach John Fox is already breaking down game video and said Tuesday that he still hopes to rejoin the team before the end of the season.

"My goal and dream is obviously to be there before the conclusion of this season," Fox said during a conference call.

"I feel good," Fox said, as he thanked people for all of the well-wishes and help he had received the past 10 days, including "... all the fans out there, obviously the Broncos organization to allow me this time to get my health back, and the process is going very well ... and first and foremost my wife, Robin."

Fox experienced dizziness and light-headedness during a round of golf Nov. 2 in Charlotte, N.C., during the Broncos' bye week. He was taken to a hospital, and underwent surgery two days later to replace his aortic valve. He continues to recover at his home in Charlotte.

Doctors have said recovery time varies from patient to patient, and it is possible Fox could miss the remainder of the regular season. But he affirmed Tuesday his recovery is going well, and that he hopes to re-join the team as quickly as doctors will allow it.

Fox also said he will return to Denver when he is allowed to travel by air and finish out his recovery.

"I can just tell you I'm working very hard to get better and my doctors are pleased I've improved every day," Fox said. "Things are going great and they like where I'm at right now."

Fox said he has known aortic valve surgery was a possibility since having the issue first diagnosed in 1997, when he was the New York Giants' defensive coordinator. The valve, Fox said, normally has three flaps that control blood flow to the body, but Fox's old aortic valve had just two.

He had it monitored since and said cardiologists told him last season he would need surgery following the 2013 season.

"[It] was progressively getting worse a year ago; they thought it would last another year," Fox said.
Fox has told others with the team that doctors believe he had just 54 percent of the proper blood flow through the valve at the time of his incident on the golf course. Fox added that after discussions with his medical team, he doesn't believe the stress of coaching had a significant impact on what happened to him.

"I'm very, very healthy," Fox said. "... It wasn't due to lifestyle, not being healthy, too much stress. It's basically something I was born with. ... This is really not a lifestyle problem.

"Sure, there's some pressure and stress involved in coaching," he added, "but I think a lot of people out there, in Denver, in the country, really around the globe have pressure-packed jobs. I think our military comes to mind as one of those I don't think coaching compares to. It wasn't the pressure of coaching or that kind of thing."

Fox said he watched the Broncos' 28-20 win Sunday over the San Diego Chargers, but "I've got to admit I had to stop watching parts of it ... couple of things, knew it wasn't the best thing for me at that moment."

The third-year coach said he even called the league offices to discuss Corey Liuget's hit on quarterback Peyton Manning in the closing minutes of the game. Manning aggravated a right ankle injury on the play.

Fox said he feels good enough now that he is in daily contact with interim coach Jack Del Rio, as well as a few others in the organization.
ENGLEWOOD, Colo. – For one week, the Denver Broncos showed they are intent on getting things done while coach John Fox is away, recovering from open-heart surgery.

The Broncos moved to 8-1 with a 28-20 victory over the San Diego Chargers, continuing to show flashes of a team that is historically dominant on offense as well as one with a fast, aggressive defense that can change games. But they also showed some bobbles on both sides of the ball, enough so that the Chargers made it a game before all was said and done.

So, with that in mind, and a long look at the video, here are some thoughts on the Broncos' offense:

- Running back Knowshon Moreno touched the ball on four of the team’s first five plays from scrimmage Sunday – two runs and two receptions. Overall, Moreno led the Broncos with eight receptions – on eight targets – to go with 15 carries. And he will have to be part of the answer moving forward because defenses have gotten progressively bolder against the Broncos' offense. Whereas the Broncos faced plenty of zone coverage to go with three- and four-man rushes in the season’s first five games, recent opponents have played more man coverage, roughed up the Broncos' receivers to knock them out of the routes and added a pass-rusher to go after Peyton Manning. Chargers defensive coordinator John Pagano often added inside linebacker Manti Te’o to the rush after a delay, and used a variety of stunts to try to shake the rushers free. Moreno keeps the linebackers busy, whether in coverage or with play-action, and with Manning having to deal with some ankle issues, the Broncos will look for more ways in the coming weeks to slow those players trying to get upfield.

- Manning identified Te’o in the formation at times and indoctrinated the rookie. Te’o took the bait on play-action on the Broncos’ third play from scrimmage as tight end Julius Thomas then drifted out, uncovered, and turned what was a 4-yard completion into a 74-yard catch-and-run for a touchdown up the right sideline. Pagano also used Te’o plenty in the pass rush, often having Te’o rush on a delay, into the middle the Broncos'
formation after the offensive linemen had already engaged with other Chargers defenders.

- The Broncos have given plenty of thought to trying to help Thomas perform better in a blocking role. One of the adjustments they’ve made is to let Thomas line up with his right foot forward when he is on the outside shoulder of either tackle, and that includes when he is lined up to the offensive right, alongside right tackle Orlando Franklin. It positions Thomas angled toward the middle of the field, rather than with his right foot back when lined up to the right, as would be customary. When Thomas has lined up in a traditional stance to the right, he often takes an extra step as he moves into a blocking position and can end up off balance or wrong-footed as he engages with the defender in front of him. It is an attempt to aid him with his footwork as he plays along the line of scrimmage. He is such a big part of the passing attack, they’d like to keep him on the field in as many down-and-distance situations as possible.

- With so many defensive backs playing in off-coverage, with 7-to-10-yard cushions, the Broncos have repeatedly run screen passes to their wide receivers with great success. Manning gets them the ball quickly, and they make the most of the initial space to catch the ball. On Demaryius Thomas’ 34-yard catch-and-run score in the third quarter, Thomas started the play in the backfield and motioned left. Manning ran a play-action fake to the right to Moreno to start the play and quickly got the ball to Thomas, who had plenty of room to work. Toss in some quality blocks, especially by Eric Decker and Wes Welker to go with Chris Clark, and it went for a touchdown.

- Offensively, the Broncos’ profile against the Chargers fit the mold, at least in terms of personnel groupings, of what the team did against the Jaguars a month ago. The Broncos were in a three-wide-receiver set on 45 snaps, including penalty snaps, and in a two-tight-end set 18 times. All of the two-tight-end plays came in the second half, after the Broncos had run the ball just three times in the first half. By contrast the Broncos were in three-wide for 72 snaps against the Redskins and for 69 snaps against the Colts -- their two previous games before their bye week. Against the Jaguars the Broncos played in three-wide for 39 snaps, including penalty plays, which is a season low. They used at least two tight ends in the formation 29 times against the Jaguars.
Power Rankings: No. 2 Denver Broncos

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
November 12, 2013

A weekly examination of the Broncos’ ESPN.com Power Ranking:

Preseason: 3 | Last week: 3 | ESPN.com Power Ranking since 2002

In their first outing since head coach John Fox's open-heart surgery, the Denver Broncos showed some composure on the road and once again flashed their record-setting offense in a 28-20 victory over the San Diego Chargers as they moved up a spot in the ESPN.com Power Rankings.

While the Broncos scored a season-low 28 points in the win, they are averaging just over 41 points a game this season. The biggest concern heading into this week's matchup with the 9-0 Chiefs -- the No. 1 team in the Power Rankings -- is the health of quarterback Peyton Manning.

Manning aggravated a right ankle injury in the closing minutes of Sunday's win, and if he's hurt, there is always a possibility the Broncos offense gets a severe limp. Backup Brock Osweiler is expected to get some work with the starters in practice this week as Manning is expected to miss some practice time. But he is expected to play Sunday night against the Chiefs.

Overall, interim coach Jack Del Rio had a prepared team in San Diego that performed well in all game management areas.

"It's an honor to be given the responsibility," Del Rio said. "I love coaching ball. I love ... working with players and helping them be better. I'm just trying to do my part. I'm really just a defensive coordinator for Coach Fox and when he's healing I'm just doing a few more things, that's the way I'm looking at it."
KC's Smith knows dangers of Denver's WRs

By Adam Teicher
ESPN.com
November 13, 2013

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- The last time cornerback Sean Smith played against the Broncos, he didn't see Denver wide receivers Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker in all their glory. Smith, in fact, spent much of that 2011 afternoon defending the run as the Broncos that day were quarterbacked by Tim Tebow.

Things will change dramatically on Sunday night for Smith, then playing for Miami and now with the Kansas City Chiefs. Denver is now quarterbacked by Peyton Manning and the Broncos don't grind out their yards on the ground, but throw to Thomas, Decker, Wes Welker and tight end Julius Thomas to be the NFL's highest-scoring team.

"Any of those guys can make plays at any point in the game," Smith said. "Peyton Manning is a guy who will spread the ball around. It might be Thomas going for 100 yards one week. The next week, it's Decker's turn and Wes Welker the next week and now they have a tight end doing his thing. With all of that going on, Manning can find the matchup that he likes."

Smith, at 6-3, is one of the NFL's biggest cornerbacks. After Manning picked apart Kansas City's pair of 5-9 cornerbacks in the final game of last season, the Chiefs knew they had to get bigger and more physical at cornerback to better match up with the 6-3 Thomas and the 6-3 Decker.

So they signed Smith as a free agent from the Miami Dolphins. He had the one game two years ago against Thomas and Decker and knows more about them than merely he can look them in the eye without needing a step stool.

"Long arms, strong and fast," Smith said of Thomas, who has nine touchdown catches, the same number as Welker and Julius Thomas. "Very explosive. Whenever you have a guy who's as big as he is and moves that fast, it's always a problem."

Decker has 49 catches, or six fewer than Thomas, and three touchdowns.

"Great route runner," Smith said. "Very good hands. He's dangerous, too."
Broncos coach John Fox says coaching stress a non-issue

By Lindsay H. Jones
USA TODAY Sports
November 12, 2013

There were times Sunday when John Fox's surgically repaired heart just couldn't take it. Fox was forced to flip the channel away from the Denver Broncos' 28-20 victory against the AFC West rival San Diego Chargers, his team's first game since he had surgery to replace the aortic valve in his heart.

"It just got probably a little tense, and that wasn't the best thing for me at that moment," Fox said.

Fox, in a 20-minute conference call with news reporters Tuesday, declined to detail the moments that were particularly stress-inducing, but let's assume Peyton Manning being tackled by his lower legs and the quarterback getting up limping in the fourth quarter was one of them.

"That could have been one of them," Fox said, laughing.

It was a low, raspy chuckle, a sound that has become so familiar around the Broncos facility since Fox was hired as coach in January 2011, and it was a sign Fox's recovery from heart surgery is going well.

Fox said Tuesday he was born with a bicuspid valve and has known about the hereditary abnormality since 1997, when his doctors in New York were trying to discover the cause of a heart murmur. His heart has been routinely monitored since, and Fox had planned to have the valve replaced in the offseason.

That timeline changed after he became extremely lightheaded and dizzy, nearly to the point of fainting, while playing golf in Charlotte on Nov. 2. Fox was hospitalized, and his doctors in North Carolina decided it was time to replace the valve.

He spent a couple of days in intensive care after the surgery Nov. 4 and was released from the hospital Friday.

"I'm very, very healthy. I think the normal length of (hospitalization after) open-heart surgery is five to seven days, and I was out in four. They said this wasn't due to poor lifestyle, or not being healthy, too much stress, not enough stress," Fox said. "This is basically something I was born with that I needed fixed. This is really not a lifestyle problem."
When Fox's doctors think he's strong enough to fly, he will return to Denver to continue his rehab closer to his team, although they would not putting a specific timetable on when he'll return to the sideline.

"My goal and dream is to be there before the conclusion of the season," Fox said.

He said he is in frequent contact with his coaching staff, especially interim coach Jack Del Rio. Fox was in the middle of watching the coaches' film of the Chargers game Tuesday when he took a break to speak to reporters. He'll share his notes with the coaching the staff, which spent Tuesday concocting a plan for Sunday's prime-time showdown against the undefeated Kansas City Chiefs.

"I've got a pretty good team of people there that I stay in touch with on a daily basis, and it's obviously been helpful to me with the rehab process. It keeps me from being bored to death," Fox said.
Examining Super Bowl contenders and their fatal flaws

By Lindsay H. Jones
USA TODAY Sports
November 13, 2013

Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning has a bum ankle. The Kansas City Chiefs have played the NFL's weakest schedule. The Seattle Seahawks have had trouble protecting Russell Wilson with a banged-up offensive line. And these are just problems bugging the teams widely considered to be the best in the NFL.

In this season, perhaps more than any in recent memory, there is no perfect NFL team, no team that has proved dominant on a weekly basis, and certainly no sure thing to make it to the Super Bowl. It's all setting up a wild rest of November and December, starting with Sunday's game between the Chiefs and Broncos.

But which flaws are temporary blips, and which could prove fatal?

AFC Contenders

Denver (8-1)

Flaw: The Broncos are struggling to protect Peyton Manning.

Quarterback Peyton Manning was sacked only five times in Denver's first six games, but has been sacked eight times in the last three games. All those hits are taking a serious toll on Manning's health. Manning's sprained ankle won't keep him out of Sunday's game against Kansas City, but let's not forget that his ankle is, indeed sprained. With Manning ailing, how many more brutal hits can he endure?

How serious is it? There is no magic fix to the Broncos' offensive line, because All-Pro left tackle Ryan Clady isn't coming back this year. If the Broncos are going to make it to the Super Bowl, it will be with Chris Clark at left tackle. Denver's coaches must find a way to help Clark out more, while the pressure is on Manning and Denver's receivers to hit on quick passes to slow the pass rush.

Upcoming test: The offensive line will get its biggest challenge this week against Kansas City, which leads the NFL with 36 sacks (an average of four per game). The Broncos will have to account not just for pass rushers Tamba Hali and Justin Houston on the edges, but interior pressure by Dontari Poe.

VIDEO: Week 11 power rankings
Kansas City (9-0)

Flaw: Can they hang when the schedule gets tough?

The Kansas City Chiefs have the league's best record in large part because of a defense that's holding opponents to just 12.3 points per game – easy enough when opposing quarterbacks are guys such as Blaine Gabbert, Case Keenum, Jason Campbell, Jeff Tuel, Ryan Fitzpatrick Terrelle Pryor. None of the teams the Chiefs beat in the first half of the season have a winning record. Will the Chiefs be able to score enough points once they have to face teams with better starting quarterbacks?

How serious is it? If defense really does win championships, this could just be a minor flaw, as long as the Chiefs defense can continue to contribute points – like their four pick-sixes in the first nine weeks. But at some point, the Chiefs offense, led by Alex Smith and running back Jamaal Charles, will need to be more than safe.

Upcoming test: We'll find out in the next three weeks if Smith and the offense can keep up with elite quarterbacks, with a pair of games against Peyton Manning and the Broncos and a home game against Philip Rivers and the San Diego Chargers.

New England (7-2)

Flaw: Depleted defense

First, the Patriots lost defensive tackle Vince Wilfork, and then it was inside linebacker Jerod Mayo – both out for the season. Then cornerback Aqib Talib missed time in October with a hip injury. Just how many dings to defensive stars can the Patriots survive?

How serious is it? Tom Brady and the Patriots offense exploded for 55 points in their last game before the bye week. That sort of powerful attack will cure all sorts of defensive deficiencies, and the Patriots have made deep postseason runs with a mediocre defense before. If Talib is able to return quickly – starting with New England's Monday game at Carolina, the Patriots defense will quickly look a lot more formidable.

Upcoming test: As much fun as it is to think about Tom Brady vs. Peyton Manning (with new sidekick Wes Welker) when the Broncos visit Foxborough on Nov. 24, Manning and the Broncos will really be testing that battered New England defense. Will the Pats have enough bodies to defend Welker, Demaryius Thomas, Julius Thomas and Knowshon Moreno?

Indianapolis (6-3)

Flaw: Too reliant on Andrew Luck's fourth-quarter magic
Maybe the Colts were getting comfortable in believing there was no such thing as a second-half deficit too large for Andrew Luck to overcome. Then came Sunday's 38-8 beatdown by the Rams to reveal some significant concerns about the Colts' ability to rally when Luck is just off. The Colts have beaten the Seahawks, 49ers and Broncos – three statement wins if there is such a thing – but the losses to St. Louis, San Diego and Miami might speak even louder.

How serious is it? The Colts, provided they can beat Tennessee this Thursday, should have little trouble winning the AFC South, and might be able to look back later on Sunday's disaster against the Rams as just a small speed bump.

Upcoming test: Given their trouble with the Rams, the Colts should be wary of the Arizona Cardinals, whom they play Nov. 24 in Glendale. Then there is the Dec. 22 game at Arrowhead Stadium against the Chiefs – perhaps the biggest test for Luck and the Colts offense since the Seattle game in early October.

VIDEO: Week 11 story lines

NFC contenders

Seattle (9-1)

Flaw: Missing pieces on offense

How many teams can survive the loss of not just one offensive tackle, but two? Seattle has managed to do that for weeks since left tackle Russell Okung landed on short-term injured reserve with a foot injury and right tackle Breno Giacomini injured his knee. Center Max Unger has also been sidelined with a concussion. Those injuries, as well as a season-ending knee injury to receiver Sidney Rice and the prolonged absence of Percy Harvin, have put even more pressure, both literal and figurative, on second-year quarterback Russell Wilson.

How serious is it? As if a three-game lead in the NFC West by early November wasn't enough good news for the Seahawks, Seattle knows it's getting healthy. Okung and Giacomini and Harvin are all back at practice, and the Seahawks' offense could be nearly at full strength after it returns from its Week 12 bye week.

Upcoming test: There might be no better game on the December calendar than the Dec. 2 Monday Night game between the Saints and Seahawks at CenturyLink Field, where the Wilson will try to out-duel Drew Brees. Let's just call it a playoff preview.

Carolina (6-3)

Flaw: Cam Newton's consistency
There is little question Cam Newton has recovered well from a disappointing 2012 season. He's a better leader, a better passer and in much better command of the Panthers' offense. But is he consistent enough for the Panthers to make a serious playoff push? Newton has completed 55 percent or less of his passes in four of Carolina's games, including going 16-of-32 in the Panthers' 10-9 win against San Francisco last week.

How serious is it? The Panthers have proven they can win even when Newton isn't perfect, and that's very good news. A young quarterback is able to endure plenty when paired with a thriving running game and a stout defense – both of which Carolina currently possess.

Upcoming test: Newton and the Panthers will play the New England Patriots this week, and then have two games against the New Orleans Saints in December. Newton will need to be at his best with Tom Brady and Drew Brees on the other sideline.

New Orleans (7-2)

Flaw: Trouble on the road

Losing to Tom Brady and the Patriots on the road might be one thing. But the Saints' other loss this season came at the New York Jets. New Orleans also won road games at Chicago and Tampa by single-digits, quite the difference from blowing out opponents in the Super Dome.

How serious is it? Those AFC East losses kept the Saints from running away with the NFC South early in the season and have placed much more importance on the back half of the schedule that includes road games in three of the final five weeks, including games with playoff implications.

Upcoming test: Home field advantage in the playoffs could be determined Dec. 2 in Seattle.

San Francisco (6-3)

Flaw: Stagnant passing game

Remember when Colin Kaepernick threw for more than 400 yards against Green Bay in Week 1? Feels like a really long time ago. Even when the Niners went on a five-game winning streak, the passing game was struggling, and Kaepernick has thrown for more than 200 yards only once since that opening game, and he’s completing only 56 percent of his passes.
How serious is it? The Niners offense is better when it is run-first with running back Frank Gore. But Kaepernick just has to be better for those inevitable times the offense can't run through Gore, or when the Niners have to play from behind.

Upcoming test: Kaepernick has never beaten the Seattle Seahawks, and has played poorly in the two games against Seattle since taking over as the Niners' starter a year ago. He can try to avoid falling to 0-3 against Seattle on Dec. 8 at Candlestick.
Broncos-Chiefs Week 13 matchup flexed to late CBS game

By Will Brinson
CBSSports.com
November 12, 2013

The Broncos and Chiefs have a much-anticipated matchup coming on Sunday night. It was so good that it got flexed into Sunday night's primetime game.

They've also got a very spicy rematch coming in Week 13. It was a good enough matchup, in fact, that it was flexed to the 4:25 p.m. ET game on CBS.

Moving out of that spot are the Texans and Patriots, a previously awesome playoffs rematch that looks pretty "meh" now that the Texans are terrible. (Don't get me wrong: Case Keenum and Andre Johnson are fun to watch, but Chiefs-Broncos has much bigger implications.)

It's possible that Chiefs-Broncos could be flexed into the Sunday night game again, but as of right now that hasn't changed.

Currently Giants-Redskins is locked into that spot, although the NFL could announce a change as late as Tuesday, November 19.

There's lots of politics that goes into these changes (all of it well above my pay grade) and you can guess that the folks at the mothership don't want to give up a Peyton Manning rematch against Kansas City, especially one that could be for the rights to homefield advantage in the AFC and an AFC West crown.
Former Denver Broncos offensive guard John Moffitt blasted the NFL in a FOXSports.com podcast.

“IT’S ALL DIRTY BUSINESS AND THE WORST PART ABOUT IT IS — ALL BUSINESS IS DIRTY BUSINESS,” Moffitt said on The Peter Schrager Podcast. “LET’S BE HONEST, LET’S LOOK AT CORPORATE AMERICA AND WHAT THEY TRY TO INSTILL IN PEOPLE, LIKE IT’S SUCH A BIG DEAL BECAUSE I LEAVE THE NFL. THAT’S HOW BRAINWASHED PEOPLE ARE WITH MONEY AND A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY, BUT NOT ONLY IS THE NFL DIRTY CORPORATE AMERICA BUSINESS, BUT NOW YOU’RE RISKING PEOPLE’S HEALTH.”

Moffitt, who retired from the NFL last week, joined the podcast on Tuesday, and opined on the current state of the NFL, the concussion lawsuit and his decision to step away from the game in his prime.

Moffitt, 27, recounts when he suffered a knee injury in 2011 and needed to hire a lawyer for assistance.

“You’RE NOT APPROPRIATELY TAKEN CARE OF WITH MAJOR INJURIES,” Moffitt said. “AND STUFF LIKE THAT BECAUSE THEY DON’T WANT TO AFFECT [THEIR] PROFIT MARGINS OR WHATEVER ELSE THEY DO.

“I UNDERSTAND THE BASICS AND I KNOW IF I BASICALLY LOOK AT THIS SYSTEM, THERE’S SOMETHING REALLY, REALLY WRONG ABOUT IT.”

Moffitt noted that after he announced his retirement he was tirelessly contacted by the NFLPA. The motive was unclear, but he did say that the players’ union wasn’t supportive of his decision.

“It WAS PRETTY INTERESTING. THEY CALLED ME A FEW TIMES. SOME OF THE STUFF THEY DID, JUST TO BE BLUNT I REALLY THINK THEY DID A TERRIBLE JOB [WITH MY SITUATION]. I CAN’T REALLY SPEAK TO THEM OVERALL, BUT I WOULD JUST SAY THAT I PROBABLY GOT CALLED FOUR OR FIVE TIMES BY THEM FROM THREE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND I THINK THAT’S JUST ODD. NO ONE SAID ANYTHING DIFFERENT EVERY TIME. THERE WAS NEVER ANYTHING DIFFERENT SAID, SO YOU CAN TAKE THAT AS IT IS.

"THERE WERE THINGS IN THAT CONVERSATION THAT MAYBE ONE DAY I’D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT, BUT RIGHT NOW IS NOT PROBABLY THE RIGHT TIME. I WOULD NOT CALL THE NFLPA AN ASSISTING FORCE FOR ME.”
Another issue that draws Moffitt’s concerns is the settlement of the concussion lawsuit between the NFL and its retirees. While the league and the ex-players agreed to a $765 million settlement in August, Moffitt believes that the result is far from fair.

“The NFL is doing more than fine,” Moffitt said. “I think the concussion thing is such a joke. If you look at the settlement and how it worked, they’re going to make that money and how much more in interest over that 20-year payout.”

Moffitt is extremely happy with his decision to retire because he finally started making choices for himself. He admits he lost passion for the game and didn’t want to risk his physical health, just for money.

“The thing that stuck with me was it’s not the big collisions to the head, it’s the consistent every play hits to the head that can really affect you,” Moffit said. “And that’s what an offensive lineman is, just a consistent hit every play.”

Moffitt announced his retirement on Twitter last week after doing some soul searching during the bye week.

"Football was fun but my head hurts-haha kidding roger goodell. I'm on to new things, thanks to everyone along the way!!"  

Emails to the NFL and NFLPA were not immediately returned.
Peyton Manning reportedly cleared after MRI, ‘absolutely will play’ vs. Chiefs

By Chris Burke
Sports Illustrated
November 12, 2013

UPDATE (Monday, 2 p.m. ET): Peyton Manning aggravated his right high ankle sprain in Sunday’s game against the Chiefs but his latest MRI showed no new damage, Mike Klis of the Denver Post reported. A source told Klis that Manning “absolutely will play” in Week 11 against the Chiefs.

Manning, who has been dealing with a pair of sore ankles, struggled to get to his feet following a hit from Corey Liuget – the Chargers’ lineman wrapped Manning up just above the knees. The Broncos called a timeout so a limping Manning could stay in the game, and Manning took that extra moment to let the officials have it for not flagging Liuget.

“I’m pretty sore,” Manning said after his team’s 28-20 victory. “They kind of got me twice in that lower area. [I’ll] get an MRI tomorrow and will know more then.”

Manning did not specify which aching area of his body actually required the MRI, but he appeared to be favoring his right knee after the collision with Liuget.

The 8-1 Broncos are about to embark on their most important stretch of games this season — two with Kansas City (one home, one away) and a visit to New England. Currently in second place in the AFC West, the Broncos need at least a split against the Chiefs to maintain any real division-title hopes.

When he was asked if he would play next week vs. the Chiefs, Manning replied: “I certainly plan on it.”

The undefeated Chiefs have run into a string of backup quarterbacks of late: Buffalo’s Jeff Tuel, Cleveland’s Jason Campbell and Houston’s Case Keenum over the previous three games, plus Ryan Fitzpatrick in an earlier matchup with Tennessee. The No. 2 QB on Denver’s roster, Brock Osweiler, has never made an NFL start and has attempted just seven regular-season passes in his career.

Assuming Manning takes the field a week from now, he could find himself under fire from a Chiefs defense that leads the league in fewest points allowed and has recorded more sacks (36) than any other D. Manning had been sacked just 11
times heading into Sunday, but the Chargers took him down twice, with Tourek Williams forcing a turnover on one occasion.
John Fox says he expects to return as Broncos’ coach this season

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
November 12, 2013

John Fox is out of the hospital but currently remains at his home in Charlotte while recovering from aortic heart valve replacement surgery last week.

Fox won’t put a timeline on his recovery but he fully intends on returning to the sidelines this season as head coach for the Denver Broncos.

“Oh yeah, I don’t think there is any question,” Fox said in a conference call with reporters Tuesday to update his recovery. “There’s always a question – that’s why I don’t like putting timelines – but my goal and dream is to be there obviously before the conclusion of this season.”

“I don’t really like putting timelines on it. I can just tell you that I’m working very hard to get better and I feel like my doctors are pleased that I’ve improved every day. So things are going great. I like where I’m at right now and we’ll see where that leaves us.”

Fox described the incident at a North Carolina golf course that left him to get evaluated with surgery ultimately being necessary to repair a heart defect. Fox said he never lost consciousness but became very light-headed and got tunnel vision before having to sit down and lay down on the ground to alleviate the condition. The evaluation revealed a heart valve was nearly completely closed and required the surgery to fix the issue.

Fox says the recovery is coming along well.

“I think the fact that the normal length of open heart surgery is five to seven days – I was out in four,” Fox said.

“There is always some scary parts to it, and I’m past those. Right now it’s a matter of just doing the right thing. I’ve got good docs, I’ve got a great team in charge of me and they’re doing a terrific job. I’m feeling better every day.”
Fox 'Feeling Better Every Day'

By Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2013

On a conference call from his Charlotte home, Head Coach John Fox took the Denver media through the recovery from his heart surgery Tuesday afternoon.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Head Coach John Fox knew on a Charlotte golf course over the Broncos' bye week that he needed to go to the hospital.

"You’re getting ready to go down," he said of the light-headed feeling that nearly caused him to faint. "I don’t know if you’ve ever passed out before, but you feel it overcoming you and basically you get tunnel vision and are just trying to fight it off."

In the meantime, he chipped onto the green and putted the ball in. But he knew something was wrong.

"(I) really just had to sit on the ground and actually lay on the ground," Fox said. "I never really passed out, but just fighting that feeling of passing out. I just hit two golf shots in the middle of it."

The episode had to do with a heart problem Fox first became aware of more than 15 years ago.

In 1997, his doctors discovered a heart murmur, the cause of which was his bicuspid aortic valve.

Since then, the valve had been closely monitored through regular checkups. Last year, doctors noticed changes.

"It was progressively getting worse a year ago," Fox said. "They thought it would last another year. Obviously I didn't make it quite to that point. Then it's not something you fool with. You don't remember much after that incident (on the golf course), so it's not something you want to mess with."

When he was taken to the hospital that Saturday morning, doctors ran a CT scan and noted that the valve was almost completely closed.

"I was receiving very little blood to my body," Fox explained. "It’s one of those things that it could just happen quickly."

He went into surgery the following Monday morning for an aortic heart valve replacement.
"With heart surgery, they basically hit you with a truck pretty fast. So you have to heal," he said. "They open up the chest cavity, they perform surgery on your heart, (then) they put you all back together. They have to monitor things. The scariest part was the four days I was in the hospital."

He was released last Friday, and said he's been "feeling better every day."

When he made a call to the Denver media Tuesday afternoon, Fox said he was "sitting here relaxing, to be real honest with you."

But he couldn't help himself and was set to watch the coaches' tape of Sunday's Broncos win against the Chargers.

He watched the win on television Sunday and laughed that there were tense moments in the game that he had to stop watching.

"I knew that wasn't the best thing for me at that moment," he said.

As for when he'll be able to return to the sideline, Fox said he would prefer not to put a timeframe on his recovery. But he said he's been in touch with Dove Valley on a daily basis, joking that it's helped in his recovery because he doesn't get too bored.

He said he has great confidence in Interim Head Coach/Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio and the rest of the staff in the meantime, and he's looking forward to when he can return to coaching.

"My goal and dream is to be there, obviously, before the conclusion of this season," he said.

He expects to be back in Denver before that.

"I think number one right now they're just trying to make sure that I'm OK to fly," he said. "There are some certain things they've got to be concerned with, with altitude, those types of things. They're just trying to make sure—I don't know all the technicalities. As soon as I'm able to fly and they feel good about me going through the rigors of flying, then I'll be heading back to Denver."

Most of all, Fox wanted to reach out to everyone who has sent thoughts, prayers and support his way throughout the process.

"I want to thank all of you guys for all your good wishes and good thoughts and all the fans out there (and) obviously the Broncos organization, to allow me this time to get my health back," he said.

"And that process is going very well."
The Broncos' matchup with the Kansas City Chiefs in Week 13 has been flexed to a 2:25 p.m. MST kickoff.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- For the second time in a three-week span, the Broncos' game against the Kansas City Chiefs will be flexed.

The NFL announced Tuesday morning that the Broncos-Chiefs matchup at Arrowhead Stadium in Week 13 has been moved to a 2:25 p.m. MST kickoff. The Dec. 1 game was originally scheduled for an 11 a.m. MST kick.

The move gives the contest a larger national audience.

It's the second time the Broncos have been flexed to a new timeslot this season -- this Sunday's game against the Chiefs was moved from a 2:05 p.m. MST kick to the Sunday Night Football slot.

The Chiefs and Broncos currently hold the top two records in the AFC, and this Sunday's game has first place in the AFC West on the line.

"It's going to have to be a solid, four-quarter game," linebacker Von Miller said. "That's what we're expecting and that's what we're going to give them. I'm going to make sure of it."

The only other change for the Week 13 slate so far is that New England's game at Houston moved to 11 a.m. MST. The Sunday Night Football game that week is currently slated as the New York Giants at the Washington Redskins, but it could change. In a release, the NFL stated that the final Week 13 schedule will be announced no later than Tuesday, Nov. 19.
Manning up for FedEx Award

By Stuart Zaas
DenverBroncos.com
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Quarterback Peyton Manning is up for the FedEx Air Player of the Week Award.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- For the fifth time this season, quarterback Peyton Manning has been named a finalist for the FedEx Air Player of the Week award.

Manning completed 25-of-36 passes for 330 yards with four touchdowns and zero interceptions for a 135.2 passer rating.

His four touchdown passes tied with Drew Brees for the league lead in Week 10, his 330 yards were third-best among all passers this week and his 135.2 passer rating and 69.4 completion percentage was second among all quarterbacks with at least 30 attempts.

Manning, who has won this award in Weeks 1 and 3 of this season, is joined as a finalist by Brees and Nick Foles. Both of those players have also taken home the honor twice this season -- Brees in Weeks 4 and 8 and Foles in Weeks 6 and 9.

Broncos fans can click here to vote for Manning to become the first player to reach three FedEx Air Player of the Week awards this season.
Broncos Visit Fort Carson

By Brandon Moree  
DenverBroncos.com  
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Ben Garland and Steven Johnson visited Fort Carson Tuesday along with President Joe Ellis, a pair of former Broncos, four cheerleaders and Miles.

FORT CARSON, Colo. – Supported by thousands of fans each Sunday, on Tuesday – the players' day off – Ben Garland and Steven Johnson became supporters themselves as they paid a visit to soldiers at Fort Carson, presented by USAA.

“These guys are the real heroes,” Johnson said. “We’re just merely entertainers at the end of the day. When it comes down to it, these are the guys that we look up to.”

Garland and Johnson were joined by Broncos President Joe Ellis, former Broncos Randy Gradishar and Ken Lanier, four Denver Broncos Cheerleaders and Miles the Mascot as they met with and presented game balls to soldiers in the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade and the 52nd Engineer Battalion.

In the morning, they Broncos met with the 4th CAB, who provided assistance in fighting the Black Forest fire this summer and in the evacuation of flood victims a few months ago.

“There’s a war going on and they’re fighting outside the United States and all of a sudden we have the catastrophes with the floods and or the fires here particularly – in Colorado Springs and up north with the floods,” Gradishar said. “Having that local impact and seeing the military going out and being able to help our local citizens I know means a tremendous amount.”

While in the hangar, the Broncos explored two different helicopters while the soldiers explained the purposes of different parts of the aircraft.

“They got to walk around on the aircraft and learn a little about what we do every day,” Spc. Eric Embry said. “I think it’s a pretty important job, what we do – looking up to these guys – maybe they get to come into our house and look around, take a step back and see who they’re playing for and meeting real fans. We appreciate what they do so maybe they’ll appreciate we do also.”

During lunch with more soldiers and some of their families, the Broncos answered questions and Garland expressed his gratitude for all their hard work.
After lunch, the group met with the 52nd Engineers, who also helped in the fight against the Black Forest fire. They helped create fire barriers by digging holes to halt the progress of the flames.

Garland and Miles climbed up into some of the machinery the unit used and Garland drove a Hyex machine around.

The trip to Fort Carson is a part of NFL’s Salute to Service campaign and was coordinated in conjunction with the USAA – the Broncos’ and the NFL’s official military appreciation sponsor. Ellis said that going to Fort Carson is the “one of the best days of the year” and the Salute to Service is “one of the best periods of the season.”

Not only is the experience fun for the soldiers, it’s fun for the Broncos, too.

“The support is mutual and everybody loves pro football,” Ellis said. “I think a lot these people are Bronco fans, which makes it exciting. There’s mutual admiration and mutual respect, which makes it a great day.”
AFC West Rundown: Week 10

By Mike Morris
DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2013

Take a look at how the AFC West fared in Week 10 and what lies ahead for the four teams this week.

Kansas City Chiefs (9-0)

Week 10: The Chiefs had their bye week.

What’s next: The Chiefs travel to Denver for a Sunday Night Football matchup between the two teams with the best records in the AFC.

Between the hash marks:

-Running back Jamaal Charles' versatile productivity has bolstered the Chiefs' offense throughout the team’s first nine games. Charles’ 1,114 combined yards in 2013 rank second in the NFL – he has accumulated 725 rushing yards and 389 receiving yards. Charles’ 47 receptions lead all Kansas City players.

-In limiting opponents to an NFL-low 12.3 points per game, the Kansas City defense has poured on the pressure, generating a league-best 36 sacks. Linebackers Justin Houston (11.0 sacks) and Tamba Hali (9.0 sacks) are tied for third- and fifth-best in the league. The Chiefs’ 23 takeaways also rank at the top of the NFL.

Oakland Raiders (3-6)

Week 10: Lost 24-20 at New York Giants

How it happened: The defenses of both teams took center stage on Sunday, as the Raiders limited the Giants to 251 yards of total offense – but New York stifled Oakland to just 213 yards. Cornerback Tracy Porter’s 43-yard interception return for a touchdown with 1:18 remaining in the second quarter gave the Raiders a 17-14 edge at halftime. However, the Raiders ceded the lead late in the third quarter after a 1-yard touchdown run by Giants running back Andre Brown gave New York a 21-20 lead. The Raiders had two opportunities to launch game-winning drives in the fourth quarter, but were only able to gain a total of eight yards on those two drives.

It was over when: Quarterback Terrelle Pryor was sacked late in the fourth quarter by Giants defensive end Mathias Kiwanuka – Pryor fumbled the ball, which was recovered by defensive end Cullen Jenkins with 3:21 remaining. New York needed
to pick up one first down, and Brown gained it by picking up eight yards on second-and-7, sealing the game for the Giants.

Key performer: Porter’s score gave the Raiders a boost on the scoreboard before halftime, and the cornerback also had three tackles and one pass defensed.

What’s next: The Raiders will look to break a two-game losing streak as they travel to Houston to take on the Texans.

Between the hash marks:

-Running back Rashad Jennings churned up 88 yards on 20 carries on Sunday – the fifth-year pro has rushed for 190 yards and added 93 receiving yards over the last two weeks. The Raiders’ rush attack ranks fifth in the NFL at 143.2 yards per game.

-The Oakland defense held Giants quarterback Eli Manning to just 140 passing yards on Sunday – well below his average of 256.3 yards per game.

San Diego Chargers (4-5)

Week 10: Lost 28-20 vs. Denver

How it happened: The Chargers held a time-of-possession advantage of over 16 minutes on Sunday, but the Broncos managed to accumulate 397 yards of total offense in the 21:57 that Denver held the ball. After spotting Denver a 28-6 lead early in the third quarter, San Diego gradually narrowed the score with a 7-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Philip Rivers to running back Danny Woodhead with 8:38 remaining in the third quarter, followed by a 1-yard touchdown run by running back Ryan Mathews with 10:42 left in the game that narrowed the score to 28-20. However, the Chargers advanced the ball only 19 yards on their final offensive possession, and Denver ultimately ran out the clock.

It was over when: Broncos running back Knowshon Moreno rushed seven yards on second-and-2 for a first down – Denver’s second of its final possession – allowing quarterback Peyton Manning to kneel down twice and end the game.

Key performer: Rivers completed 19-of-29 passes for 218 yards and a touchdown, finishing the game with a 99.5 quarterback rating and connecting on a key 30-yard completion to wide receiver Eddie Royal on third-and-13 early in the fourth quarter, keeping the Chargers’ hopes alive.

What’s next: The Chargers will look to snap a two-game losing streak when they travel across the country and play the Dolphins in Miami on Sunday.

Between the hash marks:
-Rivers is one of only five quarterbacks in the NFL with a quarterback rating of over 100 for the season – his 105.9 mark ranks fourth in the league.

-In his 11th NFL season, tight end Antonio Gates continues to produce for the Chargers. Gates had four catches for 62 yards on Sunday, and the tight end ranks 20th among all players in the NFL with 612 receiving yards.

Denver Broncos (8-1)

Week 10: Won 28-20 at San Diego

How it happened: The Broncos struck three times in a span of just over 10 minutes, with wide receiver Demaryius Thomas finding the end zone all three times, in jumping out to a 28-6 lead on Sunday. Thomas’ third touchdown, a 34-yard catch-and-run on a screen pass from Manning, moved him into a four-way tie for second in the NFL with nine receiving touchdowns on the season – and it also gave the Broncos a 22-point cushion with 11:34 to play. Although the Chargers narrowed that lead to eight, the Denver defense came through when it mattered most, sacking Rivers twice in the final quarter and keeping the Chargers from crossing midfield on San Diego’s final possession.

It was over when: Moreno picked up a first down during the game’s final two minutes. Moments prior, Manning converted a key second-and-7 situation when he found Demaryius Thomas for a 9-yard gain.

Key performer: Thomas finished with seven receptions for 108 yards and a hat-trick of touchdowns, which tied a franchise record.

What’s next: The Broncos host the Chiefs in a Sunday Night Football showdown.

Between the hash marks:

-Rivers had been sacked only 12 times entering Sunday’s game, but the Broncos defense brought down the San Diego quarterback four times on the afternoon. The performance brought Denver’s season sack total to 26.

-Manning’s 330 passing yards brought his season total to a league-best 3,249 yards – marking the 15th time in the quarterback’s NFL career that he has thrown for 3,000 or more yards in a season. Manning tossed four touchdown passes, bringing his season total to 33, which tied Patriots quarterback Tom Brady’s 2007 mark as the most in NFL history by a quarterback through nine games of a season.
Quotable: Head Coach John Fox Updates Health

By DenverBroncos.com
November 12, 2013

Head Coach John Fox updates the press on his health.

Broncos Head Coach John Fox took part in a conference call with Denver media on Tuesday afternoon from his home in Charlotte to give an update on his recovery from aortic heart valve replacement surgery on Nov. 4. Below is a transcript of the call.

Opening comments
“Welcome everybody. I’m sitting here relaxing, to be real honest with you. I’m just now getting around to seeing the San Diego game from Sunday.”

On watching the Broncos-Chargers game live on Sunday
“Oh yeah, I did. It always appears a bit different on the coaches copy for sure.”

On how he is feeling
“I’m feeling good. First of all, I want to thank all of you guys for all your good wishes and good thoughts and all the fans out there [and] obviously the Broncos organization, to allow me this time to get my health back, and that process is going very well. It’s been helped by everybody there in Denver, and probably first and foremost my wife, Robin.”

On how difficult it was to watch the game from his home instead of the sidelines
“I don’t know if it was difficult. It was definitely different. I don’t think I’ve missed a game in about 195 or so [games]. It’s been a while. I’ve got to admit there were parts of it I had to quit watching, but all in all, much like a bye week, the unusual part obviously was that it was actually our team playing.”

On the parts he had to quit watching
“It got probably a little bit tense. I knew that wasn’t the best thing for me at that moment.”

On if one of the moments was QB Peyton Manning getting hit and grabbing his ankle
“Yeah, I don’t think that I want to get into specifics. I can just leave you with the thought that there were a few, and that could have been one of them (laughing).”

On how much the doctors have told him about what he can and can’t be doing
“Really, they’re kind of a ‘one day at a time’ approach. Much like when it’s a
player’s injury, or this case my injury, I don’t really like putting timelines on it. I can just tell you that I’m working very hard to get better and I feel like my doctors are pleased that I’ve improved every day. So things are going great. I like where I’m at right now and we’ll see where that leaves us.”

On if the surgery is something he would have had to have done even if he wasn’t an NFL coach

“Yeah, that’s a good question. Again, sure, there is some pressure and stress involved in coaching, but I think a lot of people out there in Denver, in this country, really around the globe, that have very pressure-packed jobs. I think our military comes to mind maybe as one of those that I don’t think coaching compares to. So, it wasn’t the pressure of coaching or any kind of thing. Basically I have what they call a bicuspid aortic valve, which uses two flaps inside that valve. Most everybody is born with three flaps. It’s something I was born with. Some guys that are way more popular than me—Robin Williams, Arnold Schwarzenegger—they had similar type valves. And they don’t last your whole life. So because [of that] there is not as much surface passing through every single pump in your heart. So I knew it was something that was eventually—it was progressively getting worse a year ago. They thought it would last another year. Obviously I didn’t make it quite to that point. Then it’s not something you fool with. You don’t remember much after that incident, so it's not something you want to mess with."

On the recovery process

"With heart surgery, they basically hit you with a truck pretty fast. So you have to heal. They open up the chest cavity, they perform surgery on your heart, they put you all back together. They have to monitor things. The scariest part was the four days I was in the hospital. You're in intensive care. It's all intensive care for heart surgery. It's not like you go from one to the next. That all went good. There is always some scary parts to it, and I'm past those. Right now it's a matter of just doing the right thing. I've got good docs, I've got a great team in charge of me and they're doing a terrific job. I'm feeling better every day."

On when the problem was originally discovered

"I think actually it was something that should have probably been discovered sooner, from all the athletics I played as a youth growing up. Actually they discovered it probably a little less than 20 years ago, in 1997. It comes across as a murmur. They check out what's causing that sloshy sound of a murmur, and with me it was the bicuspid aortic valve."

On getting regular checkups

"I was not symptomatic, meaning they can measure this thing—much like they do a sonogram with a baby, they do to your heart. So they do a sonogram on your heart and they can actually measure the force of that valve, they can measure the width
of that valve, they can measure the elasticity of that valve. So this is something I know has been monitored for at least three years here in Denver and nine prior to that in Carolina and probably—they discovered it in New York—so the five I was in New York. So this is something that they've been monitoring and looking at for some time. When those things start changing, it's time to make a change to that valve."

On whether he will return to Denver at some point in his recovery
"I think number one right now they're just trying to make sure that I'm OK to fly. There are some certain things they've got to be concerned with, with altitude, those types of things. They're just trying to make sure—I don't know all the technicalities. As soon as I'm able to fly and they feel good about me going through the rigors of flying, then I'll be heading back to Denver."

On what kind of plane he'll fly on
"It'll be something that hopefully goes in the air and stays in the air (laughing)."

On how much he's keeping in touch with people at Dove Valley
"I've got a pretty good team of people there that I stay in touch with on a daily basis. That’s obviously been helpful for me through the rehab thing too—it keeps me from getting bored to death. I feel great about the people there and that everything is in at this point. Obviously, we’ve made Jack [Del Rio] the interim coach because I know I have great confidence in him. He has great leadership on the football team. I have an outstanding staff even besides Jack. So, I feel good about the hands that all the football decisions are in."

On if he expects to return this year
"Oh yeah, I don’t think there is any question. There’s always a question—that’s why I don’t like putting timelines—but my goal and dream is to be there obviously before the conclusion of this season."

On getting a game ball from Denver’s win against San Diego
"Yeah, I think it’s something that did come back to me. Obviously I am very appreciative of that, my family is very appreciative of that. I think whenever you have spent time with people and built relationships, those feelings go both ways. Obviously I was very excited for them to have the opportunity to win—we came a little short last year and we’re trying to fix that this year."

On what happened on the golf course before he was hospitalized
"You’re getting ready to go down. I don’t know if you’ve ever passed out before but you feel it overcoming you and basically you get tunnel vision and are just trying to fight it off. I hit two shots—a chip shot and a putt that I can truly tell you I don’t remember every little part of it. And then really just had to sit on the ground and
actually lay on the ground. I never really passed out, but just fighting that feeling of passing out. I just hit two golf shots in the middle of it.”

On whether he’d been told the symptoms to be on alert for
“I never really had any of them. Shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, chest pain—really the only thing that happened to me was very light-headedness. Basically, coming very close to falling out [of consciousness] and didn’t. And so when they brought me to the hospital, the first thing they did was a CT scan and my valve was almost completely closed. I was receiving very little blood to my body. It’s one of those things that it could just happen quickly.”

On what lifestyle changes he plans on making
“I’m very, very healthy. I think the fact that the normal length of open heart surgery is five to seven days—I was out in four. This isn’t due to poor lifestyle, not being healthy, too much stress, not enough stress—this is basically something I was born with that I needed fixed. I think it speaks of my recovery of what great shape I’m in. This is really not a lifestyle problem, it’s just—call it a birth defect. I’m not really sure what you call it but I just came a little short in that department.”

On if he has a different appreciation for his job, players and family
“I think all of it. Usually in life you don’t realize what you have until it’s gone and I think it definitely gives you a bigger appreciation for what I do for a living and the people I’m so blessed to be around and really what I get to do for a job.”

On if they hid his cellphone after his surgery
“They didn’t have to, to be honest with you. It was one of the furthest things from my mind; I have to be honest with you, for at least that first 36 hours, I had more tubes coming in and out of me than you can even imagine.”

On if he will share his game notes with the coaches/players this week
“More so with coaches. I still text and talk to the players as well. The more coherent I become—that pain medication can make for some funny conversations if you allow it. I’m feeling much better now. I have had conversations with a lot of people in Dove Valley.”

On if he spoke with the NFL regarding the hit on Manning vs. San Diego
“We’re really not allowed to discuss that—anything to do with officiating. I can say that I did communicate with somebody at the league office.”

Final remarks
“Thanks for all the well wishes, gang. I really do appreciate it and glad I could spend time with you today.”