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Broncos coach John Fox remains driven to win Super Bowl

By Mark Kiszla
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Walk into the office of Broncos coach John Fox, and the eyes immediately gravitate to a 3-foot-long sword that could instigate serious bloodshed in a Quentin Tarantino movie.

The sword rests in an ornate sheath on a table. Grabbing a seat offered by the 59-year-old coach, my first thought is: Oh, so this is the machete the Broncos took to the roster between getting trounced in the Super Bowl and rewarding Fox with a new contract.

From across the table, Fox peers at the weapon sitting between us and grins.

"Should I move this, Kiz?" Fox asks, rising from his seat to find a safer spot for the sword. "You know, just in case either one of us is tempted to use it."

It's a Friday morning during another hectic week at Dove Valley, where a construction crew is knocking down walls to expand team headquarters and the Broncos' staff is working overtime in preparation for next month's NFL draft.

There is a sense of urgency in Foxy's voice as he says: "We want to hoist the Lombardi Trophy. That's our ultimate goal. That's our goal this year. But there are no guarantees."

It's good to be Foxy, empowered with a new, three-year contract worth \$16.5 million. And, on his head, the coach wears a ballcap stitched with the words "It is what it is."

When we last saw Fox's team, the Broncos were blown off the field at the Super Bowl, losing 43-8 to Seattle. It is what it is. Nothing can change that humiliating defeat now.

So forget the past. There are plenty of tough questions moving forward.

Let's start with: How in the world are the Broncos going to get back to the championship game? Sure, Denver has quarterback Peyton Manning on its side. But history suggests this quest is nearly impossible.

The last team to lose the Super Bowl and return the very next season was Buffalo in 1993. Nobody since Larry Csonka and the undefeated 1972 Dolphins has won the NFL title within a year after losing the title game.

"One of the reasons it's so hard is what makes our league so great," Fox says. "You have teams going from the outhouse to the penthouse and the penthouse to the outhouse every year. ... In football, you don't have a team that's a dynasty because it spends 30 times more than everybody else."

Broncos executive John Elway, however, invested more than \$100 million, sweeping Champ Bailey, Zane Beadles, Knowshon Moreno and Eric Decker from the locker room, while adding DeMarcus Ware, Aqib Talib, T.J. Ward and Emmanuel Sanders. Was change necessary to cut emotional scare tissue that resulted from a devastating Super Bowl defeat?

"If you lose your last game, it's always devastating. ... The loss in the Super Bowl sticks with you, but when you make decisions in personnel, you do it only to improve your football team," Fox says.

"It's the business side of football. For most of us, it's not the most enjoyable part. But it's a necessary evil, and you make hard decisions."

In three seasons since replacing Josh McDaniels as coach, Fox has won 34 regular-season games and three AFC West Division titles. That's good stuff.

But, when a player seeks to renegotiate a contract heading into the last year of his deal, self-righteous reporters and loyal fans alike often huff and puff about an athlete's greed or lack of commitment. So what makes it different for a coach? Why was it necessary for Denver to rip up the final year of the deal for a coach who has fallen short in big games?

"That's a good question," Fox says. "For whatever reason, a head coach goes into the last year of his contract and they call him a lame duck. A player does it and they call him a free agent. So it's different. ... If a player thinks, 'Ah, he ain't going to be the coach next year anyway, so I'm not going to listen to him,' I believe that's where the term 'lame-duck coach' comes from. I didn't develop the term, but I think that's the issue."

Part of what makes him folksy Uncle Foxy is a natural ability to put his team ahead of his own ego, which is a rarer trait among NFL coaches than one might think. Mike Shanahan acts as though he invented the game. Fox will engage in friendly debate about football theory with anybody, including an ink-stained wretch like me.

On a windy autumn afternoon, at a time when the Broncos were riding high with a 7-1 record, I presented Fox with my fear that no team burdened by a defense as porous as Denver's could win the Super Bowl. As the playoffs opened, I whispered to anyone who asked that a team without injured stars Ryan Clady and Von Miller could make the Super Bowl but would be in big trouble against San Francisco in the championship game. Then, when Seattle eliminated the 49ers, I talked myself into the notion Denver would not get bullied by a physical NFC West team.

My bad. It is obvious now: For two years, the Broncos have been guilty of being too reliant on Manning. So isn't this truth also self-evident, that unless Denver finds a way to significantly reduce the 24.9 points per game surrendered in 2013, this season is doomed to end in disappointment?

"I'm doing everything I can to not say yes," replies Fox, dodging the question because he steadfastly refuses to throw defensive players under the bus. "But I think you know my feeling on that subject."

The defense must improve, or another season of Manning will be wasted.

In 2012, Miller appeared to be headed for the Hall of Fame. In 2013, the most talented defensive player on Denver's roster acted like a knucklehead. The blunt question: Is Miller a follower or a leader?

"He's a young player ... and there's a maturation process," says Fox, choosing his words carefully. "He's a great football player, when healthy. ... But the goal is — and the dream is — that he comes back bigger and better than he was in every aspect."

After a lifetime in coaching, there was a frightening moment last season when Fox wondered whether he might die on a golf course during the bye week. Doctors went to a lot of trouble to fix his heart, only to have it broken in the Super Bowl. So why does Fox want to stay in this crazy business at least three more years, when defeat can be such a kick in the teeth?

"I've never won a world championship; that quest is why I do it," Fox says. "And I love the relationships in football. Whether you call it the building of team or family or the relationship among men in the locker room, I love that journey every year."

After 45 minutes of nonstop enthusiasm, Colorado's most bullish man about the Broncos pauses to take a breath. Fox looks around the office. It's a mess. Moving boxes are stacked against a wall. These are temporary digs while the building is

undergoing major renovation. Fox has a new, multimillion-dollar contract but works in a corner room with no view.

"I've got an office with no windows. It's the view I earned," chuckles Fox, knowing full well Broncomaniacs expect far better than a 35-point loss in the Super Bowl from their football coach. "Now, Elway can tell me, 'Get the heck back in that room and go back to work!' "

Broncos Draft History: Offensive Line

By Stuart Zaas
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As we wrap up the preview of the offensive linemen available in the 2014 NFL Draft, let's take a look back at the offensive linemen who the Broncos have drafted.

Below are some of the notable offensive linemen drafted by the Broncos throughout the team's history.

Player: Orlando Franklin
Year Drafted: 2011
Round: 2 - 46th Overall
College: Miami

Broncos Career: Franklin started all 47 games he's played since joining the Broncos in 2011. In 2012, he tied for third among tackles that started all 16 games with 3.5 sacks allowed. In 2011, Franklin was named to Football Outsiders' All-Rookie Team.

Player: Zane Beadles
Year Drafted: 2010
Round: 2 - 45th Overall
College: Utah

Broncos Career: Beadles played 64 games, including 62 starts during his first four NFL seasons with the Broncos. He earned a Pro Bowl selection in 2012 after allowing just one sack that year. He was named to *The Sporting News'* All-Rookie Team after opening eight contests at left guard and six contests at right tackle in 2010, becoming the first NFL rookie since 2002 to start at least six games at two different offensive line positions. Beadles signed with the Jacksonville Jaguars this offseason.

Player: Ryan Clady
Year Drafted: 2008
Round: 1 - 12th Overall
College: Boise State

Broncos Career: A three-time Pro Bowler (2009, 2011, 2012), Clady is joined by cornerback Brandon Carr and quarterback Joe Flacco as the only players from the 2008 draft class to start every possible game during the last five years. In 2009, Clady earned his first Pro Bowl selection and was a consensus All-Pro. With that honor, he became only the fifth tackle since the 1970 merger to be named a first-team AP All-Pro by his second professional season. Clady is just the fourth offensive lineman in NFL history to start every game and make at least three Pro Bowls during his first five seasons.

Player: Chris Kuper
Year Drafted: 2006
Round: 5 - 161st Overall
College: North Dakota

Broncos Career: The Alaska native appeared in just one game as a rookie before taking over at guard his second season. In 2008, Kuper was the NFL's only 16-game starting guard to not allow a sack, according to Stats Inc. He has only allowed 12 sacks in 78 career starts, including just 1.5 in 2011. Kuper, who retired earlier this offseason, earned a spot on Rick Gosselin's (Dallas Morning News) All-Pro Team for his play in 2011.

Player: Tom Nalen
Year Drafted: 1994
Round: 7c - 218th Overall
College: Boston College

Broncos Career: Nalen was drafted in the seventh round of the 1994 NFL Draft and took over the starting spot at center in 1995. He was an integral part of two Super Bowls and played in five Pro Bowls. Over his career in orange and blue, six different running backs had 1,000-yard rushing seasons, including Terrell Davis' 2,008 in 1998. Nalen was inducted into the Broncos Ring of Fame in 2013.

Player: Ken Lanier
Year Drafted: 1981
Round: 5 - 125th Overall
College: Florida State

Broncos Career: Like other Broncos' offensive lineman, it took Lanier a year before he cracked the starting lineup, but once he did he remained there for 11 seasons,

starting 178 consecutive games, including playoffs. Lanier started all three Super Bowls he appeared and was named team captain for Super Bowl XXIV. Was affectionally nicknamed, "The Rock on the Right Side."

Player: Keith Bishop

Year Drafted: 1980

Round: 6 - 157th Overall

College: Baylor

Broncos Career: A career Bronco, Bishop started 95 career games from 1980-89 including Super Bowl XXI and XXII. In 1986 and 1987, Bishop earned Pro Bowl nods and he was named to the 50th Anniversary Team.

Other offensive lineman drafted:

Year	Rd.	No.	Name	College
2013	6	173	Vinston Painter	West Virginia
2012	4	108	Philip Blake	Baylor
2010	3	80	J.D. Walton	Baylor
2010	6	183	Eric Olsen	Notre Dame
2007	3	70	Ryan Harris	Notre Dame
2005	6	200	Chris Myers	Miami (Fla.)
2003	1	20	George Foster	Georgia
2001	4a	113	Ben Hamilton	Minnesota
2000	4b	112	Cooper Carlisle	Florida
1997	3	67	Dan Neil	Texas
1989	2a	41	Doug Widell	Boston Collge
1983	1	4	Chris Hinton	Northwestern
1983	2	31	Mark Cooper	Miami (Fla.)

1977	4	101	Billy Bryan	Duke
1974	3	68	Claudie Minor	San Diego State
1973	3a	54	Paul Howard	BYU