

Peyton Manning, Denver Broncos going back to work with offseason duty

By Mike Klis
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When the Broncos last gathered as a team, they didn't have DeMarcus Ware or Von Miller to track down Russell Wilson.

Aqib Talib wasn't around to stand strong as a rocketing Percy Harvin swept toward the right corner of the Denver defense.

Feb. 2 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., the last time the Broncos were together, they didn't have Ryan Clady protecting Peyton Manning's blind side, or Will Montgomery available to snap, or T.J. Ward to come up from his strong safety position against a spinning Jermaine Kearse.

For the first time since that awful performance against the Seattle Seahawks in Super Bowl XLVIII, the Broncos will gather as a team Monday at their Dove Valley headquarters to begin the first phase of the offseason.

When they do convene, the returning Broncos will say hello to Ware, Talib, Ward, Montgomery and receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who were signed as free agents. The Broncos will welcome back a healthier Clady, Miller, Kevin Vickerson, Chris Harris, Rahim Moore and Derek Wolfe.

"It's almost like Ryan Clady was a free-agent acquisition," Manning said last week. "He didn't play last year (after tearing his Lisfranc in Game 2). Von Miller is like a new player, and Derek Wolfe. It will be nice to get some of the guys that were injured and get them back on the field to go along with some of the new players that we've added. I'm looking forward to going to work with them."

The 2014 Broncos will be similar to the 2013 Broncos. And they will be different. The Broncos had a very good team last season, winning the AFC title with a 15-3 record that included playoff wins against San Diego and New England.

But the Broncos' embarrassing 43-8 loss to Seattle in the final game of the NFL season showed they were not a great team.

"We want to all start working and get that sour taste out of our mouths," Miller said.

The injured players like Miller have been permitted to hang around the Broncos' facility throughout the offseason so they could rehab under the care of the team's medical and trainer staff. Everybody goes to work Monday.

Phase I is primarily for conditioning. Players lift weights and run, but the coaches can't be on the practice fields with them. Quarterbacks can throw to unguarded receivers. And it's safe to assume Manning and backups Brock Osweiler and Zac Dysert will take advantage of this practice exception.

Phase II, which begins May 5, is when coaches can instruct players during individual and position-specific drills, but there can't be any 11-on-11 team work.

The Broncos will have organized team activity (OTA) periods, Phase III, beginning May 28. They will spread out 13 team practices until June 19. The team then will break until reporting to training camp. The reporting date is tentatively scheduled for July 24.

Once again, the Broncos will be among the favorites to win the Super Bowl, as they were in the 2012 and 2013 seasons. They went far both years but did not finish.

When the 2014 Broncos gather Monday for the first time, they will start 0-0.

"I think forming that chemistry takes time," Manning said. "It's not an overnight process. That's something that we have done in the past. I think that's been a big part of some of the wins we've had is our offseason work and how guys have spent time together and put the time in together. I think you have to keep doing it every single offseason. I think we will do that, and I'm looking forward to having a good season next year."

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Broncos' offseason schedule

Monday: Players start weight- lifting and conditioning. Quarterbacks can throw to uncovered receivers.

May 5: Phase II begins with coaches instructing players during individual and position-specific drills.

May 8-10: NFL draft. The Broncos have a pick in each of the seven rounds.

May 16-18: Rookie minicamp.

May 28-30: OTA I.

June 2-4: OTA II.

June 10-12: Mandatory minicamp.

June 16-19: OTA III.

July 24: Tentative date for team to report to training camp.

Manning: Best 'new' addition may be Clady

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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As he progressed through his offseason work, Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning watched with great interest as his team opened free agency in high gear.

Manning is known to quickly call and/or text the team's newest acquisitions, welcoming them aboard. This offseason, Manning quickly reached out to cornerback Aqib Talib, safety T.J. Ward, defensive end DeMarcus Ware and wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders after they signed.

The Broncos are set to open their offseason program Monday, and despite all the new acquisitions, Manning said this past week one of the biggest "additions" to this season's lineup will be the return of Ryan Clady. The left tackle had foot surgery that ended his 2013 season after two games.

"We lost some players and we're getting some players back that were injured last year," Manning said. "It's almost like Ryan Clady was a free-agent acquisition. He didn't play last year [after injuring his foot in Week 2]."

Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway has consistently said in recent weeks the Broncos expect Clady to be at full speed by the time the season rolls around. Clady has progressively stepped up the work in his rehab, even after the Broncos had closed out the season with a loss in Super Bowl XLVIII.

But even as the Broncos blistered the league's single-season record book with Manning's 55 touchdowns and 5,477 passing yards to go with the team's 606 points overall, the Broncos were not always what they could have been if Clady were healthy. The Broncos used a three-wide receiver look as their base offensive set -- with Chris Clark playing in place of Clady -- but Manning didn't always have time to explore all of his options.

Manning was actually sacked fewer times with more pass attempts in 2013 than in 2012 -- he was sacked 18 times this past season with 659 pass attempts as compared to 21 times in 2012 with 583 pass attempts. The Broncos believe Clady's return will enable them to expand some of what they did last season. That includes

their ability to run the ball more efficiently out of their open formations and give Manning more time to see more options when he does throw the ball.

Manning's ankle troubles this past season were a result of hits taken from his blind side, from rushers Clady would have been blocking had he been in the lineup. Manning's sack totals don't always tell the story, and the Broncos want to address the hits he took in 2013.

With his preparation, anticipation and pre-snap recognition of what the defense has to offer, Manning has always been able to limit sacks -- almost no matter what the offensive line has looked like in front of him. He has been sacked 20 or fewer times in 10 of his seasons as a starter; fewer than 15 times in five of his seasons. Defenses have never sacked Manning more than the 29 times they got him in 2001, a season the Indianapolis Colts finished 6-10.

But after four neck surgeries and turning 38 years old, every hit on Manning is potential trouble.

Broncos head coach John Fox has said, in the wake of the departure of left guard Zane Beadles in free agency, the team will try plenty of combinations up front during offseason workouts and even into training camp -- "a million," he said -- but that the "best five" will be the starters. And as they get down to business Monday, all of those plans are based on having a healthy Clady at left tackle, handling his business on his own so the Broncos can slide the help elsewhere if necessary.

Or as Fox put it: "You always want to have your good players in the lineup. And he's one of our best. We did a lot of good things when he was out last season, but we'll be able to do even more good things with him back in there."

Broncos gather for 1st time since Super Bowl flop

ARNIE STAPLETON

Associated Press

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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) - No trip to the White House, diamond-encrusted rings or ticker tape parade.

All the Denver Broncos have to show for their historic 2013 season is the heartache and humiliation of getting destroyed from the opening snap at the Super Bowl.

The AFC champs aim to use that 43-8 shellacking by Seattle as motivation for 2014 starting Monday when they gather for the start of offseason workouts, stars Peyton Manning and Von Miller say.

They realize what a daunting task awaits them as they try to become the first team since the 1972 Miami Dolphins to win the Super Bowl the year after losing it.

Crews have turned the team's headquarters into a construction zone over the last three months with a makeover that will include the addition of an indoor practice complex, and, fittingly, general manager John Elway has taken a sledgehammer to his roster, too.

Gone are veterans Champ Bailey, Robert Ayers, Eric Decker, Knowshon Moreno, Zane Beadles, Wesley Woodyard, Shaun Phillips and Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie along with Chris Kuper, who retired.

Their departures made room for Aqib Talib, T.J. Ward, DeMarcus Ware and Emmanuel Sanders.

Despite becoming the first NFL team to score more than 600 points, behind Manning's record 55 TD throws, the Broncos surrendered a whopping 24.9 points a game - 25.3 if you count the playoffs - and Elway focused on fixing that this offseason.

He added two thumpers in the secondary and Miller will be back from a torn ACL, while refusing to re-sign players who would have cost him too much to keep around.

After all, big paydays loom for the likes of Demaryius Thomas and Julius Thomas. Both of them attended Manning's annual week of workouts at Duke recently along with Wes Welker, Bubba Caldwell and Sanders.

"That's kind of the new rules now. You have to go off-campus in early April in order to get some work with your receivers," Manning said. "It was a good kick-start to the offseason."

Manning also created a bit of a stir by heading to Tuscaloosa, Ala., a couple of weeks ago to pick the brain of Alabama coach Nick Saban, who in turn picked up pointers from the five-time MVP on the hurry-up offense that has so troubled the Crimson Tide of late.

Because Broncos offensive coordinator Adam Gase, who got his coaching start under Saban back in the 1990s, visited Alabama's football facilities at the same time, the NFL is looking into the matter. League rules prohibit players and their coaches from meeting before the start of offseason workouts.

Saban told The Denver Post, however, that he never met with Gase and Manning at the same time, other than to say pleasantries.

The first two weeks of voluntary offseason workouts at NFL team headquarters are limited to strength and conditioning and rehabilitation activities. After that, on-field instruction is allowed.

A lot of players have already been working out at Dove Valley, including Miller, left tackle Ryan Clady (foot) and cornerback Chris Harris Jr. (knee), all of whom were sideline spectators at the Super Bowl.

Even though he realizes many Broncos fans would just as soon forget the Super Bowl, Miller doesn't share their sentiments.

"I wouldn't want to get the sour taste out too quick because the year before we lost to the Ravens and that pushed us this last season. And the Super Bowl this year I think it will just push us more," Miller said. "We were right there. We were right on the edge of it and all the guys have been putting in that extra 1 percent in and hopefully it'll pay off for us this coming season."

Broncos Draft History: Defensive Linemen

Stuart Zaas

DenverBroncos.com

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As we wrap up our week's preview of the defensive linemen available in the 2014 NFL Draft, let's take a look back at who the Broncos have drafted at that position.

Player: Sylvester Williams

Year Drafted: 2013

Round: 1 - 28 Overall

College: North Carolina

Broncos Career: Williams played 13 games, including four starts, as a rookie in 2013. He made 19 tackles with a pair of sacks, five tackles for a loss and one fumble recovery. Williams started all three playoff games and made three tackles.

Player: Derek Wolfe

Year Drafted: 2012

Round: 2a - 36 Overall

College: Cincinnati

Broncos Career: Wolfe joined Barney Chavous as the only defensive linemen in Broncos history to start every game during their rookie seasons. He finished third on the team with six sacks in 2012 and led the club's rookies with 40 tackles. In 2013, Wolfe started 11 games and registered four sacks to go with 16 tackles.

Player: Malik Jackson

Year Drafted: 2012

Round: 5 - 137 Overall

College: Tennessee

Broncos Career: Jackson led the Broncos with 11 tackles for a loss and 15 quarterback hits in 2013. He played all 16 games with five starts and led the team's defensive linemen with 42 tackles and finished second on the team with six sacks. Jackson also broke up four passes and forced one fumble in 2013. As a rookie, he played 14 games and made five tackles.

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

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

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

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

Player: Simon Fletcher
Year Drafted: 1985
Round: 2b - 54 Overall
College: Houston

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

Player: Karl Mecklenburg
Year Drafted: 1983
Round: 12 - 310 Overall
College: Minnesota

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

Player: Lyle Alzado
Year Drafted: 1971
Round: 4a - 79 Overall
College: Yankton College

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

Here are some other defensive linemen drafted:

Year	Rd.	No.	Name	College
2013	5a	146	Quanterus Smith	Western Kentucky
2011	7	247	Jeremy Beal	Oklahoma
2008	5b	148	Carlton Powell	Virginia Tech

2007 1	17	Jarvis Moss	Florida
2007 2	56	Tim Crowder	Texas
2007 4	121	Marcus Thomas	Florida
2003 4b	114	Nick Eason	Clemson
2003 4c	128	Bryant McNeal	Clemson
2003 6	194	Aaron Hunt	Texas Tech
2003 7a	227	Clint Mitchell	Florida
2002 3	96	Dorsett Davis	Mississippi State
2002 7b	231	Monsanto Pope	Virginia
2001 2	51	Paul Toviessi	Marshall
2001 3	87	Reggie Hayward	Iowa State
2000 4a	101	Jerry Johnson	Florida State
1992 2	54	Shane Dronett	Texas
1984 2	46	Andre Townsend	Mississippi
1980 2	42	Rulon Jones	Utah State
1975 5b	121	Rubin Carter	Miami (Fla.)
1973 2	36	Barney Chavous	South Carolina State