

Jordan Taylor stands out for Broncos as undrafted wideout

By Troy Renck
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Jordan Taylor runs down the sideline, long strides creating slight separation from the defender. The ball arcs into his hands as the largest crowd of training camp (4,787) erupts into cheers.

This is the intriguing twist of two-a-days, a reason for diehard fans to soak up 90-degree sun: The mystery player.

An undrafted college free agent has made the Broncos' 53-man roster in 11 consecutive seasons. Taylor represents a candidate to turn it into a dozen. The receiver continues to catch passes thrown his way, standing out as much as anyone can after five days of practice.

"You see him running past everybody. ... Jordan has such great length," offensive coordinator Rick Dennison said. "If you throw it in his zip code he seems to be able to come down with it."

Taylor remains hard to miss. He stands 6-foot-5 and weighs 210 pounds. He sports long blond hair, which earned him the nickname "Sunshine." Scouts love catch radius. In simple terms, Taylor possesses the wingspan of a pterodactyl.

"If he's covered, sometimes, he's not really covered," receivers coach Tyke Tolbert said.

Taylor exists as a longshot, but didn't land in Denver by accident.

Like many on this team, he owns Houston ties. Taylor played collegiately at Rice, teaming with Broncos coach Gary Kubiak's son Klein for four seasons. When the Broncos failed to draft a receiver, Taylor received their recruiting call with interest.

"Klein (a player personnel assistant with the Broncos) made a few calls. I knew him well and built a friendship with him in college. So yeah, he might have had a little input," Taylor said. "I thought it was a good fit. I am blessed to be in this position."

The Broncos landed Taylor with a \$7,500 signing bonus, second to lineman Dillon Day among undrafted free agents. The amount hinted of Taylor's opportunity, but guaranteed nothing. He began turning heads with his hands. He made a one-handed catch on a slant route Sunday, and consistently has used his height to his advantage. Tolbert said Taylor's smarts don't hurt either, admitting "he knows pretty much all of the offense right now."

"I am not as fast or quick as some of those smaller guys, so I have to use my size," Taylor said. "When you are undrafted, you want to prove you belong. It starts by getting in the playbook. In order to catch the coaches' eyes you have to know what you are doing so you can make plays."

Taylor defined consistency at Rice, catching 54, 55 and 57 passes his last three seasons. Part of the charm of the underdog is the path to the pros. Taylor signed with the Owls as a quarterback after setting every record at Denison High School in Texas. He earned 4A Region II player of the year honors, topping McKinney High's Zach Lee, who made his pitching debut for the Los Angeles Dodgers last month.

Taylor chose Rice hoping to play two sports. But he had to think outside of the batter's box once there, abandoning his career as a center fielder to focus on football. His experience as a quarterback has helped him as a receiver, having viewed plays through each side of the lens.

"I've always thought that could help an offensive player," Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning said.

Taylor, who has fielded punts before practice to increase his versatility, faces a tall order. The Broncos feature an experienced fourth receiver in Andre Caldwell, and a talented crew in Jordan Norwood, Solomon Patton, Nathan Palmer, Isaiah Burse and Bennie Fowler vying potentially for one spot.

All Taylor can control is his performance, while not forgetting to soak up this experience. He's a long way from Denison High.

"It was surreal that first time I was on the field with Manning," Taylor said. "You line up and see Peyton is about to throw you the ball, and I am thinking, 'I better not drop this pass.' Now he's a teammate and I am trying to learn anything I can from him."

Highs and lows of training camp: Von Miller beast for Broncos

By Nicki Jhabvala
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A quick rundown of happenings at Broncos training camp on Tuesday:

Highlight: Count on Von Miller to draw the cheers. While Peyton Manning and the quarterbacks ran through 7-on-7 drills mere feet from the crowd of 4,500 at UCHealth Training Center, Miller and the defensive line went to work against the offensive line in one-on-one drills on the opposite end of the field. Repetition after repetition Miller would push the tackles, giving them a taste of how bad it could get from an elite pass-rusher.

Then, about midway through the drill, he put his flexibility on display, sprinting underneath Ryan Harris to get to where the quarterback would be.

And just in case anyone didn't catch it live, Miller ensured all were aware it happened. He continued his sprint around the line of scrimmage and toward the training room, his arm raised in celebration as he screamed "Woooo!"

Lowlight: The Broncos' defense intercepted two passes in the red zone during situational drills, but defensive coordinator Wade Phillips sees plenty of room for improvement.

The team was tied for No. 16 in points allowed per game (22.1) last season, and on Tuesday the defense gave up three scores near the end of practice.

"It's really imperative that we improve that area," Phillips said. "We did some good things, got some interceptions down there, but definitely we need to emphasize that and keep working on that."

Position battle. Center Gino Gradkowski received many first-team repetitions in situation drills, as Matt Paradis, the second-year player who impressed in organized team activities and appeared to be pushing for the No. 1 job, spent much of practice with the second unit.

Don't read too much into it though, Paradis said. The fight for the top job is still on.

"Still plenty of competition," he said. "It's early in camp, we're both out there grinding and both trying to get better. The best man will win."

Paradis was praised by coach Gary Kubiak earlier this offseason for his work behind Gradkowski, and the young center was tabbed as a player to watch along the offensive line.

After only two days of pads, it's too soon to draw any conclusions, but it's clear Paradis is getting plenty of chances to prove himself.

Kicking game. Punter Britton Colquitt's pay cut seemed to secure his place as the Broncos' punter, but the place kicking job, special teams coach Joe DeCamillis said, still is open.

Connor Barth and Brandon McManus went head-to-head in Tuesday's practice, each getting four kicks that started around 35 yards and worked back to 50. Barth hit all four, and McManus was good on three, going wide left on one around 45.

"I think it's separated by one miss right now," DeCamillis said. "It's a pretty close competition."

DeCamillis said Barth is working on kickoffs, too.

"We want to have a guy who can kick off and kick field goals, or a guy that punts and kicks off," DeCamillis said.

Camp facts. There will be no practice Wednesday. Training camp resumes Thursday, with the usual 9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. workout open to the public free of charge. Gates open approximately one hour before, with seating and parking by the UCHealth Training Center on a first-come, first-serve basis. The stadium bag policy is in effect for all camp sessions.

Ryan Harris looks to be the top guy at right tackle for Broncos

By Nicki Jhabvala
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One day means nothing. Two days serve as a hint. Three days offer a glimpse at the direction Broncos coaches' might be headed.

Four days?

Four days of a player getting repetitions with the first unit is a good indication the job might be his to lose.

Ryan Harris has played right tackle in situational drills for the majority of training camp, and Chris Clark has spent most of his time with the second unit.

Clark struggled at the right side last season, but with Ryan Clady lost for the season, he was given another chance to prove himself in camp.

Things could always change, but coach Gary Kubiak is known for leaving players in if they show they belong there.

Austin watch. Broncos coaches said during organized team activities that the nose tackle job was Sylvester Williams' to lose.

So far, he hasn't disappointed. But other players have stepped in behind and around him during the first days of camp.

Darius Kilgo, the Broncos' sixth-round pick, has seen extended time backing up Williams at nose tackle. And Vance Walker, a free-agent acquisition who last played for the Kansas City Chiefs, has been used in multiple spots along the line as Antonio Smith works his way back to playing shape.

One name missing? Marvin Austin.

Kubiak said the lineman has been dealing with a groin injury, and he did not participate in drills Tuesday.

"He's been fine, he's just missed a lot of time," Kubiak said. "This is a tough football team to make, so we have to get him healthy."

D.T. progressing. Broncos receiver Demaryius Thomas continues to ease his way back into full-practice mode after missing the entire offseason workout program because of contract negotiations.

On Tuesday, he had his longest stretch on the field, practicing for about an hour and 10 minutes and playing in two 7-on-7 periods.

Thomas will come in Wednesday during the team's off-day to get his usual treatment, but the hope, Kubiak said, is to have him full-force at some point next week.

Injury updates. Outside linebacker Lerentee McCray (groin) did not practice Tuesday and cornerback Teverin Brandon (shoulder) missed his second consecutive session.

Offensive tackle Michael Schofield walked back to the locker room early with a trainer.

Kubiak said none of the injuries were serious enough to prevent players from returning to practice Thursday.

RBs shine. The Broncos running backs will be a centerpiece in Kubiak's offense, and so far in camp, the group has impressed offensive coordinator Rick Dennison.

"I really felt the urgency of their foot in the ground and going downhill," Dennison said. "They're feeling the soft spot, understanding what we want done, and I feel the surge into the line of scrimmage."

Von Miller pulled off his best Bo Jackson impression at Broncos camp

By Cameron Wolfe

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Outside linebacker Von Miller showed why he's one of the best pass rushers in the league on Tuesday at Broncos training camp.

He dominated one-on-one drills against the offensive linemen and was a constant menace in the backfield during 11-on-11 snaps.

The day's highlight came when he unleashed a two-step swim move that allowed him to go underneath a lunging Ryan Harris in a head-to-head battle for a would-be sack.

After the play, Miller pulled his best Bo Jackson impression and ran to the entrance of the locker room screaming 'woo' — drawing the crowd's eyes to the small drill on the opposite field.

He provided a dramatic return to the field after disappearing for ten seconds inside the tunnel to the locker room.

Injury concerns in practice

The Broncos had a few injury scares near the end of practice — but nothing serious enough to keep players out of Thursday's practice, the next time the Broncos will take the field.

Offensive tackle Michael Schofield left the field with a trainer after stretching out his back for several minutes on the sidelines.

Coach Gary Kubiak had said Monday that the Broncos were working to integrate Schofield as the second team right tackle. Rookie free agent offensive tackle Kyle Roberts took snaps in place of Schofield.

Tight end Virgil Green also got hurt — on the last play of practice — and was helped off the field by a trainer. Green is expected to see significant playing time along with tight end Owen Daniels in Kubiak's offensive system.

Linebacker Larentee McCray was held out of practice with a groin injury, and nose tackle Marvin Austin came out in a T-shirt and shorts to watch practice briefly before returning to the locker room. Austin has been limited since battling heat issues, but Kubiak said it was a lingering groin injury that kept him out Tuesday.

Defensive end Malik Jackson (calf) and cornerback Teverin Brandon (shoulder) were delegated to stretching and working with a trainer on the sideline. Brandon missed Monday's practice as well.

Receiver Cody Latimer made a heroic attempt to haul in a difficult pass during team drills and fell awkwardly on his side. He spent a few minutes on a knee, but after practice said he was fine.

Latimer had clearly played the day of camp, continuing a strong offseason.

Three impressive touchdown catches by Latimer, all thrown from quarterback Peyton Manning, drew the biggest cheers from fans.

Receiver Andre Caldwell's quietly been an impressive force in camp. He caught two touchdown passes from Brock Osweiler.

News Denver Broncos makes his mark

The newest Bronco, receiver Corbin Louks, made his first appearance at camp Monday. On Tuesday, he made a solid touchdown catch off a slant route, showing quickness and an ability to run after the catch.

Former Broncos players Joel Dreessen, Brandon Stokley and Chris Kuper visited training camp. Dreessen noted that the event appeared a lot faster and more active than the ones he took in from 2012 to 2014.

Mood music

And finally, Tuesday, the Broncos got hear more than just instructions from coaches. They listened to music on the field, too. Kubiak finally heard their pleas.

Music selection varied from Fall Out Boy's 'Uma Thurman' to Jason Derulo's 'Wiggle' to Fetti Wap's '679.' (Manning and receiver Emmanuel Sanders snuck a few dance moves in between stretches).

Music ended once team drills began.

Broncos want to save a roster spot and keep two kickers

By Jeff Legwold

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In the end, it's all about a roster spot, a roster spot the Denver Broncos want to use on someone else, someone other than a third kicker.

"It stresses your roster other places," said Broncos special teams coordinator Joe DeCamillis. "We want to have a guy that can kickoff and kick field goals, or a guy that punts and kicks off."

And with punter Britton Colquitt having just taken a \$1.4 million salary cut -- from a \$3 million base salary to \$1.6 million -- that, it appears the Broncos are positioning themselves to be more comfortable with keeping their veteran punter if he beats out rookie Karl Schmitz.

But the rub there is Colquitt does not kick off. That means one of the place-kickers the Broncos have in camp, either Connor Barth or Brandon McManus has to earn the double duty. Last season the Broncos had Colquitt, Barth and McManus all on the roster to close out the year and coach Gary Kubiak and DeCamillis have repeatedly said they would prefer not to have three kickers this time around and lose a potential roster spot for something else.

Thus far in their careers, Barth has been a more reliable field-goal kicker -- he was 15-of-16 for the Broncos in the regular season in '14 after signing in November -- while McManus was one of the league's best kickoff specialists. The Broncos removed McManus from the place-kicking job last year when they signed Barth after McManus had some misses in games, but Barth did not kick off like the Broncos wanted so McManus was brought back.

Barth and McManus are in a tight race in camp's early going -- DeCamillis said Tuesday they are separated by only one missed field goal attempt -- and the 29-year-old Barth is trying to show the Broncos he can be an option on kickoffs.

"Yeah, he's working at it, he's going to have to," DeCamillis said.

Barth took some kickoffs in Tuesday's practice. In the one game Barth was used on kickoffs last season for the Broncos -- against Kansas City -- the Chiefs started on their own 31-, 35-, 31-, 31-, 38-, 35-, 38- and 24-yard lines after Barth's eight kickoffs.

Barth was not used on kickoffs by the Buccaneers in 2011 or '12. And in 2010 he had one touchback in 78 kickoffs.

"All I did all offseason was work with my kicking coach up in Charlotte, (N.C.), Dan Orner, and he works with a bunch of guys kicking off in the league," Barth said. "It's showing. We kicked off the 30 today, and I hit one out of the back from the 30, and the rest off of the 35. That's what I'm trying to show. That's something that's kind of been a negative in my corner, so I am trying to show people that it's more of a technique thing and really just working on it like have in my field goals."

DeCamillis calls it all "EBDs" or evidence based decisions and that the coming preseason games will have a lot to say on the matter.

"It's pretty close," DeCamillis said. "It's been a good competition so far. We're trying to keep them at the same spots all the way across. ... For the most part, it's a pretty close competition right now."

Demaryius Thomas expected to participate fully in practice next week

By Jeff Legwold

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Denver Broncos wide receiver Demaryius Thomas received his biggest workload of this training camp in Tuesday's morning practice, and coach Gary Kubiak said he believes Thomas will fully participate in the team's workouts next week.

The Broncos have taken a steady approach with Thomas given he skipped the team's offseason program as his representatives and the Broncos worked out a five-year, \$70 million deal signed just before camp opened. The Broncos added a little more to Thomas' to-do list as they work through the first week of camp.

Tuesday Thomas took part in two 7-on-7 periods in practice, having practiced for an hour and 10 minutes of the roughly two-hour practice. It was the most he has taken part in a practice since camp opened last week.

"He'll be coming for his treatment (Wednesday) stay on his schedule," Kubiak said. "But I'm hoping through the course of next week he's pretty much ready ... going forward."

Defensive end Antonio Smith missed most of the offseason program after it came to light he was the subject of a criminal complaint in Texas. Smith was not arrested and no charges have been filed, but his case is still under review.

The Broncos, after discussions with NFL officials and NFL security, said it was "appropriate" for Smith to report to camp last week. He took part in some team drills Tuesday and Kubiak said he should be ready for full participation as well.

Nose tackle Marvin Austin Jr., who battled injuries throughout the offseason program, was held out of Tuesday's practice with a groin injury. Rookie Darius Kilgo got some additional work in Austin's absence.

"(Austin) has been fine, he's just missed a lot of time," Kubiak said. "This is a tough football team to make so we've got to get him healthy ... we've got to get him back on the field, and like I said, this is going to be a tough team to make."

Tackle Michael Schofield left practice with some tightness in his back, running back Kapri Bibbs suffered an ankle injury late in the workout and defensive end Derek Wolfe was pulled from drills at one point as trainers put a cold towel over his head.

Defensive end Malik Jackson (calf) and cornerback Teverin Brandon (shoulder) did not practice.

Wednesday camp preview: Texans begin search for Foster's replacement and more

By Jeff Legwold and ESPN.com Staff

ESPN.com

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NFL Nation reporters look ahead to Wednesday practices at their team's training camp.

AFC EAST

Buffalo Bills: The Bills will return from an off day and begin a four-day stretch of practices beginning Wednesday and culminating in an intrasquad scrimmage Saturday. Rex Ryan says the "cream will rise to the top" in that scrimmage, but so far none of the quarterbacks -- Matt Cassel, EJ Manuel and Tyrod Taylor -- has separated from the pack. That could soon change. -- Mike Rodak

Miami Dolphins: The Dolphins enter Day 6 of training camp with a thinning group at wide receiver. DeVante Parker (foot), Kenny Stills (calf) and LaRon Byrd (unspecified) are all injured and missing practice time. That has provided opportunities for receivers like Rishard Matthews to get more reps. -- James Walker

New England Patriots: With No. 1 receiver Julian Edelman not practicing Tuesday after appearing to come up gimpy two days prior, No. 2 receiver Brandon LaFell receiver remaining on the PUP list, and No. 4/5 receiver Brian Tyms carted off the field Tuesday, we'll keep a closer eye on whether any of the reserves such as Josh Boyce, Brandon Gibson, Jonathan Krause, Zach D'Orazio and Chris Harper to see if they rise up with potential expanded opportunities. -- Mike Reiss

New York Jets: How 'bout an interception for the Jets' new and improved secondary? Going into Wednesday, the Darrelle Revis-led unit has yet to pick off Geno Smith or Ryan Fitzpatrick. There have been a number of drops; time for extra work on the JUGS machine. -- Rich Cimini

AFC NORTH

Baltimore Ravens: The Ravens return from their first day off in training camp, and all eyes are on the health of the secondary. Three backup cornerbacks (Rashaan Melvin, Tray Walker and Chris Greenwood) are nursing injuries, and safety Matt Elam is done for the year with torn a biceps. Coach John Harbaugh said the Ravens aren't looking to add another safety. "We think we have a lot of depth there," he said. Anthony Levine and Brynden Trawick are now battling for the top backup spot at safety. -- Jamison Hensley

Cincinnati Bengals: After five straight days of practice, rest will be coming for the Bengals on Wednesday. For some, the day off comes at a good time. Hamstring tweaks and joint soreness has already set in for players like Wallace Gilberry and Cedric Peerman as the team starts getting back into football shape. Dre Kirkpatrick didn't look like he needed much rest after a solid day Tuesday, during which he broke up a goal-line pass to Denarius Moore. -- Coley Harvey

Cleveland Browns: As the Browns return for another workout from 9:30 a.m. to noon, the emphasis will be on who's not on the field as much as who is. Terrelle Pryor felt tightness in his right hamstring on Tuesday. Pryor knows he needs all the time he can get, so if the hamstring forces much missed time -- he said he does not believe it will -- it could impact his growth as a receiver. The Browns scrimmage at Ohio State on Friday, and Pryor admits he is looking forward to being back in The Shoe. -- Pat McManamon

Pittsburgh Steelers: With Martavis Bryant and Markus Wheaton missing camp time, the Steelers want to see whether young reserve receivers can take ownership of a spot on the 53-man roster. Darrius Heyward-Bey is having a nice camp, but that's expected of a veteran. Watch for third-round pick Sammie Coates, C.J. Goodwin and drafted slot receiver Eli Rogers (if healthy, he had a minor injury Monday) to compete hard in the three practices before preseason games kick off. -- Jeremy Fowler

AFC SOUTH

Houston Texans: The loss of Arian Foster for some time will call into focus the rest of the very young Texans backfield -- Chris Polk and Jonathan Grimes are entering their fourth NFL seasons, Alfred Blue his second and Kenny Hilliard his first. After Wednesday morning's practice, the Texans will travel to Richmond, Virginia, to practice against Washington on Thursday. -- Tania Ganguli

Indianapolis Colts: The Colts will be in full pads for the first time during their practice Wednesday night. The increased physicality will be the first real indicator of how the offensive and defensive lines -- both question marks for the team -- are progressing. -- Mike Wells

Jacksonville Jaguars: The Jaguars return to the field Wednesday morning and will practice in full pads for the first time in camp. Practice won't feature any Oklahoma drills, but there is expected to be some pretty intense one-on-one battles, especially along the offensive and defensive lines. The Jaguars did a lot of 9-on-7 work in the run game on Sunday and that's expected to continue. This will be the first time we'll be able to see rookie running back T.J. Yeldon in a full-contact situation and find out if he's able to navigate the middle of the field in the NFL as well as he did at Alabama. -- Mike DiRocco

Tennessee Titans: The Titans have been working Blidi Wren-Wilson inside as their primary nickelback, which doesn't seem like a natural fit for him. We'll see if the Titans shift things around in the secondary after a day off. Perrish Cox is fully capable of kicking inside to cover the slot. Incumbent nickel Coty Sensabaugh's been relegated to the second team so far. -- Paul Kuharsky

AFC WEST

Denver Broncos: The Broncos players will get their first off day of training camp Wednesday, but one of the items waiting for them on their return will be some additional red-zone work. The Broncos went through some new things Wednesday and coach Gary Kubiak said there were "a lot of mistakes. We have a lot of things as coaches that we have to go back and fix." -- Jeff Legwold

Kansas City Chiefs: Camp is getting away from two young players the Chiefs hoped would be offensive contributors, tight end Demetrius Harris and rookie wide receiver Chris Conley. Harris (foot) hasn't practiced at all and Conley (knee) hasn't worked since the first day of rookie camp. Their chances of being factors early on diminish with each passing day they aren't on the field. -- Adam Teicher

Oakland Raiders: The Raiders are digging in after an off day Tuesday. Oakland is starting a five-day stretch of practice with an evening workout Wednesday. The stretch will be its longest of training camp without a day off. -- Bill Williamson

San Diego Chargers: While it's early in training camp, San Diego's three projected starters along the interior offensive line -- left guard Orlando Franklin, center Chris Watt and right guard Johnnie Troutman -- missed practice on Monday. With a scheduled off day for Tuesday, coach Mike McCoy likely carved out two days of rest for his beefy linemen. Still, San Diego had injury issues up front last season, and even with improved depth up front, the Chargers need their frontline players to stay healthy. -- Eric D. Williams

NFC EAST

Dallas Cowboys: Tyler Patmon worked his way into national conversation with his tussle with Dez Bryant in practice on Sunday, but his work early in practice could put the Cowboys in a position to have surplus of corners and affect how they configure their 53-man roster. Like every team, the Cowboys know you can never have enough corners to match up against the pass-happy offenses of today's NFL. -- Todd Archer

New York Giants: The Giants return from their first day off, and it's expected they'll practice in full pads for the first time this camp. That means a whole new level of test for Victor Cruz, the wideout who's trying to return from a torn patellar tendon, and for Ereck Flowers, the rookie who's being thrust into the starting left tackle role. Flowers missed Monday's practice with a hip flexor injury; the Giants hope he can get some full-pads action so they can evaluate his progress. -- Dan Graziano

Philadelphia Eagles: After their first day of practice in pads, the Philadelphia Eagles will have Wednesday off. That is three days of practice so far, and then one day off. The Eagles will get back to work at the NovaCare complex on Thursday afternoon. -- Phil Sheridan

Washington Redskins: The Redskins resume practice after a day off Tuesday and might have a new person on the field: linebacker Junior Galette. It's doubtful he'd do much of anything and likely just get some work on the side. The Redskins are hopeful that he should be able to practice "really soon," according to one team official. Galette injured a pectoral muscle in June and has not done anything since signing with Washington on Friday. -- John Keim

NFC NORTH

Chicago Bears: As the Bears return to Olivet Nazarene University following a day off, the focus is on injured wide receivers Alshon Jeffery (shoulder) and Kevin White (shin). Jeffery's sprained AC shoulder joint injury is not believed to be serious, but head coach John Fox has been vague on White's long-term prognosis. -- Jeff Dickerson

Detroit Lions: The Lions take their training camp on the road Wednesday -- sort of. The team will practice Wednesday night at Novi (Mich.) High School at 7:30 p.m. More importantly, Detroit will be in pads for the first time Wednesday night, so the team can start to sort out its run game and line situations on offense and defense. -- Michael Rothstein

Green Bay Packers: There's no practice on Wednesday, but with assistant coaches and coordinators available to the media for the first time, it will be a good chance to get an update on all eight of the Packers draft picks. The next practice is Thursday morning. -- Rob Demovsky

Minnesota Vikings: After an evening practice on Tuesday, players will get their second day off of training camp on Wednesday. Head coach Mike Zimmer, who is in Florida with his ailing father, Bill, could rejoin the team for its practice on Thursday morning. -- Ben Goessling

NFC SOUTH

Atlanta Falcons: Having Tuesday off might help the Atlanta Falcons knock some of the rust off following a sluggish Monday practice. Coach Dan Quinn admitted play was a little sloppy to start the week, which is expected while players adjust to new offensive and defensive schemes. Come Wednesday, the banged up offensive line needs to somehow find its footing after the defensive front dominated the last time out. -- Vaughn McClure

Carolina Panthers: The Panthers return to practice after a day off knowing that one starting defensive tackle, Star Lotulelei, will be out at least three weeks while nursing a stress reaction on his surgically repaired right foot. The other starting tackle, Kawann Short, had missed the first four practices with back spasms and was to be re-evaluated Tuesday. Whether Short returns and how the Panthers adjust their rotation at tackle will be a subject of focus. -- David Newton

New Orleans Saints: We haven't seen much sizzle in camp from the Saints' two most dynamic playmakers, Brandin Cooks and C.J. Spiller. But that should change in the next few days as the Saints begin installing more nickel, red-zone and two-minute offense packages leading up to Friday's scrimmage. -- Mike Triplett

Tampa Bay Buccaneers: The Bucs get their first day off from camp Wednesday. When they return to practice Thursday, rookie left tackle Donovan Smith will be a player to watch. Smith had been working behind Kevin Pamphile for the first couple of practices, but got some first-team work Tuesday. He should continue to work with the starters. -- Pat Yasinskas

NFC WEST

Arizona Cardinals: Starting quarterback Carson Palmer returns to the field after a scheduled day off, while backup Drew Stanton takes his day of rest for the Cardinals. Arizona will look to get through a training camp practice without more injuries debilitating their roster. -- Josh Weinfuss

St. Louis Rams: The Rams have an off day Wednesday after their first full-team, full-pads practice Tuesday. Defensive end Chris Long and safety Mark Barron returned from injuries Tuesday, but the Rams will spend some of their day off awaiting word on cornerback E.J. Gaines. He suffered a foot injury Sunday night and is scheduled to visit soon with Dr. Robert Anderson in Charlotte. -- Nick Wagoner

San Francisco 49ers: Despite all signs that he would be a full go for the Niners' first padded practice, NaVorro Bowman was given a "vet's day off" on Tuesday. No word yet on if the 49ers will hit again Wednesday, but you have to wonder whether Bowman, who missed last season rehabbing a knee injury, will practice. -- Paul Gutierrez

Seattle Seahawks: The Seahawks went through the first few practices without working red-zone plays. Tight end Jimmy Graham has been the star of training camp. Fans might get their first glimpse of Graham in the red zone Wednesday. -- John Clayton

Texans RB Arian Foster hurts groin; surgery likely

By Tania Ganguli

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Texans running back Arian Foster likely will need surgery for a groin injury he suffered during the team's first fully padded training camp practice, a source said.

Foster likely will miss the start of the regular season. He could be placed on short-term injured reserve, which would allow the Texans to bring him back to practices after Week 6 and into a game after Week 8.

Foster suffered the injury on a pass play Monday night and did not return to the field.

Running back Alfred Blue took over some of Foster's first-team repetitions in his absence. Blue also left the field during that practice, but reportedly only did so for cramps.

Looking to fill the void created by the injury to Foster, the Texans will have RB Pierre Thomas on for a visit on Wednesday, according to ESPN's Josina Anderson and multiple reports.

If all goes well, Thomas will join the Texans in time for the team's travel for joint practices with the Redskins, a source told Anderson.

A significant factor for Thomas is joining a team that suits his skill set. Thomas, 30, was released by the Saints in March, after eight seasons. His agent, Lamont Smith, said he would neither confirm nor deny any of Thomas' team visits.

Foster ranked sixth in the NFL last season with 1,246 rushing yards even though injuries caused him to miss three games entirely and parts of three others.

He missed two games last November after suffering a groin injury against the Philadelphia Eagles. He also missed the Texans' Week 3 contest against the New York Giants with a hamstring injury.

Since 2010, Foster has the most 100-yard games (31) among running backs and is averaging the most yards from scrimmage per game (121.2), according to ESPN Stats & Information.

Broncos red zone: To pass (Manning) or run (Kubiak)?

By Mike Klis

9news

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As Irv Brown might say: Reedddd Zone.

The Denver Broncos spent the bulk of their training camp practice Tuesday working on the red zone area (inside the opponent's 20).

This is where head coach Gary Kubiak and quarterback Peyton Manning might be challenged to reconcile their play-calling preferences.

With the ball inside the 20, the Broncos in Manning's three years called 59.3 percent pass plays (306) to 40.7 percent runs (210).

They were pretty good at it, too, ranking 4th, 1st and 6th those three years in red zone touchdown percentage.

When it came to finishing off those red-zone drives, the pass was even more dominant. The Broncos scored 69.8 percent of their red zone touchdowns off the pass to just 30.2 percent runs.

Has it been mentioned Peyton Manning was the Broncos' quarterback the past three years?

The Broncos figure to run the ball more in the red zone this year and not only because Kubiak is the coach. The Broncos are littered with uncertainty along their offensive line. The red zone area is where opposing defenses tend to use the all-out blitz.

Running the ball may be imperative for this young group of blockers.

"You just try to give the (quarterback) some options," said Rick Dennison, the Broncos' offensive coordinator who has long partnered with Kubiak. "You just have to be ready for all or nothing. They're either bringing them all or they're dropping them all, so we like to give our quarterback some options."

Then again, redder zone running plays will be called primarily because Kubiak is the coach.

"We always like to run the ball down there," said tight end Owen Daniels, who is going on his 10th season with Kubiak.

"You guys know me, I like being physical all over the field but I think if you can make people play eight guys in the box in the red zone and you're not throwing against an eight-man drop, three-man rush –it sure is a lot easier to run the ball, too," Kubiak said. "The only way you're going to be able to get people to do that is to be able to run the football well down there."

Then there's the red zone defense. The Broncos weren't very good when backed up to their end zone last year. They were No. 3 in total defense but ranked just 25th in red zone touchdown percentage.

Those numbers suggest Denver's D was stingy in yards but not in points.

The way it worked Tuesday, Manning's first-string offense, Brock Osweiler's second stringers and Zac Dysert's No. 3 offense all scored on their final red zone possessions. That's good.

Except when you consider those touchdowns came against the first-string, second-string and third-string defenses. That's bad.

"There are a lot of things that we need to clean up," said Wade Phillips, the Broncos' new defensive coordinator. " One of the things and one of our goals this year, the team last year certainly played well overall yardage-wise, but I think 22nd in scoring defense. It's really imperative that we improve that area, especially in the red zone. We didn't do great at the end there. They scored all three times, but this is the first day for us. We did some good things and got some interceptions down there, but we definitely need to emphasize to keep working on that. Our techniques down there are different than the ones out on the field."

Fiery Sanders expands his role with Denver Broncos

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

August 4, 2015

Emmanuel Sanders is so wired to win that he considers his competitive streak both a blessing and a burden.

Sure, it helped him make the Pro Bowl for the first time in 2014, but the Denver Broncos' speedy wide receiver said he usually can't dial it down enough to enjoy a friendly video game or a round of poker.

"Sometimes I hate that I'm so competitive," he said. "But it ended up paying off when it comes to playing a sport."

Sanders was so eager to impress his new team and build a rapport with Peyton Manning last year that he overdid it, strained a quad and missed much of training camp. Then he went out and had a career year with 101 receptions for 1,404 yards and nine TDs.

Asked about teammate and fellow Pro Bowler Demaryius Thomas's stated goal of breaking Calvin Johnson's receiving record of 1,964 yards this season, Sanders smiled and pushed in all his chips.

"I want to be the best wide receiver in the National Football League this year," Sanders declared. "That's MY goal."

It's clear that Sanders wasn't in John Elway's crosshairs when Denver's general manager, in parting ways with coach John Fox last winter, lamented the Broncos' failure to go down "kicking and screaming" in the playoffs.

"I think that that's my mindset, regardless," Sanders said. "So it's not one of those things where I have to turn my engine on just to hear that. That's me. Every play, I want to give it my all, whether it's blocking, whether it's catching a pass, whether it's doing whatever I got to do, I love doing it. I'm competitive as all outdoors."

Sanders capitalized on Wes Welker's departure and Thomas's absence from the offseason program in a contract stalemate to build a better rapport with his quarterback and become more of a locker room leader, tutoring young receivers such as Cody Latimer and Isaiah Burse.

"First off, you wish Demaryius (had been) out there," coach Gary Kubiak said. "But yeah, he's got a lot of guys looking at him and he's a hard worker. He pushes himself, makes a great play at the end of practice, made a great play on the fourth-and-4 drill that we had going. But I'm very impressed with him. He loves to play, has a lot of fun out here. He's got a lot of confidence, which good players do."

And a competitive streak to match.

KICKING IT: The Broncos had to carry kickoff specialist Brandon McManus last year when they made the switch to Connor Barth for field goals.

They're hoping to keep just one punter (Britton Colquitt or Karl Schmitz) and one kicker this season with either of them also handling kickoffs.

Barth, who made 15 of 16 field goals last year but was 0 for 8 on touchbacks before the Broncos brought back McManus to handle kickoffs, said he spent his offseason working with kicking coach Dan Orner in Charlotte, North Carolina, to get more oomph on his kickoffs.

"He's working at it," special teams coordinator Joe DeCamillis said. "He's going to have to."

Barth is just 11 of 164 on touchbacks in his career.

Who reaches Super Bowl 50? 2015 NFL record projections for all 32 teams

By Nate Davis
USA Today
August 4, 2015

The free agents have signed, the rookies have arrived, the suspensions have been doled out — and appealed to federal court — and now the NFL's players are back to work with training camps open around the league. Now that each team's circumstances are generally solidified, USA TODAY Sports projected the results of all 256 regular-season games to create one snapshot of how the 2015 season could play out before injuries, firings and Murphy's Law take their toll.

NFC EAST

Eagles (10-6): Chip Kelly went 10-6 during his first two seasons, why not now? Really, this team's range for success or failure seems extensive based on how QB Sam Bradford, RB DeMarco Murray, a new-look defense, etc. mesh.

Cowboys (8-8): First month could be telling minus suspended DE Greg Hardy and MLB Rolando McClain as D faces four potentially elite offenses (Giants, Eagles, Falcons, Saints) without DeMarco Murray eating the clock on its behalf.

Giants (6-10): How effective will DE Jason Pierre-Paul be after his accident? Can rookie T Ereck Flowers protect Eli Manning's blind side? Can they establish run or even stop it? Lot to figure out no matter how well they chuck it.

Redskins (4-12): Much is riding on how quickly new defensive coordinator Joe Barry and O-line guru Bill Callahan whip their units into shape. Robert Griffin III's future may be riding on it, especially against two scary fronts (Dolphins, Rams) to start.

NFC NORTH

Packers (12-4): They open on road against hated Bears before hosting Seahawks at home in NFC title game rematch. Two big games to wash bile from last season out of the collective palate while potentially mapping route to top seed.

Vikings (10-6): Highly motivated Adrian Peterson should take offense and second-year QB Teddy Bridgewater to new level, and potentially stacked defense looks ready to blossom. Schedule gets friendly after Week 5 bye.

Lions (7-9): Last year's No. 1 run defense sees Adrian Peterson (twice), Marshawn Lynch, Matt Forte, Jamaal Charles in first half minus Ndamukong Suh. We'll know then how badly franchise erred (or didn't) by letting all-pro walk.

Bears (3-13): Defense will look almost entirely different in terms of personnel and scheme. They can only hope QB Jay Cutler looks entirely different from 2014 version under new coaching staff.

NFC SOUTH

Panthers (11-5): Cam Newton is healthy from a mind, body and bank account perspective. He and his formidable defense will also face just four playoff teams from last season.

Saints (10-6): They lost their final five games at Superdome in 2014 and still finished 7-9. Don't expect that streak to continue, especially with a favorable schedule and, theoretically, improved run game and D.

Falcons (4-12): New coach Dan Quinn is probably a long way from accruing the talent and personnel that fit the defensive scheme and philosophy he honed in Seattle. It could be a rough start.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers (4-12): Jameis Winston could begin 1-0 by beating fellow Heisman winner Marcus Mariota in opener. But Bucs play four of next six on road before hitting teeth of their schedule.

NFC WEST

Seahawks (12-4): Open with pair of tough roadies (Rams, Packers) and play three of final five away from comfy CenturyLink Field, so need to make hay in the middle. Week 2 game at Green Bay could determine NFC's home field.

Rams (10-6): Catch potentially battered Seahawks in opener and may not get full dose of Le'Veon Bell in his Week 3 debut. After Oct. 11 game at Lambeau Field, Rams leave St. Louis once in subsequent five weeks, good time for Nick Foles to find groove.

Cardinals (9-7): Three 1 p.m. ET kickoffs aren't good news for a team that's historically struggled on East Coast. But healthy Cards should be in the mix provided new-look defense clicks without Todd Bowles.

49ers (5-11): A schedule that includes the AFC North and NFC North doesn't look particularly forgiving to a team that lost so many key vets to retirement and is adjusting to regime change as well.

AFC EAST

Patriots (11-5): Remember, they started 2-2 last year with Tom Brady (plus Darrelle Revis, Vince Wilfork and Shane Vereen) in the lineup. Whether Brady plays out of the chute or not, rest of AFC East appeared to close on Pats this offseason.

Bills (10-6): They just missed snapping 15-year playoff drought last year. Are Rex Ryan, LeSean McCoy and Percy Harvin — plus still-loaded defense — enough to get them back into January?

Dolphins (10-6): They won't see a playoff team from last year until Week 8, and only two before December. Plenty of time for the Ryan Tannehill-led offense to crest and the Ndamukong Suh-led D to crystallize.

Jets (7-9): Unless QB Geno Smith does an about face, they still look like the division's weak link. But a defense revitalized by CB Darrelle Revis could be special under new coach Todd Bowles. Overall talent is vastly improved.

AFC NORTH

Ravens (10-6): Having four offensive coordinators in four seasons (Marc Trestman is the latest) isn't ideal. But aside from receivers, there's plenty of continuity throughout lineup. Opening with five of seven on road a major hurdle.

Bengals (9-7): Per usual, they have look of solid outfit not necessarily built for a deep playoff run. Navigating NFC West-laden schedule could even leave them short of another one-and-done postseason.

Steelers (8-8): Defense is undergoing a huge transition and seeking new leaders. Meanwhile, last year's second-ranked offense won't have all-pro RB Le'Veon Bell for first two weeks, making league's toughest schedule more difficult to survive.

Browns (5-11): Soft September opening includes Jets, Titans and Raiders. Only team they'll see rest of way with a sub-.500 2014 record is the always competitive Rams. Guess here is that Johnny Manziel will get extended tryout by midseason.

AFC SOUTH

Colts (13-3): It seems they'll again benefit from playing in the league's weakest division. And if their incremental pattern of success under coach Chuck Pagano and QB Andrew Luck holds, they'll reach Super Bowl 50.

Texans (6-10): Quarterback aside, they looked fairly formidable elsewhere — until Arian Foster was injured. No matter how good the defense is, and Jadeveon Clowney could take it to new level, offense doesn't seem capable of holding up its end now if Foster is out for long stretch.

Jaguars (6-10): The core of young talent has quickly improved, and this team plays hard for coach Gus Bradley — whose job may be on the line without a spike in the win column.

Titans (4-12): Let's have some patience with Marcus Mariota, who inherits a last-place schedule that still features trips to New Orleans and the AFC East gauntlet.

AFC WEST

Broncos (10-6): Peyton Manning must learn foreign scheme in what could be his final dance — and he may have to dance frequently behind patchwork O-line. But don't sleep on a defense that just may carry this team for stretches.

Chargers (9-7): They must deal with three 1 p.m. ET kickoffs ... though perhaps being far removed from the siren call of Los Angeles and the inherent rumor mill will help. Rookie RB Melvin Gordon could have dramatic impact.

Chiefs (8-8): With RB Jamaal Charles and OLB Justin Houston, they have a bona fide superstar on each side of the ball. But will either get enough help to make playoff return? O-line's ability to coalesce may be the key.

Raiders (5-11): The L.A. conundrum also hangs over this franchise. But the foundation is quickly improving, and new coach Jack Del Rio worked some miracles under similar circumstances in Jacksonville.

AFC playoffs

Wild card: (3) Broncos def. (6) Dolphins; (4) Ravens def. (5) Bills

Divisional: (2) Patriots def. (3) Broncos; (1) Colts def. (4) Ravens

AFC Championship Game: (1) Colts def. (2) Patriots

NFC playoffs

Wild card: (6) Rams def. (3) Panthers, (5) Vikings def. (4) Eagles

Divisional: (1) Packers def. (6) Rams; (2) Seahawks def. (5) Vikings

NFC Championship Game: (1) Packers def. (2) Seahawks

Super Bowl 50: Packers def. Colts

Denver Broncos training camp values January over August

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

August 4, 2015

Last year, or the year before, or the year before, there was a backup quarterback in training camp with the Broncos, and I think he was from North Carolina. It might've been Maryland.

I can't remember his school, or his name, or what he looked like. Guess I could look it up, but it doesn't really matter. What matters is exactly that: I can't remember him.

Why? Because he barely played. Not in games; he barely played in practice. He was a fourth-stringer, and as a fourth-stringer, he rarely took snaps in drills. I couldn't tell you if he had a big arm, because he rarely was called on to use it. Maybe in warmups. That's about it.

Then you have this training camp, the Broncos camp that just concluded its fifth day a few minutes ago. Talk about a radical change. Trevor Siemian, the current fourth-stringer, is getting roughly the same number of repetitions as Peyton Manning, Brock Osweiler and Zac Dysert, the quarterbacks ahead of him on the depth chart.

What does this all mean? It tells me Gary Kubiak is playing, and practicing, for December and January — not August and September. When Siemian is getting all those reps, the other third- and fourth-stringers are getting all those reps, and I think that's a sign Kubiak wants to build up their depth. Not for games against the Ravens, Chiefs and Lions in September — but for games against the Pats, Ravens or Steelers in January.

Take, for example, how the new coaching staff is approaching the rebuilt offensive line, which is heavy on youth and short on experience: "We're throwing them all around and trying to find the top five," offensive coordinator Rick Dennison said today.

Who knows if the transition from John Fox's staff to Gary Kubiak's staff will pay off when John Elway wants it to pay off — in the postseason. Fox won a boatload of games by approaching each one as though it were the most important of the season. Kubiak seems content with building, building, building to the playoffs. Maybe that pays off, maybe it doesn't, but their training camp M.O. has been noticeably different.

Pro Football Hall of Fame: Top candidate for each AFC team

By Elliot Harrison

NFL.com

August 4, 2015

With the Class of 2015 being enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame this Saturday, we thought we'd turn our All-32 gaze toward Canton -- by listing each franchise's most deserving candidate for inclusion. Here is the criteria we used:

- a) It can be a player.
- b) It can be a potential Seniors Committee candidate.
- c) It can be a "contributor."

One other caveat: The person must be eligible for election in 2016. Which, of course, means guys like Randy Moss and Ed Reed weren't considered. No LaDainian Tomlinson, either, though that honor will surely be bestowed on my NFL Media colleague come 2017.

No matter what, each of these names represents the best of the best for that person's NFL club. So take a look below, and let me know if your team has a more deserving candidate for enshrinement. Would love to hear your take ... @HarrisonNFL is the place.

Baltimore Ravens: Chris McAlister, cornerback

Not sure why, but like a hit song from the 1970s that never gets replayed on the classic rock stations (thinking early Van Halen, here), McAlister's oft-brilliant career seems to have drifted from people's memories. A starter as a rookie, the big (6-foot-1, 206-pound) corner was a standout member of the NFL's shining example of stout defensive teams, the 2000 Ravens. McAlister also scored six touchdowns on defense in his decade with the Ravens.

Buffalo Bills: Kent Hull, center

Center remains a vital position in pro football, although it's getting increasingly difficult for centers to get into the Hall of Fame. Sure, Mick Tingelhoff made it this year -- after waiting three decades. Even former Steeler Dermontti Dawson, who was dominant while taking over Hull's role as the NFL's premier center in the 1990s, was a finalist multiple times before getting enshrined in 2012. Hull helped run Buffalo's high-flying "K-Gun" offense, making three Pro Bowls while being named first-team All-Pro twice. If Andre Reed deserves the honor ...

Cincinnati Bengals: Ken Riley, cornerback

If candor is the name of the game, then I have to say Riley deserves this honor as much as another Ken whom Bengals fans have been touting for years: quarterback Ken Anderson. Riley picked off an insane 65 passes in his glorious 15-year career, but he never made a Pro Bowl, which means no Hall of Fame voter is going to look at him. Ironically, Riley was named first-team All-Pro in his 15th and final season, when he shared the lead in interceptions in the AFC with eight. "You'll never find a bigger advocate of his making the Hall than me," former Bengals receiver Cris Collinsworth told The New York Times in 2013. "I probably learned more football from Kenny Riley than from anyone I played for or against. Everything I did that worked against everybody else never worked against him. But as soon as he would

pick off a pass on my route or beat me to a spot, he'd tell me why, explain what I'd done wrong. He wanted me to be better because that made the team better."

Cleveland Browns: Mac Speedie, flanker

Call Speedie and Frank Minnifield "A" and "B." Speedie put up insane numbers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He led the All-America Football Conference -- which was folded into the NFL ahead of the 1950 season -- in receptions three times (with 67 in 1947, 58 in '48 and 62 in '49) and in receiving yards twice (with 1,146 in '47 and 1,028 in '49), making the AAFC's All-League team three times. After the Browns joined the NFL, Speedie made two Pro Bowls and led the league in receptions once (with 62 in 1952). Three decades later, Minnifield was one of the premier corners in the NFL, making the 1980s All-Decade Team while starting in three AFC Championship Games. Give the nod to Speedie, though, who should've gotten the call 45 years ago.

Denver Broncos: Terrell Davis, running back

Davis should have made it years ago. That is to say, he was a Hall of Famer the day he chased Jets safety Victor Green from behind on an interception and tore up his knee. Davis was the best in the late 1990s -- an era that also included Marshall Faulk, Barry Sanders and Emmitt Smith. He posted 142.5 rushing yards per game in the postseason, was a Super Bowl MVP and an NFL MVP. Put him in.

Houston Texans: Andre Johnson, wide receiver

OK, so we have to cheat a bit with the Texans, who, in their 13 seasons thus far, haven't produced any Hall of Fame-caliber players who are eligible for Canton yet. But when all is said and done, it will be awfully tough to keep Johnson -- who has been at the forefront of the top receiver debate since he entered the NFL in 2003 -- out. If he wasn't the best, it was only because of a Randy Moss or Terrell Owens, both of whom will walk into Canton in their first year of eligibility. Johnson currently ranks ninth in career receptions (1,012) and 12th in receiving yards (13,597). Those numbers should only climb in Indy, where he'll be catching passes from Andrew Luck, the first premier quarterback Johnson has ever called a teammate.

Indianapolis Colts: Tony Dungy, coach

I deliberated between wide receiver extraordinaire Marvin Harrison and Dungy ... but ultimately chose the oft-successful, socially relevant head coach. Voters aren't supposed to consider off-the-field issues, but when the pendulum swings so wildly from one end of the spectrum to the other, like it does here, the big elephant in the room becomes more difficult to ignore. Besides, after researching Buccaneers history recently, the culture change Dungy evoked there speaks for itself. And Peyton Manning still hasn't won a Super Bowl without him.

Jacksonville Jaguars: Tony Boselli, left tackle

Of all the names listed for each franchise, Boselli's was frankly the easiest to type. He should already be enshrined, irrespective of his rather short (seven seasons) career. Boselli was a technician at his position, a skilled artisan who was tough as nine acres of Texas onions (phrase borrowed from Doug English) while being a gifted athlete. Hall of Fame tackle Walter Jones told me last year, with no hesitation, "When I first got in the league, you had Tony Boselli. I think that was the guy that I said, 'Man, that's the way I want to play left tackle ... when I was coming through (the NFL), that was the guy.'" Jones, like so many other players and fans, marveled over how Boselli dominated Bills defensive end Bruce Smith in the 1996 playoffs. I remember that game, too: Hall of Should Be In vs. Hall of Fame. Put him in.

Kansas City Chiefs: Deron Cherry, safety

Cherry barely edges out another Chiefs great for this spot who, coincidentally, also played safety. Trying to pick between Cherry and '60s great Johnny Robinson is darn near impossible. Cherry was a member of the 1980s All-Decade Team, while Robinson made the Hall of Fame's All-Time AFL Team. The key for Cherry was that he was named first-team All-Pro three times while playing in a 28-team league, whereas Robinson spent most of his career in the much-smaller AFL, which only had eight teams in his first six seasons. Of course, while we're at it, you could say no to both these guys and put in cornerback Albert Lewis, a top-flight cover man who was also one of the best special teams players to ever line up.

Miami Dolphins: Zach Thomas, linebacker

Why is it that Thomas and Jason Taylor never catch a whiff of serious Hall chatter? Of the two phenomenal players, we're giving the nod to Thomas for his consistency. True, Taylor has a Defensive Player of the Year award on his résumé, but Thomas' play never really fell off until he started having injury problems in 2007, more than a decade into his career. A five-time first-team All-Pro and a member of the 2000s All-Decade Team, Thomas beat out Jack Del Rio -- whom Jimmy Johnson had signed to start -- in 1996 for the MLB gig as a rookie. And he never let go of the job.

New England Patriots: Ty Law, cornerback

Law gets little respect. It's like the guy has been completely forgotten, even though he was a member of Super Bowl-winning teams in 2001, 2003 and 2004. In an era where the top corners don't pick off very many passes, Law suckered enough quarterbacks to steal 53 of them over his sterling career. He scored on seven of those returns, while leading the league in interceptions twice (with nine in 1998 and 10 in 2005). Only two players -- Everson Walls and Ed Reed -- have ever led the NFL in interceptions more than twice. Law's three picks of Peyton Manning in the 2003 AFC Championship Game revealed how brilliant he could be when it mattered.

New York Jets: Joe Klecko, defensive lineman

There are several outstanding Jets not in the Hall of Fame, from Mark Gastineau to another solid defensive end in Gerry Philbin, a star on the Super Bowl III team. The nod goes to Klecko, who could play 4-3 defensive end or 4-3 defensive tackle -- and was really tough as a 3-4 nose tackle. In fact, he was downright dominant at that last position in 1985, when he was named first-team All-Pro. Klecko's versatility was underlined by his being named first-team All-Pro in 1981 while playing on the edge in the Jets' "New York Sack Exchange" four-man front. Klecko unofficially recorded a league-high 20.5 sacks that year, the year before sacks became an official statistic.

Oakland Raiders: Ken Stabler, quarterback

Praise was heaped on Stabler following his death a month ago, and for good reason. Stabler was one of the top quarterbacks of the 1970s, falling easily in the discussion of the top five, if not the top three. He won the NFL MVP award in 1974. And in 1976, he posted the second-highest single-season passer rating of the decade (103.4); given the rules at the time, that would be like posting a 123.4 passer rating today. He won a Super Bowl and was the leader of an iconic team. At the very least, he should merit more serious contemplation from the Seniors Committee.

Pittsburgh Steelers: Donnie Shell, safety

Yes, there are many Steelers from the 1970s already in the Hall of Fame. We get it. But Shell was simply too good to forget. Carnell Lake and Kevin Greene deserve recognition, too (although the latter gets his burn in the Panthers section of this exercise). Unlike Lake and Greene, Shell spent his entire career in Pittsburgh. He won four Super Bowl rings in the '70s, but he was actually a better player when the team

began its slow decline in the 1980s, the decade in which Shell earned two of his three All-Pro nods. He picked off a staggering 51 passes over his fine career.

San Diego Chargers: John Hadl, quarterback

If there has ever been a forgotten quarterback, it's Hadl, a guy who never gets mentioned as one of the top passers of his day. The Kansas product played 16 seasons in the AFL and NFL, leading the AFL in passing yards twice (with 2,798 in 1965 and 3,473 in '68) and doing the same in the NFL once (with 3,075 in 1971). From 1964 to 1973, Hadl threw 202 touchdown passes, eight more than the next closest guy in that span. In fact, the next three on that list -- Fran Tarkenton, Len Dawson and Sonny Jurgenson -- are already in the Hall of Fame. Hadl led the Bolts to two straight AFL title game appearances in 1964 and '65.

Tennessee Titans: Robert Brazile, linebacker

Sorry, Titans fans; while Steve McNair, Eddie George and Frank Wycheck all enjoyed stellar careers, this franchise's strongest Hall candidate never played in Tennessee. A teammate of Walter Payton's at Jackson State, Brazile became one of the top outside linebackers in the NFL with the Houston Oilers in the late 1970s. Even as Houston sank into oblivion in the early 1980s, Brazile competed at a high level, making the Pro Bowl for the awful 1-8 Oilers in the strike-shortened 1982 season, recording 6.5 sacks. He wasn't merely a pass rusher, either; No. 52 was a complete player. Brazile made All-Pro or the Pro Bowl every year from 1976 to 1982.

Player Style Files: Broncos Ronnie Hillman Has A Ton Of Shoes

By David Heim
CBS 4 Denver
August 4, 2015

Many NFL stars have their share of unique circumstances that got them into the sport of football. But for Broncos running back Ronnie Hillman, his revelation came while taking an innocent stroll with his mother.

“I was walking with my mom—she usually does these walks around the neighborhood,” Hillman said. “We had a community college by where we lived, and she used to walk there everyday. One day I decided to go walking with her and it was the football team out there—the Compton Titans—and I was like, ‘I want to do that, I want to try it.’ Ever since then, I never looked back; I loved it.”

Fast forward to today, Hillman is now fighting for starting duties with the Denver Broncos, and is enjoying all of the perks that come with it, perks like tons of Go-gurt in his refrigerator.

“I try to keep Go-gurts—I’m like a big kid. I love Go-gurts,” Hillman joked.

All kidding aside, Hillman enjoys overindulging on his ever-growing cologne and shoe collections.

“I have a pretty unique collection of cologne, I have a lot of it,” Hillman said. “I probably have over 20 bottles of cologne.”

If you think that is impressive, take a look at Hillman’s shoe collection.

“Estimated, I probably have over 500 pairs of shoes,” Hillman said.

Granted, most of the shoes that occupy Hillman’s collection are just, well...that: collectibles. But, 500 is still pretty impressive.

Ware, veterans detail vital teaching process

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

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In his 21 years of coaching in the NFL and his 11 years as a NFL player, Offensive Coordinator Rick Dennison has certainly seen a lot in this league. But the predilection of defensive players for teaching offensive players is something that demonstrates not only a first for Dennison but a helpful mindset and beneficial culture.

"The [defensive backs] have all been helping our guys saying, 'This is what we're seeing from you guys,' and 'This is why we're doing this.' They have been really good," Dennison said. "The defense has been great trying to help us out. [...] [We'll take] anything that they can add to us to help us for September, because we're not playing the Broncos, we're just practicing right and getting ready. I've overheard DBs tell us, 'This is how you're running this route. That's why I know that's coming.' It's been awesome."

DeMarcus Ware has also been a major help as he lines up opposite of tackle Ty Sambrailo on the left side. Ware's 11 years of NFL experience -- including eight Pro Bowls and four first-team All-Pro selections -- are a boon for the Broncos when he's on the field. Part of that benefit during training camp and offseason workouts has been his guidance to the rookie offensive lineman who is expected to protect Peyton Manning's blind side.

"Ty is a young guy," Dennison added, "and [Ware] can tell him how he is going to attack him, what he sees and what he feels."

Ware, as can be expected of a player of his distinction going against a rookie, has been able to get the best of Sambrailo, but it's about more than simply the outcome of a single rep or a single day's reps.

"It's about teaching him a lesson of 'Why not do this? If you do this and I see it, the next person is going to do the same thing.' And it's like that tough love," Ware said. "Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't and sometimes you don't win at all. But eventually, if you're in that dark you'll find that light and you better crawl out of there. So, I think you just keep that thumb down on him all the time. And if you're hard on him, it'll be easier during the football game."

In the end, the goal is that after facing edge rushers like Ware and Von Miller, the young linemen will go into games better prepared and with more confidence and more experience.

"I think when you're in practice it's actually harder than in the game because they know how you're going to attack them they know what you want to do," Ware said. "And I will do certain things to them to say, 'Hey, look at your stance. I know you're in a pass rush [protection] stance, I know you're in a blocking stance.'"

The effect is that the linemen learn to disguise their stances from defenders who can read them.

"And they change these things during the minicamps and the training camps to become a better player," Ware continued. "Or 'Why did you overset me and I went inside?' Or I do things to set him up so then when he goes against somebody else, he looks at me or they'll come to the sideline and say, 'Man, that

was easy!' They say that, and I'm like, 'Yeah, because you went against me, you went against Von, you went against Shane Ray every single day and we're trying to kick your butt, knowing that when you go into the game, everything else is going to be a piece of cake.'

"He's the athlete, but it's all about building that confidence."

How they teach their own

Ware doesn't just offer advice to players on the other side of the line of scrimmage, obviously. It's not difficult to spot him (or Miller for that matter) off to the side speaking with rookie Shane Ray or going over technique. Following the conclusion of practice on Sunday, Ware and Ray walked off the field together, still ostensibly discussing the day's practice.

The expectation is that although Ware and Miller should start ahead of him, Ray will make an impact when he's on the field. So Ware and Miller offer whatever tips come to mind and Ray absorbs them, whether it's in pass rush or run defense.

"He's one of those guys where he's a great listener," Ware said. "He learns very fast and I talked to him and I said, 'You have the title of a rookie, but you're going to have to play this year. You're going to have to go out there and be effective, no matter if you're out there for me, or Von. You're going to have to learn our positions.' So, he's taking that with much respect and getting out there and getting ready to play and do what he needs to do. And I'm going to groom him up the best way that I can."

The type of tutelage that Ware is giving the rookies is something cornerback Chris Harris Jr. has not only received, but that he can now give as well.

When Harris finished his collegiate career, he went undrafted and signed as a college free agent with the Broncos but had to work hard to impress coaches and stick on the active roster, mostly making an impact on special teams. But legendary Broncos cornerback Champ Bailey was there to take him under his wing, teaching him about being a pro and pointers on his technique. Now a veteran starter and one of the NFL's best at his position, Harris is in Bailey's role, including as a mentor.

However, with enough practice reps and years under their belts, the question for veterans like Harris becomes how do you impart experience that has become second nature? Like his own mentor, Harris finds the film room is the best place to teach.

"Just in the film room, [that's] where you can really watch film with the guys and really help them see what I see," Harris said. "Champ, we really just relied, like I said, on the film room. We were just sitting there, talking about different techniques, the best way to play this coverage, learn how teams attack you. That's what I learned from Champ. I learned how teams like to attack you in different coverages and that's something that kind of stuck to me."

For 10-year veteran tight end Owen Daniels, he uses certain keys to help teach young players some of the finer points of his position, which often comes back to blocking.

"There are always keys out there that you can kind of pay attention to," Daniels said, "whether you're running a route and keying on a coverage or you're in a pass protection and keying a stance or keying a

rotation with the safety and kind of knowing where guys are going so that you kind of have a head start on what's going on.

"It's easy to play when you know where your defender is going and you'll be able to block them. So [there are] just little things like that, little nuance things that you can kind of pick up. When you're seeing the same guy every day you can kind of pick up on some things and make it a little bit easier on yourself."

Ultimately, Ware knows his teaching can only go so far. No two people are exactly alike and how his pupils use his advice will in part be a reflection of their own style.

"You tell them the fundamentals of the technique and how to do it," Ware says. "And you let them mold it to their own character, how they do it themselves. Because how I do it is not going to be the same how Shane Ray or Von do it, but the thing is: The fundamentals and the steps of how to do it are going to be the same, but how you get to it, it might be different. And at the end, the final execution is going to look the same."

Few active players have the breadth of knowledge that Ware does. He has an array of moves with outstanding technique that has made him one of the best pass rushers to ever play in the NFL, and ultimately as a teacher all he can do is show the young players what he knows and let them utilize it to become the best player they can be.

"When you come in as a rookie, you know you have the college moves but then you figure out that there's a wide array of things that you can do and change," Ware says. "So you just try to throw the kitchen sink at them and you just let them figure out their own toolbox and just let them get comfortable first at playing ball and the change of speed and different guys. And it's all about hustle. All you tell them is just hustle as much as you can."

Broncos Training Camp Quick Hits: Day 5

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
August 4, 2015

The starters were back, the sun beat down on the fields, and the Broncos went through their longest and most arduous practice of training camp so far. The rigors of the practice were as much mental as physical, and by the time it was done, Wednesday's one-day respite from full-contact work seemed especially welcome.

"That was our longest practice so far, and we had a lot of stuff. We went to the red zone today and had a lot of new teaching, and with that came a lot of mistakes, so we've got a lot of things as coaches to go back and fix," Head Coach Gary Kubiak said.

At one point between a team red-zone period and another with snaps near midfield, Kubiak gathered the team in a huddle, something he's done during a majority of camp practices so far.

"You just always try to remind them of where you're at," Kubiak said. "I think the first thing as coach you want to see [is] that. You don't want to see them waiting on you all the time because you're not out there on the field with them come game days. You want to see your leaders stop things like that and regroup.

"But that's part of football, too; during the game, you have bad things happen. Can you regroup and go the next series? That's the way practice is. I was just trying to remind them each and every day."

Kubiak had shared some displeasure with how the team finished some of its recent practices, but liked the energy he saw as the team closed out its work in another red-zone period. All three sequences ended with touchdown passes: Peyton Manning-to-C.J. Anderson, Brock Osweiler-to-Isaiah Burse and Zac Dysert to Bennie Fowler.

"The thing [with which] I was really pleased at practice today: at the end of the day, when the team was dragging, the quarterbacks made plays. All three of them made big plays," Kubiak said. "That's what they've got to do. That's their job."

And that was a good place to stop for a break.

"Usually when you've had your pads on for three days, that's probably about as bad as [the players] are going to feel all year long," Kubiak said.

"It's a gut check right now. They know it. They're telling each other that, and that's a good thing. As a team, if you're going to get to where you want to go, you've got to push through those days."

TWEETS FROM THE FIELD:

Andrew Mason @MaseDenver

Back in pads. Not in pads today: Tevrin Brandon, Malik Jackson, Marvin Austin Jr., Lerentee McCray.
9:34 AM - 4 Aug 2015

Andrew Mason @MaseDenver

Connor Barth, Brandon McManus and Karl Schmitz all getting work on kickoffs.

10:51 AM - 4 Aug 2015

Andrew Mason @MaseDenver

Von Miller owned Ryan Harris in 1-on-1. Would have been a thunderous sack in a game. Miller celebrates by running 35 yards to the building.

10:59 AM - 4 Aug 2015

NOTES:

... It's never a surprise when OLB Von Miller dominates a play in the pass-rush drill, but when he ducked under RT Ryan Harris' arm without losing stride to burst into the backfield, even the three-time Pro Bowler was amazed. With his defensive teammates oohing, the giddy Miller promptly sprinted 50 yards back upfield and up to the doors leading to the locker room before coming back.

... RG Louis Vasquez and center Gino Gradkowski continue to hone their timing together. On one play, they both made perfect seals to create a hole that sprung Anderson loose for a big run to the right side. The two linemen celebrated with a fist bump as they went back to the huddle ...

... OT Ty Sambrailo held his own against OLB DeMarcus Ware in one-on-one work. Sambrailo did well at balancing getting his feet set with remaining nimble enough to guide Ware to the outside and behind the quarterback. That allowed Manning enough time to make some deep attempts.

... OLB Shane Ray had some stellar moments during one-on-one drills, including one snap where he set up OT Michael Schofield outside and then spun inside to get to where the quarterback would have been. Ray also beat RT Chris Clark for a sack during a fourth-and-goal simulation; Ray got around the edge and tagged Osweiler for the sack.

-- WR Emmanuel Sanders was active in the red-zone periods, with multiple receptions, including an out route that saw him make a lunging touchdown past just past a diving Chris Harris Jr.

... TE Dominique Jones showed some athleticism in space and downfield, with a handful of receptions during team and seven-on-seven periods.

... RB Juwan Thompson, as usual, got extra yards through scrums by continuing to keep his legs pumping, moving piles for an additional yard or two on multiple carries.

... CB Taurean Nixon burglarized rookie QB Trevor Siemian with an interception on a fade route toward the right corner.

... FB/TE Joe Don Duncan got some chances to share backfield time with QB Peyton Manning and C.J. Anderson. Duncan also saw some work on kickoff returns, blocking for Omar Bolden, who is the incumbent returner and was first up during that period. "I'm impressed with Joe [Don]," Kubiak said. "I can't remember which scout found him, but that was a good find. He fits what we do. He's athletic. He's physical. He's willing to hit, and he's going to be a good special-teams player. That's what we look for in a fullback."

... Duncan was the first player on the field, just beating guard Ben Garland.

... WR Cody Latimer had another solid day, beginning with a deep reception on a go route past Aqib Talib from Manning during the one-on-one period. Another highlight of the one-on-one period was Jordan Norwood's reception from Manning, on which he used a move to the outside and a cut back inside to get separation for the pass from Manning. Norwood's cuts look sharp -- a positive sign considering he is 11 and a half months from suffering a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

... Talib later got the better of Latimer and Manning by intercepting a pass intended for the second-year wide receiver in the back of the end zone.

... QB Zac Dysert hit WR Jordan Taylor on a deep connection from midfield during the team period. Taylor ran a go route up the right sideline and made a good adjustment to slow down and grab the pass.

... Safety Omar Bolden and WR Andre Caldwell handled kickoff returns during a special-teams period. Brandon McManus, Karl Schmitz and Connor Barth each took their turns handling kickoffs. Barth "is gonna have to" get some work in on kickoffs, Special Teams Coordinator Joe DeCamillis said.

... Barth went 4-for-4 and McManus 3-for-4 during a field-goal period in which each had one attempt from 33, 37, 43 and 49 yards. McManus missed a 43-yarder wide left. "I think it's separated by about one miss right now," DeCamillis said of the competition between the pair. "It's pretty close. It's been a good competition so far. We're trying to keep them at the same spots all the way across."

PARTICIPATION REPORT:

... WR Demaryius Thomas saw his workload increase to include two seven-on-seven periods as he nears full participation. "He practiced for probably an hour and 10 minutes," Kubiak said. "I'm hoping through the course of next week he's pretty much ready to go full with the guys."

... DE Antonio Smith saw his first team repetitions of camp, rotating onto the line. "The thought was to do that today, get a break [Wednesday], then go back at it Thursday," Kubiak said.

... DE Malik Jackson (calf strain) continued to focus on conditioning work during practice.

... CB Teverin Brandon (arm) missed practice for a second consecutive day.

... DT Marvin Austin Jr. injured his groin Monday and watched practice from the sideline in workout gear. "We've got to get him healthy. Hopefully [Wednesday's] break gives him a little more time to get back on the field," he said. "This is going to be a tough team to make for a lot of people, and we've got to give everybody a legitimate shot, so he needs his reps like anybody else."

... OLB Lerentee McCray suffered a groin injury Monday and did not practice.

... TE Jeff Heurman (torn ACL) was the only other player on the 90-man roster to not take part in practice. Unless the Broncos want to expose him to the waiver wire, he cannot go on injured reserve before the first cut to 75 players on Sept. 1.

INJURY REPORT:

... OT Michael Schofield did not finish practice because his "back was bothering him a little bit," Kubiak said.

... RB Kapri Bibbs left practice because of an ankle injury.

... TE Virgil Green gingerly left the field at the end of practice but was "okay," Kubiak said.

... "We're at that stage [of camp]; we've got a lot of nicks," Kubiak said. "Nothing that shouldn't have everybody back out here Thursday."

WEATHER REPORT: A few clouds but plenty of sun greeted fans, players and coaches. Temperatures rose from 77°F/25°C to 80°F/26.7°C by the end of practice.

ATTENDANCE: 4,787. Total camp attendance: 20,668 (average: 4,134).

Kapri Bibbs: Zone-blocking scheme 'made for me'

By Allie Raymond

DenverBroncos.com

August 4, 2015

Of all the changes the Broncos have implemented this offseason, the zone-blocking scheme has been one of the main focuses. But amid all the conversation discussing it, running back Kapri Bibbs can summarize it with one simple analogy to something you might have in your front yard.

“[Running backs] Coach [Eric Studesville] explained it like a picket fence,” Bibbs said. “You’ve got to find that one board that’s missing.”

Luckily for Bibbs, he’s got experience looking for the missing board. After working with a zone-blocking scheme during his time at Colorado State, Bibbs enters this training camp with something of an advantage over other running backs. In his one season as a Ram after two years at junior colleges, Bibbs broke CSU’s single-season records for rushing yards (1,741), rushing touchdowns (31), total touchdowns (31) and points (186). He finished his 2013 collegiate campaign ranked sixth in the nation in rushing yards and tied for No. 1 in touchdowns.

“I think this offense is definitely made for me,” Bibbs said. “It’s the second day in pads; we’ve got a long training camp to go. I’m looking to keep improving every day.”

Last season Bibbs split his time between the practice squad and the active roster, where he spent four weeks of his rookie campaign. This year he enters training camp not only with knowledge of Offensive Coordinator Rick Dennison’s offensive scheme, but also with specific goals in mind.

“I just want to be more decisive on my cuts and when I make those cuts, just get up into the hole and get my pads low and be able to break through those tackles,” Bibbs said. “Bounce off some of those linebackers that come through the hole. I think all the other stuff will just automatically come to me because I’m used to doing all that other stuff.”

Five days into training camp, Dennison is impressed by what the running back corps has done.

“I think they’ve done a great job,” Dennison said. “Three days ago, I really felt the urgency of their foot in the ground and going downhill. I thought their suddenness on the cuts, that’s when they made the turn the corner and they’re going to keep getting better at that. They’re feeling the soft spots, they’re understanding what we want done and I feel the surge into the line of scrimmage.”

But the running backs certainly can’t do it alone. They depend upon the offensive line to give them a lane. During this offseason, one of the biggest question marks for the Broncos was at offensive line. But so far into the preseason, Bibbs is happy with what he’s seen from Denver’s big men.

“I think the offensive line does a good job,” Bibbs said. “Somebody is winning every single time to give us that board that’s missing in that fence.”

Defense's intelligence, depth create options for Wade Phillips

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
August 4, 2015

With three out of four players in the Broncos secondary returning from Pro Bowl seasons, Defensive Coordinator Wade Phillips has a lot of talent to work with, but it's those players' intelligence, savvy and competitive fire that make them great fits for what Phillips wants to do.

Phillips' intention to unleash the defense's natural aggression is widely known following his initial press conference in February, but exactly how he's going to do it is an unknown, especially because he has the options to do it in many ways.

"We play a lot of man in places where we have man corners," Phillips said. "We're going to be a pressure defense. Now if it's pressure out of the zone and zone blitzes or pressure out of man and man blitzes, that's what you try to decide. Now it looks like we can have a combination."

What separates them from other teams in their ability to utilize a combination, Phillips says, is the players' intellect.

"These guys are, I think, pretty sharp and so some teams can't go from a lot of man to zone, or zone to man, because they [lose] the concepts... and it takes a lot of work and ability, but I'm hoping and it looks like we'll be able to do both."

With the Pro Bowl talent in the secondary, the intelligence, experience and communication is key from sideline to sideline.

"They're real smart, they're very competitive," Phillips added. "I think those two things, besides the ability they have, has made them as good as they are. You can have 10 Pro Bowlers coming back, you've still got to all know what you're doing [and] communicate well."

As inside linebackers Brandon Marshall and Danny Trevathan work their way back from injuries, they bring with them heaps of talent and a level of communication that adds to it.

"We communicate well together," Marshall said on Saturday. "We know each other well. So, it's actually pretty easy to have him in there. I don't really have to sit there and tell him what to do. He knows what to do and we just feed off each other."

That communication is something Phillips appreciates, but so is their talent. He also mentioned how Trevathan and Marshall each led the team in tackles in the past two years.

As Marshall and Trevathan are cautiously eased back into action, Phillips is getting a long look at the depth behind them, and they've made quite the impression upon the 38-year NFL coaching veteran.

"Our backup group is probably the best I've ever had," Phillips said, "and I think a lot of those guys can play and have played well in practice."

Between the defense's depth and the talent of its top players, Phillips has plenty of confidence that it will be able to give opposing offenses a multitude of challenging looks that few others can.

Broncos Day 5 Training Camp Takeaways: Green in the red zone

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
August 4, 2015

"Red" didn't necessarily mean stop for the offense as the Broncos emphasized red-zone work during their spirited two-hour practice in full pads. Running the ball in the red zone will be a point of emphasis at some point; as Head Coach Gary Kubiak noted, "I like being physical all over the field."

The run, of course, can set up more opportunities for the passing game, which was one of the NFL's most effective in the red zone the last three years.

"I think if you can make people play eight guys in a box in the red zone and you're not throwing against an eight-man drop or a three-man rush, it sure is a lot easier to run the ball, too," Kubiak said. "The only way you're going to get people to do that is to be able to run the football well down there."

That might take a bit of time, but for the most part, the passing game was effective in the red zone, which is where the Day 5 takeaways begin:

1. BIG PLAYS ON THE OUTSIDE.

Demaryius Thomas' return to full-scale work over the next week will be welcomed. But in his absence, Emmanuel Sanders and Cody Latimer have held up just fine as the first-team duo, with Sanders flourishing in the red zone and Latimer catching everything thrown his way.

Sanders had a lunging grab to beat Chris Harris Jr. that made it into the day's highlight package, and was a consistent target of Peyton Manning's inside the defense's 20-yard-line. Latimer opened his day by streaking past Aqib Talib in a one-on-one drill for a pass from Peyton Manning and continued grabbing passes throughout the seven-on-seven and team periods of the day.

"We all know where we want Cody to be a month from now as far as being a part of this team and a big contributor," said Offensive Coordinator Rick Dennison. "He's on his way. He got the wind knocked out of him a little bit today, but he's doing a good job and a good job on special teams, also."

The Broncos will use more two-tight end and two-back sets as a part of their offense; they have made that clear all year. But there will be opportunities for three-wide work, and the better Latimer does, the more that package will become viable -- especially given Latimer's abilities as a blocker, which distinguished him at Indiana before the Broncos drafted him.

2. TESTING THE KICKERS.

After working in end-game simulations early in training camp, Special Teams Coordinator Joe DeCamillis opted to have kickers Connor Barth and Brandon McManus attempt four field goals apiece from 33, 37,

43 and 49 yards. Barth hit all four of his attempts; McManus hit three and missed wide left from 43 yards.

McManus' leg strength was evident last year, and it remains his calling card. He crushes the football; even when he misses, the ball soars deep and high into the crowd gathered on the west-side viewing slope.

DeCamillis and Kubiak have made it clear they want to use just three roster spots for specialists among punter, kicker, long snapper and kickoff specialists. That's why it was significant that Barth was working on kickoffs Tuesday; he handled that for one game last year before the Broncos brought McManus back from the practice squad. Tuesday, he joined McManus and Karl Schmitz on kickoffs.

Barth's kickoffs in the Week 12 win over Kansas City last year were consistently short, as they were when he kicked for Tampa Bay, which begs the question: what can a veteran kicker like Barth do to remedy that issue?

"There are certain technique things they do," DeCamillis said. It's just like anything else, the more you do it and the better your technique is, the better you're going to be at it. Hopefully, we can get them better."

3. STILL FLUID ON KICKOFF RETURNS.

Omar Bolden and Andre Caldwell each had their turns during the kickoff-return period. Bolden's production late last year after seizing the job from Caldwell would seem to give him an edge, but their roles on defense and offense, respectively, will have an impact.

Bolden as a kickoff returner is a known commodity; he reads his blocks well and has a long stride when he gets going. But his experience on punt returns is scant, and he struggled in the punt-return period Saturday, muffing one return and bobbling another before he corralled the football.

"He was just catching on the field after practice. He's progressing," DeCamillis said. "We just have to see what he does in that first game against Seattle. That's going to be the big tell-tale sign for him. He's done a good job so far."

WR Solomon Patton did not work on kickoff returns Wednesday, but will be in the picture there, as well as on punt returns. Patton had a quieter day on offense than on previous days, but his return skills have impressed DeCamillis.

"For a guy that's that size, he runs strong, which means he's going to break some tackles when he gets there, which for most of those guys, doesn't happen," DeCamillis said. "We're impressed with him so far. Hopefully he can continue."

It's also apparent that the Broncos want plenty of mobile muscle in front of their kickoff returners. Working together in front of Bolden were 265-pound TE Dominique Jones, 270-pound FB/TE Joe Don Duncan, 240-pound TE/FB James Casey, 230-pound long snapper Aaron Brewer and the 215-pound Latimer, the Broncos' second-heaviest receiver. That athletic group could give Bolden -- or whoever ends up returning kickoffs -- plenty of room.

4. KENNY ANUNIKE PASSING THE TEST.

The most pressing question about the second-year Duke alumnus was always going to be this: How will he handle playing at the five-technique defensive end spot at approximately 275 pounds once the pads go on? The answer? Quite well, at least so far. Anunike has been able to use his quickness to get inside of an opposing offensive lineman and burst into the backfield, and hasn't been swallowed in the traffic that develops on a run play.

"He has gained some weight, he has a lot of strength and he's not getting knocked off of the line of scrimmage," Phillips said. "To see him with pads on—because he really did well without pads—and not get blown out of there or knocked back, and be able to do some of the things he did without pads, is encouraging."

Anunike has been able to continue using his quickness to win his share of one-on-one pass-rush drills against opposing guards, including one play Thursday where he actually got enough of a push to knock rookie guard Max Garcia back before spinning past him.

"He still has a way to go," Phillips said, "but he's done a good job so far and I think that he has picked it up since we've gotten pads on."

5. THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES.

This was the first -- and last -- time that the Broncos will practice five consecutive days in succession this year. When they return from their Wednesday respite, they will have four consecutive days on the field before getting next Monday off; after that, the longest burst of full-scale on-field work will be four days leading up to the preseason game against the 49ers. (They will have plenty of weeks in the regular season when they're on the field four days in a row, but the last of those is typically a walk-through session.)

Fatigue during Tuesday's practice was understandable for the Broncos who didn't get a veterans' rest day Monday. Exacerbating the exhaustion was the fact that the last three days were in shoulder pads.

"Usually when you've had your pads on for about three days, that is probably about as bad as they're going to feel all year long," Kubiak said. "I told them today, it's also probably the time you become your best as a player because you have to push through those things."

AND A PARTING SHOT ...

New wide receiver Corbin Louks had a reception on a short crossing route from Trevor Siemian on Tuesday. Louks wears jersey No. 6. Siemian wears No. 3. $6 \times 3 = 18$.

Yes, I'm ready for a day off, too.