

Kiszla: What the Broncos need to do to be legit Super Bowl contenders

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

Broncos coach Vance Joseph wants juice.

Would he settle for a tall, refreshing glass of water?

We all know linebacker Von Miller leads a championship-caliber defense. But the offense was so smelly last season the Broncos not only missed the playoffs, an ugly double yellow line was painted on the carpet of the locker room.

It was an angry divide. Cornerback Aqib Talib and the defenders doing their job stood proudly on one side of the room. And who was on the wrong side of the line? Those hapless slappies on offense that messed it up for Denver.

Since Joseph was named coach in January, one of his favorite words is juice. He uses it repeatedly to describe the offensive explosiveness he wants.

I hope nobody in Broncos Country is expecting fireworks. From all appearances, Denver will be a team that gets down-and-dirty in the trenches, grinding clock and wearing out foes with a run-first attack.

The Broncos did not miss the playoffs by much a year ago. A return to the postseason will require the offense to be only slightly more effective. Let's quantify how small an improvement could make a world of difference.

Denver scored 333 points in 2016. Score 375 points this season, and the team will not only qualify for the Super Bowl tournament, I'd say there's at least a 75 percent chance the Broncos will win the AFC West and earn a first-round bye.

Here's the translation: If the Denver offense can produce one more stinking field goal per game, everybody will be toasting Joseph with champagne, not juice.

But here's the caveat: One more field goal per game won't come easy for these Broncos.

Only a matter of months after winning Super Bowl 50, Gary Kubiak was widely criticized for running a painfully conservative offense. While the play-calling was less than imaginative as the defending league champion tumbled to a 9-7 record, I would argue the bigger problem was lack of player talent.

Since the Broncos last played a game that counted in the standings, Kubiak has retired as coach, general manager John Elway rebuilt the offensive line, and Mike McCoy and Bill Musgrave were hired as assistant coaches to give Trevor Siemian a quarterback whisperer in each ear.

Although it's always an inexact science to find any absolute truths in NFL preseason games, this much seemed obvious after examination of the three exhibition games before Denver starters took a seat and began preparation for the Los Angeles Chargers: The work Elway did on the offensive line will reap one immediate benefit.

With veteran Menelik Watson and rookie Garrett Bolles installed as new starters at tackle, as well as the guard position being refortified by free agent Ronald Leary and veteran Allen Barbre, the Broncos will run the ball more effectively than a season ago. Denver averaged a meager 3.6 yards per rush in 2016, which ranked 27th in the 32-team league. A reasonable goal this season seems to be 4.2 yards per carry, which would rank the Broncos in the middle of the NFL pack.

Whether the revamped offensive line can protect Siemian, however, seems to be very much in doubt. Denver quarterbacks were sacked on 6.56 percent of their dropbacks in 2016, which ranked 24th in the NFL. During the first three preseason games of this summer, Siemian and back-up Paxton Lynch were sacked during 7.24 percent of their passing attempts.

Folks love Siemian because of his unflappable demeanor and self-deprecating humor. He's the QB from next door. He doesn't have to be Peyton Manning. Joseph wants him to be Trevor. The goals are vanilla. Stay healthy. Move the chains. Milk the clock. A year ago, Denver drives ended with the third highest percentage of three-and-outs in the league. That must improve.

There's one statistic that has caught my fancy that reinforces why even a little improvement by Denver's offense can mean a lot. The stat is points per possession, which is a fairly straightforward measure of offensive efficiency. In 2016, the Broncos averaged 1.61 points per possession. The league mean was 1.94 points per possession. If Joseph can promise me the Broncos will be merely average in points per possession, I'm willing to guarantee Denver will make the playoffs.

"The offense works," Joseph said. "It fits our guys."

These guys don't have to be great. Being average would be an improvement. The last thing the Broncos want is to get into shootouts with New England, Dallas, Oakland and the top offensive teams on their schedule.

The winning formula for Denver in 2017: First team to 21 points wins.

And if the Broncos can average 24 points per game? They're legit Super Bowl contenders.

Kiszla: Are Broncos any good? Or just plain lucky? Big questions after 24-21 win in opener.

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

The stadium rocked until almost midnight, with the mile-high thunder rumbling at 112 decibels. Broncos Country stayed up late to relieve that pent-up orange, festering inside since Denver missed the playoffs last season. And what better way to get the ya-ya's out than yelling at old nemesis Philip Rivers?

Denver held on to beat the Los Angeles Chargers 24-21 Monday. Shelby Harris reached up with his right hand to block a 44-yard field goal attempt by Younghoe Koo in the final five seconds of the fourth quarter. Go ahead, you can exhale now. But get used to the nervous tension. Nothing will come easy for this team.

"It wasn't clean, but it was good to win," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "It's a hard league."

The NFL scheduled kickoff for 8:15 p.m. the final game of opening weekend, which seemed cruel and unusual punishment for Denver, which regards football as somewhere between air and water as essential to life.

By blowing nearly all of a 17-point lead, the Broncos did not allay many fears. But they did check some boxes.

After one game as a head coach, Joseph is undefeated. Yes, late-game management could use some work But he refused to let his team panic. And he iced the kicker with a timeout. Check.

Quarterback Trevor Siemian generally looked comfortable operating an offense designed for Paxton Lynch, throwing for 219 yards and two touchdown passes, while running for another score. Check.

A Denver defense whose greatness had been tarnished by weakness against the run made a statement as loud as the crushing tackle linebacker Todd Davis put on running back Melvin Gordon on fourth-and-1 to snuff out a Chargers drive early in the fourth quarter. Check.

Rookie Garrett Bolles, the first-round draft choice and centerpiece of a rebuilt offensive line, was thrown in the fire against L.A. defensive end Joey Bosa, one of the fiercest pass-rushers on the planet. Check? Well, not quite. Let's generously call Bolles a work in progress. At least he was better than fellow tackle Menelik Watson, so bad in pass protection I had Michael Schofield flashbacks.

In all the league, no fan base is sunnier with optimism than Broncos Country. Maybe it's the blue Colorado skies forever. Or the three Super Bowl rings won by Denver since Pat Bowlen purchased the team in 1984.

But this year feels different. More uncertain. Few outside the Broncos huddle, with the possible exception of John Elway, truly believes this team is championship material. Is anybody drinking the

orange Kool-Aid? The vibe I got from fans was definitely a glass half full, but perhaps filled with vodka, for courage.

There was David Litzau, a true-blue Broncos fanatic, who told me the team would win 11 games, linebacker Von Miller would be named defensive player of the year and quarterback Trevor Siemian would throw for 3,600 yards and 24 touchdowns. But, at the same time, Keith Wyatt of Henderson spoke for many nervous fans by predicting: "Brock Osweiler replaces Siemian after a 1-4 start" for a team that would struggle to establish an offensive identity. While Shantay Simoni of Brighton counted on a "Cry Me a Rivers" victory in the home-opener, she also worried, "The AFC West is so tough it's questionable to make the playoffs."

Is Denver ready for prime time? Who knows? With kickoff after 10 p.m. on the East Coast, folks in New York City were asleep by the time Denver took a 24-7 lead into the fourth quarter. A Siemian interception and a fumble by Jamaal Charles, however, gave the Chargers not one mulligan, but two.

"The game was in firm control for about three quarters and we felt good," Joseph said. "But you turn the ball over twice, on the short side of the 50 (yard line), and it's going to be a problem with Philip Rivers."

Rivers rallied the Chargers to a strong position to force overtime on L.A.'s final offensive possession. Koo lined up for a field goal well within his range. But, it was the same result as the season-opener a year ago, when then Denver coach Gary Kubiak iced Carolina kicker Graham Gano, whose 50-yard field goal was wiped out by a timely time out.

Are these Broncos good? Or lucky? It's a new season. But the old questions linger for a team that will make it hard to sleep at night.

Broncos survive late Chargers push, give Vance Joseph first win as Denver coach

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

When Vance Joseph was hired in January and stood before a crowd of reporters and players and coaches to announce his arrival, he spelled out his simple mission statement. He wanted his offense to be “attacking.” He wanted it to score early and he wanted it to score often and even though he didn’t know then who his quarterback would be, Joseph knew how he wanted him to play: with swagger.

“Being a defensive guy my entire career, only 14 seasons, when you play on offense that is attacking, it makes you be careful of your calls,” Joseph said that day. “If an offense was conservative, I loved it because I can be the attacker, but if the offense was attacking, with multiple personnel groups and all types of formations, that is what I want them to look like.”

Message received. For three quarters, anyway.

In their season opener against the Chargers on Monday night, the Broncos came out firing and narrowly escaped for a 24-21 victory, won with a blocked field-goal attempt in the waning seconds.

With the win, Trevor Siemian became the sixth Broncos quarterback in history to notch victories in his first two Week 1 starts. He finished with 17-of-28 completions, 219 yards, a rushing touchdown, two passing touchdowns (both to Bennie Fowler), one pick and a passer rating of 94.2. But he also took four sacks and watched his generally impressive first outing of the season nearly unravel in the final quarter.

Siemian got the Broncos on the board early, something they were unaccustomed to last year, when he engineered a 13-play, 70-yard drive for a score. A bull-dozing hit by Melvin Ingram knocked him back nearly five yards, but Siemian regained his composure and threaded the needle for a 20-yard completion to tight end Jeff Heurman. A pass to Fowler three plays later picked up a first down and helped set up the 5-yard TD to Fowler.

Bang. Bang.

“That’s Trevor. That’s his instinct,” Joseph said. “As far as Trevor, he played very well outside of the turnover in the fourth quarter. He was poised. He was smart at the line of scrimmage for us tonight, accurate with the football.”

Last season the Broncos scored a touchdown on only four first possessions and ranked last in the NFL with only 40 first-quarter points. Consider one flaw, so far, improved.

Siemian’s performance and the offense’s play as a whole posed a stark contrast to their struggles they endured for most of last season. But it was littered with costly errors, especially late when Siemian was intercepted in the fourth and Jamaal Charles fumbled shortly after. The Broncos 24-7 lead to open the fourth nearly disappeared with a pair of Chargers touchdowns scored about a minute apart.

"I learned pretty quickly nothing is certain, especially when you're playing a guy like Philip Rivers on the other sideline," Siemian said. "Down the stretch there, I think offensively we could have made a few more plays to help our defense out. But, shoot, a win's a win. We'll take it however we can get it."

There were mistakes early too, none bigger than the 40-yard pass-interference penalty on Bradley Roby that resulted in game-tying score for Los Angeles in the second quarter.

And Denver's retooled offensive line still had two glaring weaknesses on the edges. Rookie Garrett Bolles and veteran Menelik Watson both struggled in handling Ingram and Joey Bosa, leading to four sacks on Siemian, two of which were on back-to-back plays in the fourth.

But the bright spots were aplenty and showed Siemian's year-over-year improvement as a starter and peeled back the curtain on Joseph's vision for an attacking offense.

"It's an 11-man operation plus (offensive coordinator Mike) McCoy and the whole staff," Siemian said. "We feel really good about where we're at. We did some good things. Obviously the red zone we want to clean up and finishing the game, we need to do a better job that. But it feels good to win and to beat a divisional opponent at home, and then go back and say, 'Hey, we can fix some of these things, too.'"

Midway through the second quarter, rookie Isaiah McKenzie, who was named the a Broncos starting punt returner, early in camp, flashed his speed and quickness on a 31-yard return that set up a one-yard rushing touchdown by Siemian, the first of his career. The nine-play scoring drive included three runs for 36 total yards, and a nine-yard pass up the middle to tight end A.J. Derby on a third-and-7.

The Broncos trio of tight ends accounted for five catches and 98 yards, a drastic improvement from the 36 yards the tight ends averaged per game last season. And their two running backs coming off knee injuries, C.J. Anderson and Charles, collected 121 of the team's 140 rushing yards, a leap from the 92.8 rushing yards per game average of 2016.

The Broncos opened the year with a goal of leading the league in pass defense for the third-consecutive season and improving a run defense that fell to 28th in the NFL in 2016. Despite almost failing to finish, the Broncos, statistically, are well on their way.

The Chargers were held to 249 net passing yards, with only 64 on the ground and 185 in the air. Philip Rivers completed 66.7 percent of his passes and was picked off once, by Roby, who quickly sought to avenge his earlier PI call. Roby's interception set up the Broncos' third touchdown of the night as Siemian engineered a 48-yard drive and found Fowler up the middle for a six-yard strike.

The defense, playing without starters Jared Crick (back) and Shane Ray (injured reserve, wrist), seemed to have little trouble pressuring Rivers — and from all angles. Six defenders each had a quarterback hit, and Shaquil Barrett, starting in place of Ray, notched a sack. No hit was bigger or more significant than Todd Davis' punishing tackle of Gordon for a loss of two yards on a Chargers fourth-and-1, and no play bigger than Shelby Harris' game-ending blocked field goal.

Harris, who signed a future/reserves contract in January, is so far proving to be one of the Broncos' best offseason acquisitions. In the first quarter he had a key hit on Rivers, and in the final seconds, after Joseph iced kicker Younghoe Koo on a 44-yard attempt to tie it, Harris leapt to tip the kick.

“You’re just like, ‘Man, we just won the game. I think we just won the game,’” Harris recalled. “And then when everyone starts going crazy, it’s like, ‘I just won the game.’ ... It feels great to do anything to help the team win. It’s not about the individual glory.”

After the game, outside linebacker Von Miller awarded Joseph the game ball for earning his first victory as an NFL head coach.

The victory was always a part of Joseph’s vision back in January. The first three quarters were, too.

“It wasn’t clean, but it’s good to win,” he said. “It’s a hard league and every week is going to be a challenge. A win’s a win. We’ll take it.”

Vance Joseph out to create “Championship Habits” in Denver

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

To the left:

“IRON SHARPENS
IRON, LIKE MAN
SHARPENS MAN”

And to the right:

“BE THE MASTER
OF YOUR
ATTITUDE.”

Just outside the auditorium hangs the largest sign — CHAMPIONSHIP HABITS — in all caps and all blue, consuming an entire wall next to the locker room.

Vance Joseph was hired as the Broncos’ 16th head coach in January and in his less than eight months on the job, the team has undergone a huge change in culture — on the field and off. His fingerprints are everywhere, from the meeting rooms to the players’ T-shirts, to the staff and to the playbook, all bearing the lessons he has learned and lived by as a player and coach.

“It’s simple. I didn’t want a bunch of messages where they’re long mission statements,” said Joseph, 44. “I wanted just three or four things where we all could grab. It’s easy. ‘Championship habits.’ What’s that? It’s a lifestyle for us.”

It’s also a cultural fit that general manager John Elway sought when Gary Kubiak stepped down as coach at the end of last season. After winning Super Bowl 50 behind a historically elite defense, the post-Peyton Manning era in Denver began with a playoff-less dud and raised more questions than answers about the team’s future.

Joseph arrived as one of the former, being a first-year head coach with only one year of experience as a coordinator. But in developing a staff brimming with play-callers, in implementing a new offensive scheme, in overseeing another quarterback competition and in slowly peeling back the layers of his vision, Joseph has since spun the uncertainty into hope and promise.

“When you talk about culture, we talk about what that locker room means, how important the players (are) and the way that the players are treated,” Elway said upon hiring Joseph. “The culture becomes something that is very important. This team is less than a year removed from a world championship. It has not been a year since we’ve won the Super Bowl, so it’s very important to find somebody that can fit the culture that we had and also has a philosophy of the culture that we have in this building. Vance checks that box. He has that.”

Elway gets his man

On Jan. 12, Joseph was presented to a crowded room of reporters and Broncos players and coaches at Dove Valley as a “leader of men,” a distinguished label for a man who had never been a head coach. Elway wanted him two years earlier to be the Broncos’ defensive coordinator when Kubiak was hired as head coach. Cincinnati would not let him go. And Elway wanted Joseph again after Kubiak stepped down. He has the indescribable. The moxie. The “it” factor.

Some believe coaches are born with “it” and the wise ones use pieces of their past to apply to their future. Joseph has taken pieces from his first NFL boss in San Francisco, Mike Nolan — “He was a grinder,” Joseph said — and Nolan’s successor, former Bears star Mike Singletary.

“He was a great message guy,” Joseph said of Singletary. “He can motivate and move the room.”

He took pieces from Kubiak, for whom Joseph worked as Houston’s defensive backs coach from 2010-13.

“Good or bad, you couldn’t tell if he was stressed,” Joseph said. “That’s a (heck) of a trait for a head coach.”

He learned some coverage packages from former Bengals defensive coordinator Mike Zimmer, now the Minnesota Vikings’ head coach, that he brought with him to Denver. And he gained a “picture of longevity” and appreciation for “old-school football” from Bengals head coach Marvin Lewis.

And from his lone season as Adam Gase’s defensive coordinator in Miami a year ago, Joseph learned to trust the process.

“We were 1-4, but the process and the message didn’t change,” Joseph said. “And it turned. We won nine straight.”

“Every guy I was with I learned something from.”

Joseph arrived at each coaching stop with something few can claim, a background on offense as a player — a quarterback at the University of Colorado — and a coaching career spent entirely on the defensive side.

“It helps with this job because I can talk to both sides and kind of relate to the quarterbacks and the defense,” he said. “So from that perspective I’m happy I’ve played on both sides of the ball, because I have a true overall picture of what it should look like and most guys don’t.”

Broncos wide receiver Demaryius Thomas calls him a “players’ coach.” Others have said the same.

“The guys all respect him,” said safety Darian Stewart. “He gets the game because he played the game. ... I know this is his first time (as head coach) and everyone is wondering, but when you’re a leader, you’re a leader.”

Nolan, now the linebackers coach for the New Orleans Saints, said he was tipped off to Joseph's coaching ability when Joseph was the defensive backs coach at Bowling Green in 2004.

"A very intelligent young guy and the fact that he had played offense and was a defensive coach was something I always looked for because it's important that guys have a well-rounded knowledge of the game," Nolan said. "And he was good in all of those. He's good people."

Elway wanted a coach who relates well to the players, who can motivate a locker room of varied and boisterous personalities, who can guide the offense to new heights and maintain an elite defense.

Holding it all together

Joseph is in many ways the glue of the team, a role he's comfortable in taking but one that's required adjustments on his part, too. He's learned how to schedule. He's learned how to decorate. He's learning the process of managing and manipulating a roster that starts at 90, must be pared to 53 and constantly retooled.

"I'm not coaching a position and I'm not calling a defense," Joseph said. "And that's different for me. I want to get in there so bad and take over and micromanage, but I don't want to do it to my guys. I've been micromanaged before and I didn't like it so I'm going to allow Joe (Woods) to do his job, and Johnnie (Lynn) and those guys to be the defensive backs coaches and I won't get in their way."

As a positional coach or even a coordinator, Joseph's focus narrowed compared to the macro view he must take now.

"It's different because it's the entire roster," he said. "I want the best guys for the roster. Sometimes, when you're building a roster, you make decisions on how well they play for (special teams coordinator) Brock (Olivo), smarts or whether they're staying healthy. Those things come into play when you're building a roster, not just the promising talented guy. They could be a guy who is a smart guy who can help you in all phases. That's where my job changes. It's about building the best roster overall from top to bottom."

To do so, he first built a team of coaches, a roster of play-callers to execute his vision and add new details of their own.

Joseph's roots are firmly planted in Colorado, though he grew up in Louisiana and traveled across the country on various stops of his coaching career. The former CU quarterback began his coaching career as a graduate assistant for the Buffaloes, but never until the Broncos called early this year did he think he'd truly return to the state as a Bronco.

"This job wasn't on my radar," he said. "No jobs were, to be honest. Because you don't know. As a coordinator, you want to do the best you can do to make your defense and make your team better and if a job presents itself and they happen to call, you interview. But Denver was not on my radar because it wasn't open. I was a first-time coordinator (in Miami) and I was trying to do my job and get better at that."

The hiring happened quickly, after a phone call to his agent, a lengthy interview with Broncos officials at Dove Valley and dinner at Elway's Steakhouse, where so many big moments in Broncos history have started (and ended).

Among Joseph's first calls after accepting the job was to another man familiar with the Broncos. Mike McCoy was his first choice as offensive coordinator, a position McCoy held in Denver from 2009-12. Bill Musgrave was Joseph's first choice as quarterbacks coach, and Joe Woods was eyed to replace Wade Phillips as defensive coordinator. All three accepted offers.

Joseph's offensive staff includes five with play-calling experience. His defensive staff includes five holdovers from last year, plus two others — defensive backs coach Marcus Robertson and his assistant, Johnnie Lynn — to help supervise the "No-Fly Zone" secondary.

The intent behind each hiring was strategic, formed by lessons learned and advice heeded in Joseph's 13 years of NFL coaching. In Denver, it's the start of something new. But really, it's a collection of Joseph's past.

"The culture in Denver has already been set," Joseph said. "It's a culture of winning as far as the overall building. Every year team cultures change. Last year, that culture of playing great defense wasn't the same in the building. I want a culture of transparency of everyone doing their job. We have to get back to just playing football. Reboot this thing and get everyone back to doing their job. If we do that, it's going to be a fun season."

Trevor Siemian has remained true to himself through two years of Broncos QB competitions

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

Something changed in Trevor Siemian the first week of August, when training camp practices hit a rhythm and coordinator Mike McCoy installed more and more of his complex offense. The switch was noticeable to most, as Siemian appeared more consistent on the field and more sarcastic off.

In his weekly addresses to media he humorously referred to himself as “slappy” — twice. “I just think I’m a ‘slappy’ in general,” he said.

In responding to persistent questions about the pressure of competing for the starting job, again, he remained optimistic. “Shoot, they haven’t fired me yet,” he said.

And, in seeing a reporter fumble at a press briefing, as so often they did, he couldn’t help but to jokingly point it out. “Jeez, Mike. Really?!” he’d say. (That one was and still is used quite often.)

Siemian, the seventh-round pick out of Northwestern who was never supposed to make it, has done just that. And he finally seems comfortable in his arrival. He has won the Broncos starting job two years in a row, each time with a different head coach and different offense, validating his long-held belief that he indeed earned his spot.

“You have to understand your role as a quarterback,” he said. “You’re a leader of the team and you have to embrace that, and I do. But also, I’m just going to be myself, be authentic, a good teammate and be a good quarterback. Hopefully, guys can rely on me. That’s my mind-set.”

When Gary Kubiak pushed to select Siemian at No. 250 overall in the 2015 draft, it got little notice. The team had a future Hall of Famer in Peyton Manning, a ready successor in Brock Osweiler and Siemian limped into his first NFL camp limited by a knee injury.

But Kubiak knew what he saw and knew what Siemian could become, so when Osweiler left for Houston after the Broncos’ Super Bowl 50 victory, Siemian entered a race few expected him to finish, let alone win. Twice.

In 2016, the unlikely candidate beat out veteran Mark Sanchez, whom the Broncos traded for with plans to start him, and 2016 first-round pick Paxton Lynch. Joseph, upon his hiring in January, announced the quarterback competition would be “50-50,” in other words wide open. Siemian beat out Lynch once more in a system many thought was tailored for Lynch, the tall kid with better arm strength and an ability to run the ball.

The truth is it was also built for Siemian.

“Mike built the system for both guys. It wasn’t built for Paxton; it was built for the quarterback,” Joseph said. “... You know, Trevor gets no credit for being a guy with a great arm. That’s never been talked about.”

And in an ironic twist of fate, now Osweiler will be Siemian’s backup. The veteran re-signed with Denver for the veteran’s minimum to serve as Siemian’s backup while Lynch recovers from a right shoulder sprain.

When healthy, Year 2 for Lynch will be another for development. Although Lynch improved drastically from his rookie season, Siemian was the more consistent quarterback throughout training camp and especially the first two preseason games, after which Joseph anointed him the starter.

Expectations are high for a first-round pick, and they’ll remain as such for Lynch.

“Moving forward, he knows that he is one play away from playing,” Joseph said. “He can’t lose his enthusiasm to keep getting better as a quarterback. That’s a big deal for him. Just keep his focus, be a good teammate and keep working.”

They’re even higher for Siemian as he enters his second season as the starter. In his 14 starts last year, he threw for 3,401 yards, recorded three 300-yard games, and also left plenty of room for improvement.

Throughout Kubiak’s final year as head coach, he said his young quarterback had to do a better job of protecting himself, even when the blocking broke down. Doing so was on Siemian’s personal checklist when he returned to Dove Valley this spring.

“I think the way to stay on the field and the way you stay healthy is just decision-making,” he said. “Look at some of the older guys who manage to stay healthy — I mean everybody gets dinged up, no doubt. That’s going to happen. But, getting the ball out when you have to and moving around when you have to. Some of the older guys in the league that are never off the field aren’t the strongest guys in the world but are obviously very smart players that know how to take care of their bodies.”

Siemian’s decision-making, as well as his consistency and ball-placement all helped him maintain a firm grip on the starting job.

And it will be key to the Broncos’ hopes of returning to the playoffs.

“He won nine games last year and probably could have won 10 or 11,” Joseph said. “So I’m excited about Trevor. Protecting him more than we did last year, running the football better and continue to play great defense, I think he fits the bill for us.”

Broncos' fiery No Fly Zone has been altered but is still chasing history

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

September 12, 2017

For \$29.99, a No Fly Zone T-shirt bearing one of its founders and his signature pass-breakup celebration can still be obtained. It's a classic now and will soon be vintage as the brand that was built in 2014, reached its peak in 2015 and continues to thrive is being weaned off Chris Harris' website.

Harris, entering his sixth NFL season, is focusing on a different line of merchandise. His own line. "Strap Harris," they call him.

But he'll be darned if the No Fly Zone is ever forgotten. And they'll be darned if anyone claims their fame, though the Jets tried.

"We just laugh at it," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "They have no plays on tape. It's cute."

This group of five — not four — defensive backs began with Harris, an undrafted free agent who learned from Champ Bailey and Brian Dawkins, and took flight in 2014. General manager John Elway's shopping spree that summer following a demoralizing Super Bowl XLVIII loss brought in Talib and safety T.J. Ward, who was released after the final exhibition game. In the draft that spring Denver landed a third corner, Ohio State's Bradley Roby. And a year later, the final piece few knew was missing was filled in when the Broncos signed safety Darian Stewart, who had bounced from St. Louis to Baltimore before landing in Denver. And in 2016, they welcomed their youngest members, Justin Simmons and Will Parks.

The group has embraced being a cast of misfits.

"Nobody wanted to pick me," Roby said. "I slid all the way down as the fifth cornerback (in the draft). Chris, undrafted. Talib, all his off-the-field incidents. Everybody questions his character and this and that and he still comes back year after year as one of the top defensive backs. ... Darian Stewart, undrafted. Even down to the little guys. Justin Simmons, unknown Boston College guy. Will Parks, sixth-round Arizona guy. Elway does a great job, as I see it, putting in like-minded, like-attitude guys together."

The roster arrangement has long been part of the challenge Elway strives to figure out every year. The other part is winning. In the Broncos' self-named No Fly Zone, a secondary that has become the boisterous backbone of the defense, Elway has found a mix of personalities and talent to form an historically elite unit that continues to chase history.

"One thing with those guys, when I came in right away those guys all had a chip on their shoulder," said defensive coordinator Joe Woods, who was previously the Broncos' defensive backs coach. "You want to call it pride. When they all come out to compete they hate to get beat. It's not perfect. They'll complete a couple of passes on us, but those guys take it personal. That's the thing I love about them. You can see that whole back end. You can see the young guys starting to gravitate and become the same type of players in terms of their attitude."

Belief in their greatness

There are a few unofficial competitions brewing regarding which defensive backfield in recent years is the best.

The first is with the Seattle Seahawks' Legion of Boom, starring cornerback Richard Sherman and disruptive safeties Kam Chancellor and Earl Thomas. The group capped their banner year in 2013 by shutting down the Broncos in Super Bowl XLVIII.

Harris could only watch the destruction from afar as he was recovering from a torn ACL. Elway, of course, watched with his eyes on a rebuild, turning the then offensive-first Broncos into a defensive powerhouse. But that landslide loss has never faded from the minds of Harris or anyone upstairs at the Broncos' headquarters.

The No Fly Zone gives little thought to elite secondaries of the past. Just Seattle. And without hesitating Harris has declared the Broncos victors of this competition.

"I'd say we got better corners than them," he said. "I think they just got Sherm and a lot of other guys they just place in there, but we have better corners."

In Harris and Talib, the Broncos have arguably the best cornerback duo in franchise history. The former University of Kansas teammates are the second cornerback duo all-time to earn three consecutive Pro Bowl nods (2014-16), are two of just five NFL corners who have recorded multiple interceptions in each of the past five seasons, and were both voted first-team all-pro in 2016.

Since 2008, when Talib was drafted in the first round by Tampa Bay, he leads all cornerbacks with 33 interceptions and is tied for fourth-all time with nine career pick-sixes. His company? Three Hall of Famers: Deion Sanders, Aeneas Williams and Ken Houston.

"All of those guys played 14-15 years plus," Talib said. "I feel like I'm on the right path so now I have to just finish; I have to finish out my career strong and maybe I'll have a chance."

But the Broncos' cornerbacks come in a pack of three and this pack is out to create a new blueprint.

Three outstanding cornerbacks

The No Fly Zone's second unofficial competition is with the future of the game, and the No Fly Zone believes — unsurprisingly — it has an edge here, too.

"I don't know why they act like there are only two corners out there now," Roby said. "I can see back in the day with two corners but now there are three corners a lot of the time, so they need to change that conversation. We're already the top trio so there's no debate on that.

"It fuels me. Of course I want to be included with them. We're the best. Why would I not want to get credit for my part in doing that. But when I'm not, I like to use that as motivation. I don't hate on those guys. I look up to them."

Among their many lofty goals this season, the No Fly Zone is out to make three the standard and make Roby a Pro Bowler.

Roby, the youngest of the group, is a starter in reps and impact, but not tradition. While base defenses call for two corners, the Broncos spend most of their time in subpackages with Roby on the field as No. 3. He's played inside, he's played outside, he's even played safety. Now he wants to be known as a regular among the No Fly.

Last season Roby played nearly 60 percent of the defense's snaps and notched two pick-sixes. He'll also likely tell you the fire of the No Fly Zone was dimmed last year.

"We were just riding the wave, riding the Super Bowl wave and that human tendency to relax and complacency kind of set in while the league, everybody else in the league is gunning for us," he said. "Everybody else is picking it up. And I think last year collectively we didn't do a good job of bringing that same intensity."

The arrival of head coach Vance Joseph, once a defensive backs coach and defensive coordinator who eyed Roby in the 2014 draft when Joseph was in Cincinnati, was a big piece of the culture change at Dove Valley. The elevation of Woods to coordinator and the hires of defensive backs coach Marcus Robertson, a former all-pro free safety, and assistant Johnnie Lynn raised the intensity more.

"We added another level to our room, just helping us make more plays, strong minds in the room," Stewart said. "I think that we're going to be able to do some great things with adding them to the bunch."

The Broncos added another by subtracting one of its most fiery characters in Ward, an eighth-year safety whose personality and tenacity epitomized the No Fly. Simmons and Parks, members of the "Baby No Fly Zone," were placed on the fast track and the team believes they're ready to really fly.

"You are what you put on tape, and so it doesn't really matter what I say," Simmons said. "What matters is that I put on Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, you know, moving into the season. I'm excited for it. I'm excited for the challenge."

The team, led by its secondary, has a staff that knows and treasures the secondary and who might have the tricks to guide the No Fly Zone to victory in their third unofficial competition.

Building their legacy

It's really a conversation about legacy.

In 2015, the No Fly Zone — aided by the stout pass rush of Von Miller, DeMarcus Ware and the defensive line — led the league with only 199.6 passing yards allowed per game.

Despite missing the playoffs last season, the Broncos' pass defense improved with just 185.8 passing yards allowed to again lead the league.

“We’re trying to be No. 1 three years in a row,” Harris said. “That’s our main goal. Just trying to do something that nobody has ever done before. ... It’s definitely something I want them to remember us as, and I think they will if we go three years in a row No. 1.”

The Broncos have retained some elements of Wade Phillips’ pressure-filled scheme. But Joseph brought in new elements, and Woods added a few wrinkles of his own. Instead of playing primarily man coverage, the Broncos are utilizing more zone, allowing the cornerbacks to focus more on the quarterback with the hope they’ll accrue more pass-breakups and interceptions.

Harris had two picks last season. He expects at least four this season.

“This year we’re going to try to stay under 200 (yards),” Harris said. “That’s the main goal. But I think our run defense is going to be a lot better this year so we’ll get more passes.”

The Broncos’ offense is adapting once again to a new system with a relatively young quarterback in Trevor Siemian and a retooled support group around him. The defense is still very much the leader of the Broncos and the No Fly Zone is still a leader of the defense.

And they know it.

But there is one opponent they’ll never be able to beat: time.

Talib is coming off a career season but is also 31. And Ward is gone. The proverbial window on the defense and the No Fly Zone has been discussed often, but the only ones listening are outside the Broncos’ walls.

Elway sure doesn’t listen to it. Nor does Harris.

“I feel like I’m coming into my prime,” he said. “I feel like I’m about to have a great year, so I don’t hear anything about windows closing.”

But if you want to tell them their window is closing, if you want to tell them that other secondaries are better, if you want to tell them that they have only two elite corners instead of three, if you want to tell them that leading the league in pass defense three years in a row is unfeasible, go on.

They’ll love it.

Broncos run defense rises up against Melvin Gordon, Chargers run game

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

Melvin Gordon saw the crease as two of his offensive linemen teamed up to pin down Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe.

One quick step and Gordon, the third-year running back for the Los Angeles Chargers, was deep into the secondary for a 21-yard gain.

The Broncos were left scratching their heads.

“We hadn’t really seen that run in practice,” defensive end Adam Gotsis said. “That was something new.”

The Broncos reconfigured their defensive line in the offseason to plug some of the holes like the one Gordon sprinted through early in Monday night’s season opener. But injuries ravaged the group during training camp. Projected starting defensive end Jared Crick missed Monday’s game because of a back injury. Zach Kerr, a free-agent acquisition from Indianapolis, also was inactive.

So thin were the Broncos along the defensive line that they had to call up Tyrique Jarrett, an undrafted rookie, from the practice squad to add precious depth.

Yet, Gordon’s run wasn’t a harbinger of nightmares to come for the Broncos’ run defense. It was simply an invitation to access a higher gear. The unit did just that while largely putting the clamps on Gordon and the Chargers’ run game, which managed only 37 yards on 14 carries in the first half after the big run to open the game.

“That first play, yeah, he got like 20 yards, but then, after that, we kind of recuperated and made sure there were no holes for him to run in,” said defensive end Shelby Harris, who received a hero’s greeting in the locker room after blocking the Chargers’ would-be game-tying field goal to end the game.

Told Gordon had only 33 yards on 17 carries following the big early run, Harris wasn’t surprised.

“We expect that every week,” he said.

The Broncos’ refusal to bend on the ground was defined by one crunching tackle early in the fourth quarter. The Chargers, trailing 24-7 and facing a fourth-and-1 near midfield in the fourth quarter, turned again to Gordon.

Todd Davis turned him away. The inside linebacker bolted into the backfield and buried Gordon before he could gather any forward momentum, forcing a turnover on downs.

“I just decided to shoot my gun,” Davis said. “I knew we needed a big stop right there. I decided to shoot it, and it ended up working out.”

There wasn't much running to be done by the Chargers in the second half, not with Los Angeles facing a 17-point deficit at the start of the fourth quarter. Bigger tests on the ground await, including Sunday against Ezekiel Elliott and the Dallas Cowboys. But the Broncos emerged from their opener Monday night with room for optimism regarding their run defense after finishing 28th against the run in 2016.

“We feel like we're doing a good job up front, controlling the line and getting a little bit of knock back,” Gotsis said. ”

The defensive line held its own against the Chargers, and it had help. Safeties Darian Stewart and Justin Simmons wreaked havoc when they approached the line of scrimmage. On one key play in the third quarter, linebacker Shaquil Barrett blew through the line to push Gordon further outside on a run play than was designed, and Stewart zoomed into to take down the speedy back at the knees.

While the Broncos made gains against the run after in inauspicious start, the team's pass defense continued to be customarily stingy. Before a drive that began with 10:37 left in the fourth quarter, quarterback Philip Rivers had managed only 82 passing yards.

Two turnovers by the Broncos' offense in the fourth quarter gave the Chargers life. And Philip Rivers nearly took advantage, throwing two touchdown passes before leading his team into range for a game-tying field goal.

But Harris got three fingers on the kick from the Chargers Younghoe Koo, just enough force to thwart the 44-yard attempt.

One big run marked an inauspicious start. But the bandaged defensive line for the Broncos left the field in triumph late Monday night.

Bennie Fowler emerges as end-zone target during Broncos victory over Chargers

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

Bennie Fowler's most memorable highlight in the end zone used to be the two-point conversion pass he caught from Peyton Manning to put a bow on the Broncos' victory in Super Bowl 50.

No longer.

Fowler made good on all of the talk among Broncos coaches during training camp about the receiver's progression in the offseason.

Fowler caught two touchdown passes from Trevor Siemian during Denver's 24-21 victory over the Chargers in Monday night's regular-season opener, signaling his status as a reliable third receiver.

The scoring connections, Fowler said, were merely a sign of the chemistry he's built with a quarterback from the time both were third-string players in 2015.

"I've been on the same page with Trev for like three years now," Fowler said. "He's part of the reason I made the team as an undrafted rookie. Hopefully, it continues to happen."

On his first touchdown catch, on third down during the Broncos' second drive of the game, Fowler made a fully extended 5-yard grab in the back of the end zone to give the Broncos a 7-0 lead.

"They jumped offsides, so we had a free play, and Trevor made a great throw to the back of the end zone," Fowler said.

The second scoring catch came in the third quarter on third-and-goal from the 6-yard line and gave the Broncos a 21-7 lead.

Roby makes good. Bradley Roby was called for pass interference in the first quarter and it cost the Broncos big. The 40-yard penalty put the Chargers on the doorstep of the red zone, and they scored a few plays later to tie the game.

Roby made up for the miscue by intercepting Philip Rivers near midfield in the third quarter, a turnover the Broncos converted for a touchdown to give them a 21-7 advantage.

Roby was called for another pass interference on the Chargers' final drive of the game, a flag that moved Los Angeles into field goal range. But Shelby Harris blocked Younghoe Koo's 44-yard field goal attempt to end the final threat.

McKenzie provides burst. Isaiah McKenzie wasted no time winning a job. The fifth-round draft pick out of Georgia was named the Broncos' punt returner during the second week of training camp.

McKenzie showed why he belonged in the spotlight. The speedster caught his first punt in the second quarter of the regular-season opener against the Chargers and raced 31 yards up the right sideline, reaching the Denver 44-yard line before being shoved out of bounds.

The big return helped set up a nine-play, 56-yard touchdown drive by the Broncos that ended in a 1-yard Trevor Siemian touchdown run and gave Denver a 14-7 lead.

Left guards split time. Max Garcia, who battled with Allen Barbre throughout training camp for the top spot at left guard, earned the start Monday night.

Barbre took over at left guard on the Broncos' second series and the two continued to rotate, confirming coach Vance Joseph's claim that both players could see playing time.

Inactives. Injuries ravaged the Broncos' defense during training and the preseason and they entered Monday's opener thin on the line. Starting end Jared Crick (back) and reserve Zach Kerr (knee) were ruled out Friday and were among the team's seven inactives.

Their absences moved Shelby Harris, a fourth-year end, into the starting lineup and prompted the team to promote rookie Tyrique Jarrett from the practice squad in place of Kyle Peko, who was waived Saturday and was signed to the team's practice squad Monday after clearing waivers. Jarrett and Adam Gotsis served as the lone reserves against the Chargers.

Also among the inactives were running back Devontae Booker, who is recovering from wrist surgery; quarterback Paxton Lynch, who has a right shoulder sprain; wide receiver Jordan Taylor; guard Billy Turner; and cornerback Lorenzo Doss.

Footnotes. The Broncos honored the victims of Sept. 11, 2001 with a video tribute shown before kickoff. They also held a moment of silence in the stadium to acknowledge the victims of Sept. 11 as well as those of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. ... Beth Mowins made history as the first female play-by-play announcer to call a Monday Night Football game and the first woman in 30 years to call a regular-season NFL game. ... New Nuggets power forward Paul Millsap was among the Broncos' visitors Monday night. Fellow NBA players Jimmy Butler and Draymond Green also were in attendance, as was former professional wrestler Bill Goldberg.

Philip Rivers falls short in comeback at Denver Broncos: “This was as loud as I can remember this place”

By Kyle Newman
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

Philip Rivers had just thrown an interception on the Chargers’ first drive of the second half, and he immediately raced down to the side judge nearest the play, yelling and gesturing for a defensive pass interference call.

His histrionics elicited only deaf ears from the referee, and the Broncos used the Bradley Roby pick as a momentum boost toward a 24-21 victory at Sports Authority Field at Mile High that dropped the Los Angeles quarterback to 6-7 all-time in Denver on a night in which Rivers was never able to comfortably settle in until it was too little, too late.

“It just felt like we didn’t have any rhythm (in the first half),” Rivers said. “It wasn’t that we were playing terrible. It was just that we weren’t making any plays.” Following Rivers’ 11-yard touchdown pass to Melvin Gordon late in the second quarter that tied the game at 7-7, the Denver defense consistently leveraged its will upon Rivers in the pocket. The quarterback’s line entering the third quarter — 8 of 14 for 60 yards and a 61.6 rating — demonstrated as much.

Throughout the first half and into the third quarter, Rivers could be seen pulling his linemen aside after missed blocks and consistently changing the play at the line amid the thunders and rumbles of a near-capacity, orange-crazed crowd. One of those audibles — on Los Angeles’ second possession of the second half — led to a monstrous sack by Shaquil Barrett that punctuated the difficulty of competing in Denver for opposing quarterbacks, who, coming into this season, had a collective 32.8 winning percentage at Sports Authority Field since it opened in 2001.

“This was as loud as I can remember this place,” Rivers said. “I felt like we handled it — we had a false start the first play of the game, but we didn’t have any more silly penalties like that. But it was definitely a home-field advantage, and noise was definitely a factor. It was as hard to communicate as I’ve ever had here. That’s what makes it both so awesome and so challenging.”

The quarterback known for his fiery emotion began to rally the Chargers in the fourth quarter, throwing his second touchdown of the night on a 5-yard strike to Keenan Allen that cut the Chargers’ deficit to 24-14 following the lone interception of the night by Broncos’ QB Trevor Siemian.

A Jamaal Charles fumble on the Broncos’ preceding possession led to another Rivers’ touchdown strike, this time a 38-yard pass to Travis Benjamin that further quieted the home crowd. But Rivers wasn’t able to complete what would have been his 23rd career fourth-quarter comeback, as Los Angeles’ final drive ended with a blocked field goal by Shelby Harris to seal the Broncos’ win.

“He settled us down real good, and the line started picking up the blitzes and the blocks,” said Allen, who finished with five catches for 35 yards and a touchdown. “We finally started moving the ball in the fourth, I think it just took us too long to get moving on offense because we could have made a lot more plays early on.”

Chargers' Anthony Lynn: "Should have stayed with the run game" after losing head coaching debut

By Kyle Newman
Denver Post
September 12, 2017

After Anthony Lynn's Los Angeles Chargers fell 24-21 to the Broncos in his head coaching debut on Monday Night Football, Lynn was in no mood to reminisce on his Denver roots, where he played for four seasons in the 1990s.

Instead, Lynn stood at the podium in the underbelly of Sports Authority Field for a post-game news conference led off by some pointed self-critique following a game in which Los Angeles came up a blocked field goal short of erasing a three-possession deficit and forcing overtime.

"I felt like earlier in the game, we were running the ball, and we kind of got away from that a little bit," Lynn said. "We got behind by a couple scores, and I think I should have been more patient there. Instead of trying to catch up, I should have stayed with the run game — that would have worn down the defense."

On a historic night where he and Denver's Vance Joseph became the first two black coaches to make their head coaching debut in the same game, Lynn, the Broncos' special teams assistant from 2000–02 noted the Chargers must move on quickly from the season-opening loss considering the short work week ahead of their Week 2 showdown against Miami.

"It hurts, but we don't have the 24-hour rule anymore," Lynn said. "We've got to go back to work on Wednesday, because the Dolphins will be in town waiting for us, and they don't care about this game and how we feel."

Los Angeles quarterback Philip Rivers echoed those sentiments, and added that Lynn had the Chargers believing, even when everyone at Sports Authority Field thought the Broncos were going to run away with a blowout win.

"I thought we were put in pretty good position to win," Rivers said. "We have to play better early as an offense, and then find a way to get it done. You saw how nobody panicked, and that usually filters down from the head coach. It was 24-7, nobody panicked, and then you look up again and it's 24-21 and we're lining up for a field goal to tie it up. All of you (reporters) were probably about as surprised at that as the whole building was, but our sideline wasn't, and that starts with Coach Lynn."

Shelby Harris saves Broncos in 24-21 defeat of Chargers

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 12, 2017

It was late, really late, and Shelby Harris figured the game would get later.

Los Angeles Chargers' kicker Younghoe Koo, in his NFL debut, had just made a 44-yard field goal to tie the score, 24-24, and send the season opener thriller with Harris' Denver Broncos into overtime.

BUT WAIT! Time out. Hold on. Just before Koo kicked, Broncos' head coach Vance Joseph pulled a Gary Kubiak and called a timeout. Koo would have to kick it again. The score went back to 24-21 Broncos with 5 seconds left.

"No clue he called timeout," said Harris, a journeyman defensive end who went from player least expected to make the Broncos' season-opening, 53-man roster to unexpected season-opening hero. "No clue at all. I figure the game's tied. The next thing you know they're waving us back and I was like, "was there a flag? We called time? All right, cool."

Koo kicked it again and this time Harris got his right hand on the ball.

"Right hand is the smart hand," Harris said.

He and fellow defensive end Derek Wolfe were lined up across from the Chargers' right guard.

"Me and Wolfe got a great push, we both blew that man up, it hit my three fingers. Where did it fall?" Harris asked his teammates Wolfe and Adam Gotsis.

Even with Harris' paw on the ball, the kick was only a few yards short of the crossbar. Harris' block secured the Broncos' 24-21 win and averted what might have been one of the most spectacular single-game collapses in franchise history.

Thanks to the stellar play of quarterback Trevor Siemian and the Denver defense, the Broncos were leading 24-7 with less than 11 minutes remaining. The only way the Broncos could lose was if they self-destructed. They tried. A Siemian interception on a missed pass-interference play and a Jamaal Charles fumble -- both turnover occurred on the Chargers' side of the field -- were followed by back-to-back touchdown throws by Chargers' quarterback Philip Rivers.

In a 70-second span, it went from 24-7 Broncos to 24-21.

"We got too comfortable," Wolfe said. "That's what happens when you get too comfortable. We were thinking, 'we've got this,' and then all the sudden you see turnovers. If we don't have those turnovers it's a blowout. That's how quick things can turn in the NFL. It's so hard to put your foot on the throat in this league. Especially, Philip Rivers. He don't give up."

The Broncos had a chance to put the game away one more time when a 44-yard completion from Siemian to tight end Virgil Green, followed by a tacked on, roughing-the-passer penalty gave Denver the ball at the Chargers' 16-yard line, first and 10, with 6 minutes and 24 seconds left.

But then Siemian took two sacks for combined losses of 19 yards. Instead of McManus kicking a gimme field goal, he missed from 50.

At the 2-minute warning, Rivers drove his team from his own 38 to the Broncos' 26, setting up Koo's game-tying field goal attempt.

Joseph came up with a final-second strategy, much as his mentor Kubiak did for the Broncos in the opener last year.

Call a timeout just before the fateful field goal. Kick it over again. Celebrate victory. Kubiak did it as Graham Gano was making a winning field goal for Carolina, only to be negated by the timeout. Gano then missed his next kick.

The Chargers thought they rallied for overtime as Koo booted a 44-yard field goal as time expired. But Joseph, the Broncos' first-year head coach, called timeout just before the kick.

"I had two timeouts," Joseph said. "I didn't want to leave with those two in my pocket. Just iced the kid and see how he reacted."

Koo reacted fine. Harris just got enough fingers on the ball.

The late-arriving crowd of 74,892 at eventually-to-be-renamed Sports Authority Field at Mile High went bonkers. Late because the game kicked off at 8:21 p.m. Denver time. It ended at 11:15 p.m. But Harris made sure it didn't carry on towards midnight.

"We can't let it get like that," said Broncos' linebacker Brandon Marshall. "We'll take the win, but that can't happen again."

Perhaps, The Great Quarterback Competition steeled Siemian more than most.

After battling with Paxton Lynch for seven months before winning the No. 1 quarterback job, Siemian was ready for the season opener Monday night against the Chargers.

Ready and lucky. After an early pick six was dropped by Chargers cornerback Casey Hayward, Siemian regrouped and led the Broncos to victory.

Siemian threw two touchdown passes to Bennie Fowler III and scored another on a 1-yard run. The Broncos were up 24-7 in the fourth quarter but then turned the ball over twice. Siemian was picked off on a botched screen pass intended for Fowler and Jamaal Charles fumbled.

Siemian completed 17 of 28 for 219 yards and two touchdowns. He also scrambled 19 yards rushing. Rivers was 22 of 33 for 192 yards but with three touchdown throws and an interception.

Football can be a funny game. After both teams exchanged punts to finish their first series, Siemian started the Broncos' second possession by throwing a sideline pass – right to Chargers' cornerback Casey Hayward. The ball landed in Hayward's arms as he was clear of intended receiver C.J. Anderson.

Hayward dropped it. Flat out dropped a pick six.

"He sat on it and, yeah, got lucky there," Siemian said. "Got unlucky on the screen late so you're going to get yours either way."

Siemian not only survived the Hayward scare, he led the Broncos on a 70-yard march. A mix of Anderson runs – he had six carries for 29 yards on the drive – and Siemian passes – he completed 4 of 7 for 41 yards – allowed the Broncos to score their first offensive touchdown of the season.

It was capped when Siemian first drew the Chargers offside, then with a free play rolled right and threw a perfect pass to Bennie Fowler III, who broke off into a scramble route, in the back of the end zone.

Instead of 7-0 Chargers on the Hayward pick six, it was 7-0 Broncos on the Siemian pass to Fowler. A 14-point, first-quarter swing.

"Yes, a pick six," said Chargers' first-year head coach Anthony Lynn. "Casey makes those plays all the time. He just did not make it in the game."

Rivers led the Chargers back on their next possession. The big play came on third-and-8 from the Chargers' 39 when Rivers threw a deep pass to Keenan Allen, who was well-covered by Broncos' nickelback Bradley Roby. Only Roby tackled Allen before the ball arrived and was flagged for a 40-yard pass interference penalty.

With the ball at the 21, Chargers' running back Melvin Gordon rushed for 10 yards and then after flipping the field with the change of quarters, caught an 11-yard pass from Rivers for a game-tying touchdown.

The Broncos' go-ahead score was set up by speedy rookie Isaiah McKenzie's 31-punt return. With the ball at the Broncos' 47, Siemian converted a third-and-7 with a 9-yard completion to tight end A.J. Derby.

Anderson then ran for 18 yards and the Broncos were in business at the Chargers' 26. Jamaal Charles had a couple nice runs – his first action in a Broncos' uniform after nine seasons with the Kansas City Chiefs – and then Derby caught a 13-yard strike to the 1.

Siemian rolled right and decided to run it in for the go-ahead score.

To start the second half, Roby atoned for his early penalty by intercepting a Rivers' pass across the middle intended for Allen. The turnover was caused by a safety blitz. Justin Simmons hurried Rivers into his errant throw. Rivers heatedly complained Roby held up Allen on the play but it wasn't called and the Broncos had the ball at the Chargers' 43.

One play after Broncos receiver Demaryius Thomas dropped an easy pass from Siemian, he made a difficult catch down the right sideline for a 29-yard gain setting up first and goal at the 10. Siemian made

it 3 of 3 in red-zone conversions by throwing a 6-yard touchdown to Fowler, their second scoring hookup in the game.

The Broncos were up 21-7 early in the third quarter. After driving down to first-and-goal at the 1, the Broncos couldn't put the game away, settling instead for a short Brandon McManus field goal. Earlier in the day, McManus and the Broncos agreed on a three-year contract extension that included a \$5 million signing bonus.

The only the Broncos could lose a 24-7 lead midway through the fourth quarter was if they gave it away. On third down, Siemian attempted a screen pass into coverage. Fowler was thrown down on the before the pass got to him but there was no call. The ball bounced in the air and safety Adrian Phillips intercepted.

Rivers finished the short-field drive with a touchdown pass to Allen. On the next series, Charles made a nice 11-yard run but then fumbled. On the next play, Rivers hit Travis Benjamin for a 38-yard touchdown pass and it was suddenly 24-21 with 7:07 remaining.

Bronco Bits

Broncos star Von Miller awarded Joseph with the game ball for his first head coaching win. ...

Right guard Ron Leary left in the second half with a concussion. He was replaced by Connor McGovern.

...

rookie cornerback Brendan Langley suffered a right knee injury during Cody Latimer's 36kickoff return.

...

Safety Darian Stewart strained his left groin in the fourth quarter. ...

Charles had 10 carries for 40 yards but his fourth quarter fumble nearly marred his Broncos' debut. ...

Anderson finished with 81 yards on 20 carries in a solid performance coming back from last year's season-ending knee surgery.

McManus three-year extension includes \$5 million signing bonus

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 12, 2017

It's not that Brandon McManus convinced John Elway he was worthy of multiyear security through his perfect preseason.

But it didn't hurt.

Elway, the Denver Broncos' general manager, announced Monday a new four-year deal with McManus, the team's placekicker and special teams captain. It's actually a three-year, \$11.254 million extension -- that includes a whopping \$5 million signing bonus that will be paid out this year, sources told 9News -- on top of the \$2.746 million salary McManus was already making this year as a second-round tendered restricted free agent.

That adds up to a four-year, \$14 million deal. In new money, McManus' \$3.75 million a year average ranks fifth among NFL kickers behind only New England's Stephen Gostkowski (\$4.3 million average), Baltimore's Justin Tucker (\$4.2 million), Green Bay's Mason Crosby (\$4.025 million) and Oakland's Sebastian Janikowski (\$3.775 million) who is on injured reserve.

"Brandon's make a lot of big kicks & is an important weapon for our team!" Elway wrote on Twitter.

McManus has proved he can be consistent in big games, preseason games and practice. He was 10 of 10 in field goals during the Broncos' 2015 postseason run that ended with a Super Bowl 50 title.

He was also 10 of 10 in field goals during the Broncos' four-game preseason with seven kicks coming from at least 40 yards and two from 50 yards-plus. He was also 11 of 11 on 33-yard extra points.

McManus' new deal includes \$8.25 million in total guarantees with \$6 million fully guaranteed -- \$5 million of which is in his signing bonus. So cash-wise, McManus will draw \$7.746 million in 2017.

It been quite a five-day period for McManus as last Wednesday he became a rare kicker to be selected special teams captain in a vote by his teammates.

It's the second year in a row Elway has signed a player to a contract extension on the same day as the season opener. It was receiver Emmanuel Sanders who received a three-year, \$33 million extension on opening day 2016.

Broncos promote defensive tackle Tyrique Jarrett

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 12, 2017

When Jared Crick and Zach Kerr suffered injuries that cost them the season opener, and when Kyle Peko didn't bounce back as hoped from his offseason foot injury, the Denver Broncos' defensive line was missing some essential ingredients.

Bodies.

They added the biggest of front linemen Monday by promoting 335-pound rookie defensive tackle Tyrique Jarrett from the practice squad, a source told 9News. Jarrett replaces Peko on the 53-man roster. Peko was waived Saturday with hopes he would rejoin the team's practice squad once he clears waivers.

With Crick missing the opener because of a disc issue in his back and Kerr down with a sprained MCL in his knee, the Broncos' front three for their game tonight against the Los Angeles Chargers will be end Derek Wolfe, nose tackle Domata Peko and either Shelby Harris or Adam Gotsis at the other defensive end position.

Gotsis was having an encouraging offseason until he underwent arthroscopic knee surgery on the final day of minicamp in mid-June. Harris, who played sparingly for two seasons with the Oakland Raiders before bouncing around to various practice squads last year, played extremely well in two preseason games.

Jarrett will be asked to spell Domata Peko.

The Broncos will also take on the Chargers without starting right outside linebacker Shane Ray, who will miss the first half of the season with a left wrist injury. Shaq Barrett will start in place.

9 key factors in Broncos-Chargers opener

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 12, 2017

It hasn't been the smoothest of offseasons for the Denver Broncos.

It began with head coach Gary Kubiak resigning for health reasons. He was replaced not by Kyle Shanahan, son of Mike Shanahan, the best head coach in Broncos' history, but Vance Joseph, a one-year defensive coordinator.

It moved on to The Great Quarterback Competition where seventh-round pick Trevor Siemian beat out first-rounder Paxton Lynch for the second year in a row.

It finished with the controversial release of Pro Bowl strong safety T.J. Ward, the roster cut of preseason rookie standout Kyle Slotter and return of Brock Osweiler.

The Broncos can calm the waters by defeating the Los Angeles Chargers in their season opener tonight (8:20 p.m. kickoff, Channel 20). Here are 9 key factors for the Broncos tonight:

1. Pressure Philip

Give Chargers' quarterback Philip Rivers time to throw and he is one of the NFL's best pure passers. He is 12th all-time in passing yards (45,833) and 8th in touchdowns (314). But while all quarterbacks are less effective when pressured in the pocket, Rivers really suffers because of his immobility. The Broncos' 57 sacks against him are more than any other team. Von Miller has 13.5 of those sacks, putting Rivers No. 1 on his list.

Establishing a consistent pass rush is one of the Broncos' concerns entering this season because of the retirement of DeMarcus Ware and injury to Shane Ray at the outside linebacker position opposite Miller. The return of Shaq Barrett from an offseason hip injury should help.

2. Play it cool, Trevor

Even if Trevor Siemian played better than expectations last season, the seventh-month, Great Quarterback Competition this offseason could have been taken as a sign his bosses didn't think it was good enough.

Siemian didn't take it that way, and his ever-unflappable demeanor is one reason he keeps winning the job. But he needs to have a strong opener to quash any concerns of the Broncos' fan base, not to mention his superiors.

3. Stop Melvin Gordon

To think the Broncos nearly signed Calais Campbell, who just surpassed J.J. Watt as the NFL's best 3-4 defensive end with his 4.0 sack performance in Jacksonville's stunning season-opening win at Houston.

Instead, the Broncos' top defensive ends opposite Derek Wolfe are both hurt (Jared Crick, Zach Kerr) and won't play.

Shelby Harris and Adam Gotsis will get the playing time against the Chargers, while the Broncos may also call up nose tackle Tyrique Jarrett from the practice squad to spell starter Domata Peko.

Gordon, a first-round draft pick out of Wisconsin in 2015, was a fumbler as a rookie, but improved dramatically in his second season, rushing for 997 yards and 10 touchdowns at halftime of his 13th game when a knee injury that required surgery ended his season.

4. Blockin' Bolles

The Broncos have a rookie left tackle in first-round pick Garrett Bolles and the Chargers are sure to test him, not only one-on-one with Melvin Ingram, who combined for 18.5 sacks the past two years, and Joey Bosa, who had 10.5 sacks in 12 games as a rookie, but through blitzes and disguised blitz looks.

5. Get C.J. and Jamaal going

C.J. Anderson will be the Broncos' starting tailback for a third consecutive season. He will need a few carries to find his tackle-breaking rhythm. Jamaal Charles has been kept fresh through the offseason and preseason in hopes he will breakout his burst and instincts tonight. Given Charles has played little the previous two seasons because of a knee injury, he may be limited to 10 touches or so.

6. Get Demaryius and Emmanuel involved

This is the Broncos' 1,000-yard receiving duo three years catching. The return of the screen and run for Demaryius Thomas would be an especially nice touch.

7. Kickin' McManus

This game could easily come down to a field goal. Chargers' rookie Younghoe Koo made a 27-yard field goal and 33-yard extra point during the preseason. And that was it. He can be tricky on onside kicks but the only trick that matters on game day is consistently splitting the uprights with the pressure on. The Broncos' Brandon McManus was 10 of 10 in field goals, 3 of 3 in extra points, during the team's 2015 postseason run to Super Bowl 50. He was 10 of 10 in field goals and 11 of 11 in extra points during the preseason.

8. Turnover ratio

Gordon and Rivers are known fumlbers. Rivers has also averaged better than an interception a game the past three seasons.

Siemian only threw 10 picks in 14 games last year but he figures to push the ball downfield more in his second season.

9. No Antonio record on home turf

The Chargers have consistently been the most lethal tight end team of the past 15 years. So much so Antonio Gates is tied with Tony Gonzalez for the all-time lead in touchdown catches among tight ends with 111. He has 11 against the Broncos, who are third behind his 16 scores against Kansas City and 13 against Oakland.

Gates' tight end partner, Hunter Henry, had his best rookie game against the Broncos last season when he had six catches for 83 yards and a touchdown in a 21-13 win at San Diego.

Justin Simmons, the second-year safety who replaced Ward, will have his coverage skills tested quickly.

Former Bronco Jordan Norwood retires from NFL

By Alexander Kirk

9 News

September 12, 2017

Former Denver Broncos wide receiver Jordan Norwood has announced his retirement from the NFL at age 30.

"It has been a blessing to play thru 8 NFL seasons and 23 years of my life!!" Norwood wrote on Instagram.

Norwood played in 25 games for the Broncos from 2014 to 2016. He also was a member of the Cleveland Browns, Philadelphia Eagles and Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Norwood was not re-signed by the Broncos in the offseason and was an unrestricted free agent.

Bronco fans will best remember Jordan Norwood's record-setting punt return in Super Bowl 50. Norwood set the record for longest punt return in Super Bowl history (61 yards) helping the Broncos to a victory over the Carolina Panthers.

Denver's defense pours 'a little sugar on it' in opening win

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 12, 2017

Throughout the offseason Denver Broncos defensive coordinator Joe Woods said the team's defensive playbook would look familiar to those who cared to follow how things have gone, but said he was "just going to put a little sugar on it."

Well, consider the first serving of sugar dispensed quite nicely.

The Broncos escaped with a 24-21 victory against the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night, a win that was closed out only when defensive end Shelby Harris blocked Youghoe Koo's 44-yard field goal attempt with seconds remaining in the game.

"Way too close," said linebacker Von Miller. "A little too exciting."

"It wasn't clean, but it was good to win," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph.

But in the first game of Woods' tenure as the Broncos' defensive signal-caller, the Broncos offered what they hope is a preview of what's to come.

After all, there were many among the team's faithful who regarded Wade Phillips' departure this past offseason as the biggest loss. Phillips was a social media star and had been on the headset when the Broncos put together one of the best defensive seasons in history in 2015.

The Broncos then followed that up in '16 as the league's No. 1 pass defense for the second consecutive season. Phillips was not re-signed by the Broncos after Gary Kubiak stepped down as the head coach. Joseph, shortly after he was hired, promoted Woods to the job. Monday night proved to be quite the opening act.

"Just look at it," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We didn't even give up 200 yards passing. You don't give up 200 yards passing in this league and you're going to win some games, a lot of games."

The Broncos held Philip Rivers to 192 yards passing, the Chargers finished with 249 net yards and Los Angeles tight end Antonio Gates had two receptions for 17 yards. All that without a sack for Miller.

"This was crucial for us," said cornerback Aqib Talib. "You start with a division game, right away, that's crucial, super important ... we know we've got some things to get right, but that's a good start."

The Broncos know the defense-first model works, it's how they put the franchise's third Super Bowl trophy in the lobby of the team's complex two seasons ago. But they have changed some things as well.

They released safety T.J. Ward (a two-time Pro Bowl selection in his three seasons with the Broncos), have dealt with some early injuries in the defensive front and have put second-year safeties Justin Simmons and Will Parks into the mix.

And Monday night, after safety Darian Stewart left the game with a groin injury, undrafted rookie Jamal Carter found himself playing on defense. None of it mattered, at least on this one night.

Though it wasn't everything a group that is notoriously hard to please wanted, the Chargers had arrived to Monday night's affair thinking they had impact players across the formation on offense, starting with Rivers. And after three quarters the Chargers had 115 yards worth of offense and Denver's run defense, which finished 28th in the league last season, limited the Chargers to 64 yards rushing -- at 2.9 yards per carry -- with 21 of those rushing yards coming on Melvin Gordon's first carry of the game.

Rivers kicked things into gear a bit in the fourth quarter after a fluke interception thrown by Trevor Siemian that bounced off a player's shoe and a Jamaal Charles fumble. But the Broncos' three quarters of work outweighed the rally by the three fingers Harris said he got on the game-winning field goal block.

"It's one game, we have to string a bunch of these together," Harris said. "But I don't know why people haven't really talked about us or whatever. We'll just keep doing it and then they can talk about us later if they want. We know what we can do and we can be a lot better."

Trevor Siemian, Broncos' defense do just enough to get opening win

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 12, 2017

Denver Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian was efficient in answering questions people had about him heading into opening night. Denver's running game delivered. And the defense made a critical final stand as Shelby Harris blocked a 41-yard field goal attempt with one second remaining to hold off a furious comeback by the Los Angeles Chargers.

All in all, it was a lot more difficult than Vance Joseph might have wanted in his head-coaching debut, but the Broncos still escaped with a 24-21 victory on Monday night.

"Me and [Derek] Wolfe, we got big push back. And I just stuck my hand up and I felt three fingers on the ball," Harris said of his fellow defensive end and the blocked kick. "I turned my head around as I was being tackled, and he missed it. Just big. Happy to be a part of it."

But the contest was a far bigger headache than what might have been expected, starting as the third quarter drew to a close. To that point, Siemian had showed composure in recording three touchdowns and helping the Broncos take a 24-7 lead. Denver also had flaunted a power run game, and its defense was dominant, holding the Chargers to 115 yards.

But the Chargers were able to wrestle some momentum away, getting help on a wild interception in the fourth quarter. Siemian had a pass bounce off Chargers safety Desmond King's shoe and into the hands of teammate Adrian Phillips. Six plays later, the Chargers parlayed the turnover into a Philip Rivers-to-Keenan Allen 5-yard touchdown pass.

On the next possession, Broncos running back Jamaal Charles fumbled as he tried to power to a first down. Rivers needed just one play to turn that into a 38-yard touchdown on a pass to Travis Benjamin, closing the Chargers' gap to 24-21.

All of that was made a moot point of sorts when Harris, who made the roster after recording a team-high three sacks in the preseason, blocked Youghoe Koo's kick.

It all will be live-and-learn stuff moving forward, as there also were some real concerns in a revamped offensive line late in the game as the Broncos were almost unable to close the deal.

"It was a little bit too exciting," Denver linebacker Von Miller said, "but a win is a win."

Siemian's work proved to be just enough. He led a 15-play scoring drive on the Broncos' second possession of the game, finishing it with a 5-yard scoring pass to Bennie Fowler. He closed out the Broncos' fourth possession of the game with a 1-yard scoring jaunt around Chargers star defensive end Joey Bosa. And by the time the third quarter was over, Siemian had three touchdowns, and the Broncos had built their 17-point lead.

This is all worth noting even after the closest of shaves -- and reminiscent of last season's 21-20 victory over the Carolina Panthers in the 2016 opener, when the Panthers missed a kick to end the game -- because the Broncos believe Siemian is just the guy to run an offense that could be a little burlier this season, especially in the run game. The Broncos finished 27th in the NFL in rushing last season, but they recorded 140 yards rushing on Monday. And then there's the Broncos' defense, a unit that powered a Super Bowl run two seasons ago and a group that has openly wondered why so few people believe it can show that kind of teeth again.

The defense demonstrated just that on Monday, limiting the Chargers to 140 yards of offense at just over four minutes into the fourth quarter, a fact punctuated by linebacker Todd Davis' throwdown on Melvin Gordon to stop Los Angeles on a fourth-down play.

But perhaps more importantly, the Broncos held Rivers to 192 passing yards.

"You hold a team with a quarterback like that to under 200 yards passing, you're going to win some games," Denver cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said.

Broncos get extension with Brandon McManus

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 12, 2017

Denver Broncos kicker Brandon McManus' teammates showed what they thought of him this past week when they voted him a team captain and the Broncos' decision-makers showed him Monday with a new contract.

The deal, which is for four years, puts a three-year, \$11.254 million extension on the end of a one-year deal he had in place. The deal includes \$6 million in full guarantees with the an additional \$2.25 million in bonuses, according to sources.

The total guarantee in McManus' deal is \$8.25 million, making him the fourth-highest-paid kicker in the NFL.

John Elway, the Broncos' president of football operations/general manager, broke the news via his Twitter account:

The deal came just hours before the Broncos open the season against the Los Angeles Chargers in Sports Authority Field at Mile High. McManus had expressed hope in recent days the new deal would soon be a reality.

"I think obviously you're always looking forward to the guarantees and that security," McManus said. "That's my position that I do and if you do miss a couple of kicks you're going to be in trouble. Obviously we'll see what happens. I'm excited the season's here."

McManus, who was scheduled to be an unrestricted free agent in March, had signed a one-year \$2.746 million tender as a restricted free agent just before training camp had opened. He had attended the team's offseason program, including the mandatory minicamp, as his agent Drew Rosenhaus and the Broncos had tried to work out a long-term deal.

McManus, 26, made \$600,000 last season. McManus had already achieved a goal for his season last week when his teammates voted him as the special teams captain.

"It's a testament to Brandon's leadership, to his personality and all the qualities that he brings to this team," special teams coordinator Brock Olivo said Saturday. "Not only as our kicker, but as our go-to-guy when we need a big one, he's a guy who has a strong character presence. Guys look up to him and I'm really proud of him."

"It was a huge honor for me," McManus said of being named a captain. "This is, believe it or not, the first time I've been a captain I think in any sport. This was an honor for me to be here even though the team did vote a kicker out of the football room to be a captain."

McManus was 10-of-10 in field goal attempts in the preseason and has consistently shown one of the power legs in the league with his touchback ratio on kickoffs. Last season he was 29-of-34 in field goal attempts (.853). He was 30-of-35 in 2015 before he went 10-of-10 in the team's run to a Super Bowl 50 win.

Beth Mowins, Vance Joseph and Anthony Lynn make Monday a historical night

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 12, 2017

As the Denver Broncos and Los Angeles Chargers go about their business Monday night at Sports Authority Field at Mile High, there will be a significant slice of history along for the ride.

On the respective sidelines, Denver's Vance Joseph and Los Angeles' Anthony Lynn will be the first two African-American coaches to make their head-coaching debut in the same game. And in the network television booth overlooking the Broncos' sideline, ESPN's Beth Mowins will be the first woman in 30 years to handle play-by-play duties in an NFL regular-season game.

And while all involved understand the significance of the evening, they also hope they, in some way, help move things to the point where it won't even raise an eyebrow down the road.

"Certainly, I understand the moment," Mowins said. "But I most look forward to calling the game, talking about the Broncos and the Chargers. This is a job I have a lot of passion for. I love the preparation, love the people, and I look forward to it all."

"I think it means a lot for the league," Joseph said. "We're making strides towards it not being about your skin color. It's about your accomplishments and about your ability to coach a football team. With that being said, Monday night is about the two football teams playing a game, the Broncos versus the Chargers. That's my only concern, but obviously as a big-picture issue, it's definitely a special night."

Mowins, a fixture in a variety of play-by-play duties through the years in college football and basketball and the NCAA softball tournament, has said in many ways that she has "been preparing for this my whole life."

She has been paired with former Buffalo Bills and New York Jets coach Rex Ryan in the booth. Mowins and Ryan worked the Florida State spring game and two NFL preseason games for ESPN -- in a "second booth" -- in recent weeks. Mowins also spent time with both the Broncos and Chargers in training camp.

Since 2015, Mowins has also handled play-by-play duties for the Raiders preseason broadcasts. Mowins and Ryan were at the Broncos' suburban Denver complex on Saturday and met with Lynn and some Chargers players on Sunday.

"I'm just going to prepare like I always have for games, be ready for whatever the direction the game goes," Mowins said. "I've really tried to keep my focus on the game and doing the job and not to wrap my head around the bigger picture. Again, if a young woman or a young play-by-play announcer sees opportunity in this, that would be outstanding and I would be happy to discuss any of that. But I want to prepare and do the work because this is something I've always wanted to do."

Joseph, who is the first African-American head coach in the Broncos' history, said this past week that he and Lynn were former neighbors in Aurora, Colorado -- "the back of my house faced the back of his," Joseph said -- when Lynn was still on the Broncos' roster.

"It's obviously a special thing on a big picture," Joseph said. "...Hopefully in four and five years, it won't even be an issue. It would just be two coaches going at it, and may the best team win. But it is special at the moment."

Broncos block late FG, top Chargers 24-21 in Joseph's debut

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 12, 2017

The rookie head coach iced the rookie kicker.

Shelby Harris got a hand on Younghoe Koo's 44-yard game-tying field goal try with a second left and the Denver Broncos began the Vance Joseph era with a 24-21 win over the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night.

"It was a little too exciting," Von Miller said after presenting Joseph with the game ball in the jubilant locker room. "But a win is a win."

Koo nailed the kick moments earlier, but Joseph had called a timeout to ice the kicker.

"I had two timeouts and I wasn't going to leave with those in my pocket," Joseph said.

Derek Wolfe had bull-rushed the first field goal and told Harris, a third-year journeyman who made the team largely because of a rash of injuries along the D-line, that he'd get a chance to slice through this time because the guard would lean his way.

Sure enough, Harris got his right hand on the ball, which frittered short of the end zone as the Chargers looked on in dismay and the Broncos dog-piled Harris.

"It's too bad because Koo drilled the first one," Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers said. "And they called timeout and I think he drilled the second one, too. At least, that's what it looked like to me because it was going right down the middle. And I think if we get to OT, we would have finished it off, but we didn't get that chance."

Harris got the start only because Jared Crick and Zach Kerr were out with injuries.

"I'm going to be real with you: I have no clue what happened," Harris said of his heroics. "I felt it. I just couldn't tell you where I felt it."

Koo was also at a loss to explain what happened.

"I was just focusing on the kick," he said. "I don't know how it got blocked. It felt good off the foot. I'll just have to watch film."

The ending was reminiscent of last year's opener in Denver, when the Broncos escaped with a 21-20 win over the Carolina Panthers in a Super Bowl 50 reunion when Graham Gano missed a 50-yard field goal with 4 seconds left.

Denver took a 24-7 lead into the fourth quarter in this opener and the Broncos were feeling pretty good. And why not? The Chargers were 1-155 in their history when trailing by 17 or more in the fourth quarter and Denver was 175-0-1 with a fourth-quarter lead of 17 or more.

Then came a nightmarish eight-minute stretch in which they had two turnovers that were converted into touchdowns, a missed field goal and a punt.

"The game was in firm control for about three quarters there and we felt good but you turn the ball over twice on the short side of the 50, it's going to be a problem with Philip Rivers," Joseph said.

Before those fourth-quarter foibles, Trevor Siemian threw two TD passes to Bennie Fowler and ran for another score.

The Broncos held Rivers to 115 yards passing through three quarters but let him engineer a comeback when Siemian threw an interception and Jamaal Charles fumbled on plays that were upheld despite video evidence that had the crowd of 76,324 convinced they should have been overturned.

Rivers threw touchdown passes to Keenan Allen and Travis Benjamin following the takeaways to make it 24-21.

Back-to-back sacks of Siemian set up a 50-yard field goal try that McManus pushed wide right, giving L.A. the ball at its 40-yard line trailing by three.

But Koo's miss loomed larger in the final seconds.

DENVER'S DOMINANCE: The Broncos led 14-7 at halftime after Siemian threw a 5-yard scoring pass to Fowler and scored on a 1-yard keeper .

Los Angeles' only touchdown drive was aided by a 40-yard pass interference call on cornerback Bradley Roby before Rivers hit running back Melvin Gordon for an 11-yard touchdown toss. Safety Justin Simmons hit Gordon at the 2, but he just somersaulted across the goal line.

Rivers stayed away from the All-Pro tandem of Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr., instead targeting Roby and safeties Darian Stewart and Simmons.

Roby atoned for his crucial penalty with an interception in the third quarter on a pass intended for Allen. That led to Siemian's 6-yard TD toss to Fowler that made it 21-7.

McManus kicked a 20-yard field goal on the last play of the third quarter, capping a 78-yard drive that ate up 8 minutes, 16 seconds.

HISTORIC OPENER: The game presented landmarks on the football field , along the sidelines and in the broadcast booth .

Not since 1960 had the Chargers represented L.A., where they played their inaugural season before bolting to San Diego.

Beth Mowins became the first woman to call an NFL regular season game since NBC's Gayle Sierens in 1987 when she handled play-by-play on the doubleheader nightcap alongside Rex Ryan, who made his debut as an ESPN analyst.

With Anthony Lynn also making his head coaching debut, this marked the first time two black head coaches worked their first NFL game against each other.

MCMANUS'S MILLIONS : McManus was the last restricted free agent to sign his tender this summer, waiting until June 15 to put his signature on a one-year, \$2.75 million deal after making \$600,000 last season. He did it in hopes of getting a long-term deal, which he finally got Monday just hours before kickoff when he agreed to a three-year extension worth \$11.25 million.

BEEFY BRONCOS : The Broncos beefed up their depleted defensive line before kickoff by promoting rookie nose tackle Tyrique "Pot Roast Jr." Jarrett to their active roster and waiving Kyle Peko.

INJURY UPDATES: Chargers backup SS Rayshawn Jenkins left in the second half with a concussion. So did Broncos starting right guard Ronald Leary, who was replaced by second-year pro Connor McGovern. Leary will be in concussion protocol during the week as the Broncos prepare to face his former team, the Dallas Cowboys. Broncos rookie CB Brandon Langley left in the fourth quarter with a knee injury and Stewart left in the closing minutes with a strained left groin after collecting six tackles.

UP NEXT: The Chargers host the Miami Dolphins, whose opener was scrubbed by Hurricane Irma. The Broncos are home again to take on the Cowboys.

Vance Joseph endures tense ending to win Broncos debut

By Pat Graham
Associated Press
September 12, 2017

Vance Joseph watched his team go from cruising along to a nearly colossal collapse over a nightmarish fourth quarter.

In the end, the newest Denver Broncos head coach was presented the game ball to go with all that unexpected late-game stress.

Joseph and the Broncos walked away a 24-21 winner over the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night when Shelby Harris sliced through and blocked kicker Younghoe Koo's 44-yard field goal attempt with a second left.

"It's a hard league," said Joseph, whose team led 24-7 heading into the final 11 minutes.

No arguments from Anthony Lynn, who also was making his head coaching debut for the Chargers. It marked the first time two black head coaches worked their first NFL game against each other.

This was more of the same for the Chargers, a team that had five losses by four points or less last season.

"There are some things we could've done better to help ourselves," Lynn said.

Philip Rivers caught fire in the fourth quarter and guided the Chargers into range for a game-tying field goal.

Koo nailed it — but Joseph called timeout just before he kicked. The rookie coach wanted to ice the rookie kicker.

Koo made good contact on the second attempt as well, but Harris was right there to block it with the right side of his hand.

"I'm going to be real with you: I have no clue what happened," Harris said. "I felt it. I just couldn't tell you where I felt it. It just happened."

The Broncos held Rivers and the Chargers offense to 115 total yards heading into the final quarter. But the Broncos didn't do themselves any favors with drives down the stretch ending like this: Interception (bounced off a defender's foot), fumble (Jamaal Charles), missed field goal (Brandon McManus, who just signed a new deal) and a punt.

That opened the doors for Rivers.

"We just waited too long to get started but then you could feel it," said Rivers, who threw for 132 of his 192 yards passing in the final 15 minutes. "You could feel it in the place."

Joseph kept his team focused by imploring them to remember it wasn't over. He was right.

"Everybody in the stands was getting ready to leave," Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders said. "We thought it was over and then the next thing you know it's a three-point game and they're getting ready to tie ... and it's about to go into overtime."

Harris' heroics saved the Broncos from blowing a 17-point fourth-quarter lead for just the second time in their history.

FOWLER'S TDS: Bennie Fowler doubled his career touchdown total with a pair of TD grabs, hauling in Trevor Siemian's passes from 5 and 6 yards out.

"It was amazing. It felt great to go out there and get two touchdowns. I had two touchdowns in my career coming into the game so it feels good. I'll continue to build on that," Fowler said.

Fowler was put on notice when the Broncos drafted wide receivers Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie, but he earned the job as Denver's No. 3 pass catcher behind Sanders and Demaryius Thomas.

"I've been on the same page with Trev now for three years. He's part of the reason I made the team as an undrafted rookie so I appreciate him," Fowler said.

TIGHT END TRIO: The Broncos got the most out of their tight ends, who combined for 98 yards receiving.

A.J. Derby had three catches for 34 yards, Virgil Green one for 44 and Jeff Heuerman two for 20.

"Awesome," Joseph said. "All three guys caught balls for (nearly) 100 yards. That's Mike McCoy's offense. Everyone gets an opportunity."

DUD OF A DUO: Antonio Gates is still tied with Tony Gonzalez for most touchdowns (111) in NFL history by a tight end. The Broncos limited him to two catches for 17 yards and held him out of the end zone. They also held Hunter Henry without a catch.

"We have to get those guys targets as coaches," Lynn said. "We have to do that. They were double-teaming Antonio, but we have to find those guys. We have to find those guys and dial up plays for them. They're too good of players not to get targeted, so that was on us."

REPEAT PERFORMANCE: This game was reminiscent of last season's opener, when the Broncos beat Carolina as Graham Gano missed a 50-yard field goal with 4 seconds left.

"That's how they're going to be — going to be like that all season," Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We know we're a better team than we displayed in that third and fourth quarter. We'll fix that and be able to finish the game even better."

Broncos survive nail-biter with 24-21 win over Chargers

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 12, 2017

Trevor Siemian wore a casual gray suit jacket, black pants and white-walled shoes as he strolled into the stadium Monday afternoon. Fans leaned over the silver railing, screaming his name, fingers crossed for an autograph. If Von Miller inspires fashion designers, Siemian looks made for flip flops, a worn Cubs ballcap and a pair of Dockers.

Lost in his calm demeanor -- his Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald told me Siemian is "cool like Luke Bryan" -- rages a competitive inferno. Siemian was not thrilled he had to win his job again, even if he never conceded frustration publicly. He lapped Paxton Lynch, securing the starting spot for the second straight summer in a competition tilted against him.

Yet, doubt remained. Is Siemian an in-between? A quarterback who can win you eight games, but not steer a team into the playoffs. The best thing to winning a job is showing growth in it. Extending plays and showing a willingness to scramble Siemian caffeinated the offense in a 24-21 victory over the Los Angeles Chargers that became uncomfortably close because of multiple fourth-quarter miscues.

Defensive end Shelby Harris, who forced himself onto the roster with a strong training camp, blocked Younghoe Koo's 44-yard field goal attempt to preserve the triumph. It came after Koo made his first attempt, but it was nullified by coach Vance Joseph's timeout.

"I wasn't going home with them in my pocket," said Joseph, received the game ball from Von Miller after his first career victory.

Harris benefited from intel provided by Derek Wolfe. Tired as he worked back into game shape and frustrated by going through three pairs of cleats, Wolfe gutted out the final moments. On Koo's first try, Wolfe nearly deflected it. He relayed this info to Harris.

"He said the guard was probably going to lean on him to prevent that so I would have an opportunity to get in there," said Harris, who blocked the kick with two fingers on his right hand. "It worked."

There are many things the Broncos do well: winning in Denver is one of them. The Broncos have won 17 of their last 18 home openers, including six straight. Monday could not be fairly called a must-win, but it felt like a game the Broncos could not lose after last week's victories by the Kansas City Chiefs and Oakland Raiders.

Not that Denver didn't try. Two turnovers led to a pair of Chargers touchdowns in the fourth quarter as they sliced the lead to 24-21 with 7 minutes remaining. With a chance to secure the win following a 44-yard reception by tight end Virgil Green, the Broncos fizzled. Right tackle Menelik Watson allowed one of multiple sacks, and Brandon McManus missed wide right on a 50-yard field goal.

"We have to finish better," cornerback Aqib Talib said.

The Broncos produced one critical defensive stop with no T.J. Ward (in Tampa Bay) or Darian Stewart (injured leg, but will be fine for the Cowboys game this week). But after a three-and-out, needed another in the waning moments. The Chargers moved into field goal range after a questionable pass interference on Bradley Roby before Harris' block. For the second straight season, the home opener came down to a missed field goal.

"This was a must-win game," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr. "You have to win every game at home."

The loser of Monday's game plummeted into the AFC West basement, no place for a contender in an octagon-worthy division. The Broncos are projected to reside there with national media outlets predicting a 6-10 record. Central to the sour forecast was the uncertainty at quarterback.

For one night, Siemian had the "Time of His Life -- right Sergio Dipp?" -- leading the Broncos to a 14-7 lead they never relinquished. He showed zip on his passes and delivered his first rushing touchdown.

"It feels good to win and beat a divisional opponent," said Siemian, who finished 17 of 28 for 217 yards, and 19 yards on the ground, "and then go back and say, 'Hey, we can clean up things too.' "

The Chargers, as they do in Denver, sprinkled a little luck into the equation, settling Siemian down. The second-year quarterback threw a gift-wrapped pick-six to Chargers cornerback Casey Hayward. Usually sticky-fingered Hayward dropped the pass in the flat. Siemian shook off the mistake, and began a methodical march. Converting on multiple third downs -- the defining marker in Monday's outing -- Siemian finished a 13-play, 70-yard drive with a 5-yard pass to Bennie Fowler, the first of his two scores.

Los Angeles, aided by a Bradley Roby interference call, knotted the score at 7-all in the second quarter on Philip Rivers' 11-yard strike to Melvin Gordon, who beat linebacker Todd Davis and flipped into the end zone on Justin Simmons' tackle. What appeared a night where mistakes would be amplified pivoted because of the offense.

Yes, the defense was terrific until the fourth quarter. The Chargers had 115 total yards and eight first downs through the first 45 minutes. But the offense put the Chargers on notice. Siemian's evolution was televised (an historic broadcast with Beth Mowins terrific as the first woman to call an NFL game in 30 years). He shoved Denver ahead in the second quarter with a 1-yard run that featured spread option concepts. It represented Siemian's first rushing touchdown, and widened the lens on his ability. He scrambled for yards. He sidestepped rushers -- and the pressure was real as right tackle Menelik Watson struggled and right guard Ron Leary left with a concussion -- and threw into tight windows. In a week where Alex Smith outplayed Tom Brady and Dak Prescott skunked Eli Manning, Siemian was better than Rivers, a Hall of Fame candidate.

"I've learned pretty quickly nothing is certain," Siemian said, "especially when you're playing Philip Rivers."

The Broncos opened a 24-7 lead through three quarters, gorging 8:16 minutes off the clock on a 14-play march that concluded with Brandon McManus' 20-yard field goal.

The margin felt bigger because the field continued to shrink on the Chargers. Roby intercepted Rivers. Shaquil Barrett, who showed no problems with his left hip after missing the preseason, delivered a sack.

Todd Davis smashed into Melvin Gordon on fourth down with the night's biggest not produced by the Rockies' Nolan Arenado.

A funky interception by Siemian gave the Chargers' hope, setting in motion a greasy series of events. Fowler was pulled down as Chargers safety Adrian Phillips intercepted the pass. Rivers went to work. Six players later, the Chargers were in the end zone on his connection to Keenan Allen, shaving the deficit to 24-14 with 8:10 remaining. It marked the first time the No Fly Zone missed Ward. Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. clearly thought he had help. Jamaal Charles fumbled on the next possession. Rivers, who has nearly two dozen come-from-behind-wins, connected on a 38-yard score to Travis Benjamin. Stewart was late tracking Benjamin, and then exited with an injury.

The Broncos needed an unlikely star to emerge. Harris' paw allowed the Broncos to clench the victory in their fist.

Footnotes

Wolfe was not injured when he left the game. He was gassed, and had issues with his shoes. He went through three pairs of cleats. ... Former professional wrestler Bill Goldberg, who looks like he could step into the ring, hung out with defensive line coach Bill Kollar before the game. Goldberg head butted a few players, and motivated a few others, including center Matt Paradis. ... Right guard Ron Leary left with a concussion and did not return. Connor McGovern replaced him. ... Cornerback Brendan Langlely left with a knee injury. ... The Broncos insist they are not concerned with the play of right tackle Menelik Watson. His struggles in the preseason continued Monday night. Joseph said part of the issue was simple: The Broncos were facing premier pass rushers. ... Left tackle Garrett Bolles played with emotion and relentless effort. He left the stadium with a wrap on his right wrist. ... "It feels amazing. To get two touchdowns, I had two in my career coming into this game," Fowler said.

Broncos sign Brandon McManus to four-year deal

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 12, 2017

The Broncos don't reach Super Bowl 50 without kicker Brandon McManus. For the past two seasons, he has been arguably their most reliable offensive weapon.

Monday, hours before the season opener, the Broncos rewarded McManus with a four-year deal through 2020. The deal guarantees McManus \$6 million, placing him among the top-paid kickers in the game.

"Brandon's made a lot of big kicks & is an important weapon for our team!" tweeted general manager John Elway.

The contract adds \$11.25 million over three seasons beginning in 2018.

McManus has made 68 of 82 kicks since joining the team in 2014. He is 59-for-69 over the last two seasons, while converting 8 of 13 attempts over 50 yards during this stretch. McManus' standing among the team is well-known. He is a team leader, and was recently voted a special teams captain. He did not miss a kick in the preseason.

Upon agreeing to his new deal, McManus, who brings a unique vibe to Twitter, posted, "3 more years!!! #bronscountry #return of BMAC." The post include a link to the "Return of The Mack" jam.

Footnotes

The Broncos added nose tackle Tyrique Jarrett to the active roster. Cut over the weekend, Kyle Peko rejoined the Broncos' practice squad. ... The Broncos are 16-1 in their last 17 home openers.

Denver7 Key Things to Broncos victory over Chargers

By Troy Renck

KMGH

September 12, 2017

It is easier to experience a Broncos Monday night game than explain it. The noise, the buzz, the orange, the vibe, and did I mention the noise?

The Broncos host the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night in the NFL's final game of Week 1. It is not a must-win game, but it feels like an opener the Broncos can ill-afford to lose based on the road victories by AFC West bullies Kansas City and Oakland.

History sits squarely on the Broncos' side. The Broncos own a 16-1 record in their last 17 home openers, including five straight wins. Vance Joseph makes his coaching debut, charged with executing a reboot, not a rebuild. The pressure is real with the Chiefs and Raiders showing evidence that they can do things that opponents will struggle to stop. The Broncos prefer not to talk about championship windows, but this could be this defense's last stand, and it's clear Denver needs a caffeinated offense to improve.

A look at my Denver7 Keys to a Broncos victory:

1) Von Miller vs. Russell Okung

Left tackle Russell Okung left Denver on difficult terms. He owns a championship ring, but not with the Broncos. He struggled last season, and when cornerback Aqib Talib shouted him down in the locker room after the Patriots' loss, his exit was paved. He returns as one of the men responsible for slowing Von Miller tonight. As Shane Ray told me, "Von gets double-teamed on every play no matter what." Miller must slither through a tackle, a tight end and a chipping running back. The Broncos will look to create one-on-one matchups for Miller without blitzing. Look for Miller to line up in different spots on the field, similar to the NASCAR package last season that featured three outside linebackers in the game. Okung will end up opposite of Miller at some point. It's why Miller should end up with two sacks and three quarterback hits.

2) First things First

The Broncos allowed 55 first possession points last season, tied for second worst in the NFL. It was spread across nine games. In an exclusive interview with Denver7, cornerback Chris Harris stressed the importance of showing new wrinkles in the Chargers' scripted first 15 plays. A stop early gives the offense room to breathe. The Broncos scored 41 points in the first quarter last season, terrible by any measure, and made worse by the fact Denver was too often trailing.

3) Go Get'em Bolles

Rookie left tackle Garrett Bolles inspires confidence. He talks with swag, and makes everything personal. But life can be greasy on rookies. Bolles needs those practice sessions against Von to pay off in this matchup with Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram. Not only do Bolles and new right tackle Menelik Watson need to keep Trevor Siemian upright, they must avoid penalties. Nothing undermines an offense trying to find its identity like 1st-and-20.

4) Eyes up, Trevor

Watching NFL Red Zone Sunday drove home the point that quarterbacks need to extend plays to excel. Whether it was Carson Wentz, Dak Prescott or Matt Ryan, the truth was evident. When Siemian played his best games last season -- at Cincinnati, vs. Kansas City -- he kept his eyes down field, and showed escapability. This need not define him, but quarterbacks who can deliver one first down with their feet and make multiple plays on scrambles are invaluable.

5) CJ A-OK

When C.J. Anderson went down with a knee injury in the seventh game last season, the running game went with him. The Broncos will boast four new offensive linemen at points Monday when left guard Allen Barbre plays, a more physical scheme, a heavy dose of nasty and a healthy Anderson. If Anderson can reach 80 yards on the ground with Jamaal Charles complementing him with 13 combined touches in the running and passing game, the Broncos will win. No run game means hold your breath, Broncos' fans, and hope for a defensive touchdown. And hope is not a great strategy.

6) New No Fly Zone

Harris admitted the secondary must work through communication issues with safety T.J. Ward gone. The onus is on Justin Simmons, a cerebral athlete with a 40-inch vertical leap, to grow up fast. He can cover. And no better test for Simmons, Will Parks and Jamal Carter than matching up with tight ends Antonio Gates and Hunter Henry, a duo which hurt the Broncos last season.

7) Return on Investment

The difference between the Chiefs and Broncos last year was striking, a chasm created by Tyreek Hill. The Broncos believe they have a dynamo in rookie Isaiah McKenzie. He is slippery in space. However, it never showed up in the preseason. Can the kid deliver under the bright lights on a punt return? Even if he flips the field, it could be the difference in a Broncos win.

RENCK PREDICTION: Broncos 24, Chargers 20

Colorado native Kayla Hruby rocked the national anthem ahead of Broncos' Monday Night Football game

By Mark Belcher

KMGH

September 12, 2017

Who is Kayla Hruby? Millions of fans just heard her voice as she sang the national anthem on Monday Night Football ahead of the Denver Broncos, Los Angeles Chargers kickoff.

Hruby is a Colorado native, and she just proved she's got incredible talent on an unforgettable stage.

Hundreds of people took to social media after hearing her voice if only to say she killed it.

But this Broomfield High School senior has been giving masterful performances for years already, and she hasn't even earned her diploma!

Check out some of her other performances below:

Why it happened: Broncos 24, Chargers 21

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 12, 2017

In the end, the Broncos survived.

For the 111th time in Broncos history, they held on to a lead of 17 or more points in the fourth quarter, but this time, it went down to the last, nail-biting seconds before they escaped with a 24-21 win over the Los Angeles Chargers to start their season 1-0 for the sixth consecutive year.

"We've got to finish a lot better," said cornerback Aqib Talib. "We'll take the win, but we've got to finish a lot better."

Added defensive end Derek Wolfe: "We've got to finish people, because we had them. We had them finished. But it's Philip Rivers. You can't even give him an inch, because he's going to take it."

Nevertheless, it was a win. What were some of the reasons why the Broncos ended Week 1 triumphant?

BECAUSE SHELBY HARRIS CAME UP BIG

He was forced into extensive rotational work on the defensive line because of injuries, but he made the play of a lifetime on Younghoe Koo's attempt at a game-winning 44-yard field-goal attempt, bursting through Dan Feeney to block the kick and preserve Denver's win.

"I blocked a couple of field goals in college. It's kind of like, '1, 2, 3, put your hand up.' It's like a craft," Harris said, a broad smile crossing his face.

"You just stay low, blow 'em back and put your hand up," Harris explained later. "If you look up at the ball, your arm kind of shortens down, so you've just kind of got to go and get your hand up and hope for the best."

The Broncos called a timeout just as Koo made a first attempt at the kick, which he sent through the uprights.

"I'll tell you what, that icing the kicker thing -- man, it's a thing of beauty," said tight end Virgil Green.

The timeout created the opportunity for Harris and Derek Wolfe to work together and attack.

"Without Wolfe on that play, I wouldn't have had any chance at all. It's a two-man job," Harris said. "We both out there and dominated the job and we both made the play."

Upon hearing this, Wolfe bounded over to Harris.

"Quit being so modest over here, man!" Wolfe exclaimed to his young teammate.

"That was all you, man. That was all you."

BECAUSE TREVOR SIEMIAN SHOOK IT OFF

On the first play of the Broncos' second possession, he threw pass that landed squarely in the grasp of Chargers cornerback Casey Hayward, who had a near-certain pick-six in front of him if he could just bring in the football. But Hayward bobbled it and the pass fell harmlessly away.

Given that reprieve, Siemian promptly settled in and guided the Broncos on a 13-play, 70-yard drive that saw him complete a pair of third-down passes -- including a 5-yard touchdown to Bennie Fowler that saw him take advantage of a free play that froze Chargers defensive end Joey Bosa, rolling right to locate Fowler in the end zone.

Siemian did a good job capitalizing on mismatches on the drive. His first pass to Fowler during the series came when he saw him matched up with Chargers edge rusher Melvin Ingram. Siemian hit Fowler for a 10-yard gain on third-and-7 to keep the drive moving.

"He came out and had a great game," said wide receiver Demaryius Thomas.

BECAUSE THE GROUND GAME CARRIED ITS MOMENTUM FORWARD

The holes that were there for C.J. Anderson and Jamaal Charles in the preseason were present again for the two running backs for most of the night, especially in the first half.

Anderson and Charles combined for 121 rushing yards on 30 carries, good for a 4.0-yards-per-carry average.

BECAUSE THE TIGHT ENDS CAME UP HUGE

Green, Jeff Heuerman and A.J. Derby were unleashed in the passing game in a big way Monday night, combining for 98 yards on five receptions, beginning with Heuerman's 20-yard catch on the Broncos' first touchdown drive midway through the first quarter.

Green's catch was the biggest in terms of significance and distance -- a 44-yard grab in the fourth quarter that came seconds after Travis Benjamin's 38-yard touchdown reception had trimmed the Broncos' lead to just three points. Green made the grab despite tight coverage at the numbers, giving the Broncos their longest gain of the night and pushing them into field-goal range.

The foundation for the tight ends' success Monday was poured during the Broncos' joint practices with the San Francisco 49ers in Santa Clara, Calif. last month.

"That [Chargers] defense is kind of similar to the defense that San Francisco runs, so we kind of got a little precursor to how things are going to happen when we played them," Green said. "We paid attention to a lot of things in the practice that week. A lot of things were open. So we just wanted to take advantage of the open holes on defense."

BECAUSE THE DEFENSE "SPRINKLED SOME SUGAR"

That was the promise of Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods in May, and he lived up to it, throwing in some six-man rushes that led to some unblocked rushers and incompletions from Philip Rivers. Harris,

Justin Simmons and Shaquil Barrett all took advantage of the six-man rushes to get to Rivers, with Simmons' rush helping force a Bradley Roby interception in the third quarter.

BECAUSE THE DEFENSE STOPPED THE RUN

After Melvin Gordon burst through a hole for a 21-yard run on the Chargers' first play from scrimmage, the gaps were non-existent. Gordon and Branden Oliver combined to average just 2.0 yards per carry on their next 21 rushes, picking up just 43 yards on 21 attempts after Gordon's first gallop.

Given the injuries to the Broncos' defensive line, allowing 64 yards and fewer than 3.0 yards per carry to Gordon and the Chargers was a win within the win -- especially in light of Denver's struggles against the run last year. It establishes an expectation that this year should be different -- and with the Dallas Cowboys and Ezekiel Elliott looming next Sunday, it was a performance the Broncos needed.

"We expect that every week," Harris said.

Broncos sign Brandon McManus to new four-year deal

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 12, 2017

If the value of a kicker is established in the highest-leverage situations, then the Broncos learned all they needed to know about Brandon McManus during the 2015 postseason.

During the Broncos' run to their third world championship, McManus was perfect, hitting all 10 of his field-goal attempts during Denver's postseason run, including five from beyond 40 yards. Two of the successful kicks were from beyond 50 yards, including a 52-yarder that proved decisive in a 20-18 AFC Championship Game win over the New England Patriots.

McManus came through for the Broncos when they needed him most, and that's a big part of why the Broncos agreed to a new four-year contract with him Monday.

But that's only part of McManus' success story. With a career field-goal percentage of 84.8 (including postseason), he is the most accurate placekicker in Broncos history. He also is among the league leaders on kickoffs, and ranked ninth in the league in touchback percentage last year (64.6 percent).

The 2016 season marked the third consecutive year in which McManus was in the league's top 10 in touchback percentage; he ranked fourth in 2015 (70.5 percent) and 2014 (70.3 percent).

McManus first joined the team in 2014 and he showed resiliency in overcoming a frustrating start to his career. He hit 69.2 percent of his placekicks that season before being waived in November. He was briefly placed on the practice squad and then restored to the 53-man roster as a kickoff specialist for the rest of that season.

In the following offseason, McManus changed his technique, removing a jab step from his approach to the football. His accuracy immediately improved. Since then, he has been one of the league's most accurate kickers, hitting 87.3 percent of his field-goal attempts -- 2.4 percentage points above the league average, including 8-of-16 from 50 yards or longer.

McManus' extraordinary range extends to 73 yards, a distance from which he hit in practice last month.

"That's a true weapon," Head Coach Vance Joseph said on the day McManus hit that kick.

And for the next four seasons, that weapon will keep firing in orange and blue.

Three Keys to Broncos-Chargers

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 12, 2017

Offensive Coordinator Mike McCoy has gone out of his way to downplay the significance of facing his former team in the Broncos' regular-season opener.

But make no mistake: The Broncos will benefit from having a "wizard" like McCoy on their sideline, calling their offensive plays for the first time since the 2012 season. McCoy's return is the reason why starting tight end Virgil Green believes the offense will be better.

"I think Mike McCoy is a chess master," said Green, who is one of three offensive players who played for McCoy during his previous Broncos stint, along with Demaryius Thomas and Brock Osweiler. "He knows how to call plays, set plays up and how to set plays up that he was setting up two weeks ago.

"Just listening to him talk, him showing us certain things on film, and him making sure he has an answer for everything just in case -- his i's are dotted and his t's are crossed -- and the way he explains it, he explains it to where all of us can understand. To me, that makes him a wizard."

A little sorcery and a few spells wouldn't hurt as the Broncos look to win a sixth consecutive regular-season opener.

What are three keys to the game?

1. CONTAIN LOS ANGELES ON THE GROUND

For the defense, the challenge is simple: Contain Los Angeles running back Melvin Gordon.

Among the 27 runners who posted at least 200 carries last year, Gordon's rate of one first down every 4.16 attempts ranked eighth. Gordon was one of just six runners among those 27 to rank in the top 10 in first-down and touchdown rate.

"A huge challenge," Head Coach Vance Joseph said of Gordon. "He's a great young back with great long speed. Stopping the run for us is going to be a priority versus that offense. That is going to be our first key to victory: stopping the run game."

Denver's task is helped by the return of Derek Wolfe from an ankle injury, but hindered by the absence of Zach Kerr and Jared Crick because of knee and back issues.

2. CONTAIN THE CHARGERS' PASS RUSH

A series of outstanding pass rushers in divisional play -- "two monsters off the edge," as Menelik Watson said -- begins with Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram, who combined for 18.5 sacks last season. They offer a stern challenge for Watson and Garrett Bolles, who make their Broncos debuts on a reshuffled offensive line that will feature at least three new starters, including Bolles, who is the only rookie who is expected to start on offense or defense for the Broncos on Monday night.

This is where the daily work against Von Miller will come in handy.

"The great thing out here is they play against the premier pass-rusher in the league with Von," McCoy said. "So we've been going against him every day since the first day we stepped on the field. All of the other guys we work with also, but we all know what Von can do."

3. WIN THE TURNOVER BATTLE

It's pretty simple, but always meaningful.

Since Philip Rivers became the Chargers' starting quarterback in 2006, they are 61-12 when they have a positive turnover margin. That record slumps to 14-16 with an even turnover margin and 22-51 with a negative turnover margin -- including 0-14 with minus-3 or worse.

Siemian Says: Fourth-quarter scare a learning moment

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

September 12, 2017

After helping build a commanding 24-7 lead in the first three quarters, Trevor Siemian almost watched it slip out of his hands.

Almost.

The Broncos held on for the 24-21 win, and Siemian walked away happy being 1-0 and happy he and the offense can learn from the nearly disastrous fourth quarter.

"I've learned pretty quickly nothing's certain, especially when you're playing a guy like Philip Rivers on the other sideline," Siemian said. "Down the stretch there, offensively we wish we would have made a few more plays to help our defense out, but, shoot, a win's a win. We'll take it however we can get it."

The strongest moments of Siemian's night were on the long drives, which included six third-down conversions by his arm, two touchdown passes, a rushing touchdown and a few other impressive scrambles.

Though Siemian's runs through traffic were a little harrowing for his coaches, the second-year quarterback said his decisions to take off were with one goal in mind.

"You want to win. That's the bottom line," Siemian said. "I think obviously with [Chargers DE Joey] Bosa and [Chargers OLB Melvin] Ingram on the other side, even if you're not moving around, they're moving you off your spot and trying to make you uncomfortable. They're as good as it gets. Just decided to do it a couple times here and there, but up front those guys did a heck of a job. I mean, you're talking about one of the best fronts in football, I think. Our guys up front did a heck of a job."

The touchdown run was perhaps the most stunning because he shook Bosa at the goal line, but Siemian was quick to shy away from compliments.

"I think Joey got me one other time, so I think we'll call it even," Siemian said. "But we'll see him again, so I'm sure I don't want to see myself in that situation where it's me and him too often, but glad to get there, for sure."

But as fun as the scrambles were, the third-down conversions were just as important.

"Obviously when you're talking about third downs, you're talking about protection and blitz packages, different looks like that, and I thought our offensive line did a really good job handling those," Siemian said. "Then our tight ends and Bennie [Fowler III] stepped up. Those guys did a good job trying to take away D.T. [Demaryius Thomas] and Emmanuel [Sanders], so that was kind of an adjustment we had to make on the fly. But I credit the guys up front, for sure."

Ultimately Siemian came away with a nearly complete game. There were a few miscues, but he finished with 219 passing yards and two touchdowns. In addition to the stats, Siemian simply looked more comfortable.

"I think it's an 11-man operation, plus [Offensive Coordinator] Coach [Mike] McCoy and the whole staff," Siemian said. "I think we feel really good about where we're at. We did some good things. Obviously, the red zone we want to clean up and finishing the game, I think we can do a better job there. But like I said, it feels good to win and beat a divisional opponent at home, and then go back and say, 'Hey, shoot, we can fix some of these things, too.'"

Elway, Miller, Siemian among almost 40 Broncos confirmed for Taste of the Broncos

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
September 12, 2017

If you've ever wanted the chance to meet the biggest names on the Broncos, Taste of the Broncos will likely be your best shot this year.

President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway, outside linebacker Von Miller, quarterback Trevor Siemian and cornerback Chris Harris Jr. are just four of the nearly 40 special guests confirmed to take part in the specialty tailgate event on Sept. 18 at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

Fans will have the opportunity to taste food and drinks alongside the members of the Broncos at the 30 booths run by local restaurants, and some will mingle with guests over appetizers and drinks at the VIP pre-event portion in the Broncos' home locker room.

The event, which benefits Denver Broncos Charities and community partner Food Bank of the Rockies, has helped provide more than 525,000 meals to people in need through the foundation since 2015, the first year of Taste of the Broncos.

"You get [introduced to] new restaurants and support [the Food Bank of the Rockies] and what they're doing, and it's a good way for them to get their business out, too," said Harris, who has participated in the event every year. "It's a great help for them and I know they appreciate it."

For more information on the event and how to buy tickets, please visit DenverBroncos.com/taste.

After earning his way, Shelby Harris makes play on national stage

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 12, 2017

You know his name now that he blocked a potential game-tying field goal for the Los Angeles Chargers and saved an opening-night victory for the Broncos.

His coaches and teammates sang his praises Monday night — and for good reason. The third-year player made the game-changing play during his first career start.

As Younghoe Koo prepared for his second attempt at a 44-yard field goal — Head Coach Vance Joseph called a timeout moments before his first try — it appeared the Broncos would squander a 17-point fourth quarter lead. But Harris cut through the Chargers' line and got three fingers on the ball.

Those three fingers will hurt Tuesday, Harris said, but adrenaline was the only antidote he needed Monday night after the Broncos relived an eerily similar ending to last year's 21-20 season opener over the Carolina Panthers.

"You're just like, 'Man, we just won the game. I think we won the game,'" Harris said. "And then when everyone starts going crazy, it's like, 'I just won the game.'"

And that was far better than the alternative for the other 52 players in the locker room after the game.

"I was just happy," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "It was crucial; a division game. We know all of these division games are super important, so it was a real crucial game. It was a huge play by Shelby."

So yes, after Monday night's performance, more than a few people will hear about about Harris for the first time.

But the guys inside the building? They've known him for quite a while.

"Shelby has earned his way from the first day of OTAs to training camp," Joseph said. "Through the preseason games, he's earned his way. It's the perfect example of a guy coming into camp and having an outside chance of making the football team, but he really earned his way."

Were a player like Derek Wolfe to make the play Harris made Monday night, it would have been impressive. And indeed, Harris said Wolfe played a pivotal role in the field goal block.

But for Harris to make it? Downright remarkable.

Consider that Harris joined the Broncos in January after signing a reserve/future contract.

Consider that Harris, after being drafted in the seventh round of the 2014 NFL draft, was waived four times by the Oakland Raiders, once by the New York Jets and was released by the Dallas Cowboys.

For most NFL players, that would mean the end of their career.

Instead, Harris came to Denver, where he faced long odds to make a roster just 18 months removed from a Super Bowl 50 victory.

With second-round pick Adam Gotsis and free-agent signee Zach Kerr also fighting for playing time, Harris could have easily been the odd man out.

But Harris just continued to make plays until he was too valuable to release.

In four preseason games, he recorded 11 tackles — eight of which were solo efforts — three sacks, one pass defended and two fumble recoveries.

That caught the attention of his teammates.

“He continues to make plays, and it doesn’t matter if it’s third down, second down or first down,” Von Miller said. “We had [DE] Zach Kerr and [DE] Jared Crick out, and he stepped up and made plays for us.

“Those are the stories you want to hear about a guy like Shelby coming in here and fighting his way on the team. Fighting his way until the starting role and fighting his way into a big-time role player on this year.”

If Monday’s game was any indication, Shelby Harris could stick around for a while.

Defining Moments: Broncos 24, Chargers 21

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 12, 2017

Midway through the first quarter, Broncos fans got a glimpse at the offense they may come to expect under Offensive Coordinator Mike McCoy. The Broncos executed a 13-play, 70-yard drive that started at the Denver 30-yard line. On third-and-3 from the Los Angeles 5-yard line, Trevor Siemian drew defensive end Joey Bosa offside and urged his teammates to continue the play. After he rolled to his right, Siemian found a leaping Bennie Fowler III for the first Broncos' touchdown of the year.

Cuttin' up

After the Chargers tied the ballgame early in the second quarter, Siemian and the offense would respond. With 10:20 to play in the half, Isaiah McKenzie caught a Los Angeles punt at the Denver 13-yard line and returned the kick 31 yards to jump-start the Broncos' drive. C.J. Anderson provided a run of 18 yards in which he burst through the Los Angeles front seven, and Siemian found tight end A.J. Derby for a pair of receptions. On second-and-goal from the Chargers 1-yard line, however, Siemian provided the real highlight. The third-year player scrambled to his right with Bosa in pursuit and quickly cut back left. Bosa stumbled and Siemian was left standing in the end zone with a lead for the Broncos.

The defense makes itself heard

As the Chargers looked to get something going to begin the second half, the defense came up with a play of their own. On third-and-6 from the 29-yard line, Philip Rivers' pass for Keenan Allen was intercepted by cornerback Bradley Roby. The play halted the Chargers' drive — which would prove important when points were at a premium later in the game.

Thomas goes up to get it

Immediately after the turnover, Siemian and the Broncos went to work. Anderson found a small hole for four yards, and two plays later, Siemian made another big throw. He found Demaryius Thomas down the right sideline for a 29-yard gain that brought the Broncos to the Chargers 10-yard line. Thomas elevated above the cornerback and made the big play. Just moments later, Siemian found Fowler for their second scoring connection of the day.

Sanders works his way across the field

Emmanuel Sanders' third-quarter catch will be recorded as a 20-yard reception, but the Broncos' speedy receiver ran many more yards to get to the Los Angeles 24-yard line. The play began with a short Siemian throw to the right, and that's when Sanders began to make his move. He traced his way all the way across the field as he avoided tackles and picked up blocks from his offensive line.

Big stage, big hits

There were plenty of big hits Monday night, and Shaquil Barrett's sack of Philip Rivers midway through the fourth quarter is certainly deserving of attention. But nothing could stack up to linebacker Todd

Davis' fourth-down shot on Melvin Gordon. With the Chargers looking to stay in the game, Davis burst off the edge and hit Gordon as soon as he took the handoff. Los Angeles was stuffed short of the line to gain, and the Broncos took over on downs.

Finding a way to survive

With just over eight minutes remaining, the Broncos were up 24-7 and seemed to be coasting to an early-season win over a division rival. That all changed in a hurry. The Chargers took advantage of a questionable non-call on a potential defensive holding, and Rivers found Keenan Allen for a touchdown to cut the lead to 10. Just moments later, Jamaal Charles lost the ball and gave Los Angeles more life. Rivers found Travis Benjamin on the first play after the quick change for a 38-yard touchdown, and the comeback was on. Siemian found Virgil Green for a long gain that was aided by a roughing-the-passer penalty, but Siemian later took a sack. Kicker Brandon McManus missed a 50-yard field goal that would've put the Broncos ahead by six points, the Chargers had one final chance with two minutes on the clock. Finally, though, in an opener that eerily resembled last year's game against the Panthers, the Chargers missed a 44-yard field goal as Shelby Harris got a piece of it. The play ended the game, and the Broncos hung on for a win.

The Broncos have other promotions here, in addition to following promotions available the day after the game:

- Papa John's is offering the "When the Broncos win, you win!" promotion, which gives fans 50 percent off regular menu price online orders the day after every Broncos win with promo code "Broncos"
- With two Broncos touchdowns, you score \$1 roast beef sandwiches the day after a Broncos game at participating Arby's.
- Download the McDonald's app for free Broncos gameday offers! Additionally, get a \$1 Big Mac sandwich or Sausage McMuffin with Egg the day after every Broncos Game as well as 30 percent off any hat after every Broncos game at Denver Broncos Team Stores with the McDonald's key tag.
- Buffalo Wild Wings: If the Broncos make a field goal, you could win a free sharable at Buffalo Wild Wings!
- At participating Conoco stations, grab a free 12oz cup of coffee between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m. the day after a Broncos win.
- At King Soopers, get a free raised or cake donut -- just swipe your SooperCard the day after a Broncos win.

Injury report vs. Los Angeles Chargers

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

September 12, 2017

A running update of injuries will follow below:

10:01 p.m. MDT: Denver announces offensive guard Ron Leary is being evaluated for a possible concussion.

Second-year player Connor McGovern replaced Leary at right guard.

10:14 p.m. MDT: The Broncos announce Leary is out for the game with a concussion.

10:45 p.m. MDT: Cornerback Brendan Langley suffered an injury on a Broncos' kick return. Trainers attended to him on the field before they left for the locker room for further evaluation.

10:53 p.m. MDT: The Broncos announce Langley is out for the game with a knee injury.

10:56 p.m. MDT: The Broncos announce safety Darian Stewart is questionable to return with a groin injury.

Broncos sign NT Tyrique Jarrett to active roster

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

September 12, 2017

The Denver Broncos signed rookie nose tackle Tyrique Jarrett to their active roster on Monday.

Jarrett (6-3, 335 pounds) totaled seven tackles (4 solo) in four preseason games with the Broncos after being signed as a college free agent in May from the University of Pittsburgh.

He opened 18-of-32 games played for the Panthers, totaling 59 tackles (34 solo) and three sacks during his collegiate career. Jarrett, who attended Taylor Alderice High School in Pittsburgh, was born on Feb. 16, 1994.

Paul Klee: Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian beat the odds — and the Chargers — now it's time to give him a chance

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 12, 2017

Winning you over isn't going to be easy. Trevor Siemian knows that.

Ol' Trev knows a lot of things. Northwestern grad, National Honor Society, dad's a surgeon, mom's a nurse, all that. Walt and Colleen didn't raise a dummy. But he forgets stuff. And forgetting stuff is the best thing about Trevor Siemian, the quarterback. Monday night in front of the largest TV audience (18.9 million for the 2016 finale) and crowd he's ever played in front of (74,892 at Mile High, several of whom will cop a No. 13 jersey today), Siemian forgot everything.

Forgot about the almost-interception he threw to a Chargers cornerback... then threw at the same cornerback on the next snap. Forgot that Demaryius Thomas dropped a sure first down... then threw at Demaryius Thomas on the next snap. Forgot he got creamed... over and over and over, by Chargers pass rushers, and still got up, again and again.

"It shows his courage," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said after the game.

Tell me again why you don't like this guy?

The Broncos held on to beat the Chargers, 24-21, when Los Angeles — that'll take some getting used to — had a potential game-tying 43-yard field goal blocked.

Broncos head coaches are 11-1 in their debut. Joseph got the game ball.

"It's good to win. It wasn't clean, but it's good to win," he said.

The Broncos are 17-1 in their last 18 home openers. Mile High shook again. Some things never changed. And the reason for the win was Trevor Siemian. The offensive line broke down. Running back Jamaal Charles fumbled, at a most unfortunate time, late in the fourth quarter. The "No Fly Zone" allowed three passing touchdowns.

But no one could watch Siemian on Monday and say he was a problem, the problem, any problem. He completed 17 of 28 passes, threw two touchdowns and juked Joey Bosa for a rushing touchdown. He threw for 219 yards and one interception. Siemian wasn't perfect, and won't be. But when he has time to throw, Siemian is perfectly capable. The key to the Broncos' season is the same as it ever was with Peyton Manning, and that's not in any way comparing the two: if the starting quarterback stays healthy, the Broncos will advance to the postseason and, with their defense, dangerous.

It's a big "if."

Not since Olympia High School in Orlando, across the street from the late Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill golf club, a short commute from Disney's Animal Kingdom, has Siemian played a full season. The Broncos' fortunes are handcuffed to a 6-foot-3, 220-pound, seventh-round draft pick.

Ol' Trev needn't practice his long ball. He needeth practice his self-sack. Give Peyton a call, just not on his backswing.

It was after a game against the Chargers, last season, when Siemian sold himself to the Broncos locker room. In the visiting team's cramped digs, his bare, left (non-throwing) shoulder revealed a bruise the size of a soccer ball. I wasn't sure whether to interview Siemian, or give him Advil.

Siemian played through it. Teammates dig that sort of thing. Monday night, he handed a yellow penalty flag back to an official. Officials dig that sort of thing.

Siemian also knows he was not the choice of Colorado's media. They wanted Paxton Lynch, who can't play. And when you aren't the choice of media, well, you've seen what happens.

The other star of the opener was the Broncos new coaching staff — for three quarters, at least. The creativity of Mike McCoy, the offensive coordinator who used to coach the Chargers, hasn't been seen around these hills since Adam Gase skipped town for South Beach. Still, the Broncos tried to give it back. The coaches turned conservative with their play-calling. They took the game out of Siemian's hands. Why? Their 24-7 lead flipped to 24-21. They held on, barely.

"I didn't want to have any negative plays, basically," Joseph explained. "The clock was in our favor, in my opinion. I didn't think it was conservative. I thought it was playing smart football."

Trevor Siemian won the job, twice. Now the Broncos should let him do his job.

David Ramsey: C.J. Anderson powers Broncos to dramatic victory over Chargers in season opener

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 12, 2017

C.J. Anderson turned the corner, looking for open space, but Chargers linebacker Korey Toomer was waiting.

The next instant offered an encouraging look at the Broncos 2017 season.

The two men met at the 11-yard line. Toomer lowered his shoulder, ready to drop Anderson. But Anderson had other ideas. He leveled Toomer with a perfectly timed and properly vicious stiff arm.

The shot showed Anderson at his best: feisty, imaginative and violent. Two plays later, the Broncos scored their first touchdown of the season.

When looking for the MIP – most important person – of the Broncos 2017 season, look no farther than Anderson. If he can lead a revival of the running game, which fizzled last season, the Broncos can soar among the AFC's elite.

Anderson has taken a wild ride as a Bronco, almost as wild as Monday's thrilling and confusing 24-21 win over the Chargers.

He arrived in 2013 as an undrafted free agent. He had been lightly recruited out of high school and had to settle for a junior college. Become a starter? He was a long shot to make the roster.

But he was inquisitive and hungry. At practices and in the locker room, he talked constantly with Champ Bailey. One of the greatest cornerbacks in history was happy to share his wisdom with an NFL nobody.

Here's one of the secrets Bailey shared:

NFL tacklers act tough, but nobody enjoys bone-rattling collisions. Be ruthless, Champ told C.J. Be the attacker.

When Anderson sent Toomer tumbling to the ground, you could see he had listened to Champ.

Anderson traveled rapidly from bench sitter to solid supporting actor in the Bronco drama. In 2014, he gained 335 yards rushing in wins over the Dolphins and Chiefs. In a playoff loss to the Colts, Anderson

An ugly season-ending playoff to the Colts, Anderson delivered the one bright spot. He ran only 7 yards, but it might have been the greatest 7-yard run in Broncos history.

"He broke like five tackles," Chris Harris said later. "That right there. That's the perfect example of a guy with so much heart."

He will long be remembered for the long run through the snow to the end zone in a 2015 battle with New England. At his best, he's been big and powerful, but also elusive and surprisingly rapid.

The potential is there. The production has not been there. Injuries have kept Anderson stuck.

He's healthy now, ready to show the full range of his talents.

In the third quarter, Anderson showed the fast feet that go along with his power. He sprinted to the left, looking downfield. This time, Chargers cornerback Jason Verrett was waiting.

Anderson took a hard step to his right, freezing Verrett. Anderson danced right past Verrett, who could only wave.

Anderson burst into the open, on his way to more yards, on his way to a strong 2017 season.

Rapid Reaction: Broncos highly impressive for most of the night against the Chargers

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 12, 2017

The Broncos were dominating.

Until they weren't.

For most of Monday's 24-21 victory over the Chargers, the Broncos were in utter control. Philip Rivers was on the run. Trevor Siemian was poking holes in the Chargers defense. C.J. Anderson was strong and elusive.

Mistakes utterly changed the tone in the fourth quarter. A Chargers interception and a fumble by Jamaal Charles opened the door for Rivers and the men from Los Angeles.

The Broncos almost gave this one away. The Broncos can't, and won't, count on field goal kickers missing chip shots the rest of the season.

Three things to remember:

One – Siemian's poise and accuracy

After months of enduring a quarterback controversy, Siemian looked the part of a starting quarterback. He was accurate. He was calm in the pocket. And he was finding virtually everyone. Who would have thought Bennie Fowler would emerge as a serious threat?

Two – Anderson's power and elusiveness

On the Broncos first possession, Anderson pulverized Chargers inside linebacker Korey Toomer with a well-aimed and vicious straight arm. Later, he wasted Jason Verrett with a fake. Anderson has struggled with injury for most of his Bronco career.

He looked fully healthy on Monday.

Three – The defense is powerful, again

After three quarters, Rivers had thrown for only 60 yards. He's one of the great passers in NFL history, but he looked helpless against Denver's defense.

Rivers seized control of the fourth quarter. That's true.

But Bronco defenders dominated most of the night.

Broncos block field goal in final seconds, hang on to beat Chargers 24-21

By Lindsay Jones
USA Today
September 12, 2017

A blocked game-tying field goal attempt in the final seconds of regulation could be considered luck — or a curse, if you're the Los Angeles Chargers.

But to Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe, the block by teammate Shelby Harris that sealed the Broncos' 24-21 season-opening win over the Chargers was perfectly planned.

Chargers rookie kicker Younghoe Koo's first 44-yard attempt with one second remaining sailed right through the uprights, only to be waved off because of a timeout called by Broncos head coach Vance Joseph. On that attempt, Wolfe blew through the heart of the Chargers offensive line.

Wolfe knew the Chargers, and especially guard Matt Slason would adjust. Wolfe knew he wouldn't get another shot at blocking a kick, but he figured someone else would. Joseph said later that some of Koo's kicks had a low trajectory, so given the right amount of push through the right gaps, a block would be possible.

Sure enough, Harris easily burst past a cluster of Chargers linemen. He twisted his 290-pound body to the left and stretched his right arm in the air, perfectly timing his leap to get his hand on the football. The ball wobbled and eventually landed on the grass in the back of the end zone as Broncos players dogpiled on top of Harris.

"It feels great to do anything to help the team win. It's not about the individual glory," Harris said. "It takes two to do that though, and so I couldn't have done it without Wolfe though. That's a big moment right there."

That it was Harris who made the game's biggest play seemed perfect to Wolfe. Harris, who hasn't played in a regular-season game since he was with the Oakland Raiders in 2015, was one of the final players to make the Broncos' 53-man roster, and was playing Monday night in part because of injuries to Jared Crick and Zach Kerr that decimated the Broncos' depth on the defensive line.

While the Broncos' defensive attitude and No Fly Zone swagger might remain, it is a unit in transition in 2017 following the departure of coordinator Wade Phillips and on-field leader T.J. Ward. The Broncos wouldn't need the stars like Von Miller and Aqib Talib to play well, they would need contributions from guys buried on the depth chart like Harris.

"I was just telling him how happy I was for him. He was grinding all through camp, thinking he wasn't going to make the team. He played the entire preseason," Wolfe said.

The ending of Monday's game was reminiscent for the Broncos of their 2016 season-opening win against the Carolina Panthers, when Panthers kicker Graham Gano missed his second attempt at a

game-tying field goal, and much of their 2015 Super Bowl run, when they routinely won games on a defensive stop or turnover late in games.

“It’s a good win. It wasn’t clean, but it’s a good win,” Joseph said.

Harris’ block ended what had been an impressive fourth-quarter rally by the Chargers, who scored two touchdowns in the span of 70 seconds of game time, both off of Broncos turnovers, to cut what had been a 17-point Denver lead to three points.

After another Broncos offensive possession stalled and Philip Rivers got a final chance to lead a drive after the two-minute warning, it felt like the game would almost certainly wind up going into overtime.

But the Broncos’ defensive line believed differently. A field goal attempt, especially one from a rookie like Koo, was no sure thing, especially after getting penetration on Koo’s prior field goal attempts and extra points.

“We were kicking their guys’ asses the whole game,” Wolfe said.

For the Broncos, that final push and blocked kick was the difference between ending Week 1 in a three-way tie for first place in the wildly competitive AFC West with the Kansas City Chiefs and Oakland Raiders, who both won road games earlier on the NFL’s opening weekend, or falling a game behind early.

“It was crucial, a division game,” Talib said. “We know all of these division games are super important, so it was a real crucial game. It was a huge play by Shelby.”

Monday Night Football score, highlights, stats: Siemian leads Broncos over Chargers

By Will Brinson
CBS Sports
September 12, 2017

The Chargers are known for their ability to give away really close games in really bad fashion. For once, they appeared willing to let someone else do the charging for them, as the Broncos tried to give away the game after stopping the Chargers on 4th-and-1 during the middle of the fourth quarter.

The Chargers were toast. Then the Broncos threw a crazy tip off two toes (with Rex Ryan in the booth no less!) that the Chargers intercepted. One Keenan Allen touchdown later and things were a little spicy. When Jamaal Charles fumbled, things got weird. When Philip Rivers went up top to Travis Benjamin it felt like the Chargers were just going to steal the game.

But things have a weird way of not working out for Los Angeles, and they didn't work out late on Monday night/early Tuesday morning. A bizarre series of decisions from the Chargers in terms of clock management allowed time to melt away (they waited for a measurement on one play then ran on third-and-1 despite having less than a minute on the clock) but a pass interference penalty got them in field goal range.

Rookie kicker Younghoe Koo buried his first attempt, but Vance Joseph managed to ice him. The second kick was blocked and Denver got a win, 24-21, they tried to give away.

The Broncos get the W, but both teams can claim moral victories here. The Chargers looked dead in the water and much like same old team. Then they caught fire late and we saw what we thought this team could be; Rivers was slinging it deep and ended up with a pretty nice game, while the duo of Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram turned on the gas and put major league pressure on Trevor Siemian.

Los Angeles might not know how to win games, or just might not be lucky, but this is a team with the talent to be great.

Denver is better than we think -- Siemian was slinging it around (more on him in a minute) and the defense isn't going to drop off from last year. With the weapons on hand for Siemian to throw to, and a capable group of running backs, it's not hard to see this team staying in the race for the AFC West over the course of the season.

A game that looked like a blowout became fun all of a sudden, and while it's a dagger L for the Chargers, it could be a springboard for both teams.

The Broncos might have a QB

There was a real point in time when the Broncos were considering starting Paxton Lynch over Trevor Siemian, or at least desperately trying to make it a competition. That feels like folly right now, considering how well Siemian played on Monday night against what was supposed to be a stout

Chargers defense. The Broncos quarterback went 17 for 28 with 218 yards, two touchdowns and just one interception while making things happen on the ground as well.

Siemian, a former seventh-round pick out of Northwestern, studied under Peyton Manning for a year before taking over as the starter in 2016. He appears to have taken some pretty big steps as a quarterback this offseason, finding open receivers and slinging some very impressive passes while under pressure.

He decided to juke Joey Bosa out of his pants just for fun on his first ever rushing touchdown.

Siemian's first passing touchdown was on a free play after the Chargers jumped offsides, but that only makes me like it more. Knowing he was not going to turn the ball over, Siemian rolled out to the right and whipped a pass to the back of the end zone, finding a leaping Bennie Fowler for a score.

The awareness of Siemian to get the play off quickly, roll out and put the pass in a spot where Fowler could go up and get it, along with the surprising arm strength to get the ball back there while on the run -- there might be a little more upside to Siemian running this offense than most people thought.

The Chargers offense needs to be consistent

It is entirely possible that Joe Woods' defensive unit is good. It's likely: the Broncos are a really good defensive team. But the Chargers, man, were just woeful on offense for a lot of this game. There were stretches where Melvin Gordon got some big holes to run through, but by and large the Bolts were not good moving the ball.

With the score 24-7 and the Chargers squatting on a 4th-and-1, desperate to try and pick up a yard to stay alive, they ran Gordon right into the middle. Todd Davis destroyed him before he even got the ball.

By the time a pass from Siemian went off two toes for a Chargers interception to give L.A. a breath of life late in the fourth quarter, the Chargers had mustered just 140 yards of total offense. Hunter Henry was nowhere to be found (literally no catches) and Keenan Allen didn't emerge until a late touchdown.

There's too much talent at the skill positions here for Los Angeles not to be more explosive. It was like the Chargers wanted to play it close to the vest against a dangerous defense. That's ... fine? But there were multiple times down the stretch where Los Angeles didn't look like it was on the same page on the decision-making front.

The best part of the night for the Chargers was the decision to bleep it and chuck it deep. it panned out well for Rivers and his receivers; there's no reason to be overly conservative with the weapons on hand here.

It's also possible this team looks better against a lesser defense. Give credit to the Broncos who consistently got pressure on Rivers and who had the receivers on lockdown throughout the first three quarters of the game.

Three & Out: Takeaways from the Denver Broncos' Win over the Los Angeles Chargers

By Robert Klemko
MMQB
September 12, 2017

1. Trevor Siemian did enough to convince any doubters that he deserved the starting job, while still flashing the kind of poor decision-making that led to some very avoidable turnovers in critical situations a year ago. In the Broncos' 24-21 win, he was masterful in orchestrating scoring drives of 70, 56 and 78 yards, grinding down the Chargers' defense with a short passing game that minimized risk and allowed playmakers Emmanuel Sanders and Demaryius Thomas opportunities to create with their feet. Yet he threw two bone-headed passes—one mercifully dropped by a fast-breaking Casey Hayward in the first half, and another intercepted in the second half by Adrian Phillips—after targeting a smothered receiver. The last throw gave Los Angeles the ball at Denver's 43, and a Keenan Allen touchdown six plays later opened the door for a short-lived San Diego comeback.

2. Looking forward, it's difficult to trust either of these offensive lines against the Chiefs or Raiders in the AFC West. Chargers left tackle Russell Okung played matador against Shaquil Barrett (a role he's familiar with at Mile High). The combination of Von Miller and Barrett, Denver's third-best pass rusher, had Philip Rivers on the run for much of the night. When the Broncos had the ball, right tackle Menelik Watson was obviously overmatched by Melvin Ingram (which is understandable) and Ingram understudy Chris McCain (less so). First-round pick Garrett Bolles did his best with a tough draw in Joey Bosa and Ingram, and turned in a blemished performance that nonetheless justified his draft position. Both of these teams spent draft picks and cash on the offensive line this offseason, but if Monday night is any indication, neither did enough to feel confident about two games apiece against Oakland's Khalil Mack and Kansas City's Justin Houston.

3. After watching convincing Oakland and Kansas City wins over tough opponents in Week 1, this felt like the third-place game in a division race that one could imagine producing three playoff teams, or at least a 9-7 team that misses the dance. If you were looking for a clear favorite, Monday didn't provide one. Keenan Allen could have distinguished himself as the kind of No. 1 receiver who remains a consistent factor against any and all competition, but he didn't. Denver's talented defense could have shut the door on Rivers and an uninspiring group of receivers, but stumbled late and opened the door for a would-be game-tying Younghoe Koo field goal, which was blocked by Broncos defensive end Shelby Harris.

Broncos win a late-night thriller on a blocked field goal

By Frank Schwab

Yahoo! Sports

September 12, 2017

Most of the country was probably in bed by the time the Los Angeles Chargers made the second game in the "Monday Night Football" doubleheader interesting.

A little before 1 a.m. Eastern time, trailing the Denver Broncos 24-7 in the fourth quarter, the Chargers finally got going. A fluky interception led to one touchdown. A forced fumble led to a quick-strike deep touchdown from Philip Rivers to Travis Benjamin cut the Broncos' lead to 24-21. What looked like a Broncos blowout was all of a sudden a close game.

After forcing a punt, a pass interference call helped get the Chargers into field-goal range. Younghoe Koo, who won the Chargers' kicking competition in the preseason, came on for a game-tying 44-yard field goal with five seconds remaining. The Broncos iced him on his first attempt, which he made, then defensive end Shelby Harris blocked Koo's attempt after the timeout. Denver held on for a surprisingly exciting 24-21 win.

The Broncos defense came through when it mattered. Denver had a big stop after a missed field goal with 4:07 left. Broncos cornerback Bradley Roby broke up a long pass to Tyrell Williams. Pressure from a safety blitz off the edge forced Rivers to throw quickly and he misfired badly on a deep pass. A receiver screen on third down had no chance, as linebacker Brandon Marshall quickly dropped Benjamin for a loss. The Chargers punted.

The Chargers got the ball back with two minutes left at its 38-yard line. They took forever to get a first down on that drive, finally converting a fourth-and-1. A pass interference call on Roby got the Chargers in position to tie the game, but then the field goal was blocked.

The Broncos' defense provided the finishing blows, and through three quarters it was the star of the show.

As Denver built a 24-7 lead by the end of the third quarter, it allowed the Chargers just 115 yards and eight first downs. Melvin Gordon had a 21-yard run on Los Angeles' first offensive play, and the Chargers didn't have another play longer than 14 yards until the game seemed practically locked up by the end of the third quarter. By the time the Broncos took a 17-point lead, Philip Rivers had eight completed passes for 60 yards.

Early in the fourth quarter the Chargers went for it on fourth-and-1, and linebacker Todd Davis shot through the line like he knew the snap count before Rivers called it out, and blasted Gordon just as he was given the ball. That's when it seemed like the Chargers were done.

The Broncos let them back in the game after that, but the Chargers couldn't finish.

The AFC West might have plenty of interesting games this season. The Kansas City Chiefs and Oakland Raiders had two of the NFL's best performances in Week 1. The Broncos and Chargers went down to the

wire to finish the opening week. Most people probably missed the fourth quarter of the final Monday night game, but the AFC West teams should provide plenty of entertainment the rest of the season.

Broncos hold off Chargers' rally by a fingertip in opener

By Connor Orr

NFL.com

September 12, 2017

1. If you went to bed a little early, it's a scene worth watching even if you know the result: Two minutes to go, an animated Philip Rivers with the ball and a chance to win or tie. After getting the ball to their own 47-yard line thanks to a quick dump-off to Melvin Gordon and a flick over the middle to Antonio Gates, the Chargers are forced to take their final timeout with 42 seconds remaining -- but not before almost 15 seconds are drained off the clock amid some confusion (the crowd in Denver was noticeable even from the most volume deprived television sets Monday). Gordon converts the first on the ground. Rivers, on the next play, catches Denver corner Bradley Roby climbing over his receiver and draws the flag. Then, he hits Keenan Allen on a suspiciously wide open route allowing him to jog comfortably out of bounds.

Younghoe Koo, the Chargers kicker, drills a game-tying 44-yard field goal, but not before Broncos coach Vance Joseph gets the last-second timeout off -- an icing attempt. A play later, Shelby Harris, a 26-year-old former seventh-round pick of the Oakland Raiders, shoves his way past a blocker and gets his right fingertip on Koo's second attempt, forcing it to ricochet off to the left.

2. I think both Anthony Lynn and Vance Joseph -- brand-new, first-time head coaches without lengthy coordinator stints on their resumes -- learned a ton. Joseph got a little too conservative with a 24-7 lead despite watching quarterback Trevor Siemian (17 of 28, 219 yards, two touchdowns, one INT) make some of the most mature plays of his career to date. Lynn, meanwhile, watched his Chargers struggle with the deafening noise, and watched his coaching staff call plays that took Rivers (22 of 33, 192 yards, three touchdowns and one INT) in and out of control. At this point, it looks like both are good enough to keep their teams interesting until December.

3. It was awesome to hear play-by-play announcer Beth Mowins make history on Monday night. Take it away...

I was lucky enough to be in attendance for Mowins' reception of the 2015 Marty Glickman Award for Leadership in Sports Media and couldn't help but be inspired by her relentless drive back then. Two years later, on a night that could -- and should -- open doors for anyone who loves the game, Mowins was as good as it gets.

3a. As good as Mowins was, Rex Ryan's debut in the booth will be a major storyline. I was surprised, personally, by his approach. Having covered Ryan, hearing him speak anecdotally about football was entertaining and informative. His ability to recognize the complexities of NFL defenses or dip into his pocket for a good story were uncanny. Even during a televised preseason trial run with Mowins, Ryan flashed the ability to call out a blitz in progress or a shifting coverage. Given the meteoric rise of Tony Romo after just one week, that ability could have earned Ryan some kudos. Instead, I felt he leaned on some old clichés. Ryan was awkward at times and unexpectedly quiet at others. He shied away from the persona he crafted for himself over the last decade. Everyone gets better with reps, but Ryan might be closer to finding success again on the sideline.

4. Regardless of who is calling the shots in Denver defensively, this unit is still one of the best three in football. With Von Miller double- and triple-teamed all night, the Broncos still rattled off six quarterback hits and a sack. Joseph was gashing Los Angeles where it hurt: up the middle when Rivers wouldn't have time to react. We saw a lot of the Chargers' quarterback wheeling away from the pocket, flinging the ball out of bounds.

5. Not to be outdone, 1.5 sacks each for Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram. Bosa got to the quarterback twice while Ingram tallied four quarterback hits. The tandem was especially beastly in the opening moments of the game, when just about any replacement-level tackle in the NFL is going to struggle to handle them one on one without a chip.

Brandon McManus, Broncos agree on 3-year extension

By Staff

NFL.com

September 12, 2017

The Denver Broncos made sure Brandon McManus will be their kicker for the long haul on Monday.

General manager John Elway announced the team and the kicker agreed on a contract extension. NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport reported, per a source, it's a three-year extension worth \$11.254 million with \$6 million of it guaranteed. McManus is now the NFL's fourth highest paid kicker.

McManus connected on 68 of his 82 field goal attempts in his three years in Denver with a long of 57 yards. He also made 108 of his 110 career extra-point attempts. Last season, McManus missed just five of his 34 field goal attempts.

History Is Made As Beth Mowins Calls Broncos Game

By Staff

CBS Local

September 12, 2017

History was made Monday night at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

Beth Mowins became the first woman to call a nationally-televised NFL game when the Broncos took the field against the Los Angeles Chargers.

Mowins began calling college games for ESPN in 2005, becoming only the second woman to call a nationally-televised college football game for the network.

Ahead of the game, Broncos defensive end Derek Wolfe tweeted out his excitement.

Mowins is only the second woman, and the first in 37 years, to do play-by-play of an NFL regular-season game.

Following her debut, Mowins will continue calling games for NFL on CBS throughout the season, beginning with the Cleveland Browns and the Indianapolis Colts on Sept. 24.

"I'm really excited to welcome Beth Mowins to the CBS Sports family," CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus said at the NFL on CBS Media Day. "I think it says a lot about what CBS is all about. Beth was hired not because she's a woman. Beth was hired because she's a terrific play-by-play personality and is really going to be a great addition to our team."

High-tech helmets designed to lower risk of concussions make NFL debut

By Rick Maese
Washington Post
September 12, 2017

There was a noteworthy football debut that took place during the NFL's opening week. It could be seen as Kansas City quarterback Alex Smith led his team to an upset over New England, as Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson sat in the pocket against Green Bay and as Dallas running back Alfred Morris took a handoff from Dak Prescott on Sunday night.

All three players were wearing a new high-tech helmet, available for the first time this season, that league officials hope provides a preview of how technology and innovation could help make the game safer.

Smith, Wilson and Morris were among 70 or so players who wore the VICIS Zero1 helmet, the product of a Seattle start-up that might look like the traditional football helmet from afar but has a completely different design just beneath its exterior shell.

The helmet incorporates engineering principles more commonly seen in the automotive field. The outer shell is softer and more pliable, made from flexible thermoplastic. Beneath it is a layer of more than 500 small columns, each measuring an inch or so long, which absorb force and also twist and move laterally, lessening the impact of rotational acceleration, a major concussion culprit.

"Think of the current helmets like old cars, all made of steel," said Dave Marver, the VICIS CEO. "They get in a collision and they're rigid. The passenger continues to move forward. Today's cars, though, have bumpers that crumple, that slow acceleration before they reach the passenger compartment."

The VICIS Zero1 was the top-performing helmet in the NFL's Helmet Laboratory Testing Performance Results, faring better than 32 other counterparts when tested for head impact severity. Though not yet available for youth or high school players, it's being used this season for the first time on NFL and college fields.

Professional players have the option of wearing the helmet of their choice from a list of those approved by the NFL. There's a poster that hangs in every NFL facility showing that VICIS finished first in the independent testing. While nearly all of the NFL clubs have VICIS available to them, only players from about half the teams wore the new helmet during their Week 1 games. Teams like Seattle, Houston and Kansas City each had a handful of players take the field in the Zero1. Others, like the Washington Redskins, didn't have any. The helmet is also being used this season by players on 20 or so college teams, including Alabama, Notre Dame, Florida State and Texas A&M.

Like other manufacturers, VICIS is careful not to make any claims that its helmet prevents concussions. Instead, the company says the product's design reduces the severity of impacts the head and brain experience in collisions.

“We will have players in the Zero1 get a concussion, almost certainly,” Marver said. “We’re hopeful the likelihood is lower, though, because we’re reducing those impact forces.”

Marver’s company has already started studying other possible applications. Marver was in Washington last week for meetings on Capitol Hill. The company has been working on prototypes of a military combat helmet that incorporates many of the same engineering principles as its football helmet, and Marver was meeting with lawmakers and legislative aides to discuss the possibilities.

The current version of the company’s football helmet retails for \$1,500, six times more than competitors that also performed well in the NFL’s tests. VICIS plans to eventually make versions of the helmet more accessible at lower price points. Marver says he hopes to test the helmet with younger and lighter football players in 2018 and then hit the market in 2019.

“Look, we were founded in part by a pediatric neurosurgeon. We didn’t get into this to help 2,000 pro players, even though we want to do that,” he said. “We want to help 4 million kids. That’s what motivates us.”

Trevor Siemian wants to finish stronger, but “a win’s a win”

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 12, 2017

For the first three quarters of Monday night’s game against the Chargers, it looked like the Broncos would cruise to a win over their AFC West rivals.

They built a 24-7 win after scoring on both of their third quarter possessions and quarterback Trevor Siemian kept making the right calls on third downs to extend drives while the Chargers couldn’t find the same success. Things went the other way in the final 15 minutes as Siemian threw a pick and Jamaal Charles lost a fumble to give the Chargers a chance to cut the lead to three points as time wound down. A missed field goal added to the woes and the Chargers got a chance to try to pull out the comeback after Siemian threw incomplete on a third down with 2:09 left in the game.

L.A.’s bid to tie the game ended when Shelby Harris blocked a field goal, allowing Siemian to balance his postgame evaluation between the desired result and acknowledgement that they can’t give teams a chance to get back into games.

“I’ve learned pretty quickly nothing’s certain, especially when you’re playing a guy like Philip Rivers on the other sideline,” Siemian said, via the team’s website. “Down the stretch there, offensively we wish we would have made a few more plays to help our defense out, but, shoot, a win’s a win. We’ll take it however we can get it.”

Siemian ended the night 17-of-28 for 219 yards, two touchdowns and that interception and he also ran for a touchdown when he avoided Joey Bosa on a 1-yard run in the second quarter. The turnover was ill-timed, but it was otherwise the kind of game the Broncos will likely be OK with from Siemian if they can match it with the 140 yards they got on the ground and strong defense.

Brandon McManus signs four-year deal with Broncos

By Josh Alper

Pro Football Talk

September 12, 2017

The Broncos will kick off their 2017 season on Monday night against the Chargers and they took care of some other business a few hours before the game gets underway.

General Manager John Elway announced that the team has signed kicker Brandon McManus to a new four-year deal. Elway didn't offer any details about the financial terms of the deal. PFT has learned, via a league source, that it is a three-year extension worth \$11.254 million with \$6 million in fully-guaranteed money. (The total guarantee, including injury-only, is \$8.25 million.)

McManus signed a restricted free agent tender this offseason that left him set to make \$2.746 million in salary this year. There was talk at the time of his signing and when the Broncos released safety T.J. Ward that a longer commitment to McManus might be coming.

Elway called McManus "an important weapon" for the Broncos and he's made 68-of-82 field goals over his three seasons with the team. He's also made 108-of-110 extra points over that span.

Chargers, Broncos make practice squad promotions before opener

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
September 12, 2017

The Chargers and Broncos will bring Week One of the 2017 season when they play in Denver on Monday night and both teams made roster moves ahead of the game.

The Chargers announced that they have promoted wide receiver Jeremy Davis from the practice squad. Cornerback Jeff Richards was waived to make room.

Davis' promotion comes with Dontrelle Inman listed as questionable for the game due to a groin injury. Rookie Mike Williams is out with a back injury, leaving Keenan Allen, Tyrell Williams and Travis Benjamin at the top of the depth chart.

Denver also made a practice squad promotion. According to multiple reports, defensive tackle Tyrique Jarrett will join the club for Monday night's game. They had a roster spot open after waiving Kyle Peko and a need on the defensive line with Jared Crick and Zach Kerr both ruled out due to injuries.

Jared Crick, Zach Kerr inactive for Broncos

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

September 12, 2017

The Broncos enter tonight's game thin on the defensive line, with Jared Crick (back) and Zach Kerr (knee) both on their inactive list. Adam Gotsis will make his first career start.

Denver promoted Tyrique Jarrett from the practice squad, with Jarrett and Shelby Harris the only reserves against the Chargers.

Running back Devontae Booker (wrist), quarterback Paxton Lynch (shoulder), cornerback Lorenzo Doss, guard Billy Turner and receiver Jordan Taylor also are inactive for the Broncos.

The Chargers' inactives are: receiver Mike Williams (back), receiver Dontrelle Inman (groin), defensive end Jerry Attaochu (hamstring), tight end Sean McGrath (knee), safety Dexter McCoil, quarterback Cardale Jones and offensive lineman Sam Tevi.

Ron Leary out with a concussion

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

September 12, 2017

Broncos right guard Ron Leary left in the third quarter with a concussion.

Connor McGovern replaced Leary. McGovern, a fifth-round pick in 2016, had never played a down in the NFL before Monday night.

Leary left the Cowboys as a free agent to sign a four-year, \$35 million contract with the Broncos, including \$20 million guaranteed. He started 47 games at left guard in four seasons in Dallas.

In 2015, Leary lost his starting job to La'el Collins but got it back in 2016 when Collins was injured in Week 3. Leary's play drove up his price in free agency, making him too expensive for the Cowboys to keep and a key addition to the Broncos' revamped offensive line.

Bennie Fowler touchdown gives Broncos lead over Chargers

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
September 12, 2017

A 5-yard touchdown pass from Trevor Siemian to Bennie Fowler gave the Denver Broncos an early 7-0 lead over the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night.

A hard count from Siemian enticed Chargers defensive end Joey Bosa to jump offside and give the Broncos a free play. Siemian bought time and lofted a pass into the back of the end zone to Fowler to give Denver the lead.

The connecting with Fowler capped a 13-play, 70-yard drive for the Broncos. Siemian and Fowler also connected earlier on the drive to convert a 3rd-and-7 with a 10-yard gain. It was one of only two third downs faced on the drive by the Broncos.

Denver has converted four of five third downs in the first quarter offensively.

Broncos hold halftime lead over Chargers behind two Trevor Siemian TD drives

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
September 12, 2017

Trevor Siemian and C.J. Anderson have combined to lead the Denver Broncos to a 14-7 lead over the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night.

Siemian completed a 5-yard touchdown pass to Bennie Fowler and scored on a 1-yard run to give the Broncos the lead at the break. C.J. Anderson has also added 66 yards on 13 carries as Denver has rushed for 88 yards in the first half against the Chargers defense.

A hard count from Siemian enticed Chargers defensive end Joey Bosa to jump offside and give the Broncos a free play. Siemian bought time and lofted a pass into the back of the end zone to Fowler to give Denver the lead. He then scrambled for the 1-yard touchdown, evading a chasing Bosa, to retake the lead.

Melvin Gordon has been one of the few bright spots for the Chargers. Gordon scored the only touchdown of the half on an 11-yard pass from Philip Rivers. He also had 51 rushing yards at half as well.

Broncos hold off frenzied Chargers rally with blocked field goal

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
September 12, 2017

Icing the kicker worked for the Denver Broncos as they survived a furious rally from the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night.

Shelby Harris blocked a game-tying 44-yard field goal attempt by rookie kicker Younghoe Koo as the Broncos escaped with a 24-21 victory. Koo had converted the 44-yard attempt the first time around only to have Broncos head coach Vance Joseph call timeout just prior to the snap.

A game that had been in Denver's control for most of the contest suddenly needed the heroics of Harris to enable the Broncos to avoid a trip to overtime.

Broncos linebacker Todd Davis knifed into the backfield to blast Melvin Gordon for a 2-yard loss with 12 minutes remaining and the Chargers trailing 24-7 that seemed to slam the door shut on any thoughts of a rally.

But rally the Chargers did anyway.

Philip Rivers connected with Keenan Allen and Travis Benjamin for a pair of touchdowns to cut the Broncos lead from 24-7 to 24-21 in just over a minute of game time.

After Rivers hit Allen for a 5-yard touchdown, linebacker Korey Toomer forced a fumble from Jamaal Charles to give the Chargers possession again. It took just one play for Rivers to hit Benjamin for a 38-yard touchdown to close the gap to just three points.

Rivers finished the game with 192 yards and three touchdowns with an interception. Siemian passed for 219 yards with two touchdowns, an interception and a rushing touchdown for Denver.

The Broncos quickly drove back into scoring range after Siemian connected with Virgil Green for 44 yards with a roughing the passer tacked on to the end of the play to move Denver to the Chargers' 16-yard line. However, two sacks of Siemian forced Denver to try a field goal and Brandon McManus missed for 50 yards out to keep the deficit at just three points.

The Chargers managed to drive to the Denver 26 before Koo's kick was deflected in the closing seconds allowing the Broncos to hold on.

Siemian scored on a 1-yard run in the first half and connected with Bennie Fowler for both of his touchdown passes in the game. C.J. Anderson rushed for 81 yards on 20 carries as well as the Broncos rushed for 140 yards in the game.

Melvin Gordon had success in the first half but became marginalized with the growing deficit after the break. He finished with 54 yards on 18 carries with five catches for 25 yards and a touchdown as well.