

Broncos search for root of red-zone issues

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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When the Denver Broncos officially exit their bye week on Monday, one of the biggest issues they will have had on the to-do list is to figure out why something that was good in the season's first two weeks has been so decidedly not good in the last two weeks.

Because in their last two games before the bye, the Broncos' ability to score touchdowns once inside the red zone has dipped significantly. And the Broncos have spent some time this past week trying to determine how much they need quarterback Trevor Siemian to pick up the pace when the goal line is in view, how much is the receivers not winning enough one-on-one battles in and around the end zone as well as how much is just simply too many mistakes at the wrong time.

Or whether it simply has been all of the above.

"It's the difference in one play or two plays," Siemian said. "When you have opportunities, you have to capitalize on them. I can think of a couple plays we could have turned into points."

Overall, inside their opponents' 20-yard line the Broncos have converted just 50 percent of their trips into touchdowns and that is tied for 20th in the league. But even that figure is built on their quality efforts in the first two games while the signature play of the red-zone frustrations of the last two games may have come last Sunday.

On a first-and-goal from the Raiders' 4-yard line, in position to turn a 16-7 lead into a three-possession game as the third quarter drew to a close, Siemian had a pass deflected into the air that Emmanuel Sanders caught for a 10-yard loss. That put the Broncos in second-and-14 and three plays later Brandon McManus missed a 29-yard field goal.

"That kind of stinks," Siemian said. "It's just one or two plays here and there, and when you get those opportunities in the right play, you have to make the most of it."

They've had penalties -- two in the last two games inside the 20 -- they've surrendered sacks on back-to-back plays inside the 20 against the Bills, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas doesn't have a touchdown catch this season and in four games the Broncos don't have a running back with more than one rushing touchdown as C.J. Anderson and Jamaal Charles each have one.

It all means after the Broncos were 3-of-5 scoring touchdowns in drives inside the opponents' 20 in the season opener against the Chargers and 4-of-4 in the rout of the Cowboys, they are 1-of-7 combined in the last two games -- a loss to the Bills and a win over the Raiders.

Upon further review, coach Vance Joseph has called it "self-inflicted wounds," a combination of Siemian, penalties, bobbles in pass protection and the team's marquee players not winning enough battles to finish touchdown plays.

"We can be better and we will be better," Joseph said. "Absolutely we can. In my mind, as I've said, it's not scheme, it's mistakes, it's a batted ball, a false start at the 5-yard line. We can't do those things. I think we've had two penalties already this season at the 5-yard line or closer. You can't have those. It's detail and winning those matchups. We've had moments where we've done it pretty well and we need more of those moments when we come back."

"We know we can be better there," Siemian said. "There's an urgency there. But again, it's four games. It's a small sample size. So, we're going to get better there. I trust in that."

Fast start is great, but Broncos defense wants to be No. 1 at season's end

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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There is a theory that John Elway the NFL executive has tried to construct a team for which John Elway the quarterback would have found it difficult to face.

The roster Elway and his staff have constructed has the Denver Broncos at 3-1 behind its stout defense. The team doesn't have to look far -- its trophy case -- to see how far a dominant defense can take them.

The team's Super Bowl 50 run was powered by a defense that finished that season near the top of every major defensive category.

"It's early, it's only been one month into the season," said linebacker Von Miller. "There have been a lot of seasons where teams go into their bye week undefeated and they don't win the game after that. You've got to constantly fight for success. You've got to be desperate every single week for wins or they'll evade you."

So consider many of the Broncos' veteran players, the guys who earned Super Bowl rings the last time around, cautiously optimistic. After four games the Broncos are No. 1 in total defense, No. 1 in run defense, tied for No. 6 in scoring defense and No. 10 in pass defense.

What that says is the Broncos took their biggest deficiency on defense last season -- they finished 28th in run defense at 130.3 rushing yards allowed per game -- and made a significant effort to repair it. They're surrendering 50.8 yards rushing per game -- a pace that would be exceptionally difficult to maintain -- but it is evidence of the potential the group has considering the Broncos have largely the same secondary that has finished No. 1 in pass defense in each of the previous two seasons.

They're trending in the right direction with the attention-grabber in all of that being the Broncos held Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch to a combined 95 yards rushing. But all the Broncos really want to talk about is what the defense could be.

The Broncos have given up a big play or two in the passing game, allowing seven touchdown passes in four games. By comparison, they allowed 13 touchdown passes all of last season. They haven't been as effective as they would like to be defending in the red zone and they have yet to force a fumble.

"So we can do some things," said cornerback Aqib Talib. "We've got to put the work in. We've given up too many plays, the way we look at it. It's all about getting those game plans and making the plays. You want to be the top defense at the end of the season, that's always a goal."

Asked this past week what he believed the ceiling could be for the defense, Broncos coach Vance Joseph said, "I think it's high. It's only two or three plays per game. It's really on us. It's about focus and details. It's a high ceiling for that entire group. Stopping the run the way we have, that forces teams to be one-

dimensional. Now our pass-rushers can take over the game along with our cover guys. If we stop the run that way for the entire year and play solid pass defense, we're going to be hard to beat."

The emphasis is on "the entire year." When the Broncos return from their bye, they will have 11 consecutive weeks worth of games to close out the regular season and the three teams currently ranked Nos. 1-3 in total offense (the Patriots, the Chiefs and the Eagles) are all on the schedule in the first five weeks after the bye.

The Broncos will also face five quarterbacks currently ranked among the league's top 10 in passing yards in the five games immediately following the bye. In order, that's Eli Manning (fifth in passing yards), Philip Rivers (seventh), Alex Smith (ninth), Carson Wentz (10th) and Tom Brady (first) over their next five weeks.

"I think we should feel good about that but have understanding that it's not good enough," Joseph said. "We have to continue to work and we have some issues that we need to clean up. They should feel good about that. It's a hard league and to win three out of four in the first quarter is good for this team."

Broncos making defenses pay for attention on Emmanuel Sanders, Demaryius Thomas

By Jeff Legwold

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Wide receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders certainly have been involved in the Denver Broncos' offense this season.

The Broncos would like for them to advance a level beyond that, however.

Thomas has been targeted 30 times and Sanders 34 times in four games. No other player on the roster has more than 16 targets.

But the Broncos' top two receivers have combined for two touchdown receptions in four games -- both by Sanders.

They have received plenty of attention from opposing defenses -- so much so, that even as the Broncos pound away with the league's No. 3 rushing attack at 143 yards per game, those defenses have continued to keep extra players in coverage, essentially deciding they'd rather take their chances against the Broncos' running backs rather than let Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian pick away at them with Thomas and Sanders in full flight.

Or as coach Vance Joseph has put it: "When you're facing a lot of Cover 2 or shell coverage, No. 88 [Thomas] and No. 10 [Sanders] are really taken out of the ballgame."

That look has opened up things for others. Tight end A.J. Derby had four catches for 75 yards and a touchdown in last Sunday's victory over the Raiders, and Bennie Fowler is tied with Sanders for the team lead in touchdown catches with two.

However, the Broncos' quest to get Thomas and Sanders the ball in the scoring zone will continue.

Thomas has been targeted at least eight times in three of the Broncos' four games and Sanders has been targeted at least eight times in two games, including 15 targets in the team's Week 3 loss in Buffalo. The Raiders, however, got enough pressure up front to disrupt Siemian when he dropped back to throw, and the Broncos leaned on the run game even more.

Thomas and Sanders were each targeted just five times against Oakland, as Sanders had four catches for 27 yards and Thomas had one reception for 11 yards. It was Thomas' first one-reception game since the Broncos' win in Super Bowl 50.

"We're close, I think," Thomas said. "As long as we move the ball and score points, that's what we need to do. [Defenses] have to make choices and these are their choices right now. ... We'll keep working."

Joseph was asked this week if he thought the Broncos' top two receivers were getting frustrated.

"Receivers? They're always frustrated," Joseph said with a laugh. "They want to catch 10 balls a game. I like that. Especially from [Sanders]. I like his personality. He wants the ball every play. That's cool. He should want the ball every play. He's a competitive dude."

"I think the difference is, it happened a little last year, too, but we weren't running it as well as we'd like to," Siemian said. "We want to be difficult to defend regardless of how teams are playing us. ... Guys know they're going to get touches, they're going to get involved. We'll be all right."

Joseph has said he believes the Broncos can continue to do things schematically to get the ball to Thomas and Sanders in red zone situations. But he added that if the Broncos continue to stress defenses with their run game -- they've run for at least 140 yards in three of their games -- it will be far more difficult for those same defenses to keep using an extra defender when Thomas or Sanders or both are in the formation.

"If that happens, we have to continue to run the football and force teams to give us fair coverage," Joseph said. "And when we get fair coverage, we have to take advantage. So far ... our run game has been effective. We have rushed for 140 yards a game, and if we can do that we can control the game."

Asked if he believes defenses will have to consider changing their ways if the Broncos keep pounding the ball, he added: "They will."

Broncos' improved run defense key to Denver's turnaround

By Arnie Stapleton
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Scout over, "No Fly Zone." Make room for "Ground Control."

The Broncos are allowing a league-low 50 yards rushing through the first month of the season, helping them hit their bye week at 3-1, a game behind the lone unbeaten Kansas City Chiefs in the AFC West.

The Broncos have shut down Melvin Gordon, Ezekiel Elliott, LeSean McCoy and Marshawn Lynch .

Those four workhorses loomed large on their schedule as the Broncos mixed changes in philosophy and personnel to seal the leaks in their run defense that doomed them in 2016. Collectively, that group rushed for nearly 4,000 yards and 40 touchdowns a year ago even with Lynch on hiatus. Against Denver, they managed a measly 95 yards and no TDs on 49 carries.

That's 1.9 yards a pop.

"Everyone in the front seven has been playing great," noted nose tackle Domata Peko, the gem of general manager John Elway's free agent class and a major — but not the only — reason for Denver's turnaround.

"I feel like I found my second wind here in Denver," said Peko, who spent his first 11 NFL seasons in Cincinnati.

He's sure made a great first impression.

"He's on fire every day," coach Vance Joseph said. "That is fun to see from a guy in his 12th year. He hasn't missed a start in seven years. He never complains. He's here every day and in a good mood."

Nobody is really salty in Denver, although the Broncos know they're going to have to take this show on the road soon. After hosting the Giants next week, the Broncos, whose lone loss came at Buffalo in Week 3, play seven of their final 11 games away from home.

As they demonstrated in 2015, however, defense travels.

Denver's top-ranked defense carried Peyton Manning across the finish line two years ago, sending the five-time MVP out as a champion.

The inability to stop the run last year — the Broncos were 28th in the league, allowing 130 yards a game — was a major reason they missed the playoffs and a chance to defend that title. So, Elway drafted DeMarcus Walker and signed free agents Peko, Zach Kerr, Shelby Harris and Kasim Edebali, then claimed Ahtyba Rubin off waivers from Seattle.

Joseph promoted secondary coach Joe Woods, a Wade Phillips protege, to defensive coordinator and they began blending concepts from Joseph's 4-3 background and Woods' 3-4 roots.

Joseph also put his team in full pads a lot more than his predecessor did a year before, when the Broncos were coming their Super Bowl triumph.

"I think stopping the run and running the football better" is where that's paid off, Joseph said. "That was our goal in training camp. ... If you don't do it in pads, you won't get good at it."

Peko replaced Sylvester Williams as the fulcrum of Denver's run defense and his teammates marvel at how he never gets his hips turned and is absolutely eating up double teams.

"I don't think he gets enough credit," linebacker Von Miller said. "We have the No. 1 run defense and that's mainly because of how beastly Peko is."

Inside linebackers Brandon Marshall and Todd Davis are playing closer to the line of scrimmage on early downs, attacking the running lanes instead of inching back in the read-and-react style they played under Phillips.

"I love it," Davis said. "It's kind of 'See ball, get ball.' We're stopping the run like we never have before and I think that's going to just elevate our defense to a whole other level."

Opponents must deal with Miller and star cornerbacks Aqib Talib and Chris Harris Jr. again, something they shied away from down the stretch last year when they could just hand off the ball.

"We're just earning those passing downs, earning those pass rushes for the outside 'backers, letting Aqib and Chris and those guys do what they do best," Marshall said.

Guards now have to account for Marshall and Davis, and that, in turn, means defensive ends Derek Wolfe and Adam Gotsis aren't getting double-teamed nearly as much. Then, Miller and fellow outside linebacker Shaq Barrett are pinching the edges and keeping the backs from bouncing outside.

The key to it all is having their top-notch cornerbacks cover receivers one on one, which Harris figures will lead to more big plays by the "No Fly Zone."

"We're taking that run away. We're going to get way more attempts," Harris said. "Now, turnovers are going to start skyrocketing out there."

An assistant defensive coach walked through the locker room this week and suggested the front seven get its own moniker, maybe "No Run Zone."

Across the room, the defensive backs sneered. They insisted the run stuffers need more than a month's worth of wonderful work to earn a nickname like theirs.

Marshall, for one, is fine with such a holding pattern for "Ground Control" or anything else that comes up.

"I'm good with that," Marshall said. "It's too early."

All Colorado Congress members to Jeff Bezos: Build Amazon HQ2 here (Video)

By Mark Harden

Colorado Business Journal

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It's not every day that Colorado's entire congressional delegation unites around one goal, but it happened Wednesday with the objective of landing Amazon.com Inc.'s massive second headquarters complex.

Both of the state's U.S. senators and all seven of its members of the U.S. House of Representatives signed a letter sent Wednesday to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, urging the e-commerce giant to pick Colorado as the site for its "Amazon HQ2."

"Colorado offers a highly skilled workforce and a demonstrated commitment to providing the environment and lifestyle that businesses and their workers need to thrive," the joint letter says.

Amazon (Nasdaq: AMZN) announced Sept. 7 it is looking for a city in North America where it can build a second headquarters that would be equal to its sprawling HQ campus in Seattle. It said it plans to invest more than \$5 billion to build and operate Amazon HQ2, and that up to 50,000 employees would work there, making an average of more than \$100,000 each.

The new complex would operate in addition to Amazon's 40,000-employee, 8.1 million-square-foot downtown Seattle campus.

Colorado leaders swiftly said they intend to mount a major effort to land the new campus somewhere in metro Denver.

In their letter to Bezos, the Colorado lawmakers touted the state's "world-class workforce, ... outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities, a strong education system, dynamic employers, and a moderate cost of living."

And they cited Denver International Airport's growth, "responsible stewardship of our public lands, development of diverse energy sources, and responsible fiscal management" in the state, keeping "Colorado on the forefront of innovation."

The delegation added that Colorado's "local, state, and federal policy makers are committed to continuing the policies that have allowed our state to thrive, and we look for you to be a partner in that endeavor. This commitment transcends partisanship."

In addition to sending Bezos the letter directly, the message will be included in the formal bid for Amazon HQ2 that the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. in response to Amazon's request for proposals.

Amazon already has a large and growing footprint in metro Denver, mostly in Adams County.

It has a new 1 million square foot fulfillment center plus a "sortation" warehouse in Aurora, and also moved recently into the Crossroads Commerce Park complex in Adams County. And through its recent acquisition of Whole Foods Market, Amazon also owns a Whole Foods distribution facility in Aurora, along with several stores in the area.

A 2.5 million square foot fulfillment center in Thornton is slated to open in August 2018.

Amazon says its hunt for a site for HQ2 focuses on metro areas of at least 1 million people, of which there are about 80 nationwide. It also wants a site with an international airport within 45 miles, and that has a strong university system. Metro Denver-Aurora meets all those criteria.

The company also wants a place with "a stable and business-friendly environment" and a location "with the potential to attract and retain strong technical talent."

The letter went out the same day as several Colorado business leaders unveiled a website to show Amazon just how people here love Colorado.

The New York Times touted Denver as a favorite in the HQ2 race in a Sept. 9 analysis. Other handicappers have picked other locations based on varied criteria.

Newton fumbles reply to reporter

By Betsey Guzior

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Was it really funny, Cam?

Carolina Panthers' quarterback Cam Newton, during his weekly news conference Wednesday, looked surprised by a technical question from Jourdan Rodrigue, a woman football writer for the Charlotte Observer.

"It's funny to hear a female talk about routes," he replied, smiling, reports The New York Times. He then answered her question about wide receiver Devin Funchess' running routes on the field.

Many interpreted his answer as patronizing and sexist, reports SB Nation.

Rodrigue, who's covered college football and has been on the Panthers beat for a year, tweeted shortly after: "I don't 'think' it's funny' to be a female and talk about routes. I think it's my job."

In a statement released by the Charlotte Observer, Rodrigue said, "I was dismayed by his response, which not only belittled me but countless other women before me and beside me who work in similar jobs."

Rodrigue and Newton spoke briefly after the news conference. She told the Observer that Newton didn't apologize. "Newton said that maybe he should have said it was funny to hear 'reporters' talk about routes and that, if she actually did know about them, then she knew more than most reporters," according to the Observer.

The Charlotte Observer's Scott Fowler, in a column published hours after the news conference points out that the real sexist sin - dismissiveness - was revealed in the private conversation:

"Rodrigue ended by asking Newton – whom she had introduced herself to on the first day of her employment with The Observer in October 2016 – if he knew her name after she had covered the team almost every day for the past year.

Sweet Emotion: How Emmanuel Sanders lets joy guide the way he plays

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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Take your eyes off the ball.

Ignore the center-quarterback exchange, the pitch to the running back and the toss to the tight end.

It's hard to do when everything seems to stem from where the quarterback chooses to go, how he avoids the pressure and how he throws the ball.

But instead, focus on the receiver on the outside.

No. 10, if you would.

Watch his footwork off the line — his speed to get into his route and his quickness to break out of it. See him streak across the field and elude the cornerback. The ball is there now, and he hauls in a pass and is racing forward, sideways, backward — any which way, so long as he avoids the defender.

Perhaps he somersaults into the end zone. Maybe he imitates a baseball pitcher and goes into his windup. It's possible he throws up a Mile High Salute and jumps into the stands.

With Emmanuel Sanders, it's hard to rule anything out.

And that's just how it goes when you let emotion — joy, mostly — rule your playing style.

Other emotions? They show up, too.

On one of those routes, you could've seen a play where the ball didn't go to Sanders, a play when the quarterback missed the 5-foot-11 blur flashing across the field.

If that's the case, you've probably seen throw his hands up. Or pound against his thigh pads. Or jump up and down.

But that's not his way of showing up the quarterback. It's no different to Sanders than any one of his touchdown celebrations.

"It's crazy, because you see me on film and you see me out there on the field, and you see sometimes I'll be wide open and I'm throwing my hands up and going crazy. On some teams, they'd say, 'Oh man, he's showing up the quarterback.' But I played with Peyton [Manning], I played with Trevor [Siemian], and they both know, 'He's not trying to show me up in any kind of way. He just loves the game of football and he wants to win.'"

This isn't manufactured emotion. On the other side of the football, Aqib Talib serves as the defense's energy, as its juice, as its soul.

When he finds himself in the position to celebrate or when he's on the wrong end of a big catch, there's no pageantry involved.

Emotion? Plenty of it. But fake, contrived reactions? Not a chance.

"It's how we play the game, man," Talib said. "It's real. It ain't like we're out here faking and trying to put on a show. We've been playing this since we were little. We love the game, and now we're getting paid for it."

This joy isn't just part of Sanders' game.

It's the entirety. It's his calling card.

When Sanders decided in 2014 he wanted to leave Pittsburgh and test the free-agent market, Mike Tomlin had just one request for the wide receiver the Steelers drafted in 2010.

"He said, 'You were one of my favorite guys that I've ever coached,'" Sanders said. "'When I see you on film, whatever team you go to, I still want to see that same kid that's dancing in the end zone, that's having fun and is showing his love for the game.'"

That kid's been around for a while.

He couldn't show off his moves the way he wanted to while at Bellville High School or Southern Methodist University, but the NFL's relaxed celebration rules meant his emotional displays could come out in Pittsburgh.

Understand this, though: His reactions aren't born on game day. That's when they're seen, of course, but they stem from weeks, months and years of work.

"When you see me out there and you see me catch a pass, just because of all the hard work I put in prior to that week to go out and execute that play that I caught in practice and to make that big-time third-down catch for my team and to hear Broncos Country roar to the excitement of me making a catch. It's hard not to get pumped up. It's hard not to flex. It's hard not to be excited."

Lately, he's had another reason to work and another reason to be excited come Sunday.

His 3-year-old son Princeton has adopted his dad's team in an extreme way. And that's been just one more reminder for Sanders to play with joy and passion.

"My son, he's a die-hard Broncos fan," Sanders said. "I feel like he's going to be a Broncos fan till the day that he leaves this earth. He loves the Broncos. Every time I allow him to go and get dressed, he goes and throws on his Broncos gear, and he don't want to take it off. He'd wear Broncos gear every day if I allowed him to. That's all he knows."

“My kids have played a huge role in keeping me with my feet on the ground, and I think my son definitely does that,” Sanders said. “Not only that, my family, as well. I care what they think. I care how I’m representing them. I love to go out and play in front of them and play for them and play for my teammates. Not only to play, but show out and have fun and hopefully lighten the mood off all my team, as well.”

The NFL season is a grind.

As the calendar pages turn and October gives way to November and then December, the weekly routine can sap the energy from teams.

That’s when some locker rooms fall off the pace.

And that’s when players like Emmanuel Sanders are most valuable.

He and Talib are pivotal in keeping the locker room lively and engaged during the toughest parts of the season.

Talib thinks players feed off the pair’s energy, and wide receiver Demaryius Thomas echoed that sentiment. Whether the team is coming off a win or a loss, Sanders’ mood never changes.

He’s the constant buzz.

“I think it’s not just E. Everybody got their own emotions in different ways,” Thomas said. “He’s just showing it a lot more. It brings excitement not only to the crowd, but us as players. I know it motivates him. It helps him out. And I enjoy seeing it, so I try to do the same. It’s just something he does.”

“It’s always the same with him,” Thomas said. “You’re going to get the best out of him. He’s going to work hard and always has the same mood. There’s no ups and downs, he’s always up, no matter what.”

While Sanders may not be a captain, that sort of contribution is invaluable to a locker room.

If his past is any indication, it’s also unlikely to end anytime soon.

So when the Broncos take the field against the Giants, pick a third down, and ignore what Trevor Siemian does.

Keep your eyes on Emmanuel Sanders instead.

No matter how the play ends, you never know when you could be in for a show.

Pres./CEO Joe Ellis joins Habitat for Humanity for fourth annual CEO Build

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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President and CEO Joe Ellis joined 43 other CEOs on Thursday for the fourth annual CEO Build.

The Denver-based, C-level executives worked at Habitat for Humanity's Sheridan Square site to get their hands dirty and build provide affordable housing for more than 63 families.

The event, let by Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver CEO Heather Lafferty, was the largest build since the CEO Build began in 2014.

"It's a wonderful cause and you're really doing something meaningful [by] building a home for somebody," Ellis said. "It's great work that Habitat for Humanity does, enabling people to own their own homes, providing this in a program that's sustainable and carries on and builds families and gives them a great foundation."

The Broncos' partnership with Habitat for Humanity began in 2012, and Ellis said Thursday the group gives families "a lifetime of dreams" when they're able to assume affordable ownership of their own homes.

"This is always a great day, where we have leaders who are passionate about giving back to our community," Lafferty said, "and we are so grateful for their support."

"CEOs have a way of just coming out and getting things done. It's amazing how everybody comes together. They may be competitors outside of the Habitat site, but when they come out here, we are all partners. We have one mission, one goal, and that's to ensure that some day, every human being has a good place to call home."

Added Ellis: "They've been a great partner. Heather Lafferty does a great job running the Denver-area Habitat for Humanity program. I think for everybody, we have four or five builds throughout the organization during the year. Everybody that participates really understands just how meaningful it is and how you're making a difference in a family's life."

Reflections on Ring of Fame inductee and former head coach Red Miller's legacy

By Staff

DenverBroncos.com

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More than 20 former players and many others associated with the Broncos celebrated the life of Ring of Fame head coach Red Miller on Thursday. Two of his former players, Ring of Famers Billy Thompson and Rick Upchurch, and former General Manager John Beake, reflected on the legacy of the first coach to take the Broncos to a Super Bowl.

Thoughts on Red Miller and what he meant

Former GM John Beake: It was a great tribute to Red Miller today. For all of us in that room, we had different experiences, different job responsibilities — whether it was coaching or player personnel — he was a wonderful person to work with. He listened to you, he asked for help and he appreciated it. You could just see the outpouring of everybody in here what it means for his family, his grandkids and the coaches that were there, the players that were there. I think it's a great tribute to Red and I'm honored that I was a part of it.

Ring of Famer Billy Thompson: He was a very unusual coach. He was one of those kinds of coaches that didn't mind getting his hands dirty. In other words, if he wanted to show or tell you something or coach you something, he would actually get down and show you how to do it. He was that kind of a guy. He was very motivating, had a lot of talent, played the piano and, like I said, it wouldn't be strange to see him wrestling in the locker room with one of the guys. Just flat out in a brawl on the floor. And we were all like 'The head coach? Yeah, that's him.' But the guys loved him.

The Broncos started in 1960 and they had never [won] double-digit games before. Red's first year, we went 12-2 for the first time in the history of the Broncos. There were a lot of firsts, and to top it off we went to the Super Bowl, Super Bowl XII. For every player, that's your desire, that's your goal, to go to the Super Bowl and win. But, we didn't win. But we got there and we've been there a lot of times and we've won [since], which is a testament to the legacy that Red started about getting to the Super Bowl. Pat Bowlen now has that same legacy and everybody in the Broncos knows if we don't go to the Super Bowl, we had a bad year.

Ring of Famer Rick Upchurch: Coach Red Miller honestly and truthfully was the best thing that happened to the Denver Broncos when he came in 1977. He brought accountability. He brought toughness. He was a players' coach, a guy you could sit down with and get true answers from. That's what I loved about him. But not only that, after the game was over, he still remained your friend. I would go over to the house, sit down with him in his backyard. He came down to Pueblo when I was trying to get the head coaching job down at East [High School]. He vouched for me. He stood there for me. This gentleman gave me my opportunity to become a starting wide receiver in the National Football League. So for me, Red was the man. And I loved him, I still love him today and I love his whole family, great people.

What's your favorite memory of or game with Red Miller?

Thompson: My favorite game was the Super Bowl in Dallas. We were down, but we weren't [out] and we had a contingency of Colorado people there. We were leaving the field and the people didn't stop cheering. So I looked at coach and said 'Did we win or lose?' and he said 'Listen to that. That's your telling.' That's the kind of guy he was. It was just fun for me to be with him. He was so energetic all the time. I didn't really realize how talented he was. He could play the piano, and vaudeville was nothing for him. He was just a great coach like I said and a great motivator. He'll be remembered in Broncos history that's for sure as the first coach to come in his first year and go to the Super Bowl.

Beake: I was very fortunate. I had coached for Kansas City and New Orleans. I was a high school coach, a college coach. I was at New Orleans when the Broncos played in '77. I was in the stands watching it because we were all told to leave. All the kids wanted to come back to Colorado because I had been at CSU in '75. So I went up and watched practice at CSU with the Broncos, and a lot of the coaches knew me and they came over. So Red came over and said 'Well, come on, bring those kids down to lunch. So I went to lunch, we talked, Fred Gehrke was there. We went over to Steamboat [Springs] for the weekend and came back. There weren't cellphones there. There were all these pins at the door saying 'Call Fred Gehrke. Call Red Miller.' So I did and I went down there on Monday. Red was really wonderful — this is a great story of how he is. He says, 'John, you have good coaching background but I don't have a coaching job open.' He said, 'However, what I'd like to have you do is work with Carroll Hardy. He's going to do the college scouting, and I want you to develop a pro personnel department.' And that was my introduction to the Denver Broncos. ... That was my treasured story because he changed my whole career.

What is Red Miller's lasting legacy?

Beake: I think his legacy [is] he taught us all how to win and work and play and work together. When he came in, like Billy Thompson said, [to go] 12-2 in his first year and [go to] a Super Bowl, it's unheard of. That was great. But all of a sudden, everything started to catch on: what was expected of everyone and what are your work habits and how you treat each other. That's his legacy that he brought to the Denver Broncos.

Upchurch: His legacy is that he came in and made men out of us where we could overcome and go to our first Super Bowl here in Denver, Colorado. He'll be remembered for that, but he'll be remembered, also, as a great guy who cared about people.

What does he mean to the city of Denver?

Thompson: I won't say it put Denver on the map, but that first Super Bowl did a lot to change people's perception of Colorado. Since then ... there's too many people (laughs). I love Colorado and I've been here since '69 and it's my home.

Upchurch: He means a lot. First and foremost, in 1977, to take this team to 12-2 and then go to a Super Bowl for the first time and win the AFC West for the first time and win the AFC Championship for the first time, it leaves an impression. You can never ever top that one. I don't care what anyone says.

What would have been Red's reaction be when he saw his name the day it's inducted into the Broncos Ring of Fame?

Beake: Thank God that he did know that he was put in the Ring of Fame. He was ecstatic. He was honored. When we went to tell him that he's been inducted, it was our privilege to see his reaction. He'll be there, just he'll have a different view.

Thompson: I think he'd be excited. I really do because they did a tape before he got sick and told him that he was going to be inducted and I could just hear it in his voice how happy he was to be recognized for the job. It was only four years that he [coached here]. We were double digits in wins for three years and his last year I think we were 8-8. But he was like 60-something winning percentage. He was a tremendous, tremendous coach for us.

Upchurch: I think he would just be smiling and sitting there saying, 'Thank you so very much. I'm thankful that you guys recognized me for what we accomplished during my tenure.' And he would be smiling big-time. I know he's going to be smiling that day along with the rest of us.

Broncos Film Room: What exactly is behind Denver's immense success running the ball?

By Andre Simone
BSN Denver
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They might not be scoring as much as you'd like, but there's no denying the Denver Broncos offense has been different in just the first four weeks of the 2017 season.

A big part of that has been Denver's running game which is currently third in the NFL, averaging 143 rushing yards per game. The Orange & Blue have gone over the century mark on the ground in every game thus far, and it's all happening in a variety of ways. More impressive, it's occurring with an offensive line that features three new starters, in a new offensive scheme that's paying off in a big way. Something that we featured in offensive coordinator Mike McCoy's first game against the Chargers with endless personnel variations.

We went back to see what the Broncos did to impose themselves in the run game over the Oakland Raiders a week ago in their 16-10 win. To try to understand what's working so well this season.

A taste of their own medicine

I hate to harken back to this but, back in 2016, the Raiders stomped the Broncos vaunted defense on the ground. This past week it was time for Denver to get their revenge. The Broncos did just that, using a sixth offensive lineman, a key to Oakland's 2016 win.

Denver did this in six different instances, using tackle Donald Stephenson as an "eligible receiver," lined up to the right of right tackle Menelik Watson. Every time Denver was in these jumbo packages they ran the ball and had plenty of success.

In all these jumbo packages, there were also either two tight ends or a TE and a fullback, giving Denver eight players on the field who were competent blockers. In using this package, the Broncos had 62 yards on the ground, including the biggest run of the game; C.J. Anderson's 40-yard run that you'll see below.

This run is a perfect example of how effective the running game can be, and how good some underrated blockers are performing. Watson, with Virgil Green, made this play, as Green makes a crucial block coming in motion inside to clear Anderson's initial lane. Watson, all the while, takes out the inside linebacker opening up a big hole for C.J. at the second level.

Stephenson is also crucial here, as he completely takes out Khalil Mack while Jeff Heurman—an underrated blocker in his own right—does a great job here, too.

While there've been lots of issues for the line in pass protection, the run blocking has been much better. Even more so in these jumbo packages, where Denver is bullying teams in a manner that we haven't seen for a while.

Even when you take out the one 40-yard run, the Broncos still averaged 4.4 yards per rush on the other five plays out of the six-man o-line groupings.

It might be a tell and could be a great way to set up play action in the future, but while it's not exotic, this formation's working. Stephenson and the two tight ends also give Watson more help in pass protection as the Broncos do pass out of two tight end formations a bunch.

In general, the attitude from the ground game is different, and it's showing on short yard downs. Denver converted all second and third downs of three yards or less against Oakland and has looked much better in short yardage.

Don't look now, but Denver's offense is trying to bullying opponents.

Running out of the gun

While the Broncos are imposing themselves physically on teams with their jumbo packages, essentially saying, "we're going to run it down your throat, try to stop us," another wrinkle that's been fairly effective is how well the team has run the ball out of the shotgun.

In last Sunday's game, the Broncos had 40 snaps with Trevor Siemian in the gun and 12 of those times they ran the ball. While there weren't any big runs, without anything big to brag about, the rushing attack still averaged 4.4 yards per carry out of the gun.

Jamaal Charles had three of his five runs out of the shotgun and was explosive, showing himself to be a real weapon out of the formation. While Devontae Booker also had two of his three runs out of the shotgun go for nine yards.

Part of this has been talked about by head coach Vance Joseph who's said the Broncos offense just isn't getting many single-high safety looks.

The play below is a perfect example of this, and Denver's running game is taking advantage.

As you can see, right guard Ronald Leary was crucial getting out on the move, where he was able to get to the second level and take the inside linebacker out of the play. You can also see how the entire line is getting great push here, something we're seeing much more of than a year ago. In this play, the left side of the line dominates, as tackle Garrett Bolles and guard Max Garcia blocked their defenders five yards downfield.

The Broncos ability to keep you honest and run with consistency out of both heavy and three-wide formations has been crucial. That balance will allow for more room to open up for Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders, while also keeping pass rushing defenders at bay from the Broncos biggest liability, their pass protection.

Running back production

The running game's success hasn't just been scheme and blocking as the running back tandem of Anderson and Charles has been very successful thus far.

Anderson is currently fourth in the league in rushing yards, averaging 82.5 per game, his highest in a season thus far in his career. On film, it's easy to see that he has an extra step this year. He's more powerful, and he's making more people miss once he gets to the second level. His ability to make later cuts has been outstanding.

Anderson has also been a valuable asset as a blocker and receiver, two essential qualities that make him a true three-down back. If he can stay healthy, there's no reason to doubt C.J.'s ability to maintain this performance for a whole year.

Charles has only carried the ball 33 times so far this season, an average of only eight per game, but he's already seventh in the NFL in yards per carry at 5.3. It's clear that Charles' vision and balance have been there since the preseason but we're now seeing that burst. Charles is also looking deadly quick on his lateral cuts and is just impossible to bring down on a first tackle attempt.

He's been ever so close to making one last tackle miss and breaking off a big run but hasn't quite got it yet. Jamaal is actually the only runner in the top 10 leaders in yards per carry to not have a run over 20 yards this season; all other runners have at least one run of 35 yards or more. It sure feels like that big run is just around the corner.

As Charles is clearly being used on a bit of a pitch count, Devontae Booker is now back and could add yet another dimension to this unit with his young legs, versatility, and power.

With all these pieces in place, the running game has gelled and so far has been the true strength of this offense. Their ability to keep it up into November and December might just be the difference between Denver being a contender this year or a pretender. The initial signs are encouraging, particularly with the versatility of scheme with which the Broncos are having success on the ground. With a deep stable of backs on the team, there's also reason to believe that this success can be maintained for the long haul.

Only time will tell, but seeing the Broncos offense impose their will on teams is a welcome change, there's no denying that.