

Shaq Barrett aims to take the next step

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
May 12, 2016

Colorado has been kind to third-year outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett. Just a few years after wreaking havoc with the Colorado State Rams, Barrett has found his niche in the Broncos linebacker room. And it didn't take long.

The 2013 Mountain West Conference Defensive Player of the Year spent much of his rookie season on the Broncos' practice squad, but he broke onto the scene in 2015.

Barrett earned playing time in all 16 regular season games and each of the Broncos' three postseason steps toward a Super Bowl title. He showed a knack for the big play, as he racked up 5.5 sacks, four forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries during the regular season.

Add in the eventual Super Bowl 50 title for the CSU product, and you're left with a pretty incredible storyline for a player who clung to the bottom of the roster in 2014.

"I didn't imagine that [level of success] at all," Barrett said. "I thought I was going to be a majority special-teams guy. The Super Bowl, I knew [with] the winning culture here we always wanted to get to the Super Bowl and expected to get there every year. I didn't think that far ahead. I'm happy to be a part of the organization and the winning tradition, and hopefully we keep working and try to get there again this year."

After the season, Barrett rewarded himself with a little rest and relaxation. He boarded a cruise that went to the Bahamas, Virgin Islands, Grand Turk and St. Thomas. And while he said his diet slipped a little bit while he was on vacation, he's now back on track as OTAs draw near.

Barrett said he'll try to contribute more on defense and special teams this year, but he wouldn't bite when asked whether his goal is to start for the defending Super Bowl champions.

"If that's what the coaches want," he said. "We're going to go out there and compete. I know we've got me and [OLB] Shane [Ray], we're going to compete. Whatever happens, happens. I think I'm ready if they need me to."

To take the next step, Barrett said he needs to continue to tailor his technique for the NFL level. That tune up includes improving his footwork on his pass rush and keeping his body low as he comes off the edge.

As Barrett focuses on his own game, he'll also aim to follow the lead of outside linebackers DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller and be an asset to the younger players.

"I'm still a young guy," Barrett said, "but we still have young guys that are younger than me now. We've just got to try and help them out. [We've got to] teach them like D-Ware and Von have been teaching me.

“They are very involved. They’re always willing to lend a helping hand. That’s what I think I need to get better at. I see guys doing stuff sometimes and I might be lazy and I don’t feel like trying to help them out. I’ve got to get rid of that trait and just always be willing. Put myself behind and worry about the team and help them out so everybody could be strong links to the chain.”

Should Barrett continue to improve after a breakthrough 2015 season, there’s no telling just how strong that chain can get.

Shaquil Barrett seeks continued rise on Broncos defense

By Nicki Jhabvala
DenverPost.com
May 12, 2016

The opportunity came Jan. 10, 2015, when Shaquil Barrett was added to the Broncos' roster after going undrafted in 2014 and spending his first NFL season on the team's practice squad.

The window opened that day, if only slightly. But over the next eight months, Barrett took steps to ensure it wouldn't close.

He altered his diet to reduce his body fat from about 18 percent to 11. He analyzed the technique of veterans Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware to improve his play and explosiveness on the edge. Then Barrett produced, compiling a team-high four sacks and 16 tackles in his impressive preseason to announce his arrival.

He followed with 5½ sacks and 41 tackles in the regular season to go along with four forced fumbles, two fumble recoveries and four pass breakups.

The quick rise was one young players often dream of in the NFL. But not even Barrett could have scripted this.

"No, I didn't imagine that at all. I thought I was going to be a majority special-teams guy," he said Wednesday. "The Super Bowl, I knew (with) the winning culture here we always wanted to get to the Super Bowl and expected to get there every year. I didn't think that far ahead."

Looking ahead now can't be avoided.

This season could bring more changes for Barrett, arguably the best value in the NFL. Playing on a rookie deal worth only about \$525,000 in salary this season, Barrett has the potential for an increased role on a defense that led the league in multiple categories before leading the Broncos to a title.

"We're going to go out there and compete," Barrett said. "I know we've got me and Shane (Ray) — we're going to compete. Whatever happens, happens. I think I'm ready."

Last season Barrett started six games, turning in a memorable debut as a starter Oct. 18 at Cleveland with nine tackles, 1½ sacks, one pass breakup, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. In the past 15 years, only James Harrison (2007) and Vonnie Holliday (2001) have achieved that combination of numbers in a game.

The message: Barrett's preseason run was no fluke.

Ware revised his contract this preseason to match a potentially revised role. Defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said earlier the Broncos see Ware as "more of a situation, second-and-long and third-down type of guy because that's what he does so well."

Ray, who packed on nearly eight pounds of muscle and is enjoying his first NFL offseason fully healthy, could be asked to fill the void and start. But the responsibility resting on Barrett's shoulders will inevitably get heavier, too.

So, as with last offseason, Barrett has added to his list of goals to ensure that proverbial window stays ajar.

"I'm still trying to get better technique-wise, get my footsteps right on my pass rush, staying low and body language," he said. "It's all the same stuff from last year. I got better at it, but I still need to progress on it this year and become as perfect as I can be."

And after two seasons of watching and learning behind Miller and Ware, Barrett's biggest leap of improvement might not appear on the stat sheet. Barrett wants to be more of a leader, helping other players.

"I see guys doing stuff sometimes, and I might be lazy and I don't feel like trying to help them out. I've got to get rid of that trait and just always be willing," he said. "Put myself behind and worry about the team and help them out so everybody could be strong links to the chain."

The Barrett file

A closer look at broncos linebacker Shaquil Barrett:

Age: 23

Height: 6-foot-1

Weight: 237 pounds

Experience: Third season

College: Colorado State

— Added to active roster in January 2015 after signing as college free agent in 2014 and spending his first year on the practice team.

— Recorded team-high four sacks, 16 total tackles in 2015 preseason.

— Played 16 games last season with six starts.

— Made nine tackles, had 1.5 sacks, broke up one pass, forced one fumble, recovered a fumble in debut as starter (Oct. 18 at Cleveland).

— Tallied 41 total tackles, 5.5 sacks, four passes defended, four forced fumbles, two fumble recoveries in 2015.

— Made nine special-teams tackles last season.

Shaquil Barrett's journey from Baltimore to the Super Bowl

By Jeff Zrebiec
The Baltimore Sun
February 6, 2016

Shaquil Barrett left Baltimore as a 15-year-old, seeking structure and motivation, and wanting to avoid getting caught in a trap that had ensnared so many teenagers around him.

He has since been to Omaha, Neb.; Fort Collins, Co.; Denver; and many places in between. His latest stop might be the most improbable one of them all. Barrett, a reserve outside linebacker and special teams standout for the Denver Broncos, will play in Super Bowl 50 Sunday against the Carolina Panthers at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif.

"Every time I think about it, I just think that it was a crazy journey that landed me here," Barrett said in a phone interview Monday. "I just kept persevering. I have to take advantage of the opportunity now."

Essentially, that's all Barrett has done since 2008, when he left Baltimore's City College, where he stayed out of trouble and showed athletic and academic promise, though he was never fully committed to thriving on the field.

Two years at Boys Town, a private boarding school in Nebraska that attracts students from across the country, instilled discipline and a desire to play football at the next level. He started his collegiate career at Nebraska-Omaha but it dropped its football program after his freshman year, so he transferred to Colorado State.

Despite starting for three seasons for the Rams and having a Mountain West Conference-record 20 ½ tackles for losses as a senior, Barrett went undrafted in 2014. After signing with Denver as a free agent and spending much of last year on the practice squad, he found a role this season on a defense loaded with stars. His 50 tackles ranked sixth on the team, his 5 ½ sacks were tied for third, and his six combined forced fumbles or recoveries led the Broncos.

"It's very exciting for us as a family," said Barrett's father, Steven, who traveled to California this past week with other family members to attend the Super Bowl. "To me, it's just an unbelievable story coming from where he's come from."

Both father and son questioned whether Shaquil would have made it to the NFL if he had stayed in Baltimore. Steven Barrett is a youth football coach with the Charm City Buccaneers and he's seen first-hand so many promising kids get their dreams derailed.

There is one thing, however, that Shaquil is sure of: He wouldn't be the player that he's become without the experiences and influences that formed his childhood in East Baltimore.

"It made me who I am, shaped my football attitude," said Barrett, 23. "There never were excuses."

Moving away to move on

The decision to send Shaquil, the second youngest of his six children, away to finish high school was a difficult one for Steven. Another one of his sons, Kevin, a talented wrestler, was already thriving at Boys Town.

"I don't have the means to travel back and forth to see them like I need to and want to. I'm missing out on a lot of their high school life, but I'd rather have my kids not go through the trials and tribulations that they'd have to go through here," Steven said. "Baltimore is just not a good place right this minute. You see what's going on around the city. I have five boys and one daughter, and none of my kids are trouble-makers. But in Baltimore, you will find it."

Steven said the final straw was when Shaquil was robbed of his wallet and cellphone. By that point, Shaquil was already eyeing a move to Nebraska. He missed Kevin, nearly two years his elder, and complacency started to take hold of him. He even stopped going to football practices.

"I used to depend on my mom and my dad for rides up there and they'd be busy, so I'd be on my own," Shaquil said. "I wasn't wanting to take a bus ride, so I just wasn't going. If I had stayed in Baltimore, I just don't know that I would have been able to be as committed as I was when I left."

George Petrides, the longtime football coach at City, admitted last week that he had struggled to remember Barrett because the boy's time at the school was so short. However, Barrett has obviously been a topic of discussion at the school in recent weeks.

"I wish he had stayed," Petrides said with a laugh.

Family and football

When Shaquil enrolled at Colorado State in the summer of 2010, he was at his fourth school in five years. But getting acclimated to another new campus and coaching staff was hardly his only challenge.

His girlfriend, Jordanna, was pregnant with the couple's first child. They were married in a Colorado courthouse in 2012 and now have three kids together.

Barrett's days at Colorado State were full, split between school and sport, and being a doting father and husband. Jordanna took care of the kids and also had a job to help make ends meet. It helped that Jordanna had family in the area, and even some of Shaquil's Rams' teammates pitched in with the babysitting.

"Shaq is in another class when it comes to people and football players," said Ravens tight end Crockett Gillmore, a Colorado State teammate of Barrett. "Shaq is just a really special player and guy."

On the field, Barrett had 246 tackles, 18 sacks, three interceptions and seven forced fumbles in three seasons. He was the Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year in 2013.

"I always felt that he was the best football player in the Mountain West, and he's definitely one of the toughest guys I've ever gone against," Gillmore said. "No matter where the football is, he finds his way to it. In my college and pro career, there are maybe two guys I've seen who have better ball skills."

Fulfilling a dream

There was a fleeting moment where Barrett, who grew up as a Ravens' fan, thought that his hometown team might select him. He had worked out for the team leading up to the draft. The Ravens didn't initially have a seventh-round pick in 2014, but when it flashed across the screen that they traded to get back into the round, Steven wondered if his son would be the choice. But the Ravens took another local kid, selecting former River Hill standout Michael Campanaro.

Disappointed to not be drafted, but undeterred, Barrett signed with the Broncos. He needed last season to transform his body and get in better shape, goals that he's clearly accomplished.

Barrett started six games this year and he, not first-round pick Shane Ray, started opposite Von Miller when DeMarcus Ware went down with an injury.

"He's desperate to succeed, to survive, to make it," Broncos linebacker Danny Trevathan told Sports Illustrated in November. "Guys like that make this league."

His emergence hardly surprised those who know him back home.

"Size-wise, potential-wise, he probably was on the same level as the next outside linebacker," said John Dorsey, a local football coach and family friend of the Barrett's. "But intensity-wise, nobody wanted it more than him."

Sunday's game highlights a huge month for Barrett. On Feb. 27, he and Jordanna will have a formal wedding ceremony in Omaha that is four years in the making.

"I'm just happy that I'm experiencing it all," Barrett said.

He also knows it's only the start. As much work as it has taken to get to this point, Barrett foresees just as many challenges to taking the next step into being a starter and every-down player.

As he gets more established in the league, Barrett said he'd like to return to Baltimore in the offseason to host football camps and help kids who were in similar situations as him.

"I know how tough it is to make it out," Barrett said. "It's a hard thing to leave the city. You have your whole family there and your whole life is there. But sometimes moving and getting away is the best thing for you."

Shaq Hits Sports—Again and Again and Again

By Peter Axtman

Vice Sports

January 15, 2016

When the NFL schedule makers slotted New England at Denver on Nov. 29, the league probably anticipated Brady-Manning XVII. What they may not have realized was the game would also mark Shaq Bowl I.

That night in Denver, the Patriots' Shaq Mason protected Tom Brady against the Broncos' Shaq Barrett. The matchup was a byproduct of the Shaq Boom—the wave of kids born in the early 90s whose parents were inspired by basketball's rising star, Shaquille O'Neal.

When O'Neal stepped foot on an NBA court in 1993, he became the first professional athlete with the name Shaquille, which roughly translates to "handsome" in Arabic. He remained the only one until the generation of his namesakes were old enough to turn pro themselves. In 2012, Shaq Thompson entered the Boston Red Sox's minor league system. Last year saw the first Shaqs since O'Neal to play in one of the major sports leagues, with Mason, Barrett, and Thompson, a two-sport athlete now on the Carolina Panthers, all making their NFL debuts in the regular season. (A fourth Shaq, Shaq Riddick, is on the Arizona Cardinals' practice squad.)

Shaquille cracked the Social Security Administration's Top 1,000 baby names in 1991, after O'Neal's breakout AP Player of the Year sophomore season at LSU. Momentum built the next season when he brought the Tigers to the Final Four and was runner-up for the Wooden and Naismith Awards. O'Neal was the No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft that year, and Shaquille jumped to No. 426 in the baby-name rankings (that doesn't account for spelling variations like Shaquil Barrett's). Peak Shaq Baby—No. 181 in the rankings, with 1,784 Shaquille births—came in 1993, when the Big Aristotle won the NBA Rookie of the Year Award.

Of course, the Shaq Boom is relative: even in 1993, the name didn't come close to No. 1-ranked Michael, No. 10 Andrew, or even No. 85 Dakota. For the most part, baby Shaqs would grow up as the only Shaqs in town.

"I was the only one around with the name," said Mason, who grew up in Columbia, Tenn. "The first time I met another Shaq was actually Shaquille O'Neal at a Grizzlies game [when O'Neal played for the Heat]."

"I was the only Shaq growing up until I got to high school, where I met another Shaq," adds Thompson, Sacramento, California native.

Not only was Barrett the only Shaq in his hometown Baltimore; he didn't realize he was named after the Big Fundamental until recently. "I never grew up with anyone named Shaq. I never thought I was named after [O'Neal] for some reason. It wasn't until three or four years ago when someone asked me about my name and I asked my Dad about it."

"I liked Shaquille O'Neal and I liked Hakeem Olajuwon," Steven Barrett said, "so I named my son after both of the centers I really liked"—Barrett's full name is Shaquil Akeem Barrett. "[O'Neal] was a good role model for my son to follow. If my son can accomplish, two percent of what O'Neal accomplished, then I'd certainly be all right with that."

(Coincidentally, the Patriots' Shaq is Shaquille Olajuwon Mason. Neither he nor Barrett was aware of either the unlikely first- or middle-name connection before the reporting for this story.)

All three NFL Shaqs had at least one parent who was a big basketball fan, but this celebrity namesake phenomenon goes beyond simply liking sports. According to Jonah Berger, a Wharton professor and bestselling author of *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, parents choose their child's name based on its connotations, and public figures often have positive ones. "Famous people are often wealthy and liked, so naming your child after someone associates them with that fame. The name makes it seem like they will be rich and famous by association."

Popularity spikes of famous names have happened for decades, but the visibility of O'Neal and the NFL players, combined with the distinctive nature of Shaquille, provides a rare opportunity to clearly draw a line from inspiration to byproduct of a name's popularity.

"Now that we've grown up, you look around and see all these kids named Shaq and realize they were 90s babies, too," said Mason. "It's pretty cool that you share a name and know the background of it."

Barrett also feels that kinship whenever he meets another Shaq. "It's good to run into Shaqs. It's a unique name. If you run into another Shaq, you probably take a picture with him. It'll be fun for us to meet Shaq and a whole lot of Shaqs because I don't think there's too many of us out there."

The linebacker wants to imbue the pride that comes with such a distinctive name to his son, Shaquil, Jr. "I like the name a lot and Shaquille O'Neal is one of the reasons why," he said. "Hopefully my son can come in and do whatever he does—be a doctor or something like that—and keep broadening our name."

Though he doesn't have a son yet, Thompson also plans to pass the name down, in part because he feels it's important to start another generation of Shaquilles.

"I knew who [O'Neal] was but the name didn't hit me until I got older. I realized Shaquille O'Neal was who I was named after and I thought, 'We have to keep the name alive,'" says Thompson.

After peaking in 1993, the name Shaquille slid back out of the top 1,000 by 1997 (perhaps coincidentally, the year after *Kazaam's* theatrical release). The name slipped back into obscurity even as O'Neal built a legendary career on the court. Not even an NBA MVP, four NBA Championships, two Finals MVPs, and 10 more All-Star Game selections could boost his name back to its previous heights..

"The name Shaq may have been hurt by its own rapid success," says Berger. "Names that catch on more quickly tend to die out faster. People assume they are more likely to be flashes in the pan and avoid them as a result. That may have happened with Shaq: too popular too quickly, so new parents start staying away."

Instead, basketball fans who wanted a distinctive name for their newborn turned to the NBA's next rising star, who also happened to be one of the Big Namesake's teammates. Though the name Kobe never reached the heights of Shaquille—it topped out at No. 222 in 2001, with 1,552 babies—the Black Mamba's moniker has had more staying power: Kobe has hung within the top 1,000 for 18 straight years (data for 2015 has yet to be released).

Even some of the NFL Shaqs understand that a few years might have altered their names. "It's a huge possibility that if I was born five years later, I might have been Kobe," said Mason.

Barrett acknowledges the possibility, too, but believes he would have still been a Shaq. The man who held the power to name him disagrees. "If he was born five years later, he probably would have been Kobe," Steve Barrett says with a laugh.

This recent iteration of the Shaq Boom isn't finished yet: Clemson's Shaq Lawson, who played in the college football championship Monday, plans to enter the NFL Draft this year. UCLA's basketball team, however, is prepping for a freshman next season who might be the canary in the coal mine: a small forward from Los Angeles named Kobe Paras .

Shaq Barrett attacks in breakout year

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

December 20, 2015

The rise of Shaquil Barrett, 23, started in the offseason, when the second-year linebacker altered his diet and training regimen to prepare for the season.

Barrett, a father of three who signed with the Broncos as a college free agent in 2014, went from undrafted practice squad player to starting edge rusher for six games this season, filling in for the injured DeMarcus Ware. After leading the Broncos with four sacks and 16 total tackles in the preseason, Barrett has recorded 5½ sacks for a loss of 39 yards, four pass breakups, two forced fumbles, one fumble recovery and 37 total tackles in 13 regular-season games.

Barrett recently spoke with The Post about his breakout season, potentially meeting Michael Vick in Pittsburgh, and his family's holiday plans.

Q: Of the quarterbacks you've faced so far, who has been the toughest to get to?

A: I had a bit of a stretch like three games ago where I couldn't get to any quarterback. In the preseason, it was tough to get (San Francisco's Colin) Kaepernick and (Blaine) Gabbert. The tackle (Joe Staley) I was going against, I didn't know how to beat him. He was pretty good.

Q: Who has had the biggest influence on your football career?

A: Growing up, it was my coaches, parents, brothers. I watched them play and wanted to be like them. Then once I got here, I've been learning from D-Ware and Von (Miller) and my coaches, just seeing how they want things to be done. I never really idolized any — my favorite player was Michael Vick, and that's not my position.

Q: Have you talked to him?

A: I talked to (Pittsburgh outside linebackers coach) Joey Porter — he was at Colorado State — and I told him I want a Vick jersey. So hopefully he comes through with that. I'm going to talk to him after the game.

Q: What's been your favorite moment as a pro so far?

A: Winning the big games we've won so far, like the Packers and the Patriots. Just winning those, stepping up when people thought we would lose those. We rose to the occasion and got the job done.

Q: If you weren't a football player, what would you be doing?

A: That's a great question. Probably a police officer. Would be pretty good job security and benefits to help my family. Anything that would help make my family's life easier.

Q: What do you and your family have planned for the holidays?

A: I'm going to Omaha next Friday because my wife and kids will be there already. Just going to hang out with them that day and come back later that night and just get ready for work the next day. We let them open their presents (last Friday) because they're leaving for Omaha then. They'll get more presents in Omaha, but hey, (his two sons) were opening up my daughter's presents, too, because she's so young. So my oldest son was ripping open presents. He was opening everything.

Shaquil Barrett, OLB

Height: 6-foot-1

Weight: 237 pounds

Experience: 2nd NFL season

College: Colorado State

Acquired: 2014 college free agent

- Spent the majority of his rookie season on the Broncos' practice squad
- Father of two young boys and one daughter
- Appeared in 13 games this season, starting 6 of them
- Has 5½ sacks, 2 forced fumbles, 1 fumble recovery, 4 passes defensed, 37 total tackles
- Had four of the Broncos' league-high 20 sacks in the preseason
- In 38 games at CSU, had 246 total tackles, 18 sacks, 3 interceptions, 7 forced fumbles, 4 fumble recoveries

Shaquil Barrett Shapes Up

By Robert Klemko

MMQB.com

November 12, 2015

Shaquil Barrett remembers vividly the weigh-in at the 2014 East-West Shrine Game in St. Petersburg, Fla. You strip down to your compression shorts, wait to hear your name called, walk across a stage and stand on a scale to be weighed and thoroughly picked over by the prying eyes of middle-aged men. Barrett believed he'd made a lasting impression that week, and he was right, though not for the reasons he imagined.

Two years removed from Colorado State and now with the Broncos, Barrett was browsing social media early this season when the Timehop app alerted him to a years-old photo of himself oozing out of a skin-tight dark green No. 56 jersey.

Serious muffin top.

"I didn't realize how bad I was until I saw that picture," he says. "How come nobody told me I looked like that?"

Nobody had to tell Barrett why he wasn't drafted a year ago; teams were scared off by his 24% body fat as a 6-1, 250-pound rush linebacker. The Broncos asked him to sign as a free agent and stashed him on the practice squad last season while he transformed his body. Eighteen months later Barrett is emerging as a playmaker on a defense full of them. He's expected to get his second start this weekend against the Chiefs in place of the injured DeMarcus Ware.

"It's great for a coach because he's the example," says Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. "You use him as an example when you're trying to keep your young guys going, trying to keep a backup going. You say, look at what he's done for this team. You never know when your opportunity's going to come."

Barrett's opportunity came late last month against the Browns. Ware was injured, and it was widely assumed that rookie Shane Ray, the 23rd overall pick in the 2015 draft, would get the start at outside linebacker. But the staff couldn't deny Barrett, who'd been impressive in a limited role to that point—13 tackles, two sacks and two forced fumbles in 97 snaps—and he cashed in on the opportunity, collecting nine tackles, 1.5 sacks, three tackles for loss, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery against Cleveland.

The question was raised more than once: What's this guy been eating? Turns out the mild-mannered linebacker's success in 2015 has more to do with what he's not eating.

"In college I put sugar on my spaghetti or lasagna," Barrett says, drawing out the 'ah' sound in 'college' in a manner specific to Baltimore's inner city, where he grew up. "That's why I have to stay away from pasta, because the only way I can eat it is with sugar."

Ok, but how much sugar?

"I think I used to put like seven packs of sugar on spaghetti to make it taste edible."

Oh no.

“Yes.”

Barrett thought nothing of it at the time; nutrition wasn't a priority for him at Colorado State (he didn't meet a dietician until senior year), and it wasn't a priority in his household either. Barrett transferred to Colorado State from Nebraska-Omaha after his freshman season in 2011 and brought along his now-wife, Jordanna. They were married in a Colorado courthouse and had their first of three children that winter.

Jordanna worked steady jobs in food service, including a run at Starbucks in Fort Collins, to support the family. Barrett was getting scholarship assistance from Boys Town, the boarding school in Omaha where his working-class parents sent him and his brother as teenagers. (Barrett says he was unmotivated at City High in Baltimore.) The \$5,000 scholarship was a fine supplement until CSU put him on full scholarship, requiring he no longer receive outside aid. With Jordanna working nights and Barrett having no intention of cooking anything more complicated than a burger, he turned to fast food—McDonald's and Wendy's were favorites—and when she did cook meals they were typically fried, and, after Barrett had his say, drowned in sugar.

“The college budget and a healthy diet don't really fit, because the healthy food always costs more,” Barrett says. “And it wasn't really what we were thinking about. We always paid the rent first so we'd at least have a roof.”

Under those circumstances, Barrett collected 12 sacks as a Colorado State senior and set a Mountain West record with 20.5 tackles for loss. That winter his new agent and former bodybuilder Edy Jackson wrote up a nutrition plan and enlisted Jordanna to execute the meals. Well on his way to a healthier lifestyle, he arrived in Denver the next summer and met with one of the few full-time dieticians employed by an NFL team to evaluate his diet.

“We have a one-on-one consultations with new players during training camp, and I have them walk me through a typical day,” says Bryan Snyder, Denver's full-time registered dietician since 2009. “With Shaq it was about balancing his diet and portion control.

“With some players it takes a couple of weeks to start the process. I met with Shaq in the morning, and at the end of the day, after he lifted, he came to me like, where's my recovery shake? He was holding me accountable.”

Seeing Barrett grab the bull by the horns is something everyone at Broncos HQ would soon get used to.

“The job is never too big for him,” says linebacker Von Miller. “I admire that about him. He's got three kids so, he never gets rattled.”

Says linebacker Danny Trevathan: “He's desperate to succeed, to survive, to make it. Guys like that make this league.”

That Barrett landed on an NFL team with the proper resources to remedy his particular shortcoming was something of a dice roll. By Snyder's count, only 12 teams have full-time dieticians on staff (the group meets at each combine, when schedules permit). When Snyder got the job in 2009, the Broncos put Snyder in a small office far away from the cafeteria and continued to outsource meals to local caterers for five years, until the team built a kitchen space and hired chefs during the 2014 season.

“Before we had our own kitchen, we would lose guys,” Snyder says. “By November, 10 or 15 guys would be getting fast food for lunch. This year I’ve only seen outside food brought in one time, and I think it was a make-the-rookie-go-get-food situation. The credit goes to [team president] Joe Ellis and [GM] John Elway and Mr. [Pat] Bowlen to free up the resources to do it right.”

Barrett’s daily intake now consists of the following: Egg-beaters, oatmeal and turkey bacon for breakfast (a meal he rarely ate in school), some combination of fish, chicken and salad for lunch and dinner, and two protein shakes prepared by Snyder’s staff.

His body fat for the last 15 weeks: 11.5%, down from 24% at his worst at Colorado State.

Barrett says the physical transformation gave him a quicker burst and increased muscle mass, allowing him to concentrate on the finer points of pass rushing. He’s fourth on the team in sacks with 3.5, half a sack behind both Miller and Malik Jackson and three behind leader DeMarcus Ware. The Broncos rank No. 1 in yards and points allowed due in no small part to the depth provided by unheralded linemen Derek Wolfe and Vance Walker, defensive backs Bradley Roby and David Bruton, and Barrett, who spends a chunk of his time studying Miller and Ware on film and mimicking their trademarked moves.

“Von has a speed, stutter, bull-swipe kind of move that he gets a lot of sacks with, Barrett says. “I can do it in practice, but I haven’t done it effectively in games. D. Ware—when he rushes, he’s technical with it. He’s got his steps down, and his steps will match his hands every time.”

While Miller and Ware are the headliners, Denver’s defense is crowded with homegrown, diamond-in-the-rough success stories. Chris Harris Jr., a second-team All-Pro last season, was undrafted out of Kansas in 2011. Trevathan, who led the team in tackles in 2013 before fracturing his kneecap last August, was chosen in the sixth round out of Kentucky in 2012.

“We can’t all be drafted in the first round,” Trevathan says. “Having guys like Shaq is what makes a team great. He wasn’t pictured to be a playmaker, but he stepped up.”

If he hadn’t, and football hadn’t worked out—as it often doesn’t for UDFAs— Barrett says he probably would’ve been a police officer. He and Jordanna might still be carefully budgeting funds just to make rent, and Jordanna might not get the second wedding they’re planning in February 2016—the real deal this time, with 200-plus guests and formal wear for the Barrett brood. Embracing the diet plan and giving up the sugar buffet was a matter of necessity, not choice.

“I had to,” Barrett says. “I wanted to give myself the best shot I could to make an impact on the team. I see it as an opportunity to give my family a great life.”

Shaq Barrett Diet: Protein and quarterbacks

By Mike Klis

9 News

October 25, 2015

Football people talk a good game but they must not be very smart.

How else to explain why a player like Denver Broncos' outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett goes undrafted?

"You'll have to ask 32 GMs that," Barrett said.

It was put to a couple NFL personnel men around the league. Barrett during his three years at Colorado State was a backfield penetrating force, especially his senior season when he had a Mountain West record 20.5 tackles for a loss and 12.0 sacks, which tied for seventh among all NCAA Division I players.

"It had to be the way I looked," Barrett said. "Because I had good numbers."

About that body. At 6-foot-2, 250-something pounds coming out of Fort Collins, Barrett was perhaps a little small to play the 4-3 defensive end in the NFL but what all those scouts, coaches and personnel people didn't like was the physique he carried as a 3-4, pass-rushing, outside linebacker.

In the 2014 draft, seven rounds were called without Barrett hearing his name.

"They were probably looking at my 20 percent body fat coming out of college," Barrett said.

"We were hearing the same thing," said Edy Jackson, Barrett's agent along with Greg Linton. "And we just couldn't believe it. They would tell us, 'Shaq was productive. He had a great engine. He's got good size. But he's too soft around his middle.'

"We were thinking, 'Who cares what he looks like as long as he gets the job done?' But that's what we kept hearing so if this is what we have to do then this is what we have to do."

Jackson is a former competitive body builder who was well-educated in nutrition and what is referred to as the "tissue exchange" from fat to muscle. She devised a nutrition plan and sent it over to Barrett's wife, Jordanna, who bought the groceries and prepped the meals.

This was in mid-February, after Barrett wasn't drafted in 2014 and didn't play in his rookie season for the Broncos. The goal for 2015 was to make the Broncos' 53-man roster. Operation Transforming Shaq's Body had begun.

Step 1 for Jackson was to better understand the challenge confronting her client. Barrett sent her what he had been ingesting.

"He was eating pretty much whatever he wanted and he was drinking the protein supplement that the team gives you," Jackson said. "The team gives everybody the exact same thing. What's good for somebody else is not necessarily good for you."

After looking up the contents, she discovered the protein drink "was mostly sugar. Sugar and protein. I said, 'don't drink that anymore.'"

She put together a meal plan that was high in protein, high in fibrous carbohydrates. She picked a drink supplement, Isopure, which has 50 grams of protein per serving, and zero sugar and carb content.

A typical day for Barrett:

Breakfast: 3-4 eggbeaters (three-quarters of a cup), 4 strips turkey bacon, cup of Quaker low sugar/low carb oatmeal,

Snack: Protein shake

Lunch: Mixed salad, (not iceberg) with full cooked chicken breast, and a sweet potato (fibrous carb)

Snack: Protein shake:

Dinner: Fish (salmon, tilapia, orange roughy), green beans (No carbs at dinner).

If Barrett was still hungry, he would have half a protein shake, or an orange or small banana.

Look at Barrett now. He said his body fat once reached 24 percent at CSU. It's currently at 11 percent. He only lost 8 pounds to 242, but his muscle mass increased.

Despite playing behind perennial Pro Bowlers DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller in the Broncos first five games, Barrett is tied for second on the team with 3.5 sacks and leads all of those tenacious Denver defenders with three forced fumbles.

"It's kind of like the exact same fairy tale story that you've got with Chris (Harris Jr.) and all these other (college) free agent guys, Miller said. "They come in, they work, special teams, preseason and then boom, they're the guy now."

In his first NFL start last week at Cleveland, Barrett often seemed unblockable as he picked up 9 tackles, 1.5 sacks, three tackles for loss, two quarterback hits, a pass deflection, and a forced fumble he recovered.

"We knew he had it in him," Jackson said. "He just needed a chance but when you're a rookie and you have superstars on your team like DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller, you have to show up and present yourself in the best light in order to get a chance. I thought once he got a chance that he would do extremely well. But it was getting to the point where he got that shot. So I'm not really surprised but I'm very excited and elated at how well he's done."

Barrett has come a long way since the late afternoon of May 10, 2014. It wasn't until Mr. Irrelevant (Houston safety Lonnie Ballentine) was taken with the No. 256 pick that Barrett's phone started ringing.

Three teams were seriously interested -- the Pittsburgh Steelers, who had just hired Barrett's college coach and former Pro Bowl pass rusher Joey Porter, the Baltimore Ravens and the Broncos.

"His projections were to go in the fifth round, fifth to seventh rounds," Jackson said. "All these teams told us they were interested in him and would possibly draft him. And then on draft day none of them

did. The Broncos kept showing the most interest in him. They explained to us that they weren't able to draft him because of their other needs. Which is understandable. When you have DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller, pass rusher wasn't their most pressing need. So we understood that. Whereas teams like Pittsburgh, they drafted someone just like Shaq in the sixth round."

After taking linebacker Ohio State's Ryan Shazier in the first round, the Steelers doubled up by taking UCLA's Jordan Zumwalt in the sixth. Zumwalt has yet to play as he's been on injured reserve his first two seasons.

Barrett didn't play his rookie year either, as he spent most of it on the Broncos' practice squad. He credits Broncos' outside linebacking coach Fred Pagnac with helping him make a quantum leap this season.

"Last year, I just needed to get comfortable, get some experience," Barrett said. "Last year when I was on the field I didn't stick out that much. Because I wasn't comfortable out there. Now I've got the scheme down, I'm comfortable and I feel good."

Barrett started dominating in the Broncos' four-game preseason. Having that NFL 'redshirt' year behind him meant he could start playing without thinking. He even passed up first-round draft pick Shane Ray, a pass-rushing outside linebacker from Missouri, as the first man in to spell Ware or Miller.

Barrett has easily been the Broncos' biggest surprise in their 6-0 start.

"When the draft was over and he wasn't drafted, we were surprised," Jackson said. "But the Broncos were very high on him and they said please don't accept an offer from any other team until you talk to us first. Because they had that attitude we went with the Broncos. And we're glad that we did."

Shaquil Barrett keeps getting everyone's attention with his play

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

October 20, 2015

With the cameras and notebooks closing in on Denver Broncos linebacker Shaquil Barrett just minutes after the Broncos had earned an overtime win over the Cleveland Browns, some of Barrett's teammates couldn't resist trying to make Barrett lose his composure.

David Bruton Jr., Omar Bolden and Kayvon Webster fired in some verbal volleys toward a player who gets a little more well-known with each well-timed sack, forced fumble or impact play he creates.

"Sack for Shaq, sack for Shaq, sack for Shaq," the three chanted. "Shaq Diesel," they added with a nod to Shaquille O'Neal, to go with "Shaq Attack." Through it all Barrett held up and maintained his composure until the three defensive backs dropped in ...

"Kazaam, baby, Kazaam."

The reference to O'Neal's less-than-critically-acclaimed 1996 film caused Barrett to break into a rolling laugh. But it's been that kind of ride for Barrett, who had spent most of the 2014 season on the practice squad.

Barrett started against the Browns in place of DeMarcus Ware, who was held out because of a back injury. Barrett finished with nine tackles, 1.5 sacks, three tackles for loss, a forced fumble, a fumble recovery and a near interception.

Barrett is now second on the team in sacks, with 3.5, part of the Broncos' league-leading 26 sacks.

"You just see everybody making plays on this defense and you want to be one of those guys too," Barrett said. "I just want to make something happen whenever they put me out there."

With an offseason change in his diet, a little more first-step quickness and the fresh-start opportunity that comes with a new coaching staff, Barrett has simply been a revelation. A guy who makes the most of his snaps, whether it is the 10 snaps he played against the Detroit Lions or the 71 he played Sunday.

Asked Monday if, shortly after he was hired by the Broncos this past January, if he had seen Barrett's potential when he looked the video of last season's practices, Broncos coach Gary Kubiak offered a smile.

"That'd be easy for me to say right now," Kubiak said. "I think everybody knew they had a guy that was a surprise, who had done a lot of good things and that they thought could be a good player. Then when we got into the minicamp and stuff, he just kept showing up. It's fun to watch stuff like that. It's fun to watch those guys become pros and just gain confidence. This guy gets his hands on the ball -- not only the turnover that he knocks loose, but he had another one. He tipped the quarterback's hand and had a chance for an interception there. As coaches, and I know other players, too, watching their buddies become players like he has ... it's fun for everybody to see."

The Broncos will need Barrett to keep up the progress in the coming weeks. Rookie outside linebacker Shane Ray suffered an MCL sprain in his right knee Sunday and is expected to miss several weeks, while Ware's back is always a potential trouble spot. Ware is expected to play Nov. 1 when the Broncos face the Green Bay Packers, but Barrett will get spot duty behind Ware and Von Miller.

Asked what Barrett's ceiling might be, given his meteoric vocational growth in recent months, Kubiak said he didn't to set limits.

"I hope we don't know, I hope he just keeps coming," Kubiak said. He's going to get a great opportunity here. Of course, DeMarcus [Ware] we're hoping is back here when we get back to work for Green Bay. He has earned the right to go on the field ... One thing about this league, if you ever step out there and do it, they can't take it away from you if you keep doing it."

Shaquil Barrett delivers big when name called by Broncos

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
October 18, 2015

T.J. Ward didn't hesitate when asked last week which member of the Broncos' defense would come up with the big play Sunday at Cleveland.

"Put the names in the hat," the Broncos safety said. "Who knows? Somebody is going to make a play, though. I can guarantee that."

Shaquil Barrett's name was called — a few times and in a few ways, courtesy of his teammates who chanted "Shaq Diesel!" and "Sack for a Shaq! Sack for a Shaq!" afterward.

The former practice squad player who started in place of injured DeMarcus Ware (back) in the Broncos' 26-23 overtime victory over the Browns recorded his third, but perhaps most impressive sack on a second-and-8 in the third quarter. Barrett plowed through the middle of the Browns' defensive line before spotting quarterback Josh McCown, swiping at the ball and tackling McCowen.

The ball, knocked loose, lay on the ground a few feet from Barrett, who stood and searched for his prize.

"I didn't know where it was at," he said. "It felt like it was 30 seconds before I realized where the football was, so I just hurried up and dove on it."

The game-changing strip-sack and fumble recovery, which led to a 25-yard field goal by Brandon McManus on the Broncos' ensuing offensive drive, is evocative of Von Miller, the fifth-year veteran who helped Barrett expand his repertoire of moves in the offseason and has been one of Barrett's ardent supporters.

This was no Miller-taught move.

But it was one the Broncos' continually stress in practices. In defensive coordinator Wade Phillips' 3-4, the focus is and always will be to get the ball.

"That strip-sack, we work on that week in and week out in," Ware said. "Instead of just going for the sack, we try to always go for the ball, and it worked. It was a big play for us."

Barrett split another sack with defensive end Malik Jackson in overtime to extend his total to 3.5 this season and made nine tackles, the second-most on the team behind Danny Trevathan's 10.

He confirmed his place on a defense that has made 26 sacks and has carried the team to a 6-0 record before the bye week.

And he reaffirmed a depth that never was questioned, but certainly tested Sunday, when Shane Ray went down with an injury in the second quarter.

Ray, Denver's first-round draft pick this year, was helped off the field after getting caught in the fray on a tackle in the second quarter. Visibly upset, with a towel over his head, Ray was carted back to the locker room and did not return.

He sprained the medial collateral ligament in his right knee and could miss a few weeks.

"I'm being optimistic," he said after the game. He was wearing a brace on the knee and walking with the help of crutches. "I'll be back."

It could have been worse.

"We're always concerned when we lose a guy," Ware said. "But this is a testament to how our guys are prepared. I went down, Shaq comes in and plays well. Shane goes down, Lerentee (McCray) is still in the game. With me coming back soon, we're not really worried about the depth."

That depth was on display in the second half against Oakland and again Sunday at Cleveland, when the tough blow of losing Ware was softened by the play of Barrett.

On Sunday, his name was called again.

"He's been that way all year," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "I don't care what his name is or where he's from, but I know that when it's down to a play, he makes plays. All I know is every time I looked up, he was making plays. What an opportunity he's gotten, and what a good job he's done taking advantage of it."

Shaquil Barrett dominates Browns in first NFL start

By Mike Klis

9 News Sport

October 18, 2015

Shaq had a LeBron-like stat lines.

Subbing for the injured DeMarcus Ware at right outside linebacker, Shaquil Barrett filled all but one category on the Denver Broncos' defensive boxscore in their 26-23 overtime win here Sunday against the Cleveland Browns.

Here's how it read for the formerly overlooked Colorado State standout:

6 unassisted tackles, 3 assisted tackles, 10 total tackles, 1.5 sacks for 10 yards, three tackles for losses, two quarterback hits, one pass deflection, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery.

Barrett had a sack, quarterback hit, tackle for loss, forced fumble and fumble recovery on one ferociously dominant play when he gave a two-handed chuck to Browns quarterback Josh McCown.

"He's been that way all year," Broncos head coach Gary Kubiak said of Barrett. "I don't care what his name is or where he's from or what round or whether he was drafted – I don't even know but I know one thing when it's time to play he makes plays."

An interception was all Barrett didn't record Sunday. Barrett was born and raised in Baltimore until his upper classmen high school years, when he attended Boys Town in Omaha.

He first played his college football at Nebraska-Omaha until the school dropped its football program after his freshman year.

He transferred to CSU and led the Rams in tackles in his initial sophomore season. As a senior he was named Mountain West Player of the Year after he had 20.5 tackles for loss and 12.0 sacks.

Yet, Barrett didn't have the type of physique normally associated with NFL linebackers and he went undrafted last year out of CSU. Barrett signed with the Broncos as a college free agent and spent most of last season on their practice squad.

A dedication to fitness and nutrition, not to mention a remarkable preseason earned him a spot on the Broncos' 53-man roster and Barrett is already tied for second on the team with 3.5 sacks, even though Sunday was his first NFL start.

Boys Town's Barrett a big hit with Broncos

By Marjie Ducey
Denver Post
October 17, 2015

Words can't explain, Dominick Barrett says, how he feels when he turns on the TV and sees older brother Shaquil playing football for the Denver Broncos.

That's the same big brother who lets him know when he misses a tackle that he needs to get lower or get off his block faster.

Despite all the demands of a family and playing in the NFL, Shaquil Barrett watches videotape of his little brother's games, too.

Dom plays for Boys Town, following Shaquil and their older brother Kevin, who is now a family teacher at the school. The Barretts came from Baltimore, from a family of five football-playing brothers and one sister.

Dom is a junior offensive and defensive lineman for the Cowboys, 8-0 and ranked No. 2 in Class C-1.

"He's doing pretty good," Shaquil said.

So is Shaquil.

Last Sunday, the 6-foot-2, 250-pound outside linebacker had seven tackles, five solo, and forced a fumble in the Broncos' 16-10 win over Oakland.

He's played in all five Bronco wins, collecting 13 tackles, two sacks and two forced fumbles. He earned a shot at playing time with a strong preseason, tying the league high with four sacks and making a team-high 16 total tackles (13 solo).

Broncos coach Gary Kubiak says Barrett will start Sunday against Cleveland if DeMarcus Ware can't play because of a back injury.

"He continues to play well and plays well on special teams," Kubiak said.

With every tackle, Barrett is winning over more fans at Boys Town. Dom said his brother is a big thing on campus.

"Everybody looks up to him that plays football," Dom Barrett said. "They see he made it into the NFL from Boys Town, and he gives all the football players hope that they can make it."

Shaquil Barrett is actually the first Cowboy in coach Kevin Kush's 20 years to make it to the pros.

He isn't even the most athletic of the three Barrett boys Kush has coached. That label, Kush said, goes to Kevin, a three-time state champion wrestler who played several positions for the Cowboys from 2006 to 2010.

Shaquil and Kevin, inseparable as kids, talk or text every day, or play some PlayStation 4 when they get a chance.

Visit the home of Kevin and his wife, Ashley, and you'll likely find Broncos games on TV on fall Sundays, even though Kevin favors the Dallas Cowboys.

"I enjoy watching him play," Kevin said. "I brag about him and point him out."

Shaquil wasn't highly recruited out of high school, but Kush said the talent was there. He blocked six kicks from the defensive line as a senior, which Kush said isn't easy.

At the 2010 Shrine Bowl practices, Kush remembers Class A players talking about Barrett and how tough he was to block. He was the game's defensive MVP.

"His big asset is his quickness," Kush said. "I knew right then he was going to do something special in college."

Barrett walked on at UNO since it was close to home. He quickly earned a scholarship, won the starting job at middle linebacker in 2010 and posted some impressive stats: 82 tackles, including 11½ for loss, 8½ sacks, three forced fumbles and four blocked kicks.

But then UNO dropped football in 2011, leaving Barrett scrambling.

Kush remembers calling a coach at Nebraska, telling him Barrett would be a big asset. Nothing happened, and Barrett eventually landed at Colorado State.

He starred at linebacker and defensive end for the Rams, ending his three-year career there with 246 tackles (116 solo), 18 sacks, 32½ tackles for loss, three interceptions, seven forced fumbles, four fumble recoveries and six pass breakups.

In 2013, he was voted the Mountain West defensive player of the year, earned New Mexico Bowl defensive MVP honors and was invited to play in the East-West Shrine Game. He signed with the Broncos as a free agent in May 2014, then toiled last year on the practice squad.

People told him throughout his college career that he could play in the pros. But it wasn't easy switching schools and seeming to switch positions almost every year.

"It took a long, unusual journey," Barrett said. "It all worked out in the long run. It's a dream come true." Shaquil won't turn 23 until next month. But Kush said he's a quick learner with good social skills, willing to listen and accept feedback.

He's his own toughest critic, always trying to improve the small details.

Kush hopes Shaquil will share his message with his old team at Boys Town when he gets the chance. Barrett, the coach said, knows well the challenges that face Boys Town kids, like being away from home and being held accountable all the time.

He's a humble guy, Kush said, who hasn't let his NFL success go to his head.

Barrett received a three-year, \$1.5 million contract from the Broncos, helping him provide for his wife, Jordanna, and their three kids.

He did admit to making one big purchase, a Mercedes-Benz.

“It’s my one splurge. Then I’m going to save for the next four or five years,” he said. “I’m going to save for the future, because you never know.”

To determine how a Boys Town graduate has done, Kush said, look five or 10 years down the road. Barrett can be deemed a success.

“You can put a check mark next to him,” Kush said. “He’s done really well.”

Shaquil Barrett has earned Broncos' faith with work ethic

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
October 16, 2015

With Denver Broncos outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware officially out of this Sunday's game in Cleveland because of a back injury, Shaquil Barrett will just have to keep doing what he's done for the Broncos thus far.

And that is squeeze every ounce of opportunity out of the chances he's been given to show what he can do. Barrett will start in Ware's outside linebacker spot, a long way from being a player who spent all but one week of the 2014 season on the Broncos' practice squad.

Barrett also saw the team used a first-round pick on Shane Ray, who happens to play the same position. And while the Broncos are happy with their top draft pick's progress, it is Barrett who has clawed his way into the lineup.

"He comes in -- we draft a one, so he's sitting there staring at Von [Miller], DeMarcus and a first-round pick," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "As a player, a lot of guys would go in the tank and say, 'Boy, when is my opportunity going to be?' But all he did was come out here and practice hard, work hard, and every time that he gets out there, he makes a play. His teammates have a lot of confidence in him. He deserves all of the credit for where he is today."

Barrett has played all of 97 snaps combined on defense in the Broncos' first five games, yet he has two sacks and has forced a game-clinching fumble. And in Barrett's mind it's because he didn't eat to win so much as he learned how to eat to play.

In short, at "253, 254 pounds," Barrett was too heavy for Wade Phillips' speed thrills defense, so he slimmed down to his current 242 pounds, kept the same snap-to-whistle effort. And by the time training camp and the preseason drew to a close, the Broncos had so much faith in Barrett they believed they could pair him with Ray, even on downs when they have elected to take Miller and Ware off the field to give some in-game rest, and still make life difficult for opposing quarterbacks.

"I changed my diet up a lot. I used to just eat whatever I wanted to eat," Barrett said. "... I just stayed with it because I knew this was my dream and I wanted to do everything in my power to help my dream come true. ... Slimming it down just made my first step -- [it was] still quick -- but it was a little bit quicker."

Phillips has said he has the confidence to use Barrett in any game situation. That has been seen in plays like Barrett's sack and forced fumble on Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford. At the time there was just under 11 minutes left in the game with the Lions at their own 44-yard line, driving with the Broncos trying to protect a 14-12 lead.

The Broncos recovered the fumble and put together a field goal drive for a 17-12 lead in a game they eventually won 24-12.

“It's part of the plan, but I didn't envision it like that,” Barrett said of how things have unfolded thus far. “I thought I'd be able to be a real good special-teams player this year and be able to contribute that way. Defensively, I didn't think I would be able to get as many snaps as I've been getting. I've just been getting them, trying to run with them and take advantage of my opportunity.”

Shaquil Barrett has defied the odds to earn first Broncos start

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
October 16, 2015

What a jump, or better yet quantum leap, by Broncos outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett. Last season, the former Colorado State star was a wide-eyed, happy-go-lucky practice squad player coming to work everyday eager to keep his dream alive of playing in the NFL.

On Sunday, Barrett will make his first NFL start in place of the injured DeMarcus Ware.

"It's part of the plan, but I didn't envision it like that. I thought I'd be able to be a real good special teams player this year and be able to contribute that way," Barrett said. "Defensively, I didn't think I would be able to get as many snaps as I've been getting. I've been getting them, trying to run with them and take advantage of my opportunity."

He saw a sliver of opportunity hidden behind a deep and talented roster. The odds were against Barrett to even make the team behind All-Pro pass rushers DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller, along with first-round draft pick Shane Ray. He didn't have much on film to show new coach Gary Kubiak, but he found a way to make an impression during off-season workouts, and then training camp.

"As a player, a lot of guys would go in the tank and say, 'Boy, when is my opportunity going to be,' but all he did was come out here and practice hard, work hard and every time that he gets out there, he makes a play," Kubiak said.

He's made enough plays that Kubiak didn't hesitate in naming him the starter for Sunday, even over Ray, who has sacks in back-to-back games.

"It hasn't really hit me right now," Barrett said. "I'm still preparing the same way I usually prepare. But on Sunday, once it happens, I'll be pretty excited."

Barrett has been a special teams standout all season, and was the unit's captain in Oakland last Sunday. And he's gotten enough snaps on defense that he won't have butterflies when he's out there on play number one.

"This is probably the best situation for Shaq," Miller said. "For the first five games, he didn't start, but he had a lot of playing time and now he's (able) to come in and start. He's more than ready to go. You should see a lot of great stuff from him this weekend."

He has 13 tackles, two sacks and two forced fumbles this season. Last week Barrett had the best game of his young career with seven tackles, a forced fumble and a second-half sack of Raiders' quarterback Derek Carr.

The most important number, however, was 38. That's how many snaps he played on defense, a statement about the trust the coaches put in him.

"He's a great example of if you do it, you won't come out," Kubiak said. "He had a good offseason, a good training camp and all of a sudden when it came to game time, he just kept making plays. He's earned the right to be out there, play more and contribute."

Who is Shaquil Barrett?

- 6-foot-2, 242 pound outside linebacker

- Spent his freshman year in college at Nebraska-Omaha before transferring to Colorado State for the last three years after UNO's football program was cut.

- Finished his CSU career with 246 tackles, 18 sacks, seven forced fumbles and three interceptions. Was named Mountain West Player of the Year as a senior.

- Married, wife Jordanna, and three children: Shaquil Jr., Braylon and Aaliyah.

- Signed as a Broncos undrafted free agent in 2014. Made the Broncos practice squad and was called up to the active roster for two games, but didn't play.

- Has played 97 regular season defensive snaps for the Broncos this season with 13 tackles, two sacks and two forced fumbles.

With Ware expected to miss game, it's Shaq time

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
October 15, 2015

Shaquil Barrett is set to make his first NFL start on the league's top-ranked defense because star pass-rusher DeMarcus Ware is expected to miss Denver's game at Cleveland on Sunday with a bad back.

His coaches and teammates anticipate no drop-off.

"With the limited snaps that Shaq's got, he has two sacks. And I got three," Von Miller said. "So, he's right there with the bunch. He's making a lot of plays for us in the preseason and during the season. When I come out there's really not a drop in performance. Shaq, he's a good fill-in for us."

Barrett is a second-year pro who went undrafted out of Colorado State last year and spent the 2014 season on the Broncos' practice squad. He was promoted to the active roster twice but never got into a game.

Over the offseason he cut out sodas and worked out more than he dined out. He dropped from 254 pounds to 242 and trimmed his body fat from 18 percent to 11.

"I just think I got a little bit quicker and faster and more explosive," he said.

The results have been amazing.

He has a pair of sacks, three quarterback hurries and eight tackles to go with a team-best five stops and a forced fumble on special teams.

"He just continues to take advantage of every opportunity that he's gotten," coach Gary Kubiak said Thursday.

Barrett has teamed with first-round pick Shane Ray to give Ware and Miller frequent breathers and bring a second wave of pressure for opposing quarterbacks.

The Broncos have 22 sacks and 14 takeaways.

When Ware was knocked out of last week's game at Oakland with a strained back, Barrett logged a career-high 38 snaps from scrimmage, recording four tackles and one of Denver's four sacks of Derek Carr.

He also played 20 snaps on special teams and forced a fumble on the final play of the game, a punt, as time expired. Teammate David Bruton Jr. recovered, preserving Denver's 16-10 win.

Barrett's big leap from last year has taken everyone by surprise, including Barrett himself.

"I didn't envision it. I thought I'd be able to be a real good special teams player this year and be able to contribute that way," he said. "But defensive-wise, I didn't think I'd be able to get as many snaps as I've been getting."

He has taken 97 snaps, or 29.8 percent, of Denver's defensive snaps.

That experience will come in handy if Ware is sidelined on Sunday.

"Just being out there earlier in those five games helped me get the butterflies out of my stomach," Barrett said. "I know I can play in this league now."

NOTES: Defensive coordinator Wade Phillips credited Kubiak for the blitz that led to Chris Harris Jr.'s game-sealing interception and return for a touchdown at Oakland. "They kick a field goal they go ahead of us there in the fourth quarter. They're already on the 30-yard line. Coach Kubiak walked over to me and said, 'You better be aggressive.' I said, 'OK,'" Phillips recounted. ... In addition to Ware, WR Demaryius Thomas (neck), RB Juwan Thompson (hamstring), CB Aqib Talib (ankle) and G Evan Mathis (hamstring) missed a second straight day of practice Thursday. ... The Broncos are mulling a promotion of RB Kapri Bibbs from the practice squad but the problem is finding someone to cut from the roster to make room.

Through My Eyes: Shaquil Barrett's rise from the practice squad

By Shaquil Barrett
DenverBroncos.com
October 15, 2015

For any practice squad member, motivation is almost instilled naturally. You're so close to your dream you can actually touch it, but there are still obstacles in your way.

While that's a good source of motivation, for me last year on the practice squad, it was only one percent. The other 99 percent of my motivation comes from my family: My wife, Jordanna, my two sons, Shaquil Jr., 3, and Braylon, 2, and my daughter Aaliyah, 7 months.

Nothing is more motivating than being able to provide for my family and my wife and kids. That's what I want to be able to do and having been striving to do since I was in college. I want to give them everything they want so they don't have to worry about anything.

But being on the practice squad was a blessing in disguise because I took it as a learning year. I learned a lot from guys like Lerentee McCray, DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller. I would attribute a lot of my changes from last year to this year on learning from those guys.

I also saw a big change in my body after a year. Coming out of college, I had a tremendous amount of body fat. I just saw a picture recently and was shocked that I looked like that. My agent sent my wife a meal plan for a healthy diet and I'm still working on it and still keep working on that to become a better athlete, a better player. Bigger, faster, stronger.

During training camp this season I prayed that I would stay healthy. In last season's camp I injured my ankle and wasn't able to play to my full potential.

I was just as confident as I was the year before, but this time I stayed healthy, had a great preseason and then just kept it up. From the few snaps in the games and in practice, I showed the coaches I can play and my role just kept increasing on the team.

When it came time for the team to trim to the 53-man roster, I was at home with my wife, who was checking about every five minutes to see if I made it. I started looking too, but then I just had to start cleaning. I was doing the dishes and my wife said, You made the team! I looked at her and said, Are you for real?

And then it hit me 20 minutes later and then I was excited. But I knew it was just the beginning. I had to prove to them I could still perform in the regular season.

While I'm still working on certain things like my explosiveness and my hands on pass rush, this season has been exciting. I think I've been pretty sound and have made an impact on special teams, and defensively I've been able to come in and somewhat fill in for Von when he's tired.

I learned a lot on the practice squad, but the learning hasn't stopped now that I'm on the team.

Learning from the Pro Bowlers on our team I see the kind of things they do out there and I try to apply it to my game because they're successful for a reason. I want to be as successful as I can be all day.

On defense, everybody is a playmaker and when I see someone who makes a big play – I want to get one on the next play. It's a high energy that we all feed off of and we all want to be the guy who makes that play to help the team win.

Shaquil Barrett poised to make first career start for injured DeMarcus Ware

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
October 15, 2015

With DeMarcus Ware continuing to recover from the back injury he suffered Sunday, Shaquil Barrett is poised to make his first NFL regular-season start.

"Shaq's going to start the game, but they (the reserve outside linebackers) are all going to play," Head Coach Gary Kubiak said Thursday, referring to fellow backup outside linebackers Shane Ray and Lereentee McCray.

Ware has yet to practice this week after being carted back to the locker room early in the Broncos' 16-10 win at Oakland last Sunday.

But with Barrett and Ray filling in for Ware, the Broncos' pass rush did not miss a step, with each sacking Raiders QB Derek Carr once.

Barrett has flourished in his reserve role, with two sacks -- including one of Detroit's Matthew Stafford that led to a fumble the Broncos recovered in the fourth quarter of their 24-12 Week 3 win.

With Ware injured last week, Barrett had close to a starter's workload, playing a career-high 38 snaps. But actually running onto the field with the first team for the first snap will still represent a milestone.

"It hasn't really hit me right now," Barrett said. "I'm still preparing the same way I usually prepare. But on Sunday, once it happens, I'll probably be a bit more excited.

"People ask me how I feel, and I'm like, 'I really not thinking about it.' But the enthusiasm is going to come Sunday when I actually get out there and get that opportunity."

It's one that he deserves.

"He had a good offseason, a good training camp, and all of a sudden, when he came to game time, he just kept making plays," Kubiak said. "He's earned the right to be out there and play more and contribute."

Before Barrett began making an impression during training camp, he spent the offseason remaking his body, using workouts and an altered diet to reduce his weight from 254 to 242 pounds and his body fat from 18 to 11 percent.

Barrett said that his agent sent his wife a meal plan to allow for proper preparation of food for his diet.

"I tried to eat everything I wanted to eat before I started my diet, so it wasn't that big of a deal," Barrett said. "I used to drink a lot of juice and soda like all the time and I still miss that. I am drinking water the majority of the time now. Just giving up the juice and soda, for the most part [was the hardest thing]."

But it's made Barrett's work as a pass rusher much easier. With 12 fewer pounds, he has become one of the league's quickest young rushers off the edge. Per ProFootballFocus.com's calculations, only of 12 of 71 defensive ends or outside linebackers with at least 20 pass-rush snaps have hurried opposing quarterbacks at a higher rate than Barrett (one every 7.33 pass-rush opportunities).

One of them is Von Miller, who has hurried opposing quarterbacks once every 6.95 pass-rush chances.

"With the limited sacks that Shaq has had, he has two sacks -- I have three, so he's right there with the bunch," Miller said. "He was making a lot of plays for us in the preseason and during the season. When I come out, there's really not a drop in performance.

"Shaq is a good fill-in for us. It's not only Shaq, but Shane and Lerentee. If DeMarcus isn't able to go, I'm fully confident in those guys."

Shaquil Barrett and his wife happy to see their perseverance pay off

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
September 6, 2015

Jordanna Barrett has been planning her dream wedding since the day she got married.

On Feb. 2, 2012, she and her fiancé stood in a sterile courtroom. She, nine months pregnant. He, a sophomore at Colorado State. Both teenagers, signing off — literally — on the next phase of their lives.

"We never shared vows," she said. "When we got married, we said we are going to have a wedding and we are going to exchange vows."

On Feb. 27, 2016, in her hometown of Omaha, Jordanna will again marry the man of her dreams in the big, glamorous wedding she's been envisioning for years. The one in the picturesque church, with the steeple and stained glass. The one with the real flowers. The one with some 250 guests, with eight bridesmaids and eight groomsmen. The one that is followed by an exotic honeymoon, just the two of them.

This wedding, though, won't be the start of something new, as it is with most couples. The Barretts' road to the altar has been long and rocky. This wedding will be a celebration, Jordanna said. A celebration of the past five years of their journey and of all the people who helped them get this far.

This one will celebrate their dream realized when he — Shaquil Barrett, a father of three, a husband and a 22-year-old outside linebacker — became a Bronco.

One door closes, another opens

After three seasons, 37 games, 245 tackles, 18 sacks and six forced fumbles, Shaquil saved one of his finest plays for last in his career at CSU. The Rams trailed Washington State by eight points with two minutes left in the 2013 New Mexico Bowl when Cougars running back Jeremiah Laufasa took the handoff at Washington State's 31-yard line. After three strides upfield, he was stopped in his tracks by Barrett, who snatched the ball out of his arms and fell on it.

The fumble and recovery set up a Rams touchdown and game-tying, two-point conversion. CSU went on to win 48-45.

"It's about being resilient," then-CSU coach Jim McElwain said afterward. "It's about understanding every play has a history and life of its own."

That play's history was one most college students don't choose to have. Barrett was a father of two at the time. He was playing for his family. And, he hoped, a future NFL paycheck.

"His kids are his pride and joy," Jordanna said. "If anybody watched us, that's the first thing they would see. His kids are who he is."

Jordanna learned she was pregnant with Shaquil Jr. not long after Shaquil Sr. learned the University of Nebraska at Omaha was shuttering its football program in 2011. He had just finished his freshman

season with the Mavericks, and she had just completed high school. He decided to continue his dream at CSU. And she followed.

From 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., Jordanna worked as a nanny. She'd return home for a few hours, maybe see her husband for one after he finished school and football practice, then she'd race off to her second job, as a manager at Taco John's. She'd get home again at 1 a.m., only to wake up every few hours for night feedings before starting the process all over again. Shaquil picked up random work shifts where he could. He begged Jordanna to let him help at night with Shaquil Jr., now 3, and later with Braylon, 2.

"A lot of dads are like, 'You got it. You can handle it,' " Jordanna said. "He wanted to be a part of it."

They found help along the way. Former CSU cornerback Bernard Blake and his brother, Eric, volunteered to babysit, freeing up Jordanna to work in the mornings and, occasionally, allowing the couple to go on dates.

But the worry that comes with raising a family while one spouse juggles school and football and the other works and raises two children took its toll. The Barretts chose this and they wanted it and they have no regrets. But that didn't keep the "what ifs" from flooding their thoughts. What if Shaquil doesn't get drafted? What if he gets hurt? What will they do? Where will they go? What's next?

Shaquil promised his wife that his pursuit, this paycheck-to-paycheck lifestyle, would have a pot a gold at the end.

"I finally had to just listen to him or I was going to break down," she said. "I didn't know what the future held, but I knew his dream was to get to the NFL."

"I just love being around them"

Aaliyah Barrett, a baby girl Shaquil calls his little princess, was born March 30, 2015. She, like Braylon, was planned, timed so Shaquil could be there for her birth and enjoy her first couple months of life before football took over.

But football arrived earlier this year, and the need to secure a full-time job became even more pressing.

Barrett wasn't drafted after finishing his career at CSU, but the Broncos signed him as a free agent and kept him on the practice squad last year. He never got into a game.

So he and Jordanna teamed up to hurdle the next obstacle. He changed his diet to help improve his game. She made all the meals, tailoring a plan she received from his agent to his preferences. His body fat dropped from 18 percent to 11, and his comfort in new Broncos defensive coordinator Wade Phillips' 3-4 alignment grew.

For nearly a month during training camp this summer, Barrett was separated from his family. Jordanna and the kids visited her family in Omaha while he focused on football. Every morning, though, no matter if he had returned from a game the previous night at 3 a.m., Shaquil would wake up at 8 a.m. to FaceTime his wife and kids, to tell them how much he loved them and how much he missed them before heading off to work.

"I just love being around them, making them laugh and playing around with them," he said. "It makes their day and it makes mine."

Shaquil, a name unfamiliar to most Broncos fans at the start of the summer, made a splash during the exhibition schedule. He recorded a team-high 16 tackles (13 solo) and tied for a league high with four sacks. Four months ago the Broncos boasted two elite edge pass rushers, Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware, and held out high hopes for first-round draft pick Shane Ray. Now they might have four.

The hype is nice every now and again. But it's not why Barrett is here. And it's not why his family will be celebrating, together, in February. "Not many people set that high of a goal and actually get there," Jordanna said. "He has. It's been a hard road, and we're at a point now where we can just live."

Barrett file

A look at Broncos outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett:

Height: 6-foot-1

Weight: 237 pounds

Age: 22

NFL experience: Second year

Colleges: University of Nebraska at Omaha, Colorado State

At CSU

B 246 tackles (116 solo), 18 sacks, three interceptions, seven forced fumbles, four fumble recoveries in 38 games

B Mountain West defensive player of the year in 2013

2014 NFL season

B Signed with the Broncos as an undrafted rookie in May

B Waived twice while a member of the practice squad

B On the active roster for two games but didn't play in them

2015 preseason

B Tied for league high with four sacks, made team-high 16 total tackles (13 solo)

Shaquil Barrett most impressive at essential time

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

September 4, 2015

Shaquil Barrett saved his best performance of the 2015 preseason for last, and what little he missed during his two-sack night he would kick himself for after the game.

Barrett was everywhere against the Cardinals with six solo tackles and one assist to go with his sacks and one pass defended. It was Barrett's most complete game to date in his young NFL career -- and on the eve of when it matters most for young players trying to pave their own path, no less.

Yet with all he accomplished Thursday night, what might stick in his head the longest is the play that fell through his fingertips. Shane Ray had drilled Cardinals QB Phillip Sims from his blind side and fumbled. The ball practically took one bounce right into Barrett's grasp, but it slipped back to the turf. The Broncos would still capitalize with Vance Walker falling on the loose ball, but Barrett had nothing but 17 yards of green grass between him and a touchdown.

"I had the opportunity to do more," Barrett said after the game. "I had dropped that fumble that I could have returned for a touchdown, and then I missed a couple [of] sacks and I just had a couple [of] errors out there. As long as I just stay mentally focused and just do my job out there, I'll be great. I had a good showing, like a couple big plays, but I've still got to be mentally, technically 100 percent sound."

Partially satisfied with his night and partially disappointed, Barrett also noted two offsides penalties he incurred. Seven total tackles and two sacks were fine but his expectations are higher for himself and that includes erasing the lows of his game.

"I'm just still kind of bummed about those two penalties I had, the offsides penalties, trying to get a good get-off on the ball," Barrett said. "It just hurt the team too much. I've got to be more mentally focused than that. [...] Just like the coaches and like myself, I'm going to be hard on myself and I know I've got to do a little bit better right there."

With the preseason's conclusion, the focus will now turn to who remains on the 53-man roster at the Sept. 5 deadline.

Barrett's final preseason game of 2015 wasn't too different from his 2014 warm-up finale, a two-sack game against the Cowboys. Then a rookie, Barrett missed making the 53-man roster but was signed to the practice squad.

Barrett has shown more explosiveness and consistency this year. No spot on the roster is guaranteed, but Barrett would assuredly draw interest after the preseason games he's had over the past four weeks.

For his part, Barrett is satisfied with his preseason performances and the film he's added to his résumé, but he can't allow himself to relax too much.

"I feel good about the situation but I've still got the butterflies," Barrett said, "and also because you never know what's going to happen. Like, they might go in a different direction. I just don't know. I'm just going to stay by my phone in case I get a call, but hopefully I don't get it."

However, if he needs a vote of confidence from a teammate, he could find perhaps none stronger or more meaningful than from teammate DeMarcus Ware.

"I think he will," Ware said of Barrett's chances to make the 53-man roster. "The way he's been playing and what he's been doing, I know that he can make the team and I'm looking forward to playing with him."

Bennie Fowler, Shaquil Barrett show what a difference a year makes

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
September 4, 2015

Whenever a team changes its coaching staff, there is always at least some football trepidation from some of the players left behind, especially those who believed they were on a good developmental track with the former staff, that they were close.

There's some nervousness about what the new staff will think and whether the new coaches will have other people in mind for jobs. But two Denver Broncos who spent the 2014 season on the team's practice squad appear poised to take the next jump with Gary Kubiak's staff in place.

Wide receiver Bennie Fowler and outside linebacker Shaquil Barrett are poised to join the team's 53-man roster when the Broncos trim the roster by Saturday, 4 p.m. ET. Both players were among those Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said caught his eye -- again -- during the team's preseason finale Thursday night.

"No. 48 [Barrett] continues to stand out to me; he's had a great preseason," Kubiak said. "... Bennie Fowler stood up, made some tough plays in the game."

Barrett spent all but one week of the regular season on the Broncos' practice squad in '14 -- he was a game-day inactive Oct. 19 against the San Francisco 49ers -- and was on the roster for the Broncos' playoff loss to the Indianapolis Colts, but did not play in the game. Fowler spent all of the 2014 season on the team's practice squad.

This preseason, Fowler led the team in both receptions (10) and receiving yards (155) and had a touchdown as well. He showed an in-game connection with both Brock Osweiler and Trevor Siemian at quarterback.

"I've worked with [Fowler] a lot in practice and when I've been in during games," Siemian said. "If you put it where he can get it, he'll get it."

The Broncos like Fowler's size (6-foot-1, 212 pounds) and they see him as an option at both the outside position and in the slot in the offense.

Barrett initially caught the coaching staff's attention with his conditioning when he showed up to the offseason program. Even then Kubiak and the defensive coaches said he looked primed to push his way on to the roster as Barrett said he had changed his diet and stepped up his offseason work.

In the four preseason games, Barrett has consistently made life difficult for opposing offensive linemen. Despite two offside penalties in Thursday night's game, Barrett led the team in sacks in the preseason with four as the team finished with a league-leading 20 in the warm-up games, six more than the next team.

Barrett is likely the fourth outside linebacker as the cut-down deadline approaches, behind Von Miller, DeMarcus Ware and rookie Shane Ray.

"I feel good about the situation, but I've still got the butterflies and still worried also because you never know what's going to happen," Barrett said. "They might go in a different direction. I just don't know so I'm just staying by my phone in case I get a call, but hopefully I don't have to get it."

Full house, full heart for Broncos' Shaquil Barrett

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

August 28, 2015

How they got here? Well, that's a long story. Got a minute? It's worth your time. It's an exhausting, improbable, memorable story. It's a love story. There were angels.

It started on Facebook and took a pit stop at Taco John's. It's still going, through this Broncos preseason where Shaq Barrett is forcing the NFL to notice him, through his inspiring wife, Jordanna, through the best part, their three kids.

They had one, Shaq Jr., when Jordanna was closing a Fort Collins Taco John's at midnight and opening a Starbucks at 5 a.m., when Shaquil was a football player at Colorado State with weightlifting at 6 a.m. How they did it? How the newlyweds juggled college football, classes, two or three jobs while starting their own family?

Still can't wrap my head around it. But they did it, and they're doing it.

They met at church. Jordanna's friend was dating Shaq's brother, and Shaq was all about this new girl. "The first time I saw her, I was like, 'Whoa,'" Shaq says. Jordanna, though, took some persuading. "I wasn't that into him at first," she says, laughing.

That night he sent her a Facebook message. Then, a movie. Then, a wedding. Then, three kids. It all happened fast, before either turned 22. Coming next is the part in the movie where Dad makes an NFL roster and a hefty paycheck just a couple years after Mom was locking the doors at Taco John's.

She supported him. He's this close to supporting them. And Shaq Jr., Braylon and Aaliyah? The kids don't know it yet, but their parents are marvelous.

"He's a really amazing man," Jordanna says.

"I wouldn't be here without her," Shaq says.

Where is he, exactly? He's on the cusp. He's a 250-pound linebacker who went undrafted out of CSU, and the surprise of Denver's preseason. The Broncos had Von Miller, signed DeMarcus Ware, drafted Shane Ray — and Barrett, another pass rusher, still is the breakout player that seems to arrive with every Broncos training camp.

Two preseason games, two sacks, including a sack-fumble at Houston. The highest grade for a 3-4 linebacker — in the NFL, not just on the Broncos — according to Pro Football Focus. A snap-quick first step that seems to startle offensive linemen when Miller and Ware are over on the bench.

"Shaq was a great wrestler in high school," CSU linebackers coach Marty English says. "A lot of kids with that background are pretty good players."

He's been a disruptive key in a defense that can carry the Broncos until Peyton Manning and the offense figure it out.

"Being a father, a husband and everything, I'm not surprised at the success he's having," English says. "Shaq is a very focused individual. He had to be. He embraces it."

Barrett was on the practice squad last year. A bum ankle in the preseason held him back. His wife has helped him to the brink of making the team.

His agent emailed Jordanna a dietary plan this offseason, and his wife prepared each and every one of his meals. Shaq says his body fat dropped from 18 percent last year to 11.3 this year. "I just feel lighter out there," he says.

He credits his wife. She credits him.

"Pretty good team," she says.

Will Barrett make this team? He should, if the Broncos are serious about combining sheer ability with high character. It looks good for a roster spot, but hardly guaranteed. Barrett recently signed a two-year deal with Nike — "Nothing huge," Jordanna says, but it all helps - and is a favorite in the locker room.

"Shaq can play," Vonnie Football says.

Taco Tuesdays at Miller's house count as Barrett's social hour. At CSU, he was never one for the bars, preferring to hang with Jordanna and Shaq Jr. They had help, namely from Bernard Blake, a cornerback for the Rams, and his brother, Eric Blake.

"Please mention them," Jordanna says. The Blake brothers would babysit when the Barretts had work, school, football or all three. They tried to pay Eric, but he refused to take their money and would hide it around their apartment.

"Pretty much an angel," Jordanna says.

"We pray every day he makes the roster here (in Denver)," she says. "But I know if he doesn't, I know he's going to make it somewhere else."

The Broncos host San Francisco on Saturday and must cut down their roster to 75 players on Tuesday. The final cut, down to 53, arrives next Saturday. Mom and Dad agreed not to buy a "Barrett, No. 48" Broncos jersey for Shaq Jr. until it's official. Did Barrett expect this early success?

"To the degree I've been able to do it? No. It's felt really good," he says. "That's been somewhat shocking, because I didn't think I'd get this many opportunities. But I think they like me."

Who wouldn't? Shaq's worry isn't football. It's about whether he chose the right Power Ranger for his son's birthday, whether he could see his kids on Facetime while they were in Omaha and the Broncos were in Houston.

"I'm so glad we named him Shaq Jr.," Jordanna says. "He's a spitting image."

Last Saturday, Barrett erupted past the Texans' right tackle, sledgehammered his right arm at the football, smacked the quarterback to the turf. The ball bounced loose. That wasn't the best part of his weekend.

"Waking up with my son," he says.

How they got here, juggling crazy lives to provide their kids great ones?

Shaq's parents once told him to look under his seat. There, he found a pair of Jordans. See if they fit, his dad said, and they did. Another time they drove through a car wash, and Dad rolled down his son's window. Shaq got soaked, laughed all the way home. Then there was that family trip to Florida. Or was it California? No matter. It could've been the moon, but 16 years later Shaq remembers where his parents taught him to swim.

"I had my dad and my mom in my life. I was lucky," Barrett says. "As far as love from both my parents, I had unconditional love. Now we want to have that for our kids."

Pretty good team.

Shaquil Barrett hoping Broncos promotion comes with some perks

By Irv Moss
The Denver Post
October 18, 2014

He has taken a step, but rookie linebacker Shaquil Barrett figures he hasn't arrived until he has a "War Daddy" shirt.

Fresh from being called up from the practice squad, Barrett sat in front of his locker this week in the section of the Broncos' locker room reserved mostly for the linebackers. Von Miller was nearby. On the back of his shirt, the words War Daddy stood out in big letters. Brandon Marshall walked by. He also was wearing a War Daddy shirt.

"You have to earn it," Barrett replied when asked whether he had a War Daddy shirt. "Hopefully, I'm getting one this week."

Barrett explained that the team's special-recognition War Daddy shirts are awarded to players for their hard work in practices or in games.

With that in mind, the 6-foot-1, 260-pound Barrett is preparing for his first NFL game Sunday, when the Broncos play host to San Francisco. The undrafted rookie from Colorado State stands ready to accept whatever assignment coach John Fox hands out.

Defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio acknowledges that Barrett has taken a big first step.

"First, he's active. And that means he can have a role," Del Rio said. "Now that he has a uniform, we'll see if there could be a role for him."

Barrett's opportunity was created by Danny Trevathan's knee injury, which moved the rest of the linebackers up one slot on the depth chart. The big benefactor is rookie linebacker Corey Nelson, who received his first extensive action last Sunday against the New York Jets.

"Corey's earned his way, really on special teams," Del Rio said. "We like to create packages where we get our guys in — it may be in a smaller role — and if they do well, we build on the role. We had that in mind with (Nelson), and it happened to coincide with Danny going down. We basically get ourselves ready to play and get backups ready to play because we know they could be called on."

Barrett impressed the Denver coaches during training camp.

"He's a player we liked," Fox said. "He has good hands in the pass rush. He can perform at the linebacker position as it relates to coverage and run fits. He can take it from meeting rooms on to the field, so we kept him on the practice squad. We had a spot open and brought him up."

Fox treats draft picks and undrafted players the same. "Once you get them here — whether it's a draft pick or a free agent — you just coach the heck out of them," he said.

Fellow linebacker Steven Johnson knows what Barrett is facing as a newcomer trying to build credibility with no guarantee of playing time.

"You can build credibility in practice too," Johnson said. "You have to build a reputation so the coaches can trust you. I'm still doing it to this day."

Barrett took a different path to the NFL than he had hoped for when he left Colorado State.

"I was disappointed that I wasn't drafted," Barrett said. "I knew a little about the free-agent stuff, but I didn't know if it would work for me."

It's worked out so far. Now he wants his War Daddy shirt to hang in his locker next to his Western hat, which reminds him of his college days.

Barrett's opportunity well-earned

By David DeChant
DenverBroncos.com
October 15, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Shaquil Barrett knew a Broncos roster spot was opening up when, on Tuesday, Danny Trevathan was moved to injured reserve with designation to return, but he didn't want to get his hopes up about a promotion.

"I was shocked when I got the call because I pretty much prepared myself for it not to happen," the former Colorado State star said Wednesday, smiling from ear to ear. "But when it happened I was really excited."

Barrett's addition to the 53-man roster wasn't really geared toward replacing like for like on the roster -- Barrett is a bigger, strongside linebacker like Von Miller as opposed to the faster, sideline-to-sideline and coverage style that Trevathan is suited for. Rather, as Head Coach John Fox mentioned, Barrett proved himself worthy of a shot on the active roster with a strong preseason and consistent performances in practice.

"Just the way he's gone about his work, what we saw in training camp," Fox said when asked what about Barrett impressed him. "He was a guy that was a college free agent that came in and caught all the coaches' eyes based on his performance, so he's earned it."

Barrett consistently flashed in training camp practices as a run defender and pass rusher, showing off some impressive moves in one-on-one drills and bothering quarterbacks in team periods. Barrett also drew a holding penalty against the Seahawks in the preseason opener and picked up two sacks in the preseason finale against the Cowboys.

If the Broncos weren't so deep at Barrett's position -- with Miller and Lerentee McCray (who also flashed in training camp), as well as Nate Irving's experience on the strong side -- he may well have made the roster out of training camp. Now, with Trevathan sidelined until at least the Dec. 14 game against the Chargers, Barrett will get his hard-earned chance.

"I just come out here and just give my 100 percent effort every day and try to get the guys on the offense better," he said.

"I probably stuck out a couple times every practice but it probably wasn't on a consistent basis. But I feel like I did it on a consistent basis today. It just makes me more hungry now."

Barrett is the third rookie from CSU to earn a spot on a 53-man roster around the league. Second-round pick Weston Richburg has started all six of the Giants' games this year at guard, while tight end Crockett Gillmore, a third-round pick, has played in all six games for the Ravens.

"We had a lot of great talent come out this year," Barrett said. "To be out there and prove that I can play and that we've got some good talent down there at Colorado State, that's something I'm looking to do."

Barrett added that after a brief period of celebration ("about 20 minutes"), he quickly returned his focus to preparing for what could be his first NFL action on Sunday night against the 49ers.

"Now I've got to get back to business," he said. "Come back and watch film, eat right and stuff, take care of my body, so I can go out there and be the best I can be."