

Broncos kicker Brandon McManus makes anti-bullying his cause

By Jim Buzinski
Outsports
October 12, 2017

This week, the 0-5 New York Giants travel to Denver to 3-1 Broncos. Here are the LGBT angles for the game this week.

The off-field cause of Broncos kicker Brandon McManus is bullying prevention. His Anti-Bully Squad aims to raise awareness about bullying and help prevent it in schools.

"In the gay community there is a lot of sense of people being bullied because they're different," McManus told me at Super Bowl L in February 2016. "One of the biggest things we're trying to prevent is people committing suicide. For these younger kids, they're too afraid to talk to their parents, they feel embarrassed. We're trying to give an avenue for anyone who wants to speak up to help save lives."

McManus has befriended a boy with Down Syndrome who had been bullied. He even showed up at the boy's house and played football with him in the street. Said the boy's mom: "Brandon volunteered to come over and show his support for Ryder and play football in front of the neighbor to show him that if no one else cared, the Broncos did."

Giants co-owner Steve Tisch has been a longtime supporter of same-sex marriage. In 2011, when a battle was raging in New York state over legalizing same-sex marriage, Tisch made his support public in a video.

Roy Simmons was an offensive lineman for the Giants and Washington from 1979-83 and the second former NFL player to come out publicly as gay. Simmons, who was HIV-positive, died at age 57 in 2014. Simmons came out on national TV on the "Phil Donahue Show" in 1992, joining Dave Kopay as an openly gay former player. In an interview with the New York Times in 2003, Simmons told why he stayed in the closet "The N.F.L. has a reputation," he said, "and it's not even a verbal thing — it's just known. You are gladiators; you are male; you kick butt."

Outsports prediction for the game: Broncos 27, Giants 7. The Giants are a mess, with their best receiver, Odell Beckham Jr., out for the year and two other starting receivers out. This is not good going up against one of the league's best defense, one that plays at an even higher level at home. In addition, the Giants have benched one of their best defensive backs, Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, after he argued with his coach. The Giants will provide more excitement off the field in this game and Denver wins easily.

Broncos get extension with Brandon McManus

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

September 11, 2017

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

McManus was 10-of-10 in field goal attempts in the preseason and has consistently shown one of the power legs in the league with his touchback ratio on kickoffs. Last season he was 29-of-34 in field goal

attempts (.853). He was 30-of-35 in 2015 before he went 10-of-10 in the team's run to a Super Bowl 50 win.

Eat, Kick, Blog

By Kevin Clark
The Ringer
July 22, 2016

It's been a big year for Denver kicker Brandon McManus. He played a major part in the Broncos' Super Bowl win, connecting on all three of his field goal attempts. He got married. And, crucially, he blogged about the nigiri sushi at a Japanese gastropub in Denver called Izakaya Den, where he enjoyed the kanpachi's "meaty, pale white flesh with a delicate taste" and the wild tai that was "firm yet flaky."

For McManus, new to the food-blogging world in particular and to sushi in general, this was a transformative experience. The blogging, featuring the requisite photographs of about-to-be-consumed meals, was making him a bolder eater.

"I could never commit to raw fish," McManus said in an interview with The Ringer. "But I had two appetizers, then got an entree, and it was one of the best meals of my life. To get to the tenderness of the raw fish was amazing."

Like many athletes, McManus burns so many calories that he has to eat a lot. In the past, however, he never put that facet of his life to good use. So when he started eating at some of the best restaurants in his city, a sudden urge developed that even he can't fully explain. "I don't know what came over me," he said. "I just decided to blog about it, and we just kind of rolled with it."

And so McManus, whose five field goals in the Broncos' January playoff win over the Steelers tied a postseason record, became a football player who doubles as a food blogger, likely the most unusual side hustle in the NFL. If that sounds weird to you, rest assured that it once would have sounded even weirder to McManus, who said he possessed a pretty typical NFL food palate just a few months ago. "If there was filet mignon or sea bass on the menu, that was being ordered."

The typical NFL road trip, McManus said, consists of excursions to the nicest local steak house. There will be meat; there will be pasta. In his daily life, he'd routinely snack on the unhealthiest of foods: "a bunch of candy, chicken wings, fries, nachos, all that type of stuff." After his March wedding, he decided to make a lifestyle change, cutting out snacks and opting to tour some of the nicer restaurants in Denver.

He and his wife, Nadia, began carving out Friday for date night, during which they would explore their Denver surroundings.

McManus and his wife are both from the Philadelphia area and felt they needed to learn more about their new home of nearly two years, which they could do by expanding their culinary horizons. They'd take turns picking where to eat, and McManus quickly became obsessed with the experience of sampling new food at new places. As the discoveries mounted and his obsession grew, he felt that his newfound passion was worth chronicling. And so the football player decided to become a food blogger. After some discussions with local outlets and magazines, which he turned down because he wanted to write about food more than once a month, he decided to publish on Denver's team website. Like everyone else who writes for the site, his job title is listed after his byline: "Brandon McManus, kicker." He read food blogs not to study the reviews, but to search for inspiration for a good name for his own blog. He ultimately settled on McManus' Mile High Menu, and readers ate it up: He said that his first

post, about Guard and Grace (try the Bangs Island mussels, the best he's ever had), netted 40,000 page views in short order.

Weekly offseason blogging led to a series of new revelations, including a newfound love of duck. He'd sampled the meat before in small portions, but when he ordered duck confit as an entree at TAG, he realized it was "so crispy, so tasty and something I never would have ordered before [starting a blog]." "Now I have no hesitation to order this stuff," he said. "I was always a picky eater. I'm broadening my horizons."

He raved about the adventurous dishes at TAG, which brands itself as a "continental social food" eatery. "And don't even get Nadia started on the duck fat fries, which are covered with multiple spices but one in particular that sets these apart: SUGAR," he wrote. McManus, though, reserved special admiration for the flash-seared hamachi: "This is a top five favorite dish of all time. This dish is so creative using jalapenos and pop rocks — YES, POP ROCKS CANDY — which makes it nothing short of amazing. If you have been to TAG and haven't ordered this dish, you are missing out."

He could barely handle the spiced doughnut with Vietnamese coffee ice cream at ChoLon: "The light fluffiness of these donuts paired with the Vietnamese coffee ice cream had us dreaming of a bakery in France. Order extra spiced donuts to take home for breakfast the following morning. TRUST US!!"

He tried rabbit for the first time at Acorn. At Machete, he was able to dive in and rank the best tacos: pork, halibut, hanger steak, shrimp, tilapia, chicken, beef tongue. Nadia had her own rankings, but wouldn't try the beef tongue.

McManus said restaurants are now reaching out asking him to come blog about their places. He's also in advanced talks with a local network broadcaster to do video reviews this fall. As a fan of food in general, he watches plenty of food shows, but as a competitive professional athlete, he's programmed to prefer shows that feature head-to-head battles, like Chopped. Nadia agrees.

"We want to continue to grow it," McManus said of his brand. "We're in talks for a 15- or 20-minute TV segment." He wants to continue the blog entries as well as he explores more of Denver's food scene, and said social media has helped bring attention to his reviews. Though McManus wants to keep his focus local for now and explore Denver in full, he said he and Nadia would jump at the opportunity to one day take the food blogging national.

Of course, with great power comes great responsibility, and now that he's a well-known food blogger in the locker room, McManus said he'll be under plenty of pressure to recommend places on the road this fall. He's unsure how adventurous his teammates will be, though: "We'll see how big of foodies they are."

Brandon McManus aims to kick bullying to the curb

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
August 27, 2016

When Brandon McManus took to the field before Saturday's preseason game against the 49ers, a special visitor whose life had been changed by the Broncos kicker was waiting for him.

Two years ago, McManus was a guest at the Global Down Syndrome Foundation's 2015 'Be Beautiful, Be Yourself' Fashion Show in Denver. While there, he heard a touching story about Ryder Braden, a 9-year-old boy with Down syndrome who was being bullied. For nothing more for who he is, how he talks and how he throws a football, Ryder was being harassed by his neighbor.

Looking for help, Ryder's mother, Season Hillery, contacted the police to see if there was any way they could intervene. In short, they told her that they couldn't stop the bully from saying whatever he wanted.

"It was really hard to be a parent and accept that people can just say what they want to and you can't protect your child who can't defend themselves," Hillery said. "Brandon volunteered to come over and show his support for Ryder and play football in front of the neighbor to show him that if no one else cared, the Broncos did."

After meeting the family for an afternoon of playing catch, McManus had become Ryder's hero. Season had taken a video of the two playing together, and Ryder watches it almost every day.

On Saturday, Ryder and Season were on the field before kickoff as part of the Broncos' fan thank-you moment to 90 Broncos Country representatives. While the mother and son watched warm-ups, McManus strode over to them to say hello and welcome them to his home turf for Ryder's second Broncos game.

"We stay in touch all the time," McManus said, "He has this football that he loves ... and he brought it to the game Saturday, as well. ... He had a polo that was all decked out with my name and number and Anti Bully Squad all over it. Just to see how well they're doing and as he continues to do well [means a lot]."

The Anti Bully Squad is a foundation that McManus co-founded along with former music manager Tom Peterson in September of 2014. The impact McManus had on Ryder is exactly why he started it.

"Just seeing his face light up and the enjoyment that his mother had, and that Ryder had," McManus said, "it really touched me and I wanted to do something that I could help this cause a lot."

From the face-to-face insults like what Ryder faced, to the cyber-bullying that's become more prevalent with the rise of social media in the past decade or so, McManus aims to tackle whatever he can. He gives children as many avenues to find help as he can.

And when it comes to trying to prevent the problem as much as possible, McManus' goal is to create understanding for children that it's OK to be different.

"You want to be you and enjoy yourself and love yourself more than anyone else can kind of beat you down for that or make fun of you for it," McManus said. "So as much as we can kind of teach these kids how each kid can be kind of different from one another to kind of embrace each other and if one person dresses a certain way, if one person talks a certain way or looks a certain way, everyone has to kind of embrace that and kind of move on with it."

Season can attest to the impact that McManus and his foundation have had: "To me, it's made a difference that people see that people who are their idols are against bullying. It opens eyes for how much it hurts people and not even just them; it hurts their families, as well, to watch their children or their family members go through being bullied. And it really makes kids feel that their idols and people that they look up to and want to be like someday are against things that are negative and hurtful to them."

Young Broncos fan meets Head Coach Gary Kubiak, K Brandon McManus after tough break

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
August 1, 2016

Grant Thornham will never again be this happy to break a bone.

On Friday at Broncos training camp, Grant was with friends from summer camp when special teams drills began. As kicker Brandon McManus boomed field goals through the uprights, Grant and friends looked for a spot where they could be on the receiving end of the kicks.

Grant, 10, wasn't quite ready for one of the kicks, though, and threw up his right arm to try to stop the ball.

"[The ball] bent it back because it was really fast," Grant said, "and I didn't know how fast it would go."

Grant said his wrist hurt the rest of the day at camp, and his dad, Patrick Thornham, first thought the injury could be more than a sprain when Grant had trouble opening a door on Friday night.

Pretty soon, Grant and his dad were off to the doctor, where Grant was fitted with the last orange cast (with blue wrap underneath). By Sunday morning, though, Grant was back at Broncos camp, where the team welcomed him for a tour and a meet-and-greet with McManus and wide receiver Demaryius Thomas. And for the entirety of the visit, a smile was permanently affixed to Grant's face.

"It's really cool," Grant said. "I'm really glad I broke my arm this way. It's the best way for me because it's my favorite thing to do: to watch the Broncos and watch them play."

For Grant's dad, the orthopedist's office is becoming a second home. Just last week, Patrick was there with his daughter to get her own cast removed.

But an all-access morning with the Broncos was a nice way to take the family's mind off the injury and the few weeks of fall baseball that Grant will miss. He said he was amazed at how big the players looked up close, and the personal time with McManus and Thomas.

Both of the Broncos starters spent time after practice with Grant to hear his story, joke around with the fifth grader and, of course, sign his cast.

"I think it was my fault" McManus said with a laugh. "You can blame me."

Head Coach Gary Kubiak also signed a football for Grant and joked that next time he should stay on the field so that he doesn't get hurt again.

The 2016-17 season has started well from Grant's perspective, and he sees similar success coming for the Broncos this year.

"Actually, last year, I made this homemade confetti," Grant said. "Cause I was really confident we were gonna win, so I made it the first game -- it was paper. I think we have a really good chance. I think our quarterbacks are pretty good. I got Sanchez' autograph [at the] training camp practice with my camp. So I think we'll do really well. Also, with [OLB] Von [Miller]."

Playoff success of Broncos' McManus no surprise to his college coach

By Tom Torrisi
FOXSports.com
February 10, 2016

There was a point late in Super Bowl 50 when the idea of a kicker being named Most Valuable Player started to surface on Twitter.

Denver Broncos linebacker Von Miller doused that notion in the fourth quarter when he forced his second fumble to all but cement MVP honors and assure that teammate and second-year kicker Brandon McManus would not be heading to Disney World.

"The magnitude of the moment was nerve-wracking," observed Temple University head football coach Matt Rhule, who recruited McManus out of high school. "It was very surreal. This is probably the kid I've known the longest. ... We were saying, if he keeps doing what he's doing, he could be the MVP."

McManus, 24, provided the only points put up by Denver's offense through the first three quarters of Sunday's 24-10 victory over the Carolina Panthers, nailing all three of his field goal chances -- from 34, 30 and 33 yards -- and his only extra point attempt.

@KCJoynerTFS

Brandon McManus was 10-10 on FG this postseason. The most FG without a miss in a single postseason in NFL history (credit @ESPNStatsInfo).

10:35 PM - 7 Feb 2016

It capped a sensational playoff run for McManus, who set a postseason record by converting the most field goals without a miss (10-for-10) in league history. Not bad for a kicker who had been waived by the Broncos three-quarters through his rookie season in 2014.

"It was very cool to see the journey. It hasn't always been easy for him," Rhule said via phone on Wednesday. "Not just for Brandon, but it's his mom and dad. It's nice to see them have that experience, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To be such a part of that is very gratifying."

McManus' brief NFL career has had its bumpy moments. An undrafted free agent who was waived by the Indianapolis Colts in 2013, he was traded from the New York Giants to Denver on the eve of the 2014 season. Just as McManus appeared to have a solid foothold on the starting job, he missed three kicks in a five-game span and was replaced by Connor Barth.

Still, Rhule maintained an unwavering confidence in McManus, mindful of how his former kicker coped with any struggles at the collegiate level.

"You always knew if he missed a kick he'd immediately bounce back," Rhule said. "At the end of the day, that's what (the NFL) is all about. It's who handles adversity and who bounces back the best."

Rhule just completed his third season as head coach at Temple, guiding the Owls to a 10-4 mark that included an American Athletic Conference East Division title and the school's first victory over Penn State.

An assistant at Temple for six seasons, Rhule forged a strong bond with the McManus family, even attending CYO basketball games with them. Rhule spoke with pride over how McManus sent an autographed football to his 11-year-old son, who kept the souvenir front and center while watching the Super Bowl.

"I recruited him the whole way through. Obviously, he had a great leg, but he's very athletic, mentally strong and resilient," said Rhule, mentioning how McManus typically won team awards for his offseason work regiment. "I think a lot of that is why he's been so successful. He always wants to be the best at everything."

High School Of Denver Broncos Kicker Celebrates 'Brandon McManus Day'

By Rahel Solomon
CBS 3 Philly
February 5, 2016

The high school of Denver Bronco's kicker Brandon McManus celebrated with "Brandon McManus Day". Last week, North Penn High School sold orange and blue t-shirts and will now donate the money to McManus' Anti-Bullying Foundation, and the event was more successful than even the school expected.

Far, far from Denver, Colorado in Lansdale, Pennsylvania hundreds and maybe even thousands are rooting for the orange and blue.

The Denver Bronco's kicker Brandon McManus was a football player for North Penn High School, giving the school an idea.

"We said hey, let's get some t-shirts together, let's raise some money for his anti-bullying charity, and we were able to do that, and our expectations were far exceeded by the way this went," said Kyle Berger, the Director of Student Activities.

In just two days, they sold 1200 shirts and raised more than \$6,000. McManus even took the time, out of his busy pre-Super Bowl schedule, to express his gratitude.

"Thank you for all your support and selling all those t-shirts," McManus said on a cell-phone video. "Go Broncos and go Knights."

Now North Penn's school colors are actually a lot more like the Carolina Panthers, but ask around and you'll find around these parts, it is fully Bronco's country.

"It's so cool to have such a legend at our high school," said K.C Carrelli, a junior at North Penn. "It's really cool for me because my sister graduated with him, so she knew him, and it's really great that the school is recognizing that people from North Penn can go on to accomplish really great things."

"Great things," North Penn Principal Todd Bauer said. Things that have an impact, one that's felt on the field and off, in Colorado and back here at home.

"I think the message to students and our staff is that you can make a difference and you can use your talents in a positive way, which Brandon is certainly doing," Bauer said.

Broncos Brandon McManus prepares for pressure of kicking in Super Bowl

By David Ramsey and Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
February 1, 2016

McManus prepares for pressure of kicking in Super Bowl

San Jose, Calif.: Broncos placekicker Brandon McManus will work with his mind this week to prepare for the pressure of the Super Bowl, but he knows there are limitations to his preparation.

"Growing up, I dreamed of playing in the Super Bowl and making a game-winning kick," McManus said. "And I'm going to do a little visualization of seeing the ball going through the uprights."

Here's where the limitations arrive.

"I don't know how good my brain is at putting 80,000 people in a stadium with millions others watching," he said.

He paused.

"But I'm ready for it."

McManus says he slept well before playoff wins over the Steelers and Patriots. He knows what's at stake. He knows that it's no big deal when a kicker splits the uprights.

Attention is usually of the negative variety.

"It's either make it or miss it in my profession," he said. "Millions of people know how I did at my job. It makes it interesting. It kind of comes with the territory."

He knows The Ultimate Game is often a blowout. The Broncos have played in seven Super Bowls. Six of the trips were not close.

McManus hopes for a Broncos blowout in this Super Bowl.

"It would be much more enjoyable if we're able to separate ourselves and the game doesn't come down to a kick and we're winning by a lot and we can breathe a little," he said.

But he's aware of Super Bowl history. Six of the past eight Super Bowls have been decided by six points or less.

McManus could soon be asked to rescue the Broncos, and the hearts of a few million Bronco fans.

"I've prepared myself for that and I'm ready for that," he said.

What's my motivation?

Fat and happy?

Not Derek Wolfe. Oh, the Broncos defender got paid, all right: A four-year extension worth \$36 million. Wolfe responded with the best stretch of his career: 5.5 sacks over six games.

"I've never had a problem being motivated. I'll always find different kinds of motivation," Wolfe said Monday. "People are going to say: 'Yeah, but you signed your deal.' But in my head it wasn't enough."

Wolfe said the message from Broncos veterans is to soak in the moment and realize it's fleeting. He also didn't play in Super Bowl XLVIII due to injury.

"You can be injured in any play. Any snap, any event," Wolfe said. "I could be out here (at media day) and not want to do this. But who knows if you'll ever get to do it again?"

Here, let's play word association with Mr. Wolfe: Cam Newton.

"He's in my way," Wolfe said.

Location, location, location

One day in, and the San Francisco-hosted Super Bowl already beats the New Jersey accent out of the New York-hosted Super Bowl.

First, start with the weather. When the NFL hosted its media day for Super Bowl XLVIII between the Broncos and Seahawks, the temperature in Newark was 11 degrees. Only the sturdiest souls bothered to step outside. The temp in San Jose on Monday afternoon? A smooth 62 degrees. Only vampires would stay inside.

Next, the logistics. The Broncos (Santa Clara) and Panthers (San Jose) are staying outside San Francisco, where the media throngs are located for the week. The Broncos will hold their practices at John Elway-approved Stanford in Palo Alto.

Monday's media night was held at the SAP Center, home of the NHL's San Jose Sharks. It's also home to a bronze bust of Jack and John Elway. The pair is enshrined in the San Jose Sports Hall of Fame - Jack as the coach at San Jose State, John as the two-time All-American quarterback at Stanford.

Brandon McManus, anti-bullying advocate, embraces cause bigger than Super Bowl

By Ian O'Connor

ESPN.com

January 30, 2016

Brandon McManus was speaking at his old elementary school in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, and in the assembly sat a kid with good reason to hang onto every word. Dominic Zaffino was a 10-year-old in the middle of a three-and-a-half-year blur of chemotherapy treatments, and one of millions of American students annually victimized by bullies in their midst.

McManus, the Denver Broncos kicker, was telling the gathered girls and boys to be proud of who they are, and to stand up for themselves and others by reporting mistreatment to parents, teachers and guidance counselors. Don't ever be afraid to speak out, the kicker told them, and there was young Dominic thinking to himself, "This is great. I think this is good advice. This really makes me want to do something."

So he did something. Not long after McManus' talk last spring, the boy decided he'd had enough of classmates taunting him for being short. If the bullies didn't know the chemo treatments for his leukemia had stunted his growth, well, he was going to tell them.

"To everyone that calls me short," he posted on his Instagram account, "You know I may be short but that's better than being dead. ... I had cancer (if you haven't found out it's DEADLY). I like who I am and I am very lucky to still be living. ...You don't have to be tall to win. I could be tall but God slowed down my growth for me to be the best person I can become. Let that sink in and think of this before you call someone short."

Dominic cried softly to his mother that night, uncertain of the potential consequences he might face the next morning. But over time, the damndest things happened. His post went viral, and the bullies started apologizing to him one by one. Soon enough, kids from all over the United States and in faraway places such as Australia and Spain were messaging Dominic through Instagram asking for advice in dealing with their own personal crises.

"I told them, 'Don't be violent, and don't use curse words because that would make the situation worse and can get you in trouble,'" Dominic recalled by phone. "I told them that you have to stand up for yourself, and be the best person you can be and don't let them get you down. A lot of the kids later thanked me for helping them so much."

And just like that, Dominic evolved from victim to adviser to advocate. He was declared cancer-free in August, another testament to his uncommon strength, and now, as an 11-year-old, he spends his time persuading fellow sixth-graders to take an anti-bullying oath.

"As a parent, you want to protect your child from everything," Dominic's mother, Gemma, said, "and it was heartbreaking to see your son battle cancer, going to the hospital for intravenous treatments and taking pills every day for three-and-a-half years, and still having to come home upset over what kids were saying to him. We kept reassuring him that he's absolutely normal, and that the people who are his true friends will love him for who he is. But it took someone of Brandon's stature for it to sink in for Dominic to feel it would be OK.

"I think Dominic would still be holding all of this in if it wasn't for what Brandon said. His confidence today is unbelievable compared to where it was a year ago."

This is the expanding legacy Brandon McManus carries into his Super Bowl 50 matchup with the Carolina Panthers -- the boys and girls he has comforted when they've felt so vulnerable and alone. He is 24 going on 60. He is an old soul who understands that a field goal attempt to win the Super Bowl, or to lose it, can't possibly be the measure of a man who found a calling in the empowerment of children in dire need.

McManus' work started in a partnership with Tom Peterson, a former hip-hop music manager involved with the groundbreaking group N.W.A., Tupac Shakur, Snoop Dogg, Ice-T, you name it. Peterson's son, Justin, was taking private kicking lessons from McManus when Peterson told the undrafted Temple star about a couple of friends whose kids were being bullied, and asked him to aid the cause of eradicating such behavior from hallways, bathrooms and gyms everywhere.

McManus didn't hesitate. As a high school student, he was a self-described "chameleon" who blended into different corners of his classrooms. He was a star athlete, but also a serious student. "I went to Temple for biology/pre-med," he said the other day by phone, "so I always enjoyed hanging out with the so-called nerds. I was able to take things from each group and culture and learn from them. And I grew up learning from two outstanding parents who taught me right from wrong."

So together, Peterson and McManus formed the non-profit Anti Bully Squad in Stanhope, N.J. It was a natural spinoff for the 43-year-old Peterson, who ran a group promoting youth character awareness through music. "I had Ice-T do stuff for me; the guy wrote a song called 'Cop Killer' and here he was promoting our character awareness organization," he said. "My son reminds me of that all the time."

McManus had won a national community service award at Temple, but his time was precious: He was focused on trying to become an established kicker in the NFL, in which one wayward swing of the foot can get a man fired. "A lot of athletes and celebrities don't do much with their organizations, other than lend their names," Peterson said. "But Brandon is hands-on with everything. He's amazing."

And available. McManus visits with impacted children, sends them video statements of encouragement, organizes and attends charity events, and runs a football camp in the name of the Anti Bully Squad. "There are families out there with kids who are bullied so badly they don't know what to do," Peterson said. "We're trying to reach them. ... Sometimes after we speak at assemblies, a kid will come up to us and say, 'Thank you, I think you might've just saved my life.' Families approach us and say, 'You guys have no idea how much you helped us.' "

Season Hillery, mother of five in Northglenn, Colo., could go on for days about how much McManus has helped her and her middle child. While confronting a lung disease that will require a double transplant, she was also dealing with the vile reality that neighbors were verbally harassing her nine-year-old son, Ryder, who has Down syndrome.

McManus heard of the boy's plight while walking the runway at a fashion show event last season for Down syndrome children. The people next door who were mocking Ryder included an adult teacher, believe it or not, and Hillery said a call to the police was met with the response that there was little they could do.

"That was a big blow," Hillery said. "We had to tell our son it was OK for people to make fun of him."

McManus decided he should head over to Ryder Hillery's house and play football with him in the front yard, in his orange Broncos jersey, in full view of the neighbors. "To try to silently shut them up," the kicker said, "to prove how capable kids with Down syndrome are."

He stayed for two hours. Nearly every day since, Ryder has watched an iPad video of the catch he had with McManus, who has remained in touch with the family. The kicker sent Season a care package while she was receiving treatment for her lung disease. He called one of Ryder's brothers in the hospital after he was struck and injured by a car.

"It's hard to put into words how Brandon's made our family feel," Season Hillery said. "It's the worst feeling in the world when you think you can't protect your children from something awful. Nobody told Brandon he had to do this; he volunteered out of the goodness of his heart. Now every time the Broncos play, there's Ryder cheering for Brandon on TV."

Some 7,000 miles away from his Virginia home, Stephen Allen does the same thing -- at least when he can find a feed of Denver's games in Bahrain. Allen, who has served in the U.S. Navy for nearly 20 years, happened to be a Broncos fan while growing up in New Jersey, and he got so excited over Tim Tebow's overtime touchdown pass to Demaryius Thomas to beat Pittsburgh in the playoffs four years ago that he broke his ankle jumping up and down.

"I lay on the floor," Allen recalled by phone from Bahrain, "half-screaming in pain, half-screaming that the Broncos won."

As a petty officer, first class on the USS Whirlwind, Allen wasn't able to offer face-to-face support to his 10-year-old daughter, Sadie, who was being teased and taunted and physically pushed out of her seat on her bus. He reached out to Peterson, whom he'd known for years, and Peterson reached out to McManus, who sent a video message of reassurance to Sadie and invited her to take the Anti Bully Squad oath her father had just taken, and to wear the organization's bracelet her father had just received. The kicker reminded Sadie that she is the daughter of "a true hero."

The girl cried when she saw the video. "Oh my God," Sadie said, "people really care." Her mother, Jenn, saw her confidence and grades improve. Some of the bullying continued, Jenn Allen said, but Sadie grew stronger against the tide.

"There had been times when my daughter didn't want to get up and go to school," Stephen Allen said. "But her confidence has grown tenfold. She knows how to deal with it now. She knows it isn't wrong to say something to us, that she won't get in trouble if she's telling people what's going on."

McManus had sent Facebook messages to Sadie's father, who couldn't believe he was communicating with the kicker of his cherished childhood team. Stephen Allen, 44, said that the average age on the USS Whirlwind is about McManus' age, and that he's impressed a professional athlete who's so young could embrace such a selfless world view.

Allen is hoping to find a TV in Manama, Bahrain, that will start showing Super Bowl 50 at 2:30 a.m. local time. "It's a great feeling," Allen said, "knowing that Sadie will be one of a lot of people giving Brandon the strength to go out in that game and do what he does."

McManus wants to make that point clear, too: He gets out of this more than he puts into it. The rewards of bettering a kid's life, of watching him or her overcome, are out there on the field with him as he lines up a kick.

"You hear horror stories on the news of young kids killing themselves after getting bullied at school," McManus said. "To be able to give someone guidance, someone to talk to, is much bigger to me than kicking a winning field goal. There's always going to be another game, so impacting a kid or a family always gives me my most rewarding smile."

This is hardly an easy fight to win in the age of social media. "Now there are a lot more ways for kids to attack other kids," McManus said. To help combat cyber bullying and to supplement his organization's web site, antibullysquad.org, McManus has established another site, texttoreport.com, for victims or witnesses to report an incident if they prefer to remain anonymous.

The kicker isn't the first Super Bowl participant to contribute to the cause. Lee Rouson, two-time champion with Bill Parcells' New York Giants, works with Peterson and McManus to educate children and parents on the ills of bullying. Rouson also talks to teams, churches and corporations, and often brings up the time he stepped on a bus before the old Blue-Gray college all-star game in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1984 and sat next to an unfamiliar face.

"Who are you?" Rouson asked.

"I am the best wide receiver in the NFL," the young man answered. "My name is Jerry Rice. I'm from Mississippi."

Through his work with Peterson and McManus, and with an Indianapolis-based group, SportsWorld, that inspires students to make positive life choices, Rouson reminds kids that Rice wasn't even in the NFL at the time, and uses the anecdote to implore them to establish their own identities and goals at an early age.

"You look at someone like Brandon," Rouson said, "and you see a guy with an appetite to help others when so many people that age are self-centered. Brandon McManus is an exceptional dude, and he was never trying to be anyone else. He established how he was going to live his life at a very young age."

McManus worked as a United States Golf Association intern last summer at the U.S. Women's Open in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in part because he wants to run a Super Bowl one day. Yes, run it. As a second career, he wants to be in charge of operations for the biggest event in American sports.

But he would like to win a Super Bowl first. McManus was 5-for-5 on field goal attempts in the 23-16 playoff victory over Pittsburgh, including a 51-yarder, and he was perfect in the 20-18 AFC Championship Game victory over New England (2-for-2 on field goals, including a 52-yarder, and 2-for-2 on extra points) on a day when the great Stephen Gostkowski was not.

On the field and off, McManus says he has drawn so much from the resilience of the kids he has counseled. He visited with Dominic Zaffino at a kickball fundraiser last summer, and told those in attendance that the boy had stood up to the bullies with the same courage he showed by standing up to cancer.

What did McManus' words and presence mean, dating to his appearance at Dominic's elementary school? "It really helped me out," Dominic said over the phone. "I really noticed it in baseball last year."

Usually I don't hit so hard, and after Brandon spoke, I just felt stronger. We had one practice and I just kept nailing them all the way out there."

The Zaffinos are fans of the Philadelphia Eagles, who were kind enough to host Dominic for a practice. "But there's no question now we are rooting for the Broncos," Gemma Zaffino said.

Maybe Brandon McManus will win Super Bowl 50 with a strike down the middle, and maybe he will lose it with a hook or a fade. Either way, his biggest fans have spoken. The kicker might have one of the loneliest jobs in football, but he won't be out there alone.

McManus magnificent in going 5 of 5 against crosswind

By Mike Klis

9 News

January 17, 2016

It wasn't so much the wind was howling, although that was a problem.

The more significant issue was those gusts were blowing across the field, from the Pittsburgh Steelers' sideline toward the Denver Broncos' sidelines.

The strong crosswind was Brandon McManus' toughest obstacle as he set up for his 51-yard field goal attempt with 5 seconds remaining in the first half.

"I probably hit one of the purest balls I could have hit," McManus said. "I thought it was going right down the pipe and that ball just kept moving and moving."

The ball was going straight until it got past the goal line. There was still 10 yards to go until the goalposts. The ball took a wicked right turn but the wind was too late. The ball went past the right upright before continuing to tail off well right of the posts.

"Britton (Colquitt, the holder) and I, we were watching it and saw it sneak behind that upright," McManus said. "Those were the hardest wind conditions I've kicked -- in my career, at least. Even in college.

"We were out there for warmups and it was the calmest day. There was zero wind. It was a nice, sunny day and we come out 7 minutes before kickoff and I see a 30 mph crosswind came in.

"It was pretty tough to deal with but it almost made it kind of fun."

Despite the conditions – and despite the pressure of kicking field goals and extra points for the first time in the playoffs – McManus tied an NFL single-game playoff record by going 5 of 5 in field goals.

And so McManus has reached another step in his development as one of the league's most talented young kickers. He had the pressure of trying to make a roster for two years.

He had to deal with making big kicks in regular-season games last year. He did duck-hook a big kick at the end of regulation three weeks ago against Cincinnati, but came back to boot the game-winning field goal in overtime.

And now he's learning how to make 'em when they count in the postseason.

"Maybe, for the fans who still don't believe in me, these are bigger," he said. "But not for me. These were, I guess, my first field goals in the playoffs. I did kickoff last year.

"I knew after that Cincinnati game where people were upset because of that kick. I said it was an anomaly, it was a freak thing. I didn't even understand what happened. But, no, I didn't lose confidence in myself at all from that. I'm excited to move into the next round and hopefully take the next step against the Patriots."

Brandon McManus ties NFL playoff record with 5 field goals in Broncos' win

By Daniel Petty
Denver Post
January 17, 2016

Brandon McManus stepped out into a relatively warm winter day in Sports Authority Field on Sunday during pre-game, basking under sunny skies and no wind — a kicker's dream, especially in the playoffs.

Then, just before kickoff against the Pittsburgh Steelers, the weather shifted ... considerably.

"That's the hardest wind I've kicked in," McManus told The Denver Post. "It wasn't there during warmups, and I come out seven minutes before kickoff and I see 30 mph crosswinds. Sometimes when the wind is out there, you just kind of hit it to a spot and hopefully it goes through.

"So obviously I had to learn quickly what I was going to do."

At kickoff, the official weather report showed temperatures of 43 degrees with wind out of the northwest at 9 mph, gusting to 16 mph. But it grew only worse as the game went on.

McManus proved a quick study. He converted all five attempts — including one from 51 yards just before halftime that got the Broncos to within one point of the Steelers and also tied Jason Elam for the second-longest kick made in Broncos playoff history.

"I thought it wasn't going to be easy down the middle, and it barely snuck in that way," McManus said of the kick. "I have a strong leg, so I'm not going to ever aim outside the uprights, but with the wind, you might be one yard inside each upright."

The effort was a Broncos playoff record, topping former kicker Matt Prater's four field-goal performance on Jan. 29, 2014, against New England. It also tied an NFL postseason record for most fields goals made in a game, a mark matched nine other times, most recently by the Packers' Mason Crosby during that infamous loss to the Seahawks last season, according to Pro Football Reference.

All but one kick was from more than 40 yards. Here's how it broke down:

From 28 yards with 11:25 left in the first quarter

41 yards with 3:25 left in the first

51 yards with five seconds left in the second

41 yards with 2:50 left in the third

45 yards with 53 seconds left in the fourth

His 15 points kept the Broncos close to the Steelers as the Denver offense failed repeatedly to reach the end zone through three quarters (the Steelers led from 1:22 mark of the first quarter until three minutes

remained in the game). The final field goal gave the Broncos some breathing room as the Steelers made a final push to tie.

“At the end, it was a little easier to kick to the south because there was at least some wind behind you. But it was mostly crosswind coming into our bench the whole time,” he said.

On Thursday, although McManus didn’t know it at the time, he got the practice he needed, kicking repeatedly into wind that he said was similarly gusty to what came on Sunday.

“You just aim more, still swing the same, just aim more,” he said. “That ball was carrying definitely sideways today.”

McManus has been flawless since hooking a field goal far to the left against the Cincinnati Bengals on Dec. 28, making eight straight.

Given a late mulligan, Brandon McManus delivers

By Mike Klis

9 News

December 29, 2015

It's not that Brandon McManus missed his 45-yard field goal as time expired. It's how he missed.

With the Denver Broncos and Cincinnati Bengals tied 17-17, McManus would have given the Broncos a 20-17 victory in regulation against the Cincinnati Bengals on Monday night at Sports Authority Field at Mile High had he made his 45-yard field goal.

Instead, he sent a duck hook to the left that was so ugly, it left the sellout crowd so stunned in agony it couldn't boo.

In overtime, McManus got another field-goal try, this time from 37 yards. Which is normally an easy kick if not for that previous kick a few minutes earlier.

"No, I'm not nervous at all," McManus said as he lined up for his overtime field-goal attempt. "More [ticked] off at myself. Like I said, I had never kicked a ball like that in my life. I knew it was an outlier, an anomaly. I wanted to eliminate that and come back and hit it again."

In overtime, McManus nailed it. A no-doubter that pounded high off the backstop netting. Broncos win, 20-17.

"That was a 65-yarder," Britton Colquitt, the Broncos' punter and McManus' holder of the winning kick, said. "I was nervous for him because if I was in that position, I'm sitting there going 'I might miss this ball' if that happened to me. So doing what he did and coming back from that says more than hitting the first one."

McManus said on his bad kick, he didn't point his toe. He badly wrapped too far around the ball. What he didn't say is the moment got to him. It was impressive that second big moment didn't get to him.

"There's nothing harder to do than to come back," Colquitt said. "It says a ton about Brandon, especially being a young player to come back and hit that. It doesn't matter the distance at that point. Because honestly I'm thinking about it, I'm thinking this may only be a 37 yarder, but to him, the uprights must seem like this ... [and Colquitt holds his hands about six-inches apart.]"

Brandon McManus named AFC Special Teams Player of the Month

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
October 29, 2015

Clutch kicks and the long-distance leg of Broncos place kicker Brandon McManus earned him October's AFC Special Teams Player of the Month award.

McManus made 10-of-11 field goals in three October games, all wins. He also made all five of his PATs.

His 39-yard field goal in Week 4 against Minnesota and 34-yard field goal in Week 6 at Cleveland were game-winning kicks to keep the Broncos undefeated.

McManus has been a completely different kicker since eliminating the jab step from his kicking windup and it has been for the Broncos' benefit.

He led all AFC players in points per game with 11.7 in October. McManus is 16-of-17 on the season with a long of 57 yards. He's made all 13 of his PATs and obtained a touchback in over 70 percent of his kickoffs.

This was McManus' first honor of his career and the team's second monthly conference award with outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware taking home September's AFC Defensive Player of the Month award.

Former Broncos kicker Connor Barth was the last Denver player to win this particular honor. He received the award in December 2014.

Brandon McManus named AFC Special Teams Player of the Month

By Allie Raymond
DenverBroncos.com
October 29, 2015

After kicking a pair of game-winning field goals, kicker Brandon McManus has been named the AFC Special Teams Player of the Month for October.

The honor is first in his career and the ninth conference special teams player of the month recognition in Broncos history since the award was initiated in 1993.

This month, McManus connected on 10-of-11 field goals and all five PATs as the Broncos posted a 3-0 record in October. He led all AFC players with 11.7 points per game in October, totaling 35 points in Denver's three games.

McManus' two game-winning field goals were the first of his career – a 39-yarder in Week 4 (10/4) against Minnesota (1:15 remaining in 4th qtr.) and a 34-yarder in Week 6 (10/18) at Cleveland (4:56 remaining in overtime).

Here's how McManus did in the month of October:

	FGM	FGA	XPM	XPA	Pts.
vs. Min. (10/4)	3	3	2	2	11
at Oak. (10/11)	3	3	1	1	10
at Cle. (10/18)	4	5	2	2	14
Totals	10	11	5	5	35

Brandon McManus delivers consistency when Broncos need it most

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
October 15, 2015

Before the start of the season, the NFL approved rules changes that moved point-after-touchdown attempts from the 2-yard line to the 15, with the hope of shaking the almost-perfect record kickers have had with extra-point attempts.

For many, those 13 yards have made a difference. But for Broncos kicker Brandon McManus, the game has been one of inches. Not yards.

Over the summer, McManus altered his technique to not only improve his consistency, but also regain the trust from Broncos coaches after his erratic first year when he connected on only 69.2 percent of his field-goal attempts and lost his job. With extra points now the distance of some field goals, the change has helped him in more ways than one.

"I basically was a two-and-a-half-step field-goal kicker, so I would take a jab step, kind of a six-inch step with my left foot. I completely removed that," McManus said. "I'm starting from my left foot pushing off, and it allows me to make sure I'm in the same spot every time when I take my plant step. That jab step could be six inches, could be seven inches, could be eight inches, but that one inch my plant foot is off could affect the accuracy."

Through five games, McManus has been 1-A to the Broncos' defense in leading the team to a 5-0 record. He's transformed from a twice-waived player into an invaluable asset. On a team where points have been scarce, his consistency and leg strength have often saved the Broncos' offense.

Twice Denver has won without an offensive touchdown, putting the onus on McManus' leg and the defense's reads. Against Minnesota, a kick by McManus was the game-deciding score. He has scored 47 of the Broncos' 113 points to tie for the league's second-largest scoring total by a kicker, and has made four kicks from 50 yards or farther.

While many kickers around the league are struggling, McManus has been perfect, going 12-of-12 on field-goal attempts and 11-of-11 on extra points.

"Best kicker in the league," said Broncos running back Kapri Bibbs.

Kickers have converted 95.1 percent (347 of 365) of their extra-point attempts, down from 99.3 percent a season ago.) They've made 83.1 percent of their field-goal attempts, down a tad from 84 percent last year.

Week 4 was marred with missed attempts, including a 38-yarder by Minnesota's Blair Walsh in the second quarter against the Broncos. Sunday at Oakland McManus kicked four field goals in a six-point Broncos' victory. Raiders veteran Sebastian Janikowski missed a 40-yard attempt and had his 38-yard attempt blocked.

NFL kickers missed seven game-tying or winning field-goal attempts last season. They've already missed four this season.

"McManus has been the special teams MVP in four out of five games," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "That's a good thing. He's kicking extremely well. Not only on his field goals, which speak for themselves, but he's been kicking off well, too."

Also better than last season.

McManus has booted all 28 kickoffs for the Broncos, putting opponents, on average, at the 20-yard line. And he's improved his touchback percentage to 78.6 percent, up from 70.3 percent.

"He's kicking great," Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning said. "He's doing well on kickoffs. He's kicking with a lot of confidence. He's doing a heck of a job, and I'm really glad he's on our team."

McManus vs. NFL

Brandon McManus improved his kicking technique in the offseason and has been perfect in field-goal and extra-point attempts this year, when many kickers have struggled.

	FG% in 2014	PAT% in 2014	FG% in 2015	PAT% in 2015
McManus	69.2% (9-13)	100% (41-41)	100% (12-12)	100% (11-11)
League Avg.	84.0% (829-987)	99.3% (1,222-1,230)	83.1% (251-302)	95.1% (347-365)

Broncos kicker Brandon McManus figured out how to win job he lost

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

October 7, 2015

Less than a year after the Denver Broncos fired Brandon McManus as their place-kicker because he wasn't consistent enough, McManus has been a model of consistency in this season's early going.

Last season McManus missed three field goals in a five-game span and four overall. He was released in the days following the third miss in that span -- on Nov. 23, in Miami. But McManus, who was quickly re-signed and closed out the 2014 season as a kickoff specialist, used the time away from the place-kicking job wisely.

He removed a small jab step from his approach and has since blasted a 70-yard field goal in an 11-on-11 end-of-game drill in training camp, won the job back and has gone 9-on-9 on field goals in the team's first four games, including three field goals of at least 54 yards.

"For me it's just about repeating my technique and staying consistent," McManus said. "Just keeping myself in that zone where I repeat the good technique, keep making kicks."

"I think he's doing exactly what he did through the offseason, he won the job," said Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. "It wasn't like anybody said, 'No, we're just going to go this way.' He consistently -- throughout the offseason, throughout training camp -- did his job. I think he's very confident right now."

McManus does have the luxury of kicking at altitude for home games, but the Broncos' stadium -- Sports Authority Field at Mile High -- can offer some tricky wind currents at times. In short the wind swirls and McManus said the wind can seem to blow in different directions at different levels of the stadium.

The Vikings' Blair Walsh missed a 38-yard attempt in the Broncos' 23-20 win Sunday.

"The wind doesn't look like it's blowing, but the wind is always blowing," McManus said. "It's never what those flags are doing up there at all."

McManus' early-season success also includes the league's new extra-point distance -- a 32- or 33-yard kick -- with the ball placed at the 15-yard line. Overall, kickers have missed 17 extra points league-wide in the season's first four weeks with 14 different kickers missing at least one. Just eight extra points were missed all of last season.

For his part, McManus is 10-of-10 on extra-point attempts. But he has a theory as to why more have been missed beyond having simply moved the kick back.

Kickers usually warm up for potential field goals when the offense crosses the 50. McManus' theory is that extra points are being missed in quick-change situations, like touchdowns off turnovers or short drives, because kickers are standing in the bench area and not warmed up for a kick the length of a short field goal.

"It's a time when kicker might be a little mental -- 'oh, I didn't get to warm up in the net,' just focusing knowing you didn't get to warm up at all on the sideline," he explained.

"[You] keep your technique because it's still a very makeable kick ... But sometimes you're sitting on the bench, the defense scores, you have to run 50 yards this way to get your helmet, run 80 yards back the other way."

NFL kickers struggle but Broncos' McManus still perfect

By Mike Klis

9 News Sport

October 6, 2015

There is a yips epidemic that is beginning to spread among NFL kickers.

There have been a whopping 17 missed extra points – 17! – and 9 field goals missed from inside the 40. Nowhere to be found among this wayward trend is Denver Broncos' kicker Brandon McManus.

He is 9 of 9 in field goals and 10 of 10 on those 33-yard extra points. Given the narrow margins of victory in the in the Broncos' 4-0 start, McManus' impact can't be overstated.

"The misses around the league, I think it might be because a lot of the kickers in the league, contrary to other times, there are a lot more younger guys," McManus said.

He's right. There are three rookies, three first-year kickers and five second-year guys like McManus in the league. Younger kickers tend to have stronger legs for kickoffs, but the pressure of splitting the uprights is usually better handled by vets. Not that there haven't been exemptions. McManus is one of only nine kickers who have made every kick through four games.

In the Broncos' 23- 20 win Sunday against the Minnesota Vikings, McManus made three field goals, including the game-winner from 39 yards out with 1:51 remaining. The toughest kick for McManus, though, was the extra point following Ronnie Hillman's 72-yard touchdown run on the first play of the Broncos' second quarter series.

"There are situations in the game where, like Ronnie's long touchdown run, you don't get to warm up with the net," McManus said. "You go out there and you're kicking into the wind, no warmup, and it's all about refocusing and not worrying about whether you get a warmup kick."

"I don't know if that's where the misses are coming from, after an interception return or something like that. But that's an interesting part of the game for the kicker when that stuff happens."

A kicker's leg swing has been compared to a golf swing in that it's about consistently repeating mechanics. McManus is more specific.

"I would say kicking is more like putting," he said. "Because you hit the green, yeah, it's a good shot but does that mean it went through the uprights? Kicking field goals is more like putting from 10 feet and in. You're expected to make that putt."

McManus has been in a groove where he's not only making his kicks, but most of them are going right down the middle.

"One of the good things the past couple weeks, ever since I got the nod to be the starter is how well I've practiced," he said. "And then taking it into the game."

Headline: Confident Brandon McManus kicks his way to convincing start

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 13, 2015

Brandon McManus is a believer . in Brandon McManus.

He made a 57-yard and a 56-yard field goal in the Broncos' 19-13 victory, but it wasn't just the fact that he made the long kicks.

It's how he made them. Both easily cleared the uprights. Both would have been good from 65 yards, and maybe more.

"It's always good to hit one that long," McManus said of his first kick, the 57-yarder. "But I trust myself to make every single kick. I'm not relying on one kick to get my mojo going. I trust myself to make every kick."

On a day when the Broncos' offense often struggled, McManus was consistent.

He placed the season's opening kickoff into the second row of the stands in the north end zone. He made two long field goals and two more moderate field goals look easy.

And they weren't easy, he said.

"This is a tough stadium to kick in," he said. "I don't think people realize how windy it is."

The winds shift every quarter, he said, adding to the difficulty.

He insists he wasn't surprised. McManus has endured a lot of wandering during his brief NFL career. He's been cut by the Colts and traded by the Giants and cut by the Broncos.

He never faltered in his belief.

"Obviously, I'm going to surprise a lot of people in Denver," McManus said. "I might have a lot of doubters out there, but I knew what I could do and I did that today."

Yes, he did.

Young Broncos kicker Brandon McManus has arrived

By Mike Klis

9 News

September 13, 2015

Scotty O'Brien started coordinating NFL special teams units for Bill Belichick and the Cleveland Browns in 1991 and he finished his special teams career for Belichick and the New England Patriots last year.

For a few years in between he branched out and helped Mike Shanahan and the Denver Broncos by coordinating their special teams in 2007-08.

If O'Brien told me once, he told me a dozen times: It takes young kickers a couple years to figure it out. Figure out how to handle the pressure, mainly. Figure out how to get set up when the offense is running off the field and special teams is running on. Figure out leg swing fundamentals that can maintain consistency week-in and week-out, whether it's for the game's first extra point or a final-second, win-or-lose midrange field goal attempt.

O'Brien believed in young kicker named Matt Prater even though Prater had been cut by the Detroit Lions, Miami Dolphins, Atlanta Falcons and Dolphins again.

O'Brien stuck with Prater through the kicker's inconsistent first full-time season with the Broncos in 2008.

Prater would become arguably the league's best kicker from 2011-13 and broke the field goal record with a 64-yarder.

O'Brien would have loved the Broncos' current kicker, Brandon McManus. Like Prater, McManus has a thunder leg. Like Prater, McManus was inconsistent as a field goal kicker in his first full season.

Like Prater, McManus had a veteran special teams coordinator who stuck with him. Only this time it was Joe DeCamillis – and NFL special team's coordinator for going on 23 years -- who kept McManus' strong-legged potential around this year instead of the steadier, but weaker-legged Connor Barth.

McManus rewarded DeCamillis and the Broncos on Sunday with field goals of 57 and 56 yards with the wind and field goals of 43 and 33 against the wind. Only they might not have been against the wind when he kicked them.

"The wind was definitely at my back (in the first quarter)," McManus said. "I don't think people realize how windy it is in this stadium. It kind of swirls. If you looked at the flags you would have said I kicked those into the wind. I think every quarter it changes."

The Broncos beat the Baltimore Ravens, 19-16 in the season opener on a hot Sunday in September so you figure out what four field goals meant. McManus became the second kicker in NFL history to have two field goals of at least 56 yards in the same game. The other was the St. Louis Rams' Greg Zuerlein in a 2012 game.

McManus' winning performance was not bad for a guy whom the Broncos cut last year after he clanked a 33-yard field goal – this year's extra-point distance – off the upright in game 11 against Miami.

"People might be shocked I made those kicks but I know the confidence I have in myself," McManus said.

Besides the four field goals, McManus had touchbacks on five of six kickoffs. The only one he didn't boot out he was on orders to deliver a power squib kick at the end of the first half.

Still Kicking

By Brandon McManus
The Players Tribune
September 3, 2015

I heard a knock on my hotel room door at 6 a.m. Usually I'd ignore that kind of early morning call, but this was training camp, and a knock at that hour could only mean one thing: Someone was getting the boot.

I was staying with a roommate, and of course he didn't wake up. I had to drag myself out of bed, and the whole time I was thinking, I hope it's not for me. I was with the Giants at the time, and I had performed well in the preseason, so I had a good feeling. I figured they must have been coming for my roommate, which was unfortunate, but at least it meant I would survive to see another day with the team.

My stomach dropped when I found out I was wrong. They were standing there in the doorway and they asked both of us to bring our playbooks in. Both? I was still half asleep, but I shook my roommate awake and a few minutes later we were sitting in Tom Coughlin's office, getting told that we were being released.

I've become accustomed to that feeling now. I was let go from two different teams before I finally stuck with the Broncos for most of the 2014 season. It's a difficult business being a kicker, but that's kind of the way it goes. There are only 32 teams out there and many more strong legs. You're constantly kicking for your livelihood in this league.

Everyone thinks that being a kicker is a lonesome position. In many ways, it is, because most of the time you're on another field with the punter and the long snapper and the special teams coach. Even more jarring than the isolation is the fact that as a kicker, everything is so black and white. You either make or you miss. Coming close doesn't get you signed by a team.

It's an odd profession in that your job performance is very public. When most people have a rough day at work, it's not broadcast for the entire world to watch and judge. But every person knows whether I made or missed my kick. It's on Twitter and Instagram. It's posted immediately by ESPN. Everywhere I look I can see the aftermath of my performance. Sometimes the entire outcome of the game is between me, that leather ball and two yellow uprights standing 18 feet, six inches apart.

That's a pretty scary thought when you do the math. When Denver released me last year, I was 9-for-13 on field goals. Two of my misses were from 50-plus yards and the other two hit off the uprights. Eighteen feet, six inches apart, and if you hit one of them, it's worse than missing completely. You never want to be at the mercy of the balance of those poles, but those two near misses could have been the difference between me staying and going.

It took some time for me to even get that opportunity to stick with the Broncos. I didn't always want to be a kicker. I was a soccer player growing up, and even though I loved watching the Eagles with my dad, I didn't start playing football until middle school. In soccer, I had a strong leg. I was always the guy on defense who kicked it the full length of the field and I took all the penalty kicks. When I went out for the football team in middle school, I played quarterback and safety, but it was only natural that I was also the kicker. I realized that I actually kind of liked kicking, and by ninth grade I was a starter for the high school team. At that point, I was hooked. I dropped all other sports in 10th grade and became a kicker for life.

Back then — I guess it was six or seven years ago now — it was pretty uncommon for a kicker to get a college scholarship. I was one of the lucky ones.

At Temple, I set career records for field goals made and punting average, but I went undrafted coming out of college. I thought I deserved to be invited to the NFL combine, but instead I did some individual workouts at Temple and the Colts signed me to an undrafted free agent contract.

It was pretty crazy because my first taste of kicking in the NFL came side by side with a future Hall of Famer, Adam Vinatieri. He was 41 years old at the time and an absolute legend in his own right, and here I was, just this young kid with a big leg. It was clear that this wasn't the first time he had to face competition, because he handled it like a professional and we became good friends. I hit a 50-yarder against the Giants in the preseason, which was my best kick with the Colts, but they still released me after the third game. A few months out of college, like many of my peers, I was without a steady job.

There was a lot of a waiting around after that. Unfortunately that's the nature of the kicking business. You find yourself sitting with your hand hovering over the phone a lot, hoping for the call that's going to give you another shot. I had a brief stint competing for a spot with the Giants, but that 6 a.m. knock on the door sent me packing again.

I drove home to Philadelphia after leaving New York to rethink things a bit. I knew a lot of teams had questions marks at the kicker position, so it was only a matter of time until I got another call. It turned out that it came pretty quickly, because I was eating lunch that same day when my phone rang with a New Jersey area code. I figured it must have been my grandmother calling to make sure I was ok, but it was the Giants front office again. Something had changed since 6 a.m. that morning, because they told me that instead of releasing me, they were trading me to the Broncos. My flight was in two hours.

Two hours.

My clothes were still thrown in the trunk of my Toyota Avalon, all wrinkled from the long road trip. I had to shrink my suitcases up to pack one big bag, and then my parents came down to pick up my car and take me to the airport. It was a whirlwind transition, but just two days after that disappointing early morning wake up, I was kicking in the Broncos' last preseason game.

In Denver, it looked like I had a legitimate shot of sticking. With Matt Prater out on a four-game suspension, the front office was putting its hopes on me, at least for the start of the season. We got to the third game and I had only hit three short field goals, but I was one of the leaders in kickoffs and touchbacks. I guess the Broncos saw some potential, so they cut Matt Prater before he could come back, and now all of a sudden the future was riding on my leg. I definitely felt a lot more eyes watching me all the time. People were questioning me, thinking that I hadn't proven myself yet. Maybe some of the doubting got in my head, because I went through a rough patch in the middle of the season, and when Week 12 came around, Denver cut me.

Back to square one — I was sitting on my couch watching the Broncos play the following Sunday night. Connor Barth, the kicker who replaced me, had five field goal opportunities. Five. In one game. It was excruciating to watch knowing that I had been let go after only 13 tries in 12 games. I felt like I hadn't had the chance to fully prove what I could do. On my couch in front of the TV, I was powerless.

Everything happens for a reason, and eventually the Broncos realized that they were missing a strong leg. That same week, they called me and said they wanted to sign me back to the practice squad. At that

point, I was humbled by the many disappointments, so I made the most of my second chance. Two days after they signed me, I was activated to the roster to handle the kickoffs.

My NFL career is just beginning, but I've already experienced so many peaks and valleys (I'm hoping for a streak of peaks now). I've been able to move beyond the negatives in large part due to my mentality every time I take the field for a kick. It's always disappointing to miss a field goal, and you can't help feeling angry at yourself. This is your job, and in the back of your mind, you know how many other kickers are out there on the street waiting for you to fail. If you're not performing, someone else will. I think facing that reality is the hardest part.

There are inevitably times when you do everything perfectly, but you miss the field goal anyway. As a kicker, you have to have a short memory. You won't be in this league long if you're always dwelling on a negative thought. I have to remind myself of that. A kicker makes such an obvious impact on the game, and everyone knows when we succeed or fail. I think that's what shapes people's perception of us. Some might look at that as a burden. Now, I see it as an opportunity.

Kicker Brandon McManus stays confident, earns Broncos' trust again

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

August 26, 2015

Once more with feeling, as for the second consecutive August, Brandon McManus has been tabbed as the Denver Broncos' kicker of choice.

A year ago, as they received the news of Matt Prater's suspension, the Broncos shipped a conditional draft pick to the New York Giants to acquire McManus in order to make him Prater's replacement. But by late November, McManus has lost the kicking job to Connor Barth after missing three kicks in a five-game span.

But McManus has won the job again, at least for now, as Barth was released Wednesday when the Broncos added guard Evan Mathis to the roster. This time they hope McManus is now a power kicker who has the consistent accuracy to win a game or two late if the Broncos need it.

"I think he's gotten consistent," said Broncos coach Gary Kubiak after Wednesday's practice. "That's what it looks like to me. I think last year that was the concern. As you look at camp and stuff, he's been very consistent in what he's doing. He's been excellent kicking the ball off. It was up to him to prove he could do it. I think up to this point, he's done that.

Barth went 15-of-16 in field-goal attempts down the stretch last season, but after releasing McManus for a week last year, the Broncos had to bring McManus back to kick off when Barth could not drive the ball deep enough to limit opposing returners.

That was the difference this time around as well. Barth had tried to work on his kickoffs in the offseason, but had a kick short on hang time in the preseason opener returned 103 yards for a touchdown by Tyler Lockett.

"Obviously, kicking off, that's the biggest thing," Kubiak said Wednesday when asked what tipped the scales for McManus. "If we're going to find a way to do this with two [kickers] and not with three, then somebody's got to have a dual role or be able to do both one way or another for us to get that done. I also think Brandon has kicked extremely well."

"It was exciting to kind of get the trust back that they lost in me last year," McManus said. "Obviously, [Barth] was on the team last year with me, so we do have a bond and a friendship with one another. It's tough to see that, but, like I said, it was exciting for me to get that trust back and to win this job back."

McManus and Barth were in a tight competition throughout the team's offseason program and into training camp. Each of the two also had some bouts of inconsistency along the way – special teams coordinator Joe DeCamillis singled each out after one early training camp practice for some of the struggles.

Last week, however, McManus powered a 70-yard attempt over the crossbar in an 11-on-11 two-minute drill – Barth hit a 65-yarder minutes later – and McManus seemed to kick with some additional confidence as the camp days wore on.

“They trust me upstairs, but I still want to come back,” McManus said. “It’s still bitter in my mouth from last year. Just trying to do the best I could. Coming out here [Wednesday], it wasn’t an easy day to kick, [went] 12-for-12 today, so it was a good day to get the load off my back and feel good about it. ... Personally, some guys lose confidence. I never did in myself. I don’t know if that’s my personality or my mental strength, but I never lost confidence in myself.”

Brandon McManus kicks 70-yard field goal in practice

By Mike Klis

9news Sports

August 18, 2015

A week before training camp, Detroit and former Denver Broncos kicker Matt Prater was asked about the NFL record 64-yard field goal he made in December 2013.

"It's something now where I think it can be broken at any time," Prater said. "I hope to break it myself again."

Does he think the field goal record can be pushed to 70 yards?

"Sure, I think someone can hit a 70," Prater said.

During a Broncos' training camp practice on a bright Tuesday morning at Prater's old Dove Valley stomping grounds, Brandon McManus booted a 70-yard field goal.

"We were doing a 2-minute drill and I told Coach (Joe) DeCamillis that I could make this one and I don't know if he believed me or not," McManus said. "I saw him smirk at me, went over to coach (Gary Kubiak) and he told him, so I just waited for them to make the call. I knew I could get it there, it does look far away though I'll tell you that."

Practice, yes, but it was live with a defense, snap and hold.

The crowd and McManus' teammates went wild.

"I was a little skeptical, but he has the leg strength, there's no question about that," said Broncos special teams coordinator Joe DeCamillis. "He's a talented young guy."

The longest McManus has ever made?

"For a game rep, yes. I've hit 75 off a stand but snap, hold, kick is a lot different," he said.

What does it say about the state of the modern kicker when McManus has enough talent to make a 70-yard field goal yet may not make the team? A few plays later, the Broncos sent Connor Barth out for a 65-yard field goal.

Good!

"That's my longest in practice," Barth said. "I think that still breaks the record. It was just fun to go out there, [and] hopefully we kind of got the team for the rest of practice, so it was good."

"You're hoping you're going to get a little separation and both of them made it," DeCamillis said. "It's a tight competition. Just like we said, though, the kickoff thing's going to come into play for whoever that guy is. You have to be able to do both."

In that case, maybe McManus does make the team. He is far stronger on kickoffs than Barth.

Broncos bring back Brandon McManus, sign him to practice squad

By Andrew Mason
denverbroncos.com
December 4, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Last week, after releasing Brandon McManus, Broncos Head Coach John Fox suggested that the cannon-legged first-year kicker would get another shot at some point.

"He just needs to go back and work on his swing, so to speak, and I think he'll be back," Fox said.

That work will be in Denver, as the Broncos signed McManus to their practice squad Thursday, giving him a chance to develop and, perhaps make another run at the full-time job.

When the Broncos waived McManus to make room for Connor Barth, he was deep in a slump that saw him make just five of his last nine field-goal attempts, including a pair of misses in which he hit the upright. But as he struggled on placekicks, he remained among the league's leaders in touchbacks, ranking third in the league with a touchback percentage of 75.0.

That McManus possesses one of the league's strongest legs is not in question, and slumps for young kickers are not uncommon. Even long-term elite kickers such as Adam Viniatieri had first-year struggles similar to those of McManus.

And adding a kicker or punter to the practice squad late in the regular season is not unusual for the Broncos. They signed Britton Colquitt to the practice squad late in the 2009 season, and the punter ended up earning a job the following summer.

If the Broncos choose to sign McManus to a reserve-future contract after the season -- or to bring him back to the 53-man roster at some point -- it could set the stage for a fierce competition next summer. For now, McManus can quietly work on his craft, with his goal of being the Broncos' long-term kicker still intact.

Brandon McManus rejoins Broncos

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

December 6, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- From the moment the Denver Broncos worked out new kickers to replace Brandon McManus, they knew bringing him back was likely part of the equation. And that's exactly what the Broncos did Saturday.

They signed McManus to their practice squad this week and then signed him to the 53-man roster Saturday. He will handle kickoffs for the team, giving the Broncos three kicking specialists -- McManus, Connor Barth and punter Britton Colquitt -- on the roster.

To make room for McManus, who will handle kickoffs for the Broncos against the Buffalo Bills on Sunday, wide receiver/punt returner Isaiah Burse was waived. McManus had 48 touchbacks on 64 kickoffs in his 11 previous games with the team this season.

A week ago, frustrated with McManus' four misses on field-goal attempts, including a 33-yarder against the Miami Dolphins, the Broncos brought in Barth and Jay Feely for workouts, eventually signing Barth.

Neither Barth nor Feely, who has since signed with the Chicago Bears, could drive the ball on kickoffs like McManus does, however, so bringing McManus back has been on the table since for the Broncos. Earlier this week, Broncos coach John Fox was asked if he would be willing to carry three kickers on the team's roster.

"I've done it before. When I was in Carolina I had [kicker] John Kasay and a variety of kickoff guys," Fox said. "You consider everything, but you can consider nothing as well."

Barth was 5-of-5 on field-goal attempts in the Broncos' win over the Kansas City Chiefs last Sunday, but did not consistently drive the ball deep on kickoffs. On a frigid night Barth did not get the hang-time or distance to keep the Chiefs from quality field position.

After the Broncos' eight kickoffs on the game, the Chiefs started on their own 31-, 35-, 31-, 31-, 38-, 35-, 38- and 24-yard lines. Chiefs kicker Cairo Santos didn't force a touchback either, but the Broncos started a drive outside their own 25-yard line after a kickoff just once and that was only when Santos had to kickoff from his own 20-yard line after a personal foul penalty.

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

Broncos bring back McManus as kickoff specialist

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
December 6, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Brandon McManus is back with the Denver Broncos as their kickoff specialist two weeks after losing his kicking job to veteran Connor Barth.

Denver waived rookie punt returner Isaiah Burse.

McManus' 69 percent field-goal conversion rate prompted the switch to Barth, who was 5 for 5 on field goals in a 29-16 win at Kansas City.

However, none of his eight kickoffs went for touchbacks on a frigid, windy night at Arrowhead Stadium and the Chiefs' average starting position on those kickoffs was their 33.

McManus had 48 touchbacks in 64 kickoffs (75 percent) this season. Barth is just 11 for 164 in his career.

Burse averaged 7.2 yards on 29 punt returns. He'll be replaced Sunday by Emmanuel Sanders or Wes Welker against Buffalo.

Broncos promote kicker Brandon McManus to 53-man roster, waive punt returner Isaiah Burse

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
December 6, 2014

Needing greater length on their kickoffs, the Broncos promoted kicker Brandon McManus from their practice squad to 53-man roster Saturday. McManus will kick off in the Broncos' game Sunday against the Buffalo Bills while Connor Barth will handle the field goal duties.

McManus' promotion was expected. The surprise was that the Broncos made roster room for McManus by waiving rookie Isaiah Burse, who had handled all 53 of the team's punt returns this season.

Burse, an undrafted returner/receiver out of Fresno State, returned 29 punts for a 7.2 yard average and had 24 fair catches.

The Broncos have listed receiver Emmanuel Sanders as the No. 2 punt returner on their depth chart. Wes Welker also has punt-return experience.

The move was made because McManus had one of the strongest touchback rates among NFL kickers this year and Barth is among the worst. McManus was the Broncos' placekicker through the first 11 games but was waived because he was inconsistent with his field goals (9 of 13, 69.2 percent). The problem wasn't his kickoffs as his 75 percent touchback rate (48 of 64) ranks fourth in the league, behind only Indianapolis' Pat McAfee (80.8), Carolina's Graham Gano (77.8) and Detroit's Sam Martin (75.9), who kicks off for former Broncos kicker Matt Prater.

Barth was 5 for 5 in field goals but 0 of 8 in kickoff touchbacks in his Broncos' debut last Sunday in frigid, windy conditions at Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium. Since Barth entered the NFL in 2008, he ranks 47th out of 47 in kickoff touchback percentage (6.7, 11 of 164) among kickers without at least 100 kickoffs.

Broncos Q&A: Distance no big deal to Brandon McManus

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
November 23, 2014

Brandon McManus stuck his hand into a hornets nest. The New York Giants told him he wasn't making their team. He figured he might land with the Philadelphia Eagles. Instead, he was traded to the Broncos. A part-time opportunity during Matt Prater's four-game suspension became a full-time job after the Broncos released Prater on Oct. 3.

McManus is a rare Broncos player from Temple.

"It's a football factory," said defensive tackle Terrance Knighton, a former Owls star. "It's good to have him here."

But it wasn't an easy transition externally. Fans were upset with Prater's exit.

Prater missed only one kick last season. McManus missed making a roster last season. He has shown resilience, and flashes of brilliance — he's 8-for-11 on field-goal attempts — and insists that his confidence hasn't wavered even after coach John Fox passed on two attempts of more than 50 yards in last week's 22-7 loss at St. Louis.

McManus talked kicking with The Denver Post.

Q: Did you take it personally when you were left on the sideline last week at St. Louis rather than being sent in for a couple of long kicks?

A: Nope. They see me make kicks out here in practice every day, so it's not an issue for me. Especially every time you have 18 (Peyton Manning) playing offense, you have a good chance of getting a first down. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. I just come out and work hard, like everyone else. It's just whether it's part of the game plan, what they feel comfortable with. I know 100 percent they feel confident in me from distance. (He makes field goals of more than 60 yards during pregame warm-ups.) I feel support at all times.

Q: A closer in baseball and a place-kicker seem to share a similar job description: all or nothing. Do you agree?

A: One thing different is that a closer is able to throw balls. We aren't able to miss the strike zone. The reason I wanted to be a kicker is that I loved the pressure

situations and the thrill. When I was growing up, I always wanted to take the penalty kicks in soccer and the free throws in basketball. That's something I always billed myself on. I enjoy the pressure so much. I want that chance. Every kicker wants to be known for game-winners, for being able to handle the pressure in the biggest moments.

Q: When the long field goals weren't attempted at St. Louis, there was speculation about your previous groin injury and whether that was why you weren't given the chance. Are you healthy?

A: During the first couple of weeks, it was lingering. But I was still able to kick well. I feel 100 percent healthy now. I feel good. I got under the ball on those two kickoffs last week. I am pretty high up there with touchbacks (43-of-57, the second-best percentage in the NFL this season). Obviously, they know and I know my leg strength is not an issue. I can kick 60 (yards) easily. It's not an issue for me. Whether it's part of the game plan or whether they think we are going to get the first down on fourth down, we play a lot of percentages.

Q: How important is a short memory for kickers?

A: Always. Every kick, you have to go in and say "I want to go 1-for-1 here." You don't want to be thinking, "If I miss this, what is my field-goal percentage going to be?" That's a lot bad things that can creep into your mind. If I miss, for probably 45 seconds I am mad at myself because I know right then and there why I missed. But not after that. I am so wrapped up into the game. I love football, so I am watching the defense.

Q: After kicking for nearly a decade, do you know your mechanics like a hitter or a golfer?

A: I think any kicker does. I kick X amount of balls per day. It's muscle memory by now.

Brandon McManus file

The rookie ranks second in touchbacks at 75.4 percent (43-of-57).

Has converted 8-of-11 field goals, but just 2-of-5 of 40 yards or more.

Acquired from N.Y. Giants for conditional seventh-round draft pick.

Is 3-for-3 (all 46 yards or longer), with 18 touchbacks, in seven career preseason games.

Temple record-holder for career points (338) and field goals (60).

Punted 54 times for a 45-yard average during his college career.

Majored in biology/pre-med with designs on becoming an orthopedic surgeon.

Broncos kicker Brandon McManus has been impressive even if he is a short-timer

By Mike Klis

The Denver Post

September 30, 2014

Place-kicker Brandon McManus showed up for work Monday morning knowing he was about to begin either the rest of his NFL career or his final week with the Broncos.

Maybe both will be true. Matt Prater is scheduled to return from his suspension after the Broncos' game Sunday against the Arizona Cardinals. Prater was the NFL's best kicker last season in terms of field-goal accuracy (25-of-26) and touchbacks (81). He can make them from 64 yards, and he's 21-of-27 lifetime on attempts of at least 50 yards.

Keeping McManus beyond this week would require the Broncos to surrender a seventh-round draft pick to the New York Giants. So all signs point to Prater's reinstatement next week.

Still, McManus has been strong enough to force Broncos general manager John Elway to hold a conversation with his executives and coaches about how best to proceed.

"I knew coming in it was a four-game suspension, and I thought the best thing for me was to get some real, regular-season game tape in there," McManus said. "I thought that was very important. But otherwise, my intention was to put my head down, work hard and see what decision they make after four games. Whatever that decision will be, I just want to keep performing the way I am."

A native of Philadelphia who was undrafted out of Temple in 2013, McManus has shown elite leg strength by drilling 14 touchbacks from his 16 kickoffs for a league-best .875 percentage. He is 3-for-3 on field goals, but from the gimme distances of 20, 21 and 24 yards.

Still, McManus is young (23) and cheap (rookie minimum \$420,000), while Prater, 30, is the Broncos' longest-tenured player and well compensated at \$2.12 million for the final 12 weeks of the season.

But Prater has made countless field goals under pressure, and from long distance, while McManus remains untested. If this is McManus' final week with the Broncos, he probably won't stay unemployed for long.

Stanton up. Even if Arizona quarterback Carson Palmer misses his third game from a right shoulder nerve issue Sunday, the Cardinals figure to be formidable opponents. Backup quarterback Drew Stanton has led the Cards to victories against the New York Giants and the San Francisco 49ers.

"The job that team's done and that coaching staff has done for your backup to go in and perform like they did, it's tremendous," Broncos coach John Fox said. "They've got a top-five defense that they can lean on, and rightfully so. It's a very, very good football team."

Footnotes. Broncos right guard Louis Vasquez (back) and safety Quinton Carter (leg) returned to practice Monday. Special-teams captain and safety David Bruton (ankle) and linebacker Lerentee McCray (knee) did not practice. ... Cornerback Aqib Talib said he is appealing the \$8,268 fine he received from the NFL last week for his unnecessary roughness penalty during the Broncos' overtime loss at Seattle.

K Brandon McManus making a case to stay in Denver

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
September 16, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — First-year kicker Brandon McManus is making the most of his NFL tryout while Pro Bowler Matt Prater serves out his four-game suspension kicking field goals at a nearby high school.

McManus has made both of his field goal attempts and had touchbacks on 11 of 12 kickoffs in the Denver Broncos' 2-0 start. If he makes a pressure kick Sunday at Seattle or against Arizona after the bye week, he might just earn himself a longer stay in Denver.

"That's what I want to do, is put doubt in their mind about what they should do" when Prater's punishment is over, McManus said. "I don't want to come out here and think, 'Well, I'm only kicking for four games.' My mental preparation wouldn't be good. That's not the way I'm looking at it."

The Broncos traded a conditional 2015 seventh-round pick to the New York Giants for McManus last month after Prater was suspended for drinking. Prater has been in the NFL's drug program, which includes alcohol, since a DUI arrest in 2011.

Prater led the league last year by making 25 of 26 field goals, including a record-setting 64-yarder against Tennessee. He also led the NFL with 81 kickoff touchbacks.

His suspension put the Broncos in a tough spot as they open the season against four teams that averaged 11.25 wins last year.

Although the Bronco's 26 wins in Peyton Manning's first two years in Denver came by an average of 16.8 points, both of the their wins this year have been by seven. And the defending AFC champs are bracing for plenty more slugfests, some of which might come down to a clutch field goal.

A four-year starter at Temple, McManus spent the 2013 preseason in Indianapolis and the regular season preparing for another shot.

"It's tough because that's the first season that I hadn't played football since middle school," McManus said. "So, I just kept working to stay ready. I knew I was on a bunch of teams' short lists. And I was just waiting. So, I started my kicking business just to make some money."

He offered private lessons in the Philadelphia and New Jersey area through "Kickin' It With McManus," which also kept him in shape for another shot at the NFL.

He had two tryouts during the 2013 season, one with the Giants and the other with the Saints, who replaced longtime kicker Garrett Hartley with veteran Shayne Graham heading into the playoffs.

This summer, he pushed Giants incumbent Josh Brown just as he had Adam Vinatieri in Indy.

"He's one of those guys that's going to be a lifer," Brown said of McManus. "He's going to be a 10-year guy, easily. He's got that kind of talent and he's got that kind of head on his shoulders."

And a booming right leg.

"He's got a tremendously strong leg and he's got a lot of upside," Broncos GM John Elway said after trading for him.

Elway had several proven veterans to choose from but he went with the 6-foot-3, 201-pound novice with smooth mechanics and a bright future.

"The biggest knock on me it's hard to get regular-season experience for a young kicker," McManus said. "A lot of teams don't want to put their head on a line to get a rookie kicker out there. So, definitely the four games I knew would help me. I wanted to come in and perform well for those four games whether they keep me here or not when Matt comes back."

Last month, coach John Fox suggested Prater hadn't worn out his welcome in Denver, saying, "He's part of our family."

Then, a contrite Prater apologized and pledged to stay out of clubs to avoid the temptation to drink again, which could result in a yearlong ban.

His suspension is costing Prater \$750,000 of his \$3 million base salary.

There's the rub.

The Broncos are paying big bucks for their specialists — Prater will count \$3.812 million against this year's cap and punter/holder Britton Colquitt another \$3.25 million.

McManus signed a deal that would pay him \$420,000 this year and \$510,000 in 2015, when Prater's base salary jumps to \$3.25 million.

That's no small consideration for a team that has several stars coming up for big long-term contracts, including Demaryius Thomas, Julius Thomas and Chris Harris Jr.

McManus wants to stay here with them. He sees Denver not as a stopover but as his destination.

"I think that's the only way you can look at it," he said.

Brandon McManus welcomes pressure as Broncos' fill-in at kicker

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
September 2, 2014

Kicking the habit would be a lot easier if kicking wasn't the habit. Brandon McManus excelled academically at Temple. He harbors dreams of becoming an orthopedic surgeon. The solace of the operating room can't yet match the roar of a sellout crowd.

McManus decided early in life that he liked the spotlight, the moment when a game is decided by a swing of the leg. He might get that chance Sunday, making his NFL debut in the Broncos' nationally televised season opener against the Indianapolis Colts.

"The reason I wanted to be a kicker is that I loved the pressure situations, the thrill of it," McManus said after practice Monday. "When I was growing up, I always wanted to take the penalty kicks in soccer or shoot the free throws in basketball. I enjoy it."

Part of the NFL's charm is that lacking job security creates unlikely story lines. As the suspended Matt Prater's replacement, McManus could help determine Sunday's outcome and most Broncos fans haven't heard of him. He landed in Denver last Wednesday, kicked in Arlington, Texas, on Thursday then Saturday survived a tryout from another challenger. McManus' opportunity is fraught with fragility — "It's a results-oriented business," reminded coach John Fox.

But when attempting to break into the NFL, no crack in the window is too small.

"I am now," said general manager John Elway when asked if he was comfortable with McManus. "He's got a tremendously strong leg and he's got a lot of upside."

What McManus needs are repetitions with long snapper Aaron Brewer and holder Britton Colquitt. The all-time leading scorer at Temple, where he nailed four game-winning field goals, makes no excuses for missing two attempts from more than 50 yards against the Cowboys.

"Those are kicks I have to make, that you have to make in the NFL," McManus said.

Additional practice time should allow McManus to get in rhythm with the Broncos after spending the preseason excelling with the New York Giants. He narrowly lost out in his competition with Josh Brown.

"Nerves weren't a factor (last Thursday). It's almost like getting a new driver (in golf). You have to go to the range a few times," McManus said. "Aaron and Britton are the consummate pros, and great at what they do. I am looking forward to learning from them and getting comfortable."

McManus figured he would receive a tryout with another team after the resume he penned with the Giants. That it was the Broncos came as a surprise. Told he was out with the Giants, McManus returned to Temple to practice. Several teams had interest, including his hometown Philadelphia Eagles, but the waiver wire never became an issue. The Broncos traded a conditional seventh-round pick to the Giants for McManus, who registered touchbacks on 16 of 17 kickoffs in the preseason.

Denver will surrender a selection only if McManus remains with the team when Prater returns after his four-game discipline.

"Anytime you have Peyton Manning as your quarterback, the offense is going to put up a lot of points," McManus said. "It's exciting to come to an explosive team like this."

The Sports Authority Field at Mile High venue won't be familiar — he once kicked in altitude at the New Mexico Bowl in Albuquerque three years ago — but the faces will be. McManus has met former Temple star Terrance Knighton numerous times, and he spent last preseason with the Colts, gleaning advice from kicker Adam Vinatieri.

"He's a Hall of Famer for me," McManus said. "I valued his insight so much. He's known for game-winning Super Bowl kicks. I want to be known as someone who can handle the pressure."

Still kicking

Brandon McManus receives first chance as Matt Prater's replacement, making his debut on Sunday night:

- At 6-foot-3, 190 pounds has quick, strong leg.
- Temple's all-time leading scorer with 338 points, breaking Bernard Pierce's record.
- Kicked four game-winning field goals in college
- Heavily involved in community work in Philadelphia, including the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.

Elway says Brandon McManus 'our guy'

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

August 30, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- After a whirlwind arrival to the Denver Broncos, which saw Brandon McManus kicking field goals for the team just two days after being acquired by the team, the Broncos have decided to keep McManus around for a bit.

The Broncos worked out another kicker Saturday -- former Washington State kicker Andrew Furney -- but when the initial cut to 53 players was made, McManus was still the kicker tabbed to fill in for Matt Prater. Prater is suspended for the first four games of the season for violations of the league's substance abuse policy.

Executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway was asked Saturday evening if he was still confident in McManus, who was 2-of-4 in the Broncos' preseason finale against the Dallas Cowboys Thursday night with misses from 52 and 54 yards -- both kicks were wide right -- to go with field goals from 20 and 40 yards.

"I am now," Elway said. "He's going to be our guy now. He got in here late last week, he's got a tremendously strong leg and he's got a lot of upside. I've got a lot of confidence once he gets working with the center and [holder Brandon] Colquitt, get used to that, he'll be much better off. I think Brandon will be fine for us."

The Broncos sent a conditional seventh-round draft pick to the New York Giants on Tuesday, brought McManus on the trip to Texas on Wednesday, and he kicked Thursday night in AT&T Stadium. The Broncos like McManus' overall leg strength, and he had touchbacks on all five of his kickoffs against the Cowboys.

The Broncos will face the Indianapolis Colts, Kansas City Chiefs, Seattle Seahawks and Arizona Cardinals during Prater's suspension. Because of a Week 4 bye for the Broncos, Prater will not be eligible to return to practice until Oct. 6 and cannot be reinstated to play in a game until the Broncos' Week 6 game against the New York Jets on Oct. 12.

McManus was 2-of-2 in field goal attempts for the Giants in the preseason.

K McManus Relishing Opportunity

By David DeChant
denverbroncos.com
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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Less than 24 hours after being traded from the Giants, new Broncos kicker Brandon McManus was on the Dove Valley practice fields Wednesday, working on chemistry with holder Britton Colquitt.

"We just wanted to get the snap, hold and kick, me get used to the timing, everything like that," McManus said. "What nuances that I like to do, compared to Matt [Prater], for Britton to understand."

McManus will travel with the team to Dallas for Thursday's game against the Cowboys. He should have some opportunities to show off his big leg, which has produced 10 touchbacks in 11 kickoffs this preseason.

He said it was "bittersweet" to be traded, news that he learned after the Giants initially told him he was to be waived in the cut down to the 75-man roster limit. Based on calls to his agent, McManus knew there would be interest from other teams on the waiver wire, but he was pleasantly surprised to be traded instead.

"It's exciting to have a team put a little, not prize, but put something worth you coming here," he said. "So it puts some merit and value to their interest in me."

The trade happened a few hours after the NFL officially announced a four-game suspension for kicker Matt Prater to start the season. With the Broncos also waiving Mitch Ewald on Wednesday, McManus will now have the first opportunity to fill Prater's role during the veteran's suspension.

The first-year kicker from Temple said he is especially excited for the chance to further build his NFL resume, which reads 3-for-3 on preseason field-goal attempts (all from 46 yards or farther) but lacks volume.

"The big knock (on young kickers) is these older guys have experience in the game," McManus said. "Well, at some point, everyone has zero experience. You just have to put him out there and see what he's able to do in the high pressure situations."

Spending his rookie training camp with the Colts in 2013, McManus worked next to perhaps the NFL's best clutch kicker of alltime in Adam Vinatieri. McManus says he prodded the four-time Super Bowl champion for tips that helped produce his most memorable kicks.

"I was able to pick his brain even more and sponge up, because that's the reason I love kicking is the high-pressure situations," McManus said.

If the Broncos' new acquisition performs well enough, he might just see a few of those situations in the regular season.