

# A.J. Derby Q&A: Broncos' newest tight end got to the NFL after letting go of a dream

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A.J. Derby dropped into Denver last week after the Broncos sent a fifth-round draft pick to New England in a swap for the tight end. Broncos general manager John Elway and coach Gary Kubiak said Derby can make an immediate difference.

Derby was a quarterback at Iowa before transferring to a junior college, then to Arkansas, while chasing jobs as a passer. Like Tim Tebow, he couldn't let go of being a quarterback. But Derby eventually accepted a switch to tight end and was drafted by New England in the sixth round a year ago.

If Derby was a relative unknown with the Patriots, it was not for lack of potential. The second-year tight end out of Arkansas played behind two of the best tight ends in the NFL, in Rob Gronkowski and Martellus Bennett. But Derby excelled through the preseason while the Patriots rested their starters, catching 15 passes for 189 yards.

Denver's newest tight end spoke introduced himself to the city this week.

Q: How did you feel when you got the news you were traded?

A: I was a little surprised. But I'm really excited for the opportunity. This is a great team, a great organization. I'm happy to be a part of it. It was really quick. Everything happened fast. But it's part of the business.

Q: How do you fit in with this offense?

A: It's still really early. I'm just trying to learn as much as I can, as fast as I can. I'll do whatever the coaches ask me to do. I always want to play, but we'll see.

Q: How familiar are you with this Broncos offense?

A: It's a different verbiage than back in New England. There are a few similarities to college. I'm just trying to keep my head in the playbook every day and do the best I can to learn as fast as I can.

Q: Was it a complete surprise? Was it in your mind being behind those two guys in New England that you might be on the trading block?

A: I really had no idea. I try to stick to myself and do what I can. So I really don't pay attention to that stuff. I was going to work, and they called me in and told me I was going out here.

Q: Your preseason showing really impressed Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. What was your mindset going into the year?

A: I was just trying to make the team. Pretty much, every time I was thrown the ball, I tried to catch it. And make all the blocks. I'm a competitive blocker. I just stick my nose in there and do the best I can.

Q: Take us through your transition from quarterback to tight end.

A: I started at Iowa. Then they tried to change my position (from quarterback to tight end). So I transferred, went to a juco, then to Arkansas as a quarterback. Then before my senior season, I switched to tight end at Arkansas. I didn't want to change. I wanted to stick and play quarterback. I was chasing the dream.

Q: What finally made you give in?

A: I was riding the bench. Coach (Bret) Bielema (at Arkansas) told me pretty early I had a bright future if I kept working hard and stayed healthy. So I just tried to do whatever he told me to do when I was here.

Q: Have you retained a quarterback's mindset over the years?

A: As I go through learning an offense more, I can see more than just past what I'm doing. But right now, I'm trying to learn one thing and try to get down the field as fast as I can.

Q: How is your arm these days? Are you much of a passer anymore?

A: It's a little rusty. I haven't thrown in a while.

Q: Are there are some familiar faces for you in this locker room?

A: I went to high school with (center) James Ferentz, so that helps. And (long snapper) Casey Kreiter and Hank (tight end Henry Krieger-Coble) from Iowa right over there too. And (tight end Steven) Scheu was in camp with us at New England. So there are a lot of good people I know. It makes it easier. I can ask them questions about schedules and where to live and stuff like that.

Q: On a personal level, trades are hard to deal with. Has it been weird?

A: It was just surprising. It's a good surprise though. Now I just feel really bad for my wife. I just kind of took off and left here there and she has to figure out how to get everything out here. So we'll go from there. But it's very exciting, coming to a new place, a great organization like here. I'm just trying to become part of it.

Q: From New England, did you have any sense of the Broncos at all? Who they are? Their identity?

A: I watch football, so I've seen how they play. They're a tough, physical team. They're an impressive team to watch.