

# Jeff Heurman could have 'some real impact' in Broncos offense

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

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Much of the time when the topic of the 2015 Denver Broncos' offense comes up around the team, the discussion often centers around what the group didn't have.

It didn't have a healthy Peyton Manning, or a fully healthy C.J. Anderson at running back, or wide receiver Demaryius Thomas at his best or continuity on the offensive line.

And at tight end the Broncos had high hopes for Jeff Heurman's rookie season but it ended almost before it began. Heurman tore his ACL in rookie minicamp shortly after the 2015 draft and missed the Broncos' Super Bowl season.

But his recovery from that injury and his potential in this year's offense have already been noticed.

"I like what I've seen from him," said former Broncos running back Terrell Davis, who visited practice earlier this week. "He could have some real impact ... that's a big target and I like what I saw on the field from him."

Even after the shortest of glimpses of Heurman in last year's minicamp before the injury, he was a player Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said would have a significant role in the offense.

When Manning was rehabbing his foot injury last season, he needed receivers for the workouts and Heurman was used plenty in that role. And when the season was done, after weeks in the School of Manning, it was none other than Manning who predicted Heurman would have impact in the Broncos' offense in the season to come.

Thus far, Manning has been right. The 6-foot-5, 255-pound Heurman has worked plenty with the starters and he has flashed some down-the-field ability in the passing game to go with physical play along the line of scrimmage.

So much so, Heurman may already be the best receiver/blocker combination the Broncos have at tight end.

"(Heurman) has been good," Kubiak said. "He worked his tail off to get back and he's ready to go, no limitations in what we're doing and he gives us a chance to do some things at that position."

And things figure to be different this time around. The Broncos got four touchdown receptions from all of their tight ends combined in the 2015 regular season -- three of those from Owen Daniels, who was released in March.

The Broncos figure to be in more two-tight end sets and two-back sets this season. Heurman and Virgil Green have lined up most often with the starting offense early in camp.

Green has 35 receptions in his previous five seasons combined to go with two career touchdown catches. And while Green has annually expressed his optimism at training camp, Heuerman looks like he could be the top receiving option at the position.

"I just am trying to stay consistent," Heuerman said. "That's my No. 1 goal is to be consistent in how I do things, in my assignments."

Heuerman's defensive teammates say he's been tough to cover at times, even as he essentially goes through what is his rookie training camp.

He's a big guy," said Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall. "He can kind of shield the ball, runs well, gets to the ball. I think they'll get him the ball a lot on offense. I would, that's a tough match-up."

# With knee back to 100 percent, Jeff Heurman prepared to use rookie lessons to help Broncos offense

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
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All that was missing from Jeff Heurman's rookie season was practice and playing time.

From the outsider's perspective, that's like saying that it was a great four-course dinner except for the lack of a main entree and dessert; on the surface, these are the central tenets of the experience.

So scant was Heurman's visibility that he said when he would go through the security checkpoint at home games, staff would ask him for his identification to see if he was really a Bronco.

"They were like, 'You've got to show me something that you're on the team.' I'd have to show them my key card to get in," Heurman recalled. "[The security staffer] was like, 'All right, all right, you can go.'

"I dealt with that a good amount. People asking, 'Are you really on the Broncos?' ... 'Yeah, I swear.' It was a whirlwind."

What they didn't know was the truth of Heurman's rookie season. Even though he wasn't in a jersey, he was very much a Bronco, very much a part of a world championship team.

No one outside of teammates and coaches saw the work that Heurman was putting in as he rehabilitated from the torn anterior cruciate ligament he suffered during last year's rookie minicamp. But unlike with most injured players who are out for the season, Heurman continued to have a role in meetings and was in the traveling party for all road games.

This came at the coaches' request.

"As soon as the injury happened, one of the things is when we kind of sat down and talked about just staying involved in everything," Heurman recalled. "That's kind of where going to all the meetings, traveling, being on the sidelines and traveling to the games and stuff [came about]."

"They told me right away that they wanted me to stay involved. That's what I did. I appreciated that because they [could have] easily said 'Whatever, go do what you've got to do, get your knee right. I appreciate them having me involved in everything and giving me the opportunity to learn. It was good.'"

Heurman settled into a daily routine.

"I would just work out while they were at practice, and then go to meetings before practice, and go to meetings after practice, and travel to all the games, so I kind of got the feel for that," Heurman said.

If he couldn't get physical repetitions, he would get all the mental ones he could find so he could be better prepared for his return. Occasionally there was the opportunity for physical work, when he

caught passes from Peyton Manning last December as he worked his way back from the foot injury that cost him six games.

"Working with Peyton when he had his injury, just picking up little things and obviously everything you can pick up from him is good," Heuerman said. "[I was] just learning as much as I could from him, too, and just trying to take everything in that I could."

The result is clear now: When Heuerman goes about the daily paces of offseason work, he is clearly not a rookie.

"It kind of goes with the rookie emotions. I feel like those are gone," Heuerman said. "Going into install[ation], it's not the first time you're hearing it. You kind of know a lot of it."

"There are obviously little things that you're picking up here and there every day. For the most part, I know the offense pretty well. You know it in the classroom, but you also have to go out and know it on the field. That's kind of where I'm at now: just getting out there and putting the paper to the field."

His teammates have noticed his progress.

"He looks good," said fellow tight end Virgil Green. "He's running [well], catching balls and [is] a strong guy in the weight room. He's definitely moving a lot of weight around."

"He's out there running hard. He has nice routes," added tight end Garrett Graham. "He's catching the ball well. I like the way he looks."

And most importantly, Heuerman's knee is "great" through four-plus weeks of offseason work.

"I'm back to 100 percent, doing everything like normal," Heuerman said. "It feels good."

He was healthy by the time the Broncos played in Super Bowl 50. A month later, he was back to "hard training days" on the knee, and wasn't favoring it.

"Coming back here, I've been doing everything normal," he said.

After a rookie season that was anything but normal, the work is exactly what Heuerman needed. But he emerged from the 2015 campaign with the study habits of a veteran and a Super Bowl ring -- something he will treasure, even though he didn't log an on-field snap to earn it.

It took him time to appreciate the moment.

"I was a little bit bummed, like, 'Man, we're in the Super Bowl and I can't play,'" Heuerman recalled.

Then DeMarcus Ware came up to him. Ware had waited 11 seasons for the opportunity he had last February. In those years, he'd only experienced one playoff win, let alone a conference championship or a Super Bowl.

Ware's perspective altered Heuerman's.

"It kind of hit me and he was like, 'You can't think like that. You have to go like you're playing and enjoy it like you are,'" Heuerman recalled. "He was like, 'Look how long I've played and I've never won one.'"

With that, Heuerman was able to spend the week enjoying the fruits of his labor as a rookie. He'd certainly earned them the hard way through a season that lacked the emotional highs of playing on Sunday afternoons in front of 76,000 fans.

Now he's ready to show what he's learned in the simplest way possible:

"Make plays," he said. "I've just got to go out and do what you're supposed to do and compete every day."

"There is a lot of talk, but you've got to go out there and do it. There is Peyton, there [are others signing praise], but you've got to go out there and perform. You've got to go out there and make the plays. That's what I'm looking forward to and most excited for."

# From dark place to shining light Broncos expect big things from Jeff Heurman

By Troy Renck  
DenverPost.com  
April 23, 2016

A week after the 2015 draft, Jeff Heurman lined up on a kick coverage drill in the Pat Bowlen Fieldhouse. He raced down the field and chased his NFL dream straight into a dark hole.

"I knew right away when it happened that it wasn't good," Heurman said last week. "On the ride back to the training room, I looked at Greek (trainer Steve Antonopoulos) and said, 'just be honest with me. Shoot me straight.' He said, 'I am 95 percent sure it's your (left) ACL.'"

In a blink, Heurman's promising rookie season ended before it began. The Broncos carved out big plans for the third-round pick, and instead he became "a rehab guy," a lonely, mental and physical obstacle course of emotions. He trained for five hours a day in the summer, many times with former teammate Ryan Clady, and returned to his condo and lost himself in episodes of "Entourage" and "Game of Thrones."

The low point came in the days leading up to Super Bowl 50. Heurman's repaired left knee was strong. It was welcomed, but sobering because the former Ohio State standout could not contribute from the injured reserve list.

A conversation with Broncos outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware changed his outlook, and has carried him with momentum into the start of voluntary offseason workouts at Dove Valley.

"At the Super Bowl, it kind of hit me hard. I was down. And DeMarcus lifted me up. He said, 'You need to look at this week like you are the starting tight end because you may never get back,'" Heurman recalled. "It was obviously his first time in the game, and he wasn't taking anything for granted. From that moment, I was able to embrace the experience and enjoy it."

Heurman lived an "Almost Famous" existence last season, doing everything but playing. Determined not to waste the season, he attended every meeting, took weekly playbook tests, added lean muscle without losing any of his sturdy 252 pounds and traveled on road trips to experience the venues. He watched several games from the sidelines. It was life with his nose pushed into the glass of a people aquarium. He is ready — more than ready — to make his splash.

"I wanted to be as involved as I could be. The NFL rules prevented me from me being out there during practice, but I did everything else. I can't wait to contribute and help this team," Heurman said. "There's only so much you can learn from the meetings. You have to experience it on the field."

The Broncos believe Heurman will settle in quickly. If he had been healthy, it's fair to wonder if the Broncos would have traded for tight end Vernon Davis.

"We expect (Heurman) to step in and be a force," general manager John Elway said.

Heuerman boasts a unique skill set as a capable blocker with soft hands. He projects as a potential replacement for veteran Owen Daniels, who was released, but whose return hasn't been ruled out. As it stands, Heuerman would pair with Virgil Green, a solid blocker who was under utilized in the passing game last season.

"We're counting on (Heuerman) big time," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "We feel like Jeff can be a total tight end. He's not just a receiver. We think he has the ability to do both (catch and block). He's a very confident young man and he comes from a winning program. It's a big offseason for him and he's worked really hard."

Rolling up his sleeves has never scared Heuerman. He grew up playing competitive hockey in Florida, of all places. He left the game in his rearview mirror years ago, but is rooting for former Detroit Compuware Ambassadors roommate Austin Watson to win a Stanley Cup with the Nashville Predators.

The toughness and discipline learned on the ice helped Heuerman navigate his recovery. He knows the experience helped him, but the transformation from patient to player is long overdue.

"You are going to face adversity in life and face adversity in sports. It was just another hurdle, another mountain to climb. You hear these horror stories about guys getting hurt as rookies, and not being the same. But I am healthy," Heuerman said. "I got to learn from the older guys. There's a lot I didn't know. You think you know, but you don't. I tried to take in everything I could. But it's time to start taking snaps again."

# Once a budding hockey prospect, Heuerman finds NFL future after dropping NHL goal

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
October 22, 2015

At 13 years old, Jeff Heuerman was almost completely alone. He had left his family in Naples, Fla. to pursue professional hockey dreams and moved into his friend's grandparents' house in Manchester, Mich., a town of about 2,000 residents. That friend, Austin Watson, was the only person he knew in town and because Watson was a year older, Heuerman went to middle school and Watson went to high school.

By himself in a sleepy rural town, Heuerman boarded the school bus and lay down on the cold vinyl seat to fall asleep before school. That became more difficult in the bitterly cold Michigan winter mornings. Some window latches were broken or stuck, but even with cold drafts creeping through the gaps, he had plenty of time to get in more rest. The 90-minute bus ride weaved through the frosty farmland, resting momentarily to pick up children from stops at the farms' edges.

He was a hockey prodigy with a promising future. Compuware, a youth hockey program with 15 national championships and 34 state championships to its name, had offered him a spot and Heuerman happily accepted. But to take the next step on a possible path to the NHL he would have to move even farther north.

Watson was preparing to make that northern jump to the Ontario Hockey League, and Heuerman knew that if he was going to continue toward professional hockey at the highest level, that would have to be his path, too, in a year's time.

It had been fun to live in a place and play hockey with other skilled players, but he didn't know if he wanted to move to Canada and keep going with a dream that would draw him further from his family. He missed his family, especially his brothers, who were growing up without their oldest sibling. He had also hurt his ankle in the middle of the season, which made him question the route even more.

So Heuerman called his father, discussed the options and the path came to its end. He would return home to Naples.

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About a decade later, Heuerman can't help but feel somewhat out of place again. While other rookies on the roster work to make an impact on the active roster or the practice squad, the rookie tight end is still hard at work rehabbing after offseason surgery to repair a torn ACL.

Still, Heuerman is upbeat and though he wishes he could be out there with the rest of the teammates, he's happy knowing he found his way after leaving behind a path to professional hockey.

When he returned to Florida, Heuerman's hockey future had been on life support in Florida until he eventually resigned to move on from it to football. But when he started seeing his friends and former teammates -- including Watson -- getting drafted to the NHL and signing big contracts, he couldn't help but feel like he might have made a mistake.



"Should I have stuck with that?" Heuerman remembers wondering in high school. "Some of the guys I knew growing up playing around, these dudes are getting drafted at 18. Like this dude's making a million bucks at 18 and I'm sitting here living off my dad.

"Should I have just bit my tongue and gone to the OHL for a year?" he thought. "Should I have taken that route?"

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In the muggy heat of Florida, ice hockey isn't often the first sport that comes to mind. Regardless, Heuerman immediately connected with it and he quickly became a skilled center.

That Heuerman was quick learner and a natural athlete was no surprise given his father's background.

Paul Heuerman flirted with a professional sports career after playing four years for the Michigan Wolverines basketball team. A 6-foot-9-inch forward, Heuerman moved into the starting lineup as a junior and became a team co-captain the following year. A second-team Academic All-American in June of 1981, he was drafted by the Phoenix Suns in the fifth round.

Unfortunately, Paul's basketball career didn't take off. He went to law school and settled down in Naples, a rapidly-growing city on the Gulf Coast.

Paul nurtured his son's love for hockey and Jeff rapidly improved at the sport, so much so that he caught the attention of two key figures, one of whom was Austin Watson, whose parents had recently moved to Florida.

"I had gone out for stick-and-puck and you could kind of tell who's a good player and who's not," Watson recalls. "I kind of gravitated a little bit towards him because he was [so good]. He was a good player and down in Florida there's some good players but it's not a huge hockey market, so that was nice for me to meet a kid at 12 or 13 years old playing at the same level as me in Florida and we kind of just hit it off from there."

The other person Heuerman stood out to was one of Detroit Compuware's coaches. He would eventually call to offer Heuerman a spot on the team. This, to be sure, was a big deal for a young hockey player.

"It's not like they had open tryouts," Heuerman says. "You have to be asked to be on the team, so when they asked, I was like Holy crap! I'm coming from Florida and they want me to come play for them? I'm freaking doing it!"

Such a step was massive for Heuerman's future in hockey. To make it to the professional level, you can't really stay in Florida. Generally speaking, a talented player carves their way into playing at a high youth level, declares for the OHL or goes to play at college, and from there they eventually, hopefully get drafted to the NHL. Heuerman was still a good distance from there, but one of the best youth hockey teams had identified him as someone they wanted on their front line.

The decision was more or less a no-brainer for Heuerman: "All I wanted to do was play hockey and I just wanted to play on the best team I could."

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Watson and his family solved the logistics of moving 1,300 miles when they offered him a room at his grandparents' house in Manchester, Michigan. Watson, also a Compuware player, already had eight brothers, and now with Heuerman moving into the room across from his, it would feel like he had one more. They even drank their first beers together.

"He just wanted to play sports and hang out," Watson says. "We'd go fishing. [He was a] real nice, happy kid, always had a good attitude and always just wanted to be doing something active."

But with the two in different schools, Heuerman was alone as he entered a new school.

"It's character-building, I'll tell you what," he says. "I showed up to school and didn't know one single person. The only other people I knew were the guys on the hockey team and none of them went to that school. I would go to school, but then I would go home and go to practice. I would always be hanging out with all my buddies on the team. And on the weekends, it would always be the buddies on the team. So I really never met a whole lot of people at the school."

Heuerman enjoyed playing hockey at a higher level and living in a new place, but Watson's impending decision to move to Canada to play in the OHL weighed on his mind. He was unsure if he wanted to spend more years following the customary path to possibly go on to the NHL, like Watson would.

"I was like Man, I don't want to live in Michigan for another year and then move to Canada," Heuerman said. "That's the route I was headed on if I had followed it. That's kind of what you do. The top guys go play in the OHL for a year and then go to the draft. I didn't really want that."

Plus, he missed his brothers. If he took this route placed in front of him, he knew he wouldn't see them much at all. It was a lot for a 13-year-old to figure out.

"I was in eighth grade when I moved," he said. "They didn't know me. One was 7 and one was 11. So then I was going to move to Canada in a year? They weren't even going to grow up with me. [...] I'm 13 or 14 living here; I really don't know anything. I'm kind of figuring this all out at the same time and then it starts hitting me one day.

"I started to sit back, started talking with my dad. I'm like 'You know what, I don't know if this is for me. I think I want to go home.'"

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Back in Naples, Heuerman tried to continue with hockey, but it just wasn't the same. He had put so much time and effort into hockey and coming back to Florida was like taking a step back. Disinterested and drained, he just didn't want to go on with it anymore.

Paul Heuerman was fine with his son moving on to something else, but not quitting altogether. Jeff would have to find a new sport or find a job, and he sure didn't want to get a job.

Originally, Heuerman didn't even want to try football. He had played in the backyard from time to time, but he had no organized football experience. But a combination of a friend's suggestion and his hopes that it would impress girls convinced him to give it a shot.

Tight end became a natural fit after that. Heuerman was in the middle of a growth spurt that pushed his height to 6 feet 5 inches tall. He had great natural coordination, mobility and vision skills, which were further developed in his hockey days.

At that time, he didn't really see football as any kind of future career. He didn't even think he'd play college football. So while he saw friends getting drafted to NHL teams, Heuerman wondered if he could have done the same.

But once offers from colleges started to come in, those questions went away. Heuerman committed to play at Ohio State, and after four years initially marked by upheaval and scandal in Columbus, Heuerman and his teammates were national champions.

After months of frenzied draft preparation, Heuerman finally got to hear his name called as the Broncos selected him in the third round. Amid the celebration that night, he got a congratulatory text from Watson, just like the one he sent on the night of Watson's NHL Draft.

Football wasn't exactly the sport Heuerman had initially expected to turn professional in, he acknowledged. From a young age, he seemed to have a path to the NHL carved for his future but once he left it behind, Heuerman faced a new and more open reality where everything wasn't all planned out and he was able to find the sport that fit him.

As for Heuerman's questions about whether he could have or should have stuck with a direction that seemed destined for the NHL, Watson thinks he certainly could have followed in his footsteps.

"I'm sure he could have," Watson says. "It was unfortunate when he came and lived with us and had a little bit of a rough year I think with a couple of injuries and that kind of [thing]. It set his mind back a little bit and he kind of wanted to go back home and regroup but I think as you see, he goes back home and he gets drafted to the NFL years later. It's incredible. He's just an athlete and I think what he's done with football, I'm sure he could have done with hockey but I think chose the right route for himself."

# Jeff Heuerman progressing in knee recovery

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
June 26, 2015

About seven weeks after suffering a torn ACL, Jeff Heuerman is making big strides every day.

"I wouldn't call them big strides," he said with a laugh on Thursday, "not literally, because they're actually pretty small strides—but I'm making progress."

OK, well, every day Heuerman is making bigger strides.

"Each day's a bigger step, which it kind of sounds corny and it kind of sounds like I'm just saying that, but it really is," Heuerman said.

He said he started walking about a week ago and expects to be able to get back in the weight room with the training staff in a week. Each step, large and small — every bit of physical progress has him thrilled.

"I'm getting my flexion back in my knee, bending it — getting a few degrees each day is exciting," Heuerman said. "That's kind of what I look forward to now is getting those few degrees in my knee and being able to walk and not limp."

Early in May during the Broncos' rookie minicamp, Heuerman was running a route and when he made a cut, his knee gave out. "I didn't know how bad it was, but I knew it wasn't good. I knew I wouldn't just get up and walk away," he said.

Such an injury so early in his career is difficult blow. And for Heuerman—who was a talented hockey prospect in his youth and who said "I'm playing until I can't move ... Until I can't do my job to the best of my ability, that's when we'll call it" after an injury before Ohio State's National Championship game—this is one injury he can't play through with gritted teeth.

But Heuerman remains upbeat because he has the benefit of time on his side, and he knows there's no pressure on him.

"I'm not pressed for time," he said. "I've got a full calendar year until I've got to be back ready to go, which is good. I can get rehabbed right and not have to rush anything."

Patience isn't exactly Heuerman's strong suit, he'll admit, but that's because he knows too much of it can lead to complacency. However, that's not an issue for him right now. There's no timetable in his mind and he can just focus on finding the best pace to rehab.

Though the injury cut short the physical process of learning the offense, Heuerman was still with his teammates in the few weeks before his surgery. "I was here that whole time in meetings learning everything and if you want to take a positive out of the situation, that's one of the things you can do: sit back, learn the playbook for a year, learn everything and go from there," he said.

So since then he's been doing that and watching film of tight ends, and naturally that includes a lot of tape of Owen Daniels' work in Head Coach Gary Kubiak's offense over the past decade.

He's also been able to get advice from his teammates, some who have gone through the same recovery process that he's beginning. And there's also a veteran in Ryan Clady who's right there with him in rehab.

Last year Chris Harris Jr. and Von Miller went through the same process and said that their simultaneous rehab pushed one another, and Heuerman has been following Clady closely because he knows there's few people better to learn from than a multiple-time All-Pro and Pro Bowler.

"He's in there every day with me and I definitely take notice and pay attention to how he handles it because there's no one better to follow recovering from an ACL than an All-Pro," Heuerman said. "He's going to know how to do it, he's going to know how to go about it like an All-Pro and get himself back to being an All-Pro. I definitely take notes and watch and learn from him. That's been really beneficial."

The path will be long and it won't be easy, but Jeff Heuerman is clearly taking the right steps to a strong return.

# Jeff Heurman signs with Broncos, moves forward in recovery from surgery

By Troy E. Renck  
DenverPost.com  
June 4, 2015

Jeff Heurman walked out of the Dove Valley front lobby on crutches Thursday, a symbol of an interrupted future.

The Broncos believe he can be an impact player, but those plans were put on hold when he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee at rookie minicamp last month, sidelining him for the season. He took another step in his methodical road to recovery, signing his four-year rookie contract worth \$3 million with a projected \$600,000 signing bonus based on the slotting system.

The Broncos have signed their entire draft class. Heurman was expected to contend for playing time, but will instead take mental reps and help out at practice as he recovers from surgery.

"It is going well," said Heurman, carrying an Ohio State national championship backpack.

Heurman, a former top junior hockey player, caught 52 passes for 792 yards and seven touchdowns at Ohio State, serving as a premier blocker. Former Buckeyes cornerback Bradley Roby provided advice to Heurman on navigating this lost season.

"I told him, 'Don't just sulk. Things like that happen. It's football. All you can do is keep moving forward. You can't sit there and be like, 'Oh, man, I got hurt.' You have to take what life gives you and keep going," Roby said. "I just told him to keep his head up, and that I'm there for whatever he needs."

### C.J. Anderson looks to make right cuts

The external concern about the Broncos' offensive line remains palpable. Denver will feature a minimum of three new starters, and possibly five, while employing 39-year-old Peyton Manning.

Three quarterbacks have started a full season at age 39 — Brett Favre, Doug Flutie and Warren Moon, according to Football Outsiders.

Can an overhauled line keep Manning from taking hits and establish a powerful running game? C.J. Anderson has adopted Hall of Famer Jim Brown's philosophy regarding the question, believing it's on the running back.

"We will make them right, that's a promise. It's on us to make the right cuts," Anderson said. "It would be unacceptable to pick the wrong cuts and make them look bad."

Anderson reiterated Thursday that he won't be a "one-year wonder," and that he's learned plenty about the zone blocking offense by talking to Baltimore's Justin Forsett and watching video of Houston's Arian

Foster. Anderson revealed that only James Casey and Joe Don Duncan are working at fullback. Juwan Thompson, initially viewed as a fullback candidate, is working at running back.

Malik Jackson not worried about contract

Malik Jackson, a blossoming star, said the Broncos have not discussed a contract extension. He said he's not "worried about it," and that he assumes something will happen after the season. Jackson has ranked as one of the team's most productive defenders over the past two seasons. ... Virgil Green is leaning on tight end Owen Daniels to help learn the offense. Daniels has spent his career with coach Gary Kubiak. "I ask him questions all the time. He's probably going to get sick of me. He knows the little details about things."

# Broncos rookie Jeff Heurman faces setback with injury but future remains bright

By Nicki Jhabvala  
DenverPost.com  
May 21, 2015

When the Broncos selected Ohio State's Jeff Heurman in the third round of the NFL draft, they believed they got a steal — a versatile, athletic and proven leader at tight end.

"I did a lot of homework on him," coach Gary Kubiak said after the Broncos selected Heurman at No. 92 overall. "He's a leader on a national championship football team. I love his passion."

Eight days later, the plan to integrate Heurman into the Broncos' offense in 2015 disappeared. He suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during rookie minicamp at the team's Dove Valley headquarters. His season was over before it started, and he had not signed his rookie contract before the injury.

According to the NFL's collective bargaining agreement with players, a team that "drafts a player shall be deemed to have automatically tendered" the player. And although Heurman hasn't signed his contract, he and the Broncos signed a minicamp waiver that put the team on the hook for any medical expenses and rehabilitation costs for an injury suffered during the offseason program.

Assuming he returns to health, the injury is not expected to affect Heurman's future earnings.

"It shouldn't, because of the injury protection waiver that is signed by the team," said Peter Schaffer, a longtime sports agent and founder of the Colorado-based agency Authentic Athletix. "The team says it will treat the player as though he is not injured, and the Broncos, historically, have been a very fair team."

Heurman's injury is a setback, but he will soon sign his contract — which will include a first-year salary of about \$435,000 and a signing bonus of about \$610,000.

His situation is a bit different from that of Demaryius Thomas. The Broncos used their "nonexclusive" franchise tag on Thomas, giving him a guaranteed one-year salary of \$12.82 million, a big bump from the \$3.275 million he made last year.

But Thomas, who will be the third-highest-paid wide receiver in the NFL when he signs the tender, has opted to risk it all for leverage.

He will not participate in the Broncos' voluntary offseason workouts, which means they won't cover him if he is injured while working out on his own, away from team headquarters.

One wrong move could cause him to lose his season and nearly \$13 million.



# Hockey shaped work ethic of Broncos draft pick Jeff Heurman

By Mike Chambers

DenverPost.com

May 2, 2015

If things don't work out for Jeff Heurman at Dove Valley for the Broncos, the 6-foot-5, 255-pound tight end from Ohio State could become a power forward for the NHL team that practices less than a mile away.

"Go Avalanche," Heurman said Saturday after being introduced by John Elway at team headquarters. "Always been my favorite team."

He was joking. Heurman has allegiance to the Detroit Red Wings and Florida Panthers. He grew up playing hockey in Florida and Michigan, switching to football in the ninth grade because his triple-A hockey commitment proved too costly to his family life.

"Hockey is a different world, especially in Naples, Fla.," said Heurman, who was selected by the Broncos in Friday's third round of the NFL draft. "You can only get to a certain point before you have to move away to keep going. I got to that point."

Heurman played for Florida's first triple-A hockey program before moving to Michigan in eighth grade and playing for one of the country's triple-A heavyweights, Detroit Compuware. His two younger brothers stayed in Naples as Heurman thought about advancing to the Ontario Hockey League, part of Canada's major-junior system.

"They were going to grow up without me if I did that," Heurman said. "So I chose to go home and be with them ... And tried out for football. It all worked out."

Heurman excelled in high-school football in Naples and helped Ohio State win the national championship last year. He started 14 of 15 games as a senior, catching 17 passes for 207 yards and two touchdowns. He can bench press 225 pounds 26 times and run the 40-yard dash in 4.8-seconds. He's a similarly strong skater, but is focused on football.

"I honestly stay away from hockey as much as I can," Heurman said. "I grew up playing it for so long. It's like an ex-girlfriend, when you break up with her, you don't keep talking to her and hanging out with her. But I do miss it."

Hockey laid the groundwork for Heurman's work ethic and discipline. He said some hockey practices began as early as 4 a.m. because of the lack of ice arenas and the growing popularity of the sport.

"Hockey teaches you a lot," Heurman said. "It teaches you hard work, dedication, what it takes to succeed. It teaches you toughness and I've taken a lot of things from the game of hockey and brought it over to the game of football. Definitely helped in my success."

Elway is glad to have him. "We really believe he's got tremendous amount of upside, brings in the right mentality, tough, and is a great competitor," Elway said.

# Broncos' draftee would make a mean power forward for Avs

By Mike Chambers

DenverPost.com

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Working Broncos/NFL draft this weekend. I met third-round Denver draftee Jeff Heurman, the tight end from Ohio State. He's 6-foot-5 and 255 pounds, with 6 percent body fat. Impressive young guy who used to play triple-A hockey in Florida and Michigan. Heurman moved to Detroit as an eighth-grader to play for powerhouse Compuware, but missed his family — particularly two younger brothers — and chose to start playing football in Florida instead of chasing his dream to play major-junior in the Ontario Hockey League.

Heurman said hockey shaped his work ethic.

He's flourished on the gridiron, obviously, but man, he would make one nasty power forward right now if he stuck with hockey. He said he was a centerman before his "growth spurt" turned him into a man-child in high school at Naples, Fla.

This NFL duty has temporarily shortened my Stanley Cup attention span, but I saw Anaheim's Game 1 beatdown on Calgary and think the Ducks will win the Western Conference. Chicago and Anaheim in the conference finals. I'd rather see the Blackhawks move on but ...

Russia and Canada are favored to play for the 2015 World Championship gold medal in the Czech Republic. Tremendously talented teams, including four Avalanche for Canada in Matt Duchene, Ryan O'Reilly, Nathan MacKinnon and Tyson Barrie. The U.S., however, features four NCAA players, a couple from major-junior and others from European pro leagues. I'll be shocked if the American's make it to the semifinals. You?

The U.S. seemingly breezed to the U18 Worlds gold medal last week, pounding Canada in the semifinals before outshooting Russia 62-20 in a 2-1 overtime win in the final.

# New Broncos tight end Jeff Heurman example of why stats are overrated

By Mike Klis  
Channel 9 Sports  
May 2, 2015

Any college football player with aspirations to play in the NFL can learn a lesson from Jeff Heurman.

In the national championship game back in January, Heurman caught zero passes but made plenty of blocks in Ohio State's 42-20 trouncing of Oregon. It was the best no-catch feeling Heurman ever experienced following a game.

"It was awesome, unreal experience," said Heurman, who took multiple injections into his sprained ankle so he could play in the game. "First-ever college football playoff, to have it go like that, it was truly special."

Here's the lesson college player: It was partly because Heurman had zero catches in the national title game that the Broncos selected him in the third round Friday. New Broncos coach Gary Kubiak loves unselfish winners. Those two words – unselfish and winner – are not an oxymoron.

"Being a senior captain and a senior leader, I can't start complaining that I'm not getting the ball enough," Heurman said. "Then younger guys look at me and they all think they can complain, too. And then the whole team is complaining. I had to do what I had to do to help the team keep winning and it worked out in the end."

It doesn't take long for the draft experience to go from exciting to exhausting. Heurman (pronounced HIGHER-man) received the call about 11:30 p.m. Naples, Fla. time Friday that he was the Broncos' third-round draft pick. At 4 a.m. he was at an airport for a 5:40 a.m. flight to Denver. He'll fly back at 4 p.m. Saturday.

Heurman got a text from Peyton Manning shortly after they became teammates. He got a text from Brock Osweiler, too.

Those quarterbacks will learn soon enough that Heurman can catch. He had 26 receptions for an impressive 17.9-yard average and four touchdowns as a junior. His bum ankle and an Ohio State offense where quarterback J.T. Barrett rushed for 938 yards limited Heurman's production to 17 catches as a senior.

So who should be Ohio State's quarterback this season, Barrett or Cardale Jones, who played so well while outscoring Alabama and Oregon in the playoffs last season. Heurman will have to first compete for a special teams spot on Sundays while learning the NFL tight end position from veterans Owen Daniels, Virgil Green and James Casey.

"I'm excited to learn from the best to ever do it – some of the best coaches, some of the best players," Heurman said.

For more on Heuerman, watch the one-on-one interview I had with him during our Broncos Draft Special at 9 p.m. Saturday on 9NEWS.