

Community Conversation: Corey Nelson

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Each week of the season DenverBroncos.com will highlight the off-field contributions of a Denver Bronco. This week we talked to LB Corey Nelson, who has become very involved in the Broncos community.

Why is it so important for you as an NFL player to give back to the community?

"I feel like it's important because we're in a blessed position and we have an opportunity to change lives by the sport that we play. Football is one of the most renowned sports known to man around the world, and with that comes a lot of responsibility and people looking up to you. It's good to give back because it shows them that you're a normal person—you're just like them—and it shows them they can be successful, just as successful as you whenever you're giving back."

Did you spend time doing community service during college at Oklahoma?

"I did some community service in college—it was kind of on my own, volunteer work. Some people asked me to speak to kids and I went and spoke. Some people asked me to give out gifts at a daycare and I went and did that. It's a thing I've wanted to do and did some in college."

What made you become so involved in community service your rookie year?

"I'm the type of person who wants to give back. I've always felt like that's my passion to always give back, give what I have to the world. Coming in, I knew that with the platform I had and the status that I've been blessed with that I wanted to give back because that was what I was called to do, that's my purpose."

When you were younger and had people speak to you as mentors did you ever think you would one day be in their shoes?

"People came and spoke and I took it in with a grain of salt. I didn't really think that I would be doing the same things they were doing. It kind of happened in my later years growing up, coming out of high school and being in college and seeing the influence I had and the impact I could have on people's lives. That's what made me want to start doing it—being able to see the influence that I had when I was in college."

You were involved with many of the surprise visits to high school football practices as part of the Broncos High School Game of the Week series. What made you get involved with those?

“You have a lot of high school kids who don’t really know whether they want to go to college or whether they want to continue playing sports or whether they want to do whatever they want to do—there is a lot of uncertainty there. With me, I just felt like I could be a light to help them, be an inspiration to them as well and let them know they can do anything they want to do if they just believe. I was in their shoes once and I know how it feels. When an NFL player or someone speaks to them, I know it builds up a fire and motivation inside of them to do whatever they may want to do. That’s what made me want to do it and that’s what gave me the motivation to do it.”

What do you think your reaction would have been if an NFL player surprised you and spoke to you at one of your high school football practices?

“Man, I would have been blown away! Especially if they told me they made it and I could make it too—stuff like that to let you know you can do anything you want to do if you put your mind to it and if you work hard. If an NFL player did that, that would have been amazing. I would have been able to embrace those moments and embrace that day. So that’s how I look at it.”

Were there any NFL players who inspired you to become involved in the community?

“It wasn’t anyone that I looked up to, but when I got to the Broncos—in the linebackers room we have the awards players have gotten on the wall. I remember seeing [former Broncos LB Wesley Woodyard] ‘Woody’ on there for the Walter Payton Award (given to players who excel in the community). And then when we were in our rookie presentation they were talking about the Walter Payton Award and just looking at that, that kind of inspired me because it was like, ‘Wow, they really are highly involved in community—this team is—and that’s what I want to do.’ So I would say he’s the one who inspired me to want to get involved immediately.”

What has been your favorite community event that you have participated in?

“They’re all great. I always get something from each and every one of them. I always learn something new and embrace something from each and every one of them. They’re all unique in their own way. There isn’t one particular one that stands out—they all stand out to me because they all changed my heart in some way.”

Roommates Nelson and Thompson adapting to bigger roles

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Juwan Thompson and Corey Nelson push each other every day on the practice field, and then the two roommates get in Thompson's car and pick up where they left off when they get home.

That must be a fun place to be right now with the rookies growing into bigger roles that the coaching staff has grown more comfortable in giving them. Inside their apartment, they've created a supportive atmosphere for one another in which they drive each other to get better.

"We constantly remind each other whenever we're home to study a little bit before we get to our regular activities that we want to do," Nelson said. "We just make sure that we tell each other to study a little bit and that's what's helping us to adjust perfectly. We kind of have each other's back as far as watching who comes in and who comes out of our plays."

As the two undergo the adjustment process to NFL life immediately after college, living together has helped them immensely in understanding their plays. "Even though it's offense and defense, two totally different sides of the ball, it's still a lot to take in on both sides of the ball," Nelson said.

With that kind of environment powering one another to get better and learn more, you can begin to see why those two have begun making bigger impacts for the Broncos. Thompson burst onto the scene as of late, making substantial contributions on the ground when he relieves Ronnie Hillman, and Nelson has recently gotten some good time on the field in nickel defensive lineups.

Thompson's initial breakthrough came against the Cardinals in Week 5 as he barreled into the end zone for an 8-yard score. After a promising preseason in which he rushed for an average of 4.9 yards a carry and a total of 143 yards on the ground but no touchdowns, Thompson finally found the end zone when it mattered in the regular season.

He beamed as he walked through the tunnel after the final whistle, sharing the moment with Nelson.

"It was a lot of joy that day," Thompson said. "I was walking off the field with my roommate, Corey Nelson. We both got a lot of burn in the game that day. So we made some big plays and we were just happy for each other."

"I just try to be supportive for him, just kind of let him know he's not alone and whatever he does, just do it to the best of his ability and I'll do the same," Nelson said.

And then Thompson got the chance to return the favor when Nelson had his big game against the Jets in Week 6. Nelson saw plenty of time on the field in the Broncos' nickel defense for 36 snaps and he ended up leading the Broncos in tackles that game with seven.

"We were both hype," Thompson said. "I saw his first play on defense: He was just shedding off those blockers and made the tackle, made it look easy like he's a veteran. I was excited and happy for him. I saw the stats at the end of the day: seven tackles. I was like, 'Man, did you know you had seven tackles?' He was like 'Nah, I didn't know! Almost double-digits in the first game.' It was a proud moment to see it."

Their friendship had all started when the 53-man roster had been set. The two were looking for apartments, and it just made sense to be roommates.

"We work maybe 11 hours a day, it seems like: sun up to sun down, just about," Thompson said. "So you're barely home, so it's like there's no reason to spend all that money. We might as well save some of that money for this first year."

Now that they've gotten situated, the added company has been an added benefit as they get to know each other more, and as they grow on the team.

"I mean, you don't want to go home [to an] empty home by yourself, can't even talk to anyone," he added. "Sometimes we sit down in the living room and just chat it up, or we might both be in there studying, just watching something. And then Isaiah [Burse] lives right down the street, so he'll come over. We'll just all bond together. We're all rookies trying to have a good time so when we have downtime, we all try to come together and it's good to have someone on your team right there around the corner if you've got questions."

We've seen their dedication turn into blooming and increasing roles as the coaching staff sees their potential coming to fruition on the field. And it's not just from the coaches, but their teammates have noticed, too.

"Corey, he stepped up and played a big game," Chris Harris Jr. said after the Jets game. "And our defense is complex, too, so for him to come in and play on the road like that and kind of just get thrown in, I got to tip my hat to him."

A couple weeks later, Thompson rumbled through the line for two touchdowns against the Chargers, and Peyton Manning took a moment to recognize the running back's efforts on Thursday night.

"I think it tells you the confidence that we have in him," Manning said. "[Offensive Coordinator] Adam [Gase] and [running back] Coach [Eric] Stutesville are more than happy to put him in there in critical situations. End of the game, trying to get a first down, around the goal line, had a couple of goal line plays to him. So that's a nice little addition to our offense. He's been great running the ball and he catches the ball well out of the backfield as well."

To see themselves relentlessly push one another to improve and then watch as they get called on in bigger roles has been a rewarding feeling for the young running back and linebacker.

"We're both supporting each other," Thompson said. "We've both got to eat. At the end of the day, they're going to feed you the ball—go out there and get it done. When he comes off to the sideline, I'm supporting him. When I come off, he's supporting me. It's a good feeling. It's kind of like having a brother right there on the field with you at all times."

Nelson an unlikely star in Denver's defense

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Corey Nelson led the star-studded Denver Broncos in tackles last week after linebacker Danny Trevathan left the game against the New York Jets with a broken left leg.

Nelson won't blame anybody for asking, "Corey who?"

He didn't expect to hear his name called on draft day, much less over and over on the public address system at MetLife Stadium with his seven-tackle performance.

His senior season at Oklahoma ended with a torn left pectoral muscle in the Sooners' fifth game, and he was denied a medical hardship by the NCAA for another year of eligibility.

So, he earned his degree in communications and started thinking maybe he could make a living talking about football instead of playing it.

"I didn't even know if I was going to play NFL ball or even if this was a future for me," Nelson said. "Just the way the season ended how I didn't play (much). And I didn't get that much burn my junior season just because a whole new (defensive coordinator) came in. I didn't really play that much my college career. And I just thought nobody knew about me."

When other players were crisscrossing the country on visits to NFL teams, Nelson was doing crisscross puzzles.

"I didn't go on any visits," he said.

The Broncos, who take a 4-1 record into Sunday night's showdown with San Francisco (4-2), selected Nelson with the 242nd overall draft pick, 14 spots away from "Mr. Irrelevant."

Getting drafted was one thing. Making a team that had been hyperactive in free agency and which had few holes following a Super Bowl appearance was yet another hurdle facing Nelson.

He spent much of August wondering if he had what it took to make the 53-man roster. That answer finally came in his final audition in the Broncos' fourth preseason game, at Dallas.

"That's when I realized I can really do this," he said.

Like many late-round rookies, Nelson made his mark on fourth down at first.

"Corey's earned his way, really, on special teams," defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio said. "That is the main way he made this team, it's the main way gotten on the field. We're finding ways to do things with him in practice, and he does it well in practice. Then it just adds to the confidence, so when you get to games, you're not afraid to put him in."

Nelson is a big beneficiary of Del Rio's philosophy of keeping backups engaged by using them in sub packages on Sundays. "And if they do well, we build that role," Del Rio said. "So we had that in mind with him and it happened to coincide with Danny going down, so it worked out pretty well."

Brandon Marshall, who started the first three games while Trevathan was out with his first leg injury, slid over and Nelson joined Marshall in the nickel package.

"It was kind of nerve-wracking at first," Nelson said. "But once you play a couple of snaps and get those jitters out, then it's just ball."

Nelson's workload last week included 36 snaps from scrimmage to go with 26 on special teams.

"Man, Corey was huge this game," cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "He stepped up and played a great game. Nobody knew we were going to have to use him this much this year or in that game."

Nelson is that rare pro football player who wasn't a big fan of the NFL as a kid. He was into music and academics and was even class president back in high school.

"I didn't really watch football or basketball that much," Nelson said. "I was just into other stuff."

He's still a bit star struck in Denver.

"You meet guys like DeMarcus Ware, Peyton Manning, Wes Welker, Danny Trevathan. Those guys are great players in the NFL and to be taken under their wing is a wonderful experience," Nelson said. "It's something that you have to take advantage of and that you have to cherish."

Notes: LB Lamin Barrow was fined \$8,268 for throwing a punch against the Jets. ... OL Paul Cornick has played 31 snaps over the last two games as a second tight end. It's the same role RT Chris Clark played before cracking the starting five. Cornick appears primed to make a similar jump if the Broncos decide to make a change in their O-line in light of all the troubles they've had running the ball and sustaining drives.

Rookie LB Corey Nelson takes long road to Denver Broncos' roster

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
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Corey Nelson figured his football career was over. In the fifth game of his senior year at Oklahoma, he wrenched his body during a tackle against Texas Christian, tearing his left pectoral muscle off the bone.

Once a top national linebacker recruit at Dallas' Skyline High School, Nelson began weighing other options. He completed his communications degree.

"I didn't know if I had a future in the NFL. I didn't know or even think I was going to get drafted," Nelson said of his interrupted final season sabotaging his value. "I was probably going try to get into broadcasting or be a motivational speaker."

Before Nelson returned to the Denver locker room Monday, several teammates talked him up. The rookie, known primarily by Big 12 Conference fans and family, played a huge role in the Broncos' 31-17 victory over the New York Jets on the road.

The ride to relevance requires Dramamine. Five weeks ago, Nelson survived the final cut with a strong preseason performance at Dallas. With weakside linebacker Danny Trevathan out eight weeks because of a knee injury, Nelson will be required to excel after moving ahead of Nate Irving as the Broncos' second nickel linebacker.

"Nobody probably knew we were going to have to use him that much, this year or in that game," cornerback Chris Harris said. "He's going to have to learn fast. Our defense is complex, too. For him to come in and play on the road like that after getting thrown in there, I tip my hat to him."

Before the Jets' third offensive snap Sunday, Nelson had logged two NFL plays. He made the Broncos' roster because of his versatility on special teams — he's a bit undersized at 6-foot, 230 pounds — and speed in space. He can cover tight ends and execute in zone drops. Nelson participated in 36-of-63 plays, finishing with a team-high seven combined tackles, a seamless transition he credits in part to the NFL-type terminology he learned from former Sooners defensive coordinator Brent Venables.

The performance surprised his teammates little. They see what others don't — Nelson's attention to detail in practice and his inquisitive mind.

"We expect a lot from our rookies. If you are suiting up, you are expected to be playing. Corey prepares during the week," defensive tackle Terrance Knighton said. "He asks a lot of questions. I have complete faith in him."

The road to the roster began through arduous rehab and a confidence boost from his agent. When Nelson considered abandoning football, Kelli Masters expressed faith in his ability. She stationed him in Florida to prepare for the scouts.

"She gave me hope," said Nelson, a former high school class president. "That's when I started believing."

The Broncos told Nelson to stay by the phone during the draft. By the third preseason game, he rewarded their faith, conceding, "I knew then I could play in the league."

Once on the team, Nelson disappeared into his playbook, into his locker. He said little, learned more. When the moment of opportunity would come was shrouded in uncertainty, but Nelson was determined to be ready.

"He's a smart kid who's willing to study," Broncos coach John Fox said. "He's willing to do the things necessary to succeed. And he gained invaluable experience."

Broncos lean on Corey Nelson to help replace Danny Trevathan

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Replacing Danny Trevathan is a two-man job: filling in at every-down weakside linebacker and finding an understudy at the second nickel linebacker spot for the man who moves from the sub package to playing all snaps.

The first half of that contingency plan is obvious to anyone who watched the Broncos' first three regular-season games this year: Brandon Marshall. Pegged as a nickel linebacker during training-camp work, Marshall stepped into the every-down role after Trevathan's injury on Aug. 12 and adjusted to the workload over the following six weeks.

When Trevathan succumbed again to a fracture just above his knee on the second play of Sunday's game, Marshall knew the drill: he changed helmets to the one equipped with a radio receiver to hear Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio's calls, and went to work.

"Our defense, we never flinch," said Marshall. "So I just came in and I'm like, 'Let's go, man.' We live for this."

Added defensive tackle Terrance Knighton: "B-Marsh stepped up to the plate, he came into the huddle and told the defense, 'We're going to win this game,' and that's what you want to see from a guy you wouldn't expect that from."

But the big change came when the Broncos used their nickel alignment. In Weeks 1-3, starting middle linebacker Nate Irving worked in the nickel sub package. Sunday, that role belonged to rookie Corey Nelson, who led the Broncos with seven total tackles: three solo stops and four assists.

Like Chris Harris Jr. in 2011 and Trevathan in 2012, among others, Nelson, a seventh-round pick, earned his promotion on the practice field and in the meeting rooms.

"He's a smart kid that's willing to learn and study, to do the things necessary to succeed," said Head Coach John Fox.

"I think just working hard, busting my butt to get to the ball, listening to the coaches, listening to my assignments and what I had to do, and just being as fast as I can with that," Nelson added. "That's what allowed them to trust me to be able

to do that. I just tried to remain consistent, especially on special teams, and those things just all added up to now."

Nelson's teammates noticed.

"He'd been working his tail off," said Marshall.

Added Knighton: "He prepares well during the week. He asks a lot of questions. He's a knowledgeable guy. He's in the game. I have faith in him and I'm not worried about him showing up."

But Nelson still has much to learn. On the first play of the Broncos' second defensive series after halftime, Marshall had to burn a timeout because Nelson did not take field, leaving the Broncos with 10 men.

"I guess he thought it was a different package," said Marshall. "So I had to call timeout, because it was an empty set; they were going to pass the ball, and if he wasn't in there, it might have been a touchdown."

"I came off and I was talking to the special-teams (Coordinator Jeff Rodgers) and I just lost track of what personnel was out there," he said. "That's on me. I take responsibility for that."

Quick thinking by Marshall saved the play, and the Broncos forced a subsequent three-and-out. Thus, it became the ideal type of learning experience for Nelson: one that did not cost the team anything over the long run.

"I felt like I could always do better," Nelson said. "I felt like there's a lot of improvement, there's a lot of work to be done as far as the individual spot and the position that I'm in, but I feel like I did well."

Nelson was stellar against the run and solid in coverage. When he dropped in coverage, he kept an eye on Jets quarterback Geno Smith to watch for potential scrambles, but he didn't lose track of offensive targets who ran under or near his zone.

"And our defense is complex too, so for him to come in and play on the road like that and kind of just get thrown in, I've got to tip my hat to him," said Harris. "We need him to continue to improve because it's certainly going to get tougher. We're going to face better offenses than that so we're going to need Corey to step up big now."

With Trevathan once again sidelined, urgency is attached to the growth of Marshall and Nelson. But the alarm sirens are silent -- unlike on every third down the Jets defense forced Sunday at MetLife Stadium -- even with one of the league's best dual-threat quarterbacks, San Francisco's Colin Kaepernick, looming in six days.

"We know Brandon can come in and fill Danny's role," said Harris. "We still, of course, would love to have Danny and would love to have him out there, but I think there's no panic out here -- as long as Corey keeps improving."

And in keeping with the steady-as-she-goes mindset, Nelson doesn't plan to change much about his daily work. Given that his diligence helped him rise in the sub-package depth chart, it's clear Nelson is doing something right.

"Nothing changes. More, if anything, it's just a lot more focusing and cutting off more traction from here on out," Nelson said. "But nothing really changes. Everything -- the game plan, the way I work, the way I study throughout the week -- is still the same."

And as they face the prospect of another the Broncos hope the results are the same for a defense that ranks fourth in the league in yardage per game, third in yards allowed per play, fourth in rushing average per play and third in net passing yards per play.

The ascending defense is en route to a revival season after last year's struggles. It is up to Marshall and Nelson to ensure no deviations from the flight plan.